

# THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SLOVAK MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

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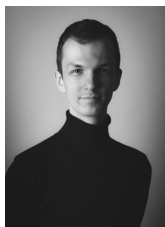
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## ABSTRACT:

The research focuses on the status of media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic by media professionals in Slovakia. Out of a representative research sample calculated to be 242 reporters out of a total of 2,130 reporters in Slovakia, only 50 reporters responded to the questionnaire, which is also a limitation of this research. From the responses, the authors generated the current status of media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Positive results of the questionnaire survey include that most of the media reporters tried to rely on the opinions of experts such as epidemiologists, virologists, etc. Also, 64% of the respondents did not feel any restriction of freedom in their work. The high percentage of self-study by reporters should also be added to the positive phenomena. On the negative side, as many as 56% of the respondents stated that it was not important for them to influence public opinion, and a smaller percentage also mentioned various influences that interfered with the impartiality and objectivity of reporting. Also, a high percentage of respondents were critical of the government's management of the pandemic. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the state of media coverage in Slovakia during the COVID-19 pandemic was not entirely optimal. Further research should complement and refine the picture of the Slovak media at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## KEY WORDS:

COVID-19 pandemic, information, journalism, media, media reporters

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## 1 Introduction

March 2020 was the month with the highest TV viewership in Slovakia since 2004; it also outperformed the traditionally strongest December. The average March viewership of news programmes grew by more than 100% compared to 2019.<sup>1</sup> This is due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which first made a significant impact in Slovakia in this period. Especially in March 2020, but also in the following months, traffic to Slovak web portals increased significantly. After the outbreak of the pandemic, the *Aktuality.sk* portal, which according

<sup>1</sup> *Koronavirus pandémie – Data & Insights z Kantar's Media Division*. [online]. [2023-01-09]. Available at: <[https://static-data.cms.markiza.sk/media/sales-platform/klienti/files/kantar\\_coronavirus\\_pandemic\\_data\\_and\\_insights\\_slovensko\\_2020\\_04\\_14.fko.pdf](https://static-data.cms.markiza.sk/media/sales-platform/klienti/files/kantar_coronavirus_pandemic_data_and_insights_slovensko_2020_04_14.fko.pdf)>.

to IABmonitor's measurements was the most visited of all the monitored portals, exceeded the threshold of three million real users per month.<sup>2</sup> For comparison, the portal's monthly average in 2019 was 2.68 million real users. Three million was also reached by the second most visited portal, *Sme.sk*, and the following websites in this order – *Pravda.sk*, *Pluska.sk*, *Čas.sk* or *Hnonline.sk* – also saw an increase.<sup>3</sup> Slovak radio stations also saw an increase in listenership, but this was mainly an increase in the amount of time that the audience devoted to listening to radio, not a significant increase in new listeners.<sup>4</sup>

Lukáš Fila, the head of the N Press publishing house, under which the daily newspaper *Denník N* belongs, says: "During the pandemic, we have seen quite a significant increase in digital subscriptions, which are our main source of income." However, the increased viewership, listenership and readership of the Slovak media was not, in the end, an exclusively positive situation for the editorial offices, as it might seem at first glance. On the one hand, more recipients usually bring higher profits, but on the other hand, journalists had to cope with producing more content in greater quantities and with new, challenging subject matter in more difficult conditions. These stemmed not only from working from home, but in many cases also from the reduction in journalists' previous financial remuneration. For example, Ringier Axel Springer, the publisher whose portfolio includes *Aktuality.sk*, temporarily reduced wages across the company by 20% from mid-April to the end of June 2020.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, although the number of recipients of the media increased after the outbreak of the pandemic in Slovakia, the amount of advertising on them has dropped significantly. News and Media Holding, a publishing company with both print and digital portfolios, spoke of a drop in advertising revenue of up to 20% in the first two months of the corona crisis. The company even made redundant several members of the editorial staff of the economic weekly *Trend*.<sup>6</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that "the pandemic caused by the coronavirus is not the only cause of economic uncertainty for the print media".<sup>7</sup> The situation was not significantly different in the television and radio space. Kantar's March 2020 survey shows that, compared to the same period in 2019, TV and radio advertising declined in up to around 40% of sectors. These were mainly in areas such as real estate, leisure, travel, telecommunications or hospitality.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, within the radio industry, in addition to the programming structure, during the first two waves of the pandemic, the way of working was also modified. Editors or news anchors in the newsrooms of the largest radio broadcasters were able, and often forced, to broadcast from home.<sup>9</sup> The summarised findings show that the media in times of social crisis face a range of adverse influences. On the plus side, at least the aforementioned influx of new recipients seeking information, especially about COVID-19, can be considered positively.

With this in mind, the media have made various changes to their traditional content structures. These include, for example, special news bulletins on television or special sections with current measures and infection counts on web portals.<sup>10</sup> However, the production of new and challenging content naturally requires sufficient staff in terms of quality and quantity, and we return to the observation that, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, newsrooms were more likely to make redundancies or cut salaries. In addition, the potential clash of interests that journalists constantly face also enters into the process. Media expert Moravec considers such as political and public activities of media professionals; their economic and business activities; reporting on their close persons or past posts, statuses or blogs in the online space, which can influence public opinion about

them.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, a crisis situation also requires proper crisis communication by relevant organisations and institutions. It is about the ability of actors to communicate with the media in conditions that are not pleasant, but all the more important to provide them with important and understandable information. However, according to Bednář, this often is not professionally managed.<sup>12</sup> Thus, at the theoretical level, we find an interconnected sequence of problems that journalists encounter even during a pandemic. The question remains how they managed to cope with them and how they affected the process of creating and publishing media content.

The media, and not only the public service media, are required to provide relevant and reliable news information at all times. They are there to provide a continuous overview of current events for the public, who then act on it.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly true in the case of events of major societal importance, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Insufficient media coverage of the issue would not only put the media outlet at a competitive disadvantage compared to those covering the issue, but would indirectly put people's health and lives at risk. According to Perreault and Perreault, journalism and journalists during a pandemic constitute the most important information channel between public officials, experts and the general public. The authors discuss the communication ecosystem of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it is not governed by geographical boundaries and requires global cooperation to ensure its functioning. It is not only related to media reporting, but also to the fields of science, medicine and 'pandemic management' at different levels. On the one hand, global cooperation can contribute to mitigating the effects and phasing out the pandemic, but on the other hand, it brings with it a rapid increase in the amount of information and therefore information overload.<sup>15</sup> It is not only the recipients of media content, but also their creators, who are struggling to navigate this unprecedented situation. A number of studies and competent institutions have attempted to offer guidelines on how to deal with pandemic information.<sup>16</sup> A study by the scientific journal *Cureus* outlines six points that the media should follow when reporting on the pandemic. These include publishing only scientifically validated information with reference to the source; mentioning new anti-pandemic measures in a timely and comprehensible manner, according to the different social categories concerned; addressing mental health issues; seeking to eliminate discrimination and prejudice, which are even more prevalent in crises; publishing helplines, especially during lockdown; and managing infodemia,<sup>17</sup> i.e., combating disinformation in conjunction with the correct interpretation of statements made by public authorities or other institutions.<sup>18</sup> However, in the daily reality of the media, theoretical recommendations are mixed with their informational and economic interests, staffing, target audience, technical conditions of the newsroom and many other factors. We believe that these, as they vary from newsroom to newsroom, are worth exploring in order to build a comprehensive picture of media information in Slovakia. Especially when it comes to reporting in the difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the pandemic brings with it another specificity. Gálik and Gáliková emphasise the need for a high epistemic and cognitive level of media professionals in processing information about the coronavirus, as these are largely professional tasks related to scientific information (especially in the field of medicine and

2 Remark by authors: The number of real users expresses how many real people, not devices, visited the given portal in the measured period. See: *Metodika výskumu IABmonitor*. [online]. [2023-01-09]. Available at: <<https://www.iabslovakia.sk/iab-monitor/informacie-o-iab-monitor/metodika-merania/>>.

3 *Dáta IABmonitor online*. [online]. [2023-01-09]. Available at: <<https://monitor.iabslovakia.sk/>>.

4 BRNÍK, A., KAPEC, M.: Impact of the First and Second Waves of Coronavirus on Slovak Radio Audiences. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 166-186.

5 KRASKO, I.: *Pandemie vytáhla slovenské weby k rekordům*. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2023-01-09]. Available at: <<https://www.mediaguru.cz/clanky/2020/05/pandemie-vytahla-slovenske-weby-k-rekordum/>>.

6 VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J.: Pandémia COVID-19 a slovenský mediálny trh. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., PIATROV, I., MARTOVIČ, M. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2020: COVID-2.0. Conference Proceedings*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2020, p. 183.

7 VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J., KAPEC, M.: *Slovenský mediálny priemysel*. Prague: Wolters Kluwer, 2022, p. 28.

8 *Koronavirus pandémie – Data & Insights z Kantar's Media Division*. [online]. [2023-01-09]. Available at: <[https://static-data.cms.markiza.sk/media/sales-platform/klienti/files/kantar\\_coronavirus\\_pandemie\\_data\\_and\\_insights\\_slovensko\\_2020\\_04\\_14.fko.pdf](https://static-data.cms.markiza.sk/media/sales-platform/klienti/files/kantar_coronavirus_pandemie_data_and_insights_slovensko_2020_04_14.fko.pdf)>.

9 BRNÍK, A., KAPEC, M.: Impact of the First and Second Waves of Coronavirus on Slovak Radio Audiences. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 166-186.

10 KRASKO, I.: *Pandemie vytáhla slovenské weby k rekordům*. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2023-01-09]. Available at: <<https://www.mediaguru.cz/clanky/2020/05/pandemie-vytahla-slovenske-weby-k-rekordum/>>.

11 MORAVEC, V.: *Proměny novinářské etiky*. Prague: Academia, 2020, p. 195-200.

12 BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Krizová komunikace s médii*. Prague: Grada, 2012, p. 12-13.

13 See: GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Media Coverage and Its Determinants in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic. In *Communication Today*, 2022, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 49. In this context, the important work of the media must also be appreciated and recognized.

14 See: SOLÍK, M.: *Uznanie ako problém spravodlivosti a jeho mediálna reflexia*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2021, p. 112.

15 PERREAULT, F. M., PERREAULT, P. G.: Journalists on COVID-19 Journalism: Communication Ecology of Pandemic Reporting. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 65, No. 7, p. 977-979.

16 GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Media Coverage and Its Determinants in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic. In *Communication Today*, 2022, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 51.

17 Compare to: WHO: *COVID-19 An Informative Guide Advice for Journalists*. Released on January 2021. [online]. [2023-03-26]. Available at: <<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/339256/WHO-EURO-2021-1936-41687-57038-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>; HE, W., ZHANG, Z., LI, W.: Information Technology Solutions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Tackling the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *International Journal of Information Management*, 2021, Vol. 57, p. 1-8; *Tips for Journalists When Reporting on COVID-19 Vaccines*. [online]. [2023-03-26]. [online]. Available at: <<https://projectsanchar.org/journalist-tips/>>.

18 Remark by authors: The term "infodemic" was created by combining two words, information and epidemic. It refers to the rapid and far-reaching dissemination of both accurate and inaccurate information about a disease with a large impact on the public. See: POSETTI, J., BONTCHEVA, K.: *Disinfodemic: Deciphering COVID-19 Disinformation. Policy Brief 1*. Paris: ICFJ, UNESCO, 2020.

19 ANWAR, A., MALIK, M., RAEES, V.: Role of Mass Media and Public Health Communications in the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *Cureus*, 2020, Vol. 12, No. 9, Article No. e10453.

health care) and its communication.<sup>19</sup> We are talking about the ability to acquire, understand and interpret highly technical data, often based on scientific or academic processes. The authors further note that various communication issues related to the publication process, press releases, and general media coverage of science and research on the pandemic have emerged in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>20</sup> In addition, despite the generally increasing quality of science journalism in recent years, Dunwoody points to the politicisation of scientific issues.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in a communication ecosystem impacting the health and quality of life of percipients of media content, this may be another fundamental problem journalists are facing. Training in journalistic skills is essential and requires the latest technology, scientific background and theoretical knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, we also consider it essential to monitor the educational attainment of media professionals and their additional education in new areas, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This information, in conjunction with editorial conditions, which vary from media outlet to media outlet, can help us to develop a comprehensive picture of media reporting in the country.

This is because media information, if it is correct and accurate, reduces the risk of fear and panic and represents a kind of ontological-informational security for citizens. However, not all information on the pandemic in the Slovak media was sufficiently correct, professional and comprehensive. For this reason, in our article on the COVID-19 pandemic, we also want to discover the state of media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia. This is also the main aim of the work. Part of this objective is also empirical research conducted in a questionnaire form, in which we will build on the international research Worlds of Journalism Study, specifically its third wave (2020 – 2022), which was conducted for the first time in Slovakia. On the basis of the conducted research, we would like to find out the state of the media ecosystem in Slovakia, namely the knowledge of the state of media coverage of the pandemic in Slovakia, in which, as we assume, there were also disinformation, hoaxes, etc.

## 2 Methodology

The current state of the problem, based on the knowledge gained from the literature and the statistical data mentioned above, is illustrated by the results of several studies looking at the working conditions of media professionals and their motivations during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. An August 2020 study of 1,406 journalists and media professionals from 125 countries, conducted as part of the *Journalism and the Pandemic* project at Columbia University, discusses the different types of changes that have taken place in the media as a result of the pandemic. One of the major findings concerns its negative impact on the psyche, which was felt by up to 82% of those surveyed. In turn, 46% of respondents identified politicians and government officials as the main source of misinformation about the disease. With regard to finances, almost 90% of respondents reported that their media institution had resorted to austerity measures, which included laying off staff or cutting salaries.<sup>23</sup> The factors mentioned inevitably affect conditions in the newsroom and therefore the outputs it publishes. It can therefore be assumed that the pandemic crisis is similarly modifying the existing conditions in the Slovak media. Their condition before the outbreak of the pandemic is discussed by Oprala in a questionnaire survey of a sample of 240 Slovak media professionals as part of his dissertation. Interesting results include the identification of the most significant factors influencing the journalistic work of the respondents, which mainly included competing media, their supervisors and ethical principles of the

19 ČÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAJOVÁ, S., ČÁLIK, S.: Epistemic and Ethical Risks of Media Reporting in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, as Challenges for the Development of Journalistic Practice. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 78.

20 ČÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAJOVÁ, S., ČÁLIK, S.: Epistemic and Ethical Risks of Media Reporting in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, as Challenges for the Development of Journalistic Practice. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 78.

21 See more: DUNWOODY, S.: Science Journalism and Pandemic Uncertainty. In *Media and Communication*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 473; CAULFIELD, T. et al.: Let's Do Better: Public Representations of COVID-19 Science. In *Facets*, 2021, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 409-410. [online]. [2023-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/pdf/10.1139/facets-2021-0018?download=true>>.

22 ČÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAJOVÁ, S., ČÁLIK, S.: Epistemic and Ethical Risks of Media Reporting in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, as Challenges for the Development of Journalistic Practice. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 91.

23 See: POSETTI, J., BELL, E., BROWN, P.: *Journalism and the Pandemic: A Global Snapshot of Impacts*. Washington: International Center for Journalists, 2020.

editorial office. For 52% of the respondents, personal opinions are additionally a factor. The proportion of respondents who said that they try to appeal to the emotions of the audience when creating their media outputs and tailor their content in order to impress in particular may also appear to be a concern at almost 60%.<sup>24</sup> Based on the above, we feel that a closer examination of the conditions and motivations of Slovak media professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic is needed to shed light on the circumstances that determined the resulting media outputs that influenced the general public.

The insights gained from the literature and existing research lead us to a number of questions about media practice during the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, the main aim of the questionnaire survey among Slovak journalistic staff of different media is to find the current state of media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia. We seek to shed light on the ways in which journalistic objectivity and ethics have been maintained during this period; the use of different types of sources on the coronavirus; the degree of freedom media professionals have in producing their outputs; but also the overall working conditions they have had to contend with in an unprecedented situation.

Thus, we are trying to measure the frequency and intensity of these phenomena in the selected research sample, and therefore we consider the questionnaire, as a quantitative research method, to be adequately chosen to achieve the stated main objective of the research.<sup>25</sup> In order to define more precisely the purpose of the research and to fulfil the objective, we set out the following research questions:

1. What sources and according to what criteria did media professionals in Slovakia choose when reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Which principles of journalistic ethics were most important for media professionals?
3. What conditions did media professionals work in during this period and what influenced their work the most?

On the basis of the above known facts about the coronavirus in the media, we dare to assume the results of the research. As this is a rather large questionnaire with multiple subject headings, we do not set hypotheses, which tend to be very narrowly specified, but more open-ended assumptions tied to the individual research questions:

1. Media professionals drew information about the COVID-19 pandemic mainly from medical professionals and government officials.
2. The guiding principles in reporting on the coronavirus were impartiality and 100% verification of published facts.
3. Uncertainty related to salary levels or job retention had the most significant impact on the production of media professionals.

## 3 Results

The research was conducted on a random, non-representative sample of journalistic employees who worked in Slovak media institutions during the period of the significant course of the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia, i.e., from mid-2019 to mid-2022. It consists of 50 media respondents aged between 21 and 61 years of age. We can speak of an even age distribution of the sample, as in four cases there are at most three respondents with the same age. In the other cases, there are no more than two people of the same age within the same age group, with approximately the same percentage of respondents in each of the ten age groups, i.e., 21 – 30, 31 – 40, 41 – 50 and 51 – 61, at 28%, 22%, 24% and 22% respectively in each category. We also strive for an even representation by gender, with 2% more women than men.

24 OPRALA, B.: *Médiá a pravda: Epistemologický problém mediálneho informovania v kontexte spoločenských vplyvov*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2022, p. 97-133.

25 RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Propedeutika (mas) mediálnych štúdií*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2019, p. 23.

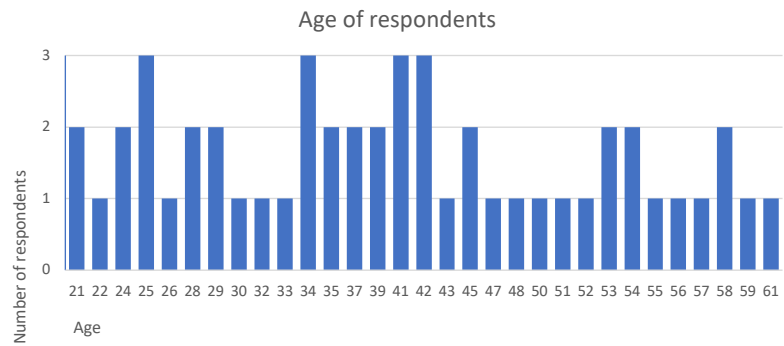


Figure 1: Age of respondents  
Source: Own processing

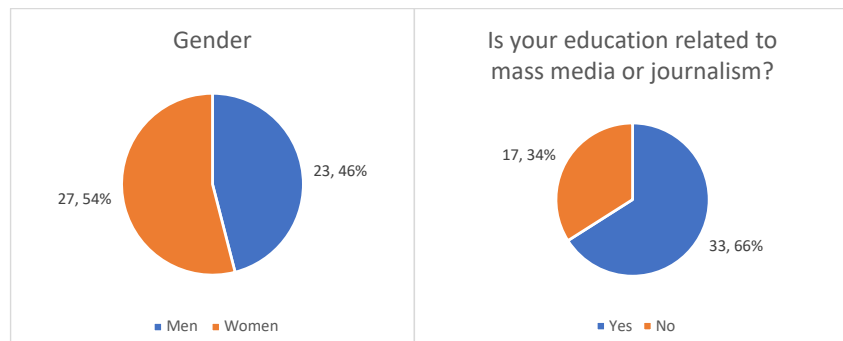


Figure 2: Gender  
Source: Own processing

Figure 3: Education  
Source: Own processing

The research sample of media professionals also reveals their percentage representation in educational categories. None of the respondents have only primary or secondary vocational education. As many as 82% of the respondents have completed one of the three levels of higher education, of which more than two thirds have a second level of higher education. 33 respondents have also attained a degree in a field related to mass media or journalism. The analysis of the research sample further shows that the vast majority of the 50 respondents, exactly 62%, have more than 10 years of media experience. Thus, we can speak of experienced media professionals. Up to 80% of the respondents have at least five years of practical experience in this field.

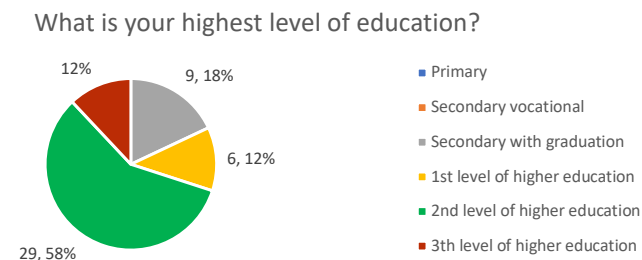


Figure 4: Level of education  
Source: Own processing

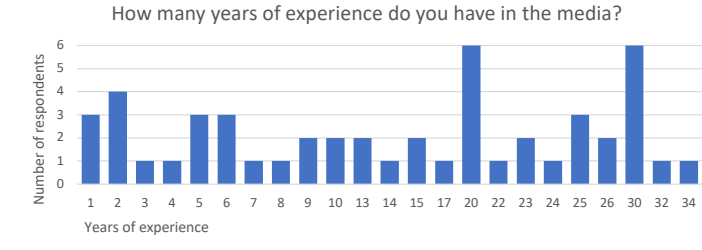


Figure 5: Experience  
Source: Own processing

Looking at the representation of the respondents in terms of their current job positions, we find that the position of reporter dominates, along with a combination of editor and presenter positions. In total, this represents 48% of the research sample. The senior editorial positions of editor-in-chief, head of department and editor are also relatively well represented, with five to six respondents each claiming these positions, together accounting for 34% of all respondents. The other five positions listed in the questionnaire with smaller numbers thus together account for 18% of the research sample.

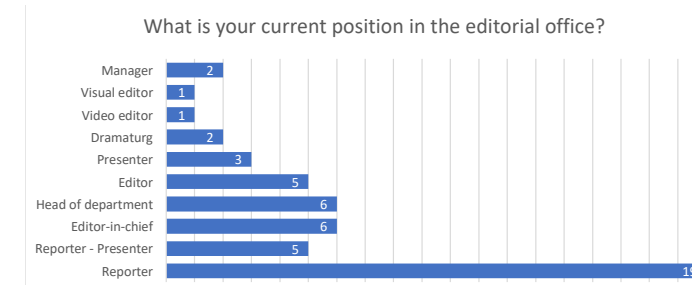


Figure 6: Current position  
Source: Own processing

More than half of the respondents hold these positions predominantly in national media. 38% of respondents work at regional and local levels. Two respondents work in international media institutions. The Slovak dual media system, divided into commercial and public sectors, is also reflected in the structure of our research sample. 90% of the respondents, with a difference of three respondents in favour of private media, split almost exactly in half between the two aforementioned categories dominating our media market. The remaining 10% is split between community, municipal, non-profit and state media – with at most a two-way split.

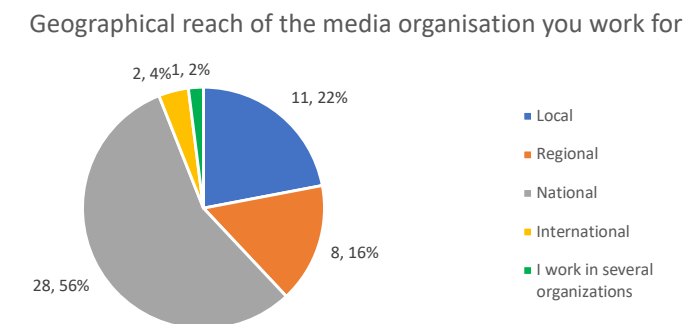


Figure 7: Geographical reach of the media  
Source: Own processing

Form of ownership of the media organisation you primarily work for

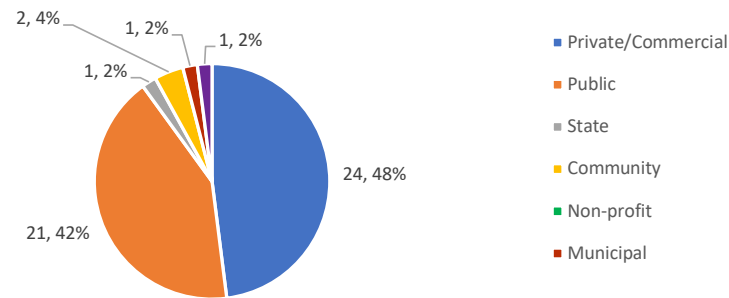


Figure 8: Ownership  
Source: Own processing

Respondents in the defined research sample answered questions related to reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic. The answers obtained shed light on several important areas of journalistic work in this period – how respondents obtained information about the coronavirus, how they evaluated its truthfulness and relevance, what they considered to be a problem in communication from the state and institutions, and the editorial conditions in which they prepared media outputs. A comprehensive analysis of these findings offers a picture of the situation in which the journalists in question worked for several pandemic months.

### Sources Used and Journalistic Objectivity

Only four respondents reported that they did not directly produce media content on the coronavirus; the other 92% were actively involved in the issue. Moreover, the previously uncommunicated topic required them to familiarise themselves with a completely new area. Up to 82% of the respondents acquired the information through self-study. 60% of the respondents also consulted medical experts on the subject. In several cases, therefore, a combination of several educational methods was involved, as respondents could indicate several answers at the same time. Only six of the 50 journalism staff had used university education or webinars. None had attended a course, workshop or paid internship. Thus, independently seeking data and information directly from experts can be considered the most frequent form of their education about the pandemic.

Have you prepared media output(s) related to COVID-19?

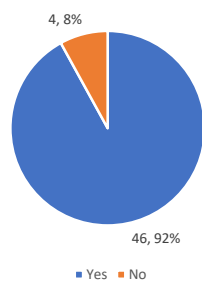


Figure 9: Media outputs related to COVID-19  
Source: Own processing

How have you been professionally educated about the pandemic since December 2019?

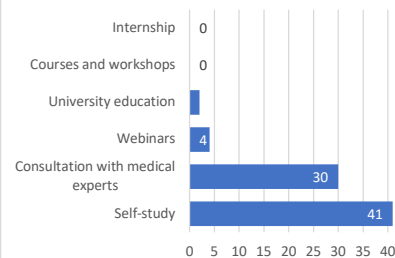


Figure 10: Professional education related to pandemic  
Source: Own processing

When gathering information to create media content about the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents indicated that they used all 15 of these types of sources to a greater or lesser extent. However, on a five-point scale, there were only two instances where the response that the journalist had never used the source was not present. These were ‘Publicly Available Information’ and ‘Personal Experience of Respondents’, which all respondents therefore drew on when reporting on the coronavirus. Publicly available information is also the most frequent source of information, together with ‘Press Reports’. As many as 40 respondents, i.e., 80% of the research sample, identified them as the most frequent or a very frequent source. In contrast, newsletters are not used at all by 38% of respondents. Despite the ever-increasing popularity of podcasts, this is the only type of source that not a single respondent indicated as the most frequent. 34 respondents use them rarely or not at all – together with newsletters, they can thus be described as the least frequent option. An interesting result was also recorded for ‘Social Media’ and ‘Digital News Apps’, frequent sources in the digital age, where around 40% of journalists said they rarely or never use information from them.

Please indicate the extent to which you use the following types of resources

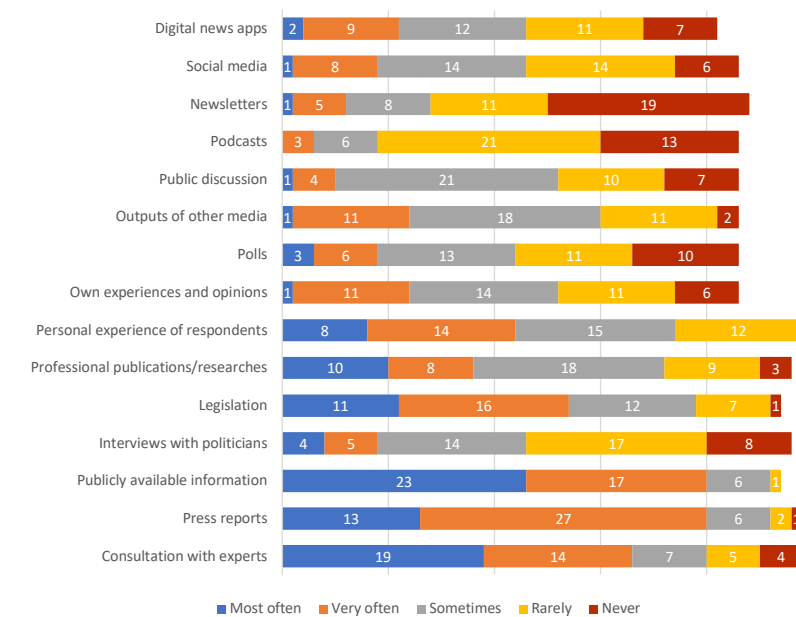


Figure 11: Types of resources  
Source: Own processing

The choice of sources is also closely related to the often debated and unmeasurable journalistic objectivity. One of its general principles is to draw information from multiple, verified sources. However, in the questionnaire, only six respondents answered that they never draw on their own experiences and opinions when creating content. As many as 86% of the journalists who responded to the question therefore use them as one of their sources at least rarely. The extent to which this practice, in combination with other relevant sources, is consistent with journalistic objectivity remains open to debate. Media professionals responded to a separate question about the methods of achieving this. The most common option, with 72% of the respondents, was considering all relevant opinions on the topic. The combination of the above responses may indicate that the majority of respondents consider their opinion on the issue to be relevant and use it as one of the sources analysed when gathering information. The risk of including irrelevant opinions among the sources used is further increased when all opinions on the topic are taken into account and when opinions that the journalist

considers to be correct are taken into account. These two options, as ways of ensuring journalistic objectivity, account for up to 26% of all responses, and respondents could indicate multiple options at the same time. On the other hand, it appears positive that 70% of journalists try to achieve objectivity in their outputs by checking the information they receive multiple times. 21 respondents said that in order to guarantee the objectivity of media content, they give it to another person to check – mainly editors – or consult with their colleagues.

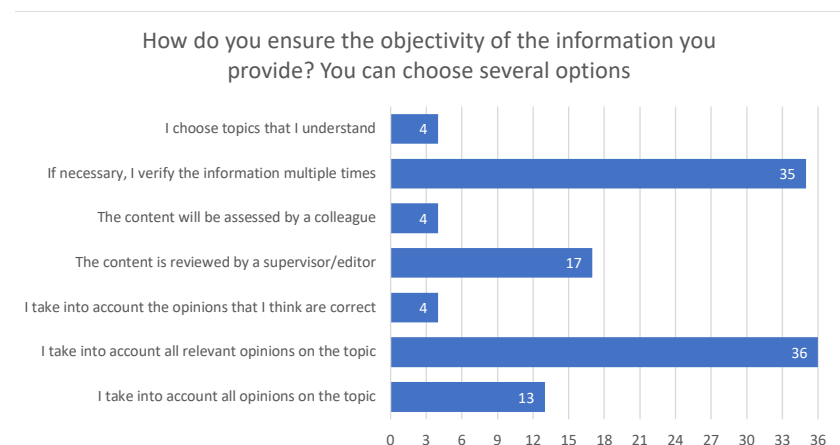


Figure 12: Objectivity of provided information

Source: Own processing

If any of the objectivity methods reveal a false claim, 21 out of 50 respondents do not include it in the news item at all. Eight more respondents would include such a claim in the output with the explanation that it is false information. An interesting finding is the marking of the option “I will not include a false statement in the output” of two respondents who are editors-in-chief of a local commercial and regional community media outlet. In both cases, moreover, this is a marking of only one of the three options offered. However, these respondents, along with 18 other respondents, went on to indicate that one of the most important characteristics of a published media outlet is transparency. This feature, as well as truthfulness, timeliness, objectivity, clarity and ethicality, were considered most important and very important by between 88% and 100% of respondents. Clarity and objectivity were even considered at least very important by all 50 respondents. Factuality is less important according to journalism practitioners. Only the trait of brevity received the most varied responses, i.e., all five options, with two respondents describing it as negligible and one as unimportant. Intuitiveness was clearly the least important of the options offered, according to the respondents. Not a single respondent considered it to be the most important, and as many as 15 of them thought it was negligible or unimportant. Thus, the summarized findings suggest to us that media professionals consider objectivity, clarity ethicality, truthfulness and timeliness as the most important journalistic values.

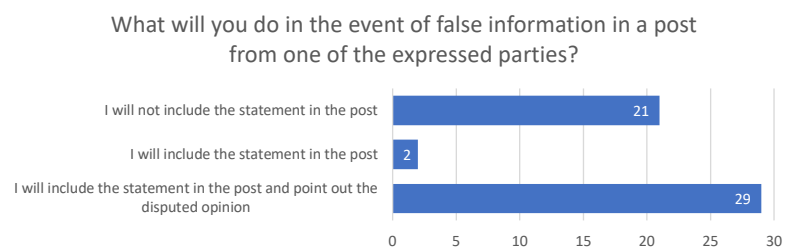


Figure 13: Processing of false information

Source: Own processing

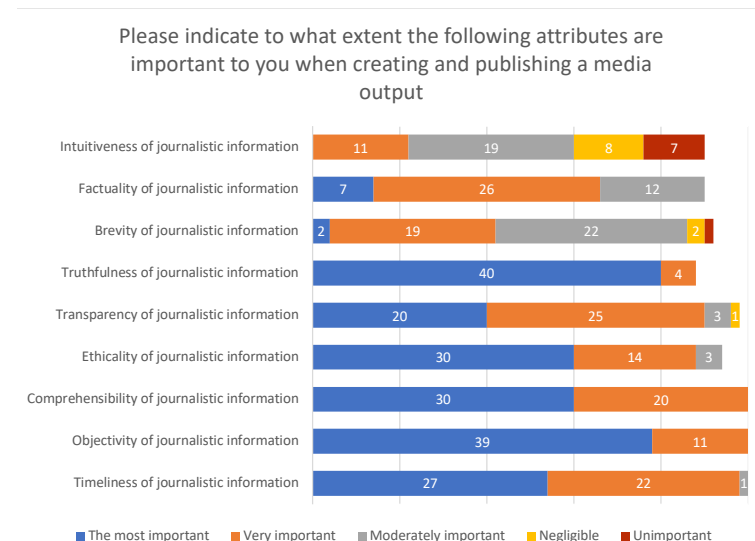


Figure 14: Attributes related to creation and publishing outputs

Source: Own processing

## Work Freedom and Influencing the Work of Media Professionals

The fulfilment of the principles of journalistic objectivity is almost impossible without the free production of journalists. None of the Slovak media representatives who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they felt very little or no freedom in their work. 42% and 48% of the respondents have full freedom and a high degree of freedom, respectively – 90% of the respondents thus do not feel significantly constrained when deciding which aspects of the presented information to highlight in their output. The remaining respondents indicated the middle option, a certain degree of freedom, implying that they do not produce media content without any interference.

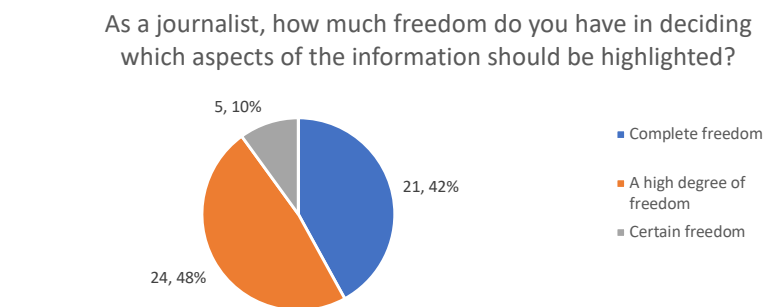


Figure 15: Freedom of highlighting aspects of information

Source: Own processing

Interference with freedom in the form of persons or various phenomena can more or less affect the final form and essential characteristics of the published outputs that subsequently reach the readers. Journalistic ethics was clearly identified by respondents as the phenomenon with the most significant impact, with as many as 45 out of 50 stating that it had a particular or major impact on their work. ‘Editorial Rule’ and Policies’ is also a very significant factor, as only 5 respondents found this factor to have little or no impact. The other

four significant phenomena can be discussed by looking at their percentage summation of the labels of the first three scale options. For more than two-thirds of the respondents, the phenomena ‘Supervisors, Editors and Editorial Management’; ‘Availability of Sources of Information’; ‘Colleagues in the Newsroom’; and ‘Time Limits’ (deadlines) have an extraordinary, great or at least average impact. In particular, commercial media, where almost half of the respondents’ work, are financially dependent on profits from advertising or the support of their owners. Therefore, private newsrooms in particular face the risk of influence and loss of impartiality. Ironically, however, media earnings and those associated with media earnings were most often identified as options with no influence or irrelevant options. Expectations of profit, advertisers, owners and business managers were identified as such by between 34 and 36 respondents. A notable factor is journalists’ own opinions and beliefs. These have at least a minor influence on as many as 25 respondents, and even a major or extraordinary influence on six of them. These responses also show that it is almost impossible to completely exclude the influence of one’s own attitudes in the creation of media content. If we are talking about journalism, this is perhaps even necessary and desirable.

Below is a list of potential persons and phenomena influencing journalistic work. Please tell us to what extent each factor influences your work as a journalist

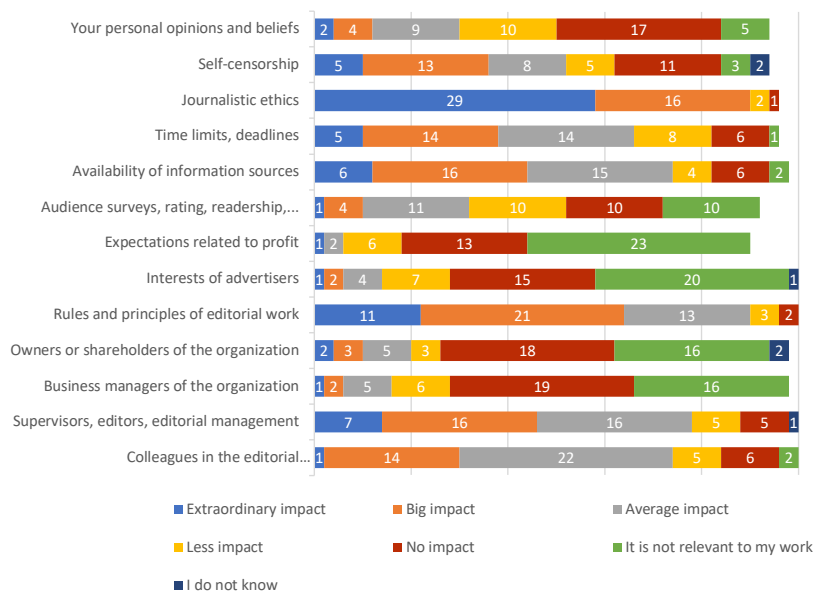


Figure 16: Influencing journalistic work  
Source: Own processing

In addition to the above-mentioned persons and phenomena, mostly from the editorial or media institution environment, various external factors also influence the respondents. ‘Media Legislation’ has at least a minor impact on the work of 41 of them. In addition to laws, ‘Relations with Information Sources’ and ‘Feedback’ are also strong influencing factors. However, three respondents also assigned the “I don’t know” option to the latter, and thus could not assess whether feedback has any influence on their journalistic work. A similar case occurred in the assessment of ‘Government Censorship’, where three respondents did not know whether it influenced them in the production of media content. However, as many as 40 rate this factor as irrelevant or without any impact. Up to 13 of the 20 categories offered came out similarly. For each, more than 20 respondents indicated that they had no impact on their journalistic work; for almost every one, more than 10 additional respondents additionally said that these options were irrelevant to their work. Thus, we can

conclude that the media professionals in question are largely independent of external influences, but at the same time we must consider the impossibility of including all existing factors in the questionnaire question. The summarised results show that the interviewed journalistic professionals feel relatively free in their work, with more substantial influence felt from internal factors and less from the external environment.

In the following list, indicate on a scale of 1 to 7 how much each factor influences your work

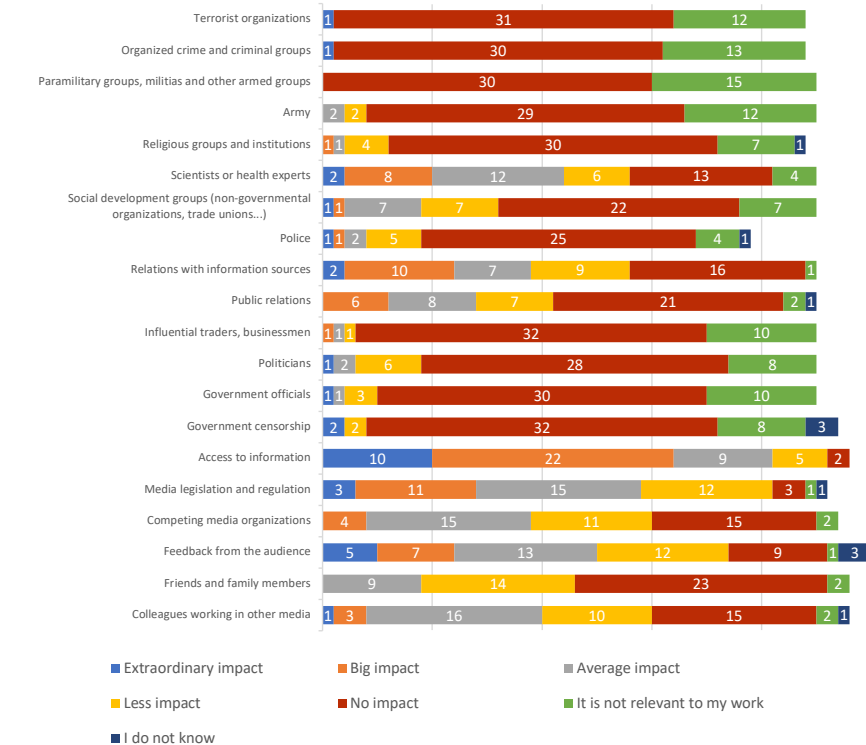


Figure 17: Factors that may influence work of respondents  
Source: Own processing

## Selection of Topics and Interpretation of Information

COVID-19, as a previously unknown topic, not only forced journalists to educate themselves, but also led them to try to interpret difficult information in the context of the pandemic in different ways. For more than 60% of the participants, it was colloquial language, addressing an expert and using examples to try to relate to the general reader. Over 40% of respondents also used visuals in the form of various images and infographics. Significantly fewer media professionals resorted to simplifying facts at the expense of clarity, and thus only around 20% of respondents preferred omitting technical terms, abbreviations or selection of information.

How do you try to interpret difficult topics in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in your media outputs?

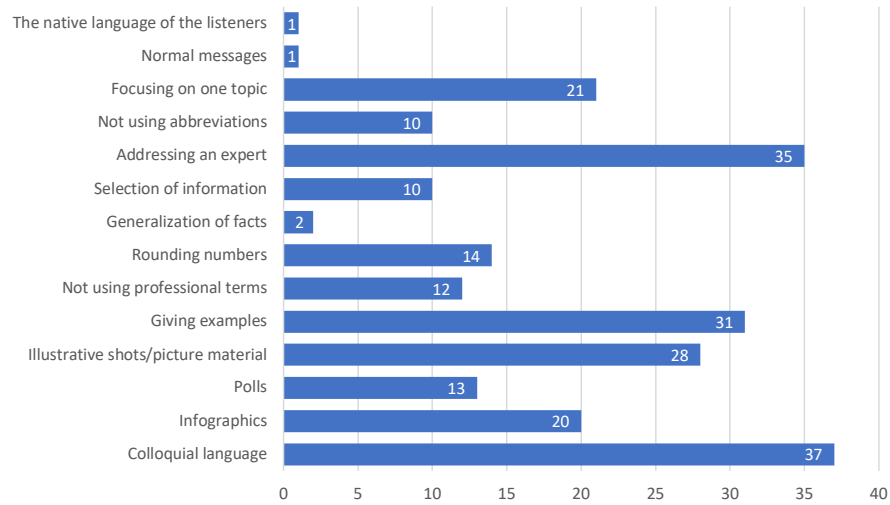


Figure 18: Ways of interpreting difficult topics in the context of COVID-19

Source: Own processing

Also, by choosing the way of reporting, journalists put themselves in a certain position and, according to this, in the questionnaire they evaluated to what extent the given activities and roles are important in their daily work. For up to 86% of them it is extremely or very important to be an impartial observer of events. It is worth reflecting on whether the answer does not clash with the same percentage of respondents who state above that they at least rarely use their own opinions as a source of information. The effort to be an impartial observer is thus very difficult to assess. Very high percentages are also achieved by the opportunities to shed light on society-wide issues and to present an analysis of current events, which can be considered as basic definitions of the job of contemporary journalists and are therefore understandable. The most varied answers are attributed to the possibility of influencing public opinion. We believe that the use of the phrase with a negative connotation may have an impact on this, especially in the context of criticism of the media by various social actors for manipulating the public. In fact, it is a natural, obvious and even necessary fact that the media, and therefore journalists, influence the opinions of society. Respondents clearly distance themselves most strongly from spreading a positive image of political leaders or setting a political agenda, which corresponds most closely with the journalistic principles summarised above, especially in the case of the former.

Please indicate to what extent the following activities and roles are important in your daily work

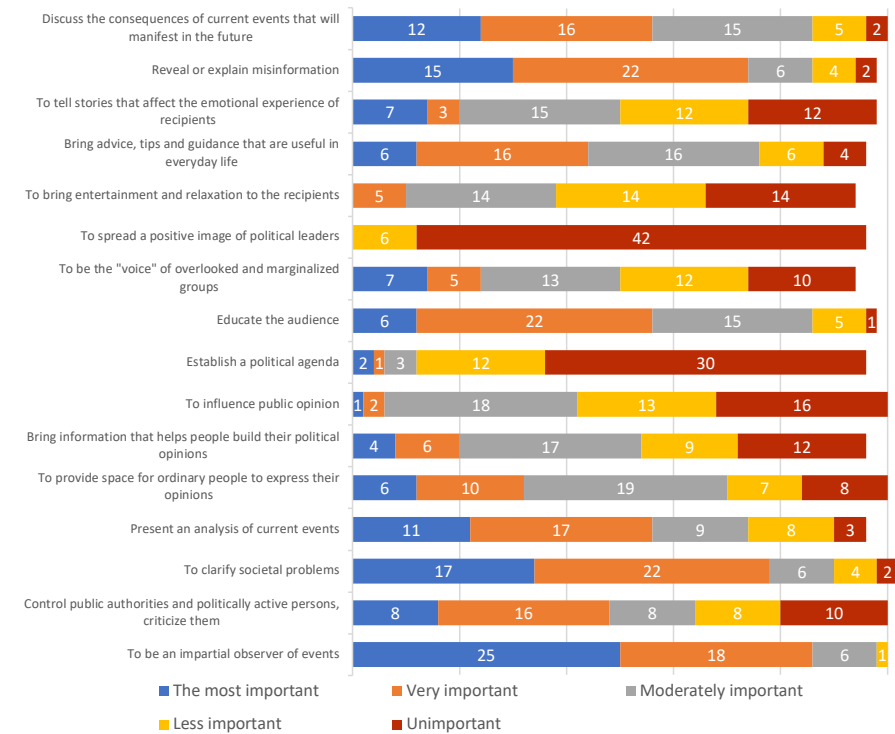


Figure 19: Important activities and roles

Source: Own processing

Related to this is the selection of sources of information, which has been mentioned several times. Moreover, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, often it is a matter of choosing a relevant expert to comment on medical or health topics. Approximately 90% of the respondents considered infectologists, virologists or the Chief Hygienist to be the appropriate experts to present their views on the pandemic. Almost 60% also include the Minister of Health. This is the only political representative that media professionals would address on the topic. The Prime Minister is considered relevant by three respondents and the members of the National Council by none.

The expertise of these personalities is judged by journalists on the basis of several criteria. The most dominant is long experience in the field, which all respondents are inclined to. Academic competence, i.e., the level of the h-index and their university degree, is taken into account by over 70% of the respondents. Media popularity or recognition of expertise by the government play a minimal role for journalists.



Who do you consider to be relevant experts when presenting your views on the COVID-19 pandemic?

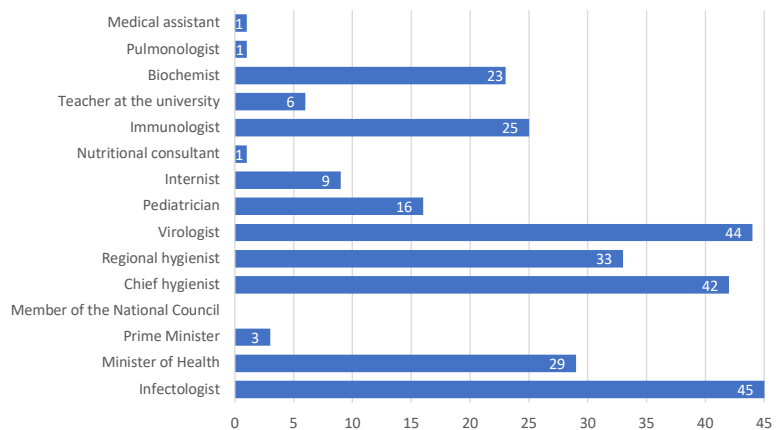


Figure 20: Relevant experts  
Source: Own processing

Which criterion do you think is the most important in assessing competence?

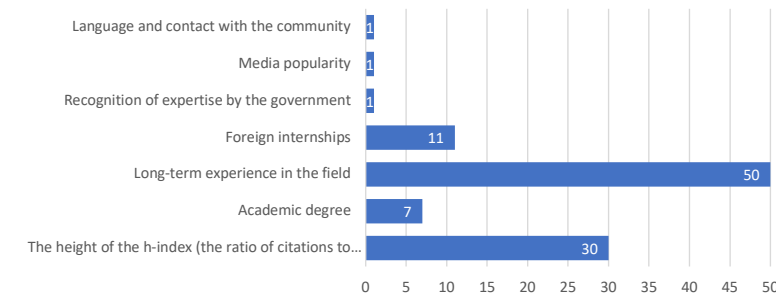


Figure 21: Criteria of assessing competence  
Source: Own processing

The above shows that the most relevant respondents for the interviewed media professionals on the topic of coronavirus are long-standing medical professionals. These are mostly Slovaks, as up to 88% of the respondents draw mainly from domestic sources, an understandable fact as only 2 respondents from the research sample work in international media institutions.

Which sources do you prefer in your work?

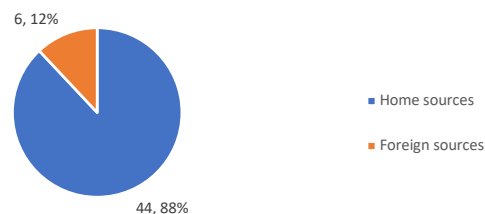


Figure 22: Preferred sources  
Source: Own processing

## Information from Government and Official Institutions

The above shows that the surveyed media practitioners draw information most often from publicly available sources, press reports and interviews with respondents. It was on the level of information provided by the first two methods that they commented in their answers to the two questions. The first concerned satisfaction with the way in which the competent authorities communicated about the evolution of the pandemic. None of the respondents indicated that they were very satisfied. On the contrary, we recorded up to 20% very dissatisfied and 26% dissatisfied respondents.

In the second, journalists assessed access to public information related to the pandemic and measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Again, there were no respondents who rated access very positively. A total of 38% of respondents, or 19 respondents, had a very negative or negative experience. This sample went on to give reasons for their dissatisfaction. The most prominent problems were contradictory or late information, late delivery of legislative documents and also poor organisation of press briefings. In addition, the pandemic measures also constrained them in their fieldwork. It can be assumed from the responses that, given the most frequent types of information sources mentioned, the situation made it very difficult for journalists to work and produce media outputs.

How satisfied were you with the way in which the pandemic was communicated to those in charge?

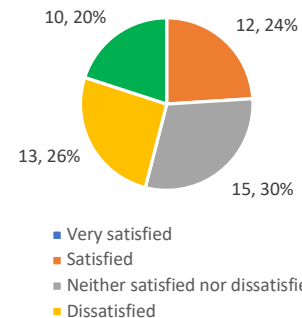


Figure 23: Satisfaction with communication of those in charge  
Source: Own processing

How do you rate access to public information on the pandemic and measures?

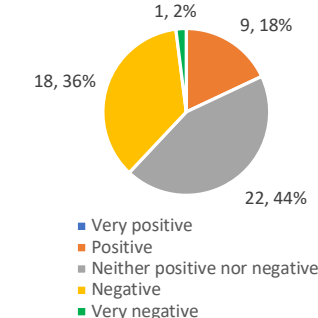


Figure 24: Access to public information  
Source: Own processing

If you answered the previous question negatively or very negatively, what do you see as the shortcomings?

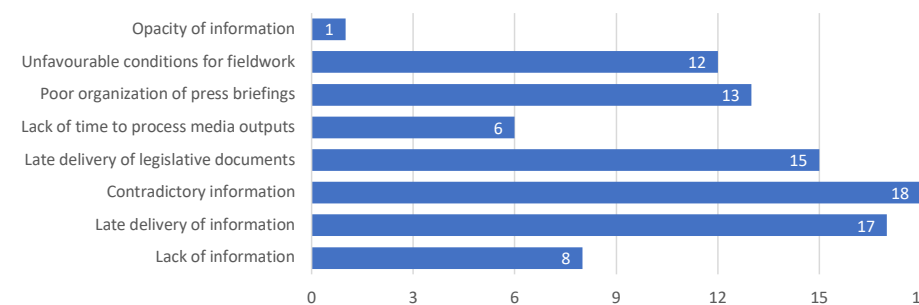


Figure 25: Shortcomings of communication with those in charge  
Source: Own processing

## Working Conditions of Media Professionals during Pandemic

Directly related to the limited fieldwork is the difficulty in communicating and meeting with respondents – this is just one of the negative ways in which the pandemic has affected respondents' work performance. Others are the dominance of the COVID-19 theme or the lack of other themes, which bothered up to 86% of respondents. In fact, many, regardless of their previous field of work, had to switch more or less from one day to the next to the topic of the coronavirus, as it affected virtually all sectors. Moreover, 74% of the respondents found it difficult to identify with the limited meetings in the workplace and working from home.

Other major factors, such as quarantine or pay cuts over the past two years, had not prompted the majority to consider quitting either. Only two respondents had thought about this option. On the one hand, this could be the journalists' determination to persevere in their profession or the friendliness of the media organisation to its employees, but on the other hand, the well-known fact that during a pandemic the situation on the labour market is unstable and it is not easy to find a new job could have played a role.

How has the pandemic negatively affected you in your work?

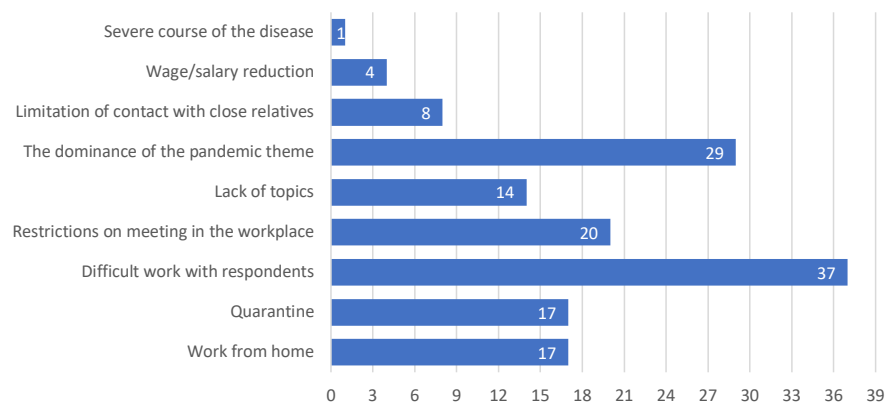


Figure 26: Impact on work  
Source: Own processing

During the last 24 months, have you thought about terminating your employment for reasons related to the pandemic?

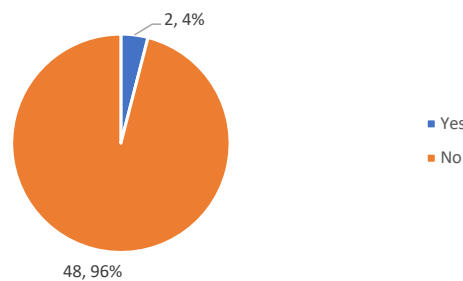


Figure 27: Considering termination of employment  
Source: Own processing

## Principles of Journalistic Ethics and Limitations on Their Observance

As many as 94% of the research sample report that they consider ethicality as one of the essential attributes of producing media outputs. This may include various practices and mechanisms whose ethicality appears to be questionable. The majority of respondents rated examples related to giving and receiving different types of rewards, publishing material without the permission of the source, or impersonating another person in the questionnaire as unacceptable under any circumstances. However, a certain percentage of respondents described some practices as occasionally justifiable. Approximately half of the respondents consider the covert recording of communications to be such, while 44% also consider the publication of private documents or records of influential persons without their consent to be such. Interestingly, when it comes to the same option for ordinary people without significant public power, only 20% of respondents would occasionally justify this practice. A few respondents would even accept the use of secret government or business documents without authorization or the acceptance of free products and services from various sources as a reward under certain circumstances.

Which of the following decisions by a journalist do you think are always justifiable, which are justifiable occasionally, and which are unacceptable to you under any circumstances?

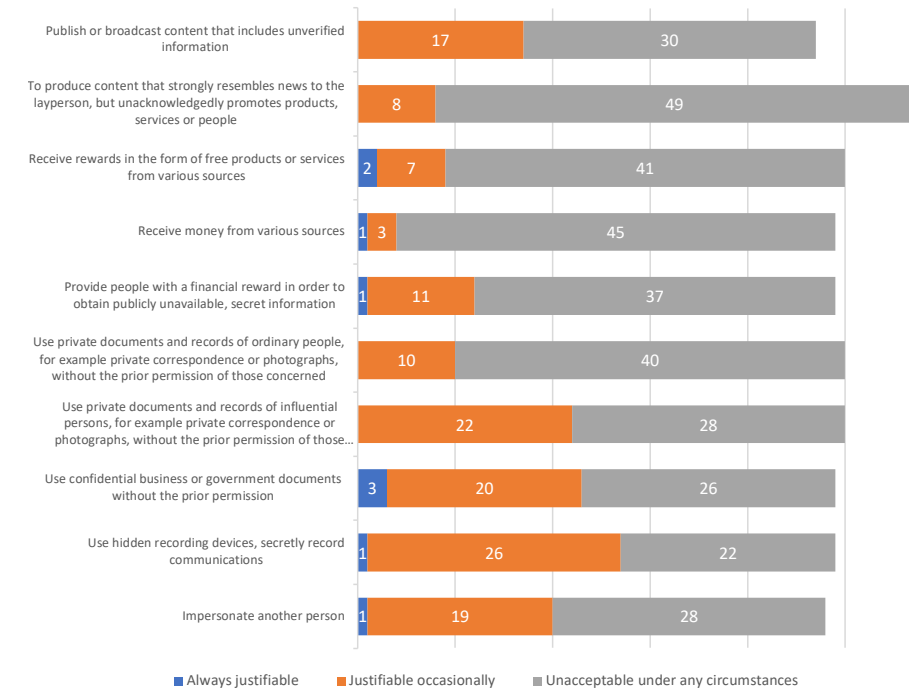


Figure 28: Approving or disapproving the decisions of journalists  
Source: Own processing

Perspectives on journalistic ethics are also explored in another question, which asked respondents to express the extent to which they agree with statements about what they consider to be ethical behaviour in journalists. The least number of respondents agreed with the statement that what journalists consider to be ethical should be a result of their personal stance on an issue. Ten percent fewer, about half of the respondents, disagreed with the statement that what journalists consider ethical always depends on the specific situation. The responses to the first two options, which essentially allow journalists to bend the rules of ethics to their own beliefs or the conditions of the moment, suggest that the journalists surveyed do

not share similar attitudes toward ethical principles. Only 6% and 26% of the respondents fully or rather agreed with the first and the second statement, respectively. In contrast, other statements state that what journalists consider ethical should be defined by professional standards, with one further stating – except in moments when exceptional situations require waiving them, and the other stating – regardless of the situation and the journalist’s personal opinion. 16% of the respondents disagree with the former and not even one journalist disagreed with the latter. Thus, the vast majority of media professionals acknowledge the observance of established ethical standards of journalism in all circumstances.

The following statements describe the different attitudes of journalists towards issues of journalistic ethics. For each of the attitudes listed, please express how much you agree with it

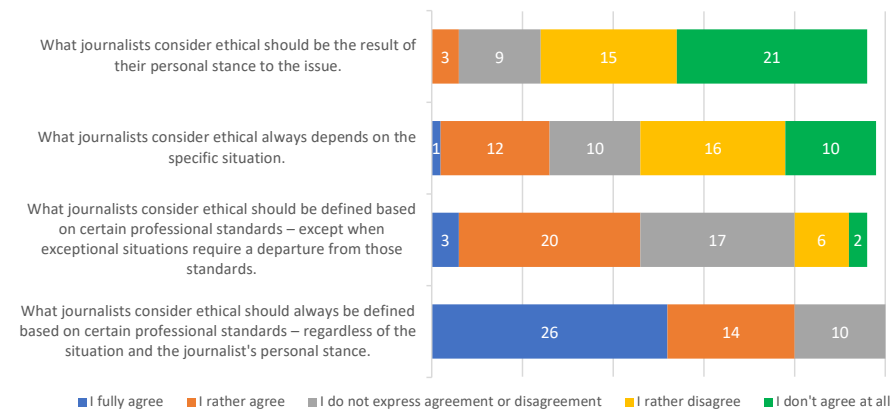


Figure 29: Attitudes of journalists towards issues of journalistic ethic  
Source: Own processing

This corresponds to the finding that up to 80% of respondents did not tailor information about the COVID-19 pandemic to the ideological focus of the media outlet in which they work. However, in addition to the universal ethical guidelines that many newsrooms have long followed, a number of media outlets have developed specific standards for publishing media stories related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This applies to 8 of the 50 respondents, four of whom agreed on the rule of publishing only 100% verified information about the coronavirus, and another four cited practices such as eliminating daily reporting on the number of infected and dead; incorporating infographics and addressing experts; graphic labelling of stories about the pandemic; or uniform use of specific terms such as virus or disease. However, the majority of the research sample did not observe similar editorial policies, which could be assumed to risk inconsistent reporting by different members of the media or to make the work of journalists more difficult, who could not rely on the relevant norms and rules in the new situation. On the other hand, it may mean that the editorial offices continued to trust the quality of their established standards and sought to report on the coronavirus in the same objective and balanced way as on other topics.

Did you tailor information about the pandemic to the ideological focus of your medium?

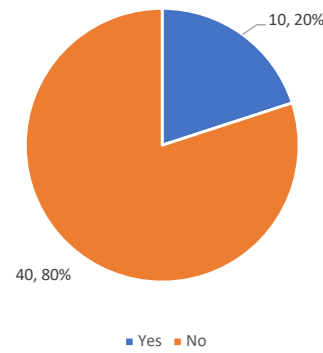


Figure 30: Tailoring information  
Source: Own processing

Does your media outlet have prescribed standards on publishing pandemic-related outputs? If so, what are they?

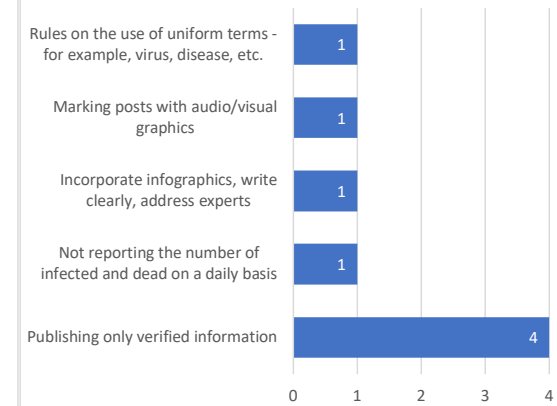


Figure 31: Prescribed standards  
Source: Own processing

However, several media professionals felt pressure from their employer during the pandemic. 18 respondents, or 36%, faced it at least sometimes. Seven respondents also mentioned specific difficulties they had encountered. These were mainly an increase in the number of tasks and level of responsibility, but also pressure from advertisers or efforts to promote the views of the city management. The risk of negative or dangerous impact of such influences on media reporting is further increased when preparing journalistic outputs in social crises such as the global COVID-19 pandemic.

In the last 24 months, how often have you experienced a feeling of pressure from your employer as part of your job?

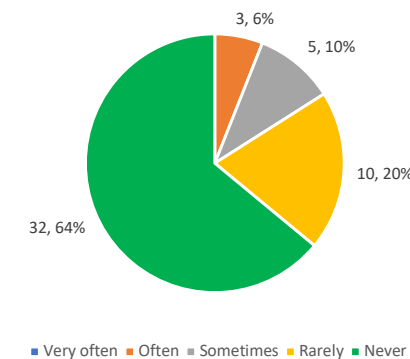


Figure 32: Pressure in work  
Source: Own processing

If you gave an affirmative answer in the previous question, please state what it was specifically:



Figure 33: Specification of pressure in work  
Source: Own processing

## 4 Discussion and Limitations

We feel that the fundamental findings of the research in each of its areas of focus are most clearly reflected in the contrasting responses of the respondents, which could be termed positive and negative responses. We therefore summarise the positives and negatives arising from the questionnaire results in the following table of the most important research findings.

Table 1: Summary

Area of Research	Positive Responses	Negative Responses
Sources and journalistic objectivity	Most respondents drew information for media outlets from experts.	Up to 86% of respondents, although rarely, use their own opinion as a source of information.
Work freedom and influence	None of the respondents indicated that they felt very little or no freedom at work.	Subjective attitudes influence the work of up to half of the respondents.
Topic selection and interpretation of information	Respondents mainly considered infectologists, virologists and the Chief Hygienist to be experts on the pandemic.	-
Information by government and institutions	-	None of the respondents rated the communication of competent people and access to information about the pandemic very positively.
Working conditions	64% of respondents felt no pressure from their employer in the last two years.	20% of the respondents adapted the published information to the ideological focus of their medium.
Principles of journalistic ethics and constraints on adherence to them	Only two out of 50 respondents had considered terminating their employment in the last two years.	The majority of respondents found it particularly difficult to work due to restrictions on movement in relation to fieldwork, meeting respondents and working from home.

Source: Own processing

We consider the main positive findings from the answers of the respondents to be their drawing of information from medical experts, not only in the creation of media outputs, but in several cases also in their individual study of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the positive responses we also include the perception of low pressure from the employer and the will to continue working in the media field despite the social crisis situation. However, in this case, as we state above, it cannot be verified that journalists do not remain in employment simply because of the difficulty of finding another job during the pandemic. We consider these findings, as well as the multiple fact-checking; the efforts to ensure that the published content is clear, up-to-date or truthful; or the almost complete distancing of media professionals from political influence in their production, to be positive, as they can be assumed to contribute to the quality of useful information for Slovak recipients.

On the contrary, some negative results may be detrimental to it. The vast majority of respondents at least rarely rely on their own opinion when creating media outputs. This, like the adaptation of information to the ideological focus of the media, is in contradiction with the declared effort to verify facts and to maintain objectivity or impartiality in publishing them. Thus, on the one hand, the quality of the content may be reduced by the unprofessional approach of the editorial staff, on the other hand, it may also be the working conditions of the journalists themselves. These were particularly difficult during the pandemic because of the inadequate way in which the competent authorities communicated and the opaque or incomplete information on the coronavirus. Most interviewees were also hampered by restrictions on movement in relation to fieldwork, meeting respondents and working from home.

We also find several questionable answers that would need further investigation to determine their pros or cons. One of the most striking is the absence of new editorial standards to guide the publication of pandemic information for up to 84% of respondents. This may be a failure of the media to provide the necessary guidance to its staff in a new and difficult situation. However, this situation can also be explained by the sufficiency of the original editorial guidelines, under which the media sought to report on the coronavirus in the same balanced and objective way as on other topics. The 56% of respondents who said that it was not very important or not important for them to influence public opinion can also be disputed. We feel that the attitude may stem from the negative undertones of this association in the context of criticism of the media by various social actors for manipulating the public. In reality, however, it is a natural, even necessary, effect that journalists influence the opinions of society through their outputs in the media.

However, the positive, negative and questionable results of the research must be seen as clearly not applicable to all Slovak media professionals, as the research sample of the questionnaire is not representative. The most significant limiting factor of the present research is its aforementioned non-representative sample. Out of the planned 242 respondents,<sup>26</sup> it was possible to obtain answers from only 50 media professionals in Slovakia. This may be mainly due to the questionnaire form of enquiry, which requires an investment of time and extra activity on the part of the respondents. Although the responses of the 50 journalists provide some picture of the coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Slovak media environment, the results cannot be applied to the overall state of the local media. Nevertheless, we feel that the summary of the results provides interesting findings that open space for further research.

We consider the absence of questions related to the temporal aspect of the pandemic to be another limitation of our investigation. Scientific knowledge about COVID-19, as an emerging global disease, changed fundamentally in a short time period. The statement by the renowned virologist Peter Sabaka on the *TV Markíza* show *On the Body* that “vaccinated people do not transmit coronavirus”<sup>27</sup> was later clearly refuted by scientific research. This is just one of several examples where, given the unprecedented nature of the situation, the relevant experts were also wrong, who were subsequently often labelled by the public as liars or misleaders, even though in most cases it was just a lack of facts at the time. Thus, our survey questions do not capture the media coverage of these changes over time.

## 5 Conclusion

In the introductory section of the study, we set out the research questions and assumptions that we seek to answer by summarising the answers and interpreting the results. The first question is – What sources and according to what criteria did media professionals in Slovakia choose when reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic? The most common sources were publicly available information, press releases and consultations with experts. However, obtaining information from experts was also repeated when asked about media professionals’ training or ways of interpreting complex facts about the pandemic. Thus, we can conclude that the first part of the assumption related to the first research question in the wording media professionals drew information about the COVID-19 pandemic mainly from medical experts and government officials was fulfilled. Within government officials, journalists approached the Minister of Health, but did not consider the Prime Minister and members of the National Council to be relevant.

The second research question sought to determine which principles of journalistic ethics were most relevant to media professionals. From the summary of the answers to several questions, we learn that in relation to the ethical behaviour of journalists, it was especially important for the respondents to be in the role of impartial observers of events, to verify facts multiple times if necessary, and to take care of transparency, truthfulness, timeliness, clarity or objectivity in media outputs. It can be said that the second assumption

<sup>26</sup> Remark by authors: This sample was calculated from the total number of 2,130 reporters working in the media. These numbers of reporters were found in the research of the third wave of the Worlds of Journalism Study, which was carried out in 2020 – 2022 in Slovakia.

<sup>27</sup> Sabaka klame, že očkovaní neprenášajú ochorenie. [online]. [2023-01-09]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lu2XhCj\\_tfE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lu2XhCj_tfE)>.

– that impartiality and 100% verification of published facts were the guiding principles in reporting on the coronavirus - has also been fulfilled. However, it must be added that in assessing the relevance of the answers given, we must also take into account the following facts. A fifth of the respondents adapted information about the coronavirus to the ideological focus of their media outlet; journalists were influenced to a greater or lesser extent by a number of internal and external factors, and the work of several was also determined by their subjective opinions and attitudes. Thus, based on the positive answers, the assumption can be considered fulfilled, but the actual fulfilment of the impartiality inherent in it is difficult to assess in light of the other factors identified.

The final research question asks what conditions media professionals were working in during the pandemic and what influenced their work the most. In particular, the most limiting factors were restrictions on movement in relation to fieldwork, meeting respondents and working from home, as well as late, contradictory or poorly organised reporting of information by the competent authorities. This is not consistent with our assumption, made on the basis of existing evidence, that the production of media professionals was most significantly affected by insecurity related to the level of pay or job retention. The assumption is also refuted by the findings that none of the surveyed journalists experienced a total lack of freedom at work and most of them did not feel significant pressure from their employers.

We would like to state that by answering all the research questions and evaluating the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the defined assumptions, we meet the main objective of the questionnaire survey among Slovak media professionals. Within the specific 50 cases of a non-representative sample, we have outlined the current state of media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia related to the observance of the principles of journalistic ethics, the selection and use of sources, and also their working conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become an unprecedented and global event that has affected almost every country in the world. The global nature of the pandemic was amplified by the media, which disseminated information from centres such as the WHO and the EMA, allowing a universal narrative of the pandemic to emerge. Another important factor was time, which was important for a better understanding of the pandemic, and as a result the narrative changed. A third non-negligible factor was the interests of pharmaceutical companies, which could create and change narratives about the pandemic, treatment, vaccination, etc.<sup>28</sup>

Slovak society was also affected by this unprecedented global event, where life changed dramatically for 2 years. With hindsight, however, we can ask, which was also the aim of our research, what role did the media play during the pandemic? How did the media in Slovakia report on the COVID-19 pandemic? On the basis of this research objective, questionnaire distribution, data collection, we obtained information (although not complete) about the state of media coverage in Slovakia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Positive results undoubtedly include the finding that most of the Slovak media coverage tried to rely on the opinions of experts such as infectologists, epidemiologists, virologists, etc. Also, that 64% of the respondents did not feel that their freedom in their work was restricted and the high percentage of self-study of the reporters. Among negative phenomena, it should be added that up to 56% of the respondents stated that it was not important for them to influence public opinion, and a smaller percentage also mentioned various influences that interfered with the impartiality and objectivity of reporting. Also, a high percentage of respondents were critical of the government's management of the pandemic. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the state of media coverage in Slovakia during the COVID-19 pandemic was not entirely optimal.<sup>29</sup> However, the most surprising result is that up to 56% of the reporters did not consider it important to influence public opinion, which is contrary to the role of the media, as all media information has an impact. The media's indispensable role is to present a variety of relevant information, to hold dialogues and discussions

28 For that, see contributions: GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNÁIOVÁ, S.: Media Coverage and Its Determinants in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *Communication Today*, 2022, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 46-58; GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNÁIOVÁ, S., GÁLIK, S.: Epistemic and Ethical Risks of Media Reporting in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic, as Challenges for the Development of Journalistic Practice. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 76-94.

29 K. Lovaš critically reflects on the current media in the context of informing about the COVID-19 pandemic. According to him, 3 phenomena played their role here to a great extent: ideology, activism and propaganda, which undermine the original mission of journalists to capture and convey information. See: LOVAŠ, K.: Aktivizmus a ideologizácia médií. In SÁMELOVÁ, A., STANKOVÁ, M., HACEK, J. (eds.): *Fenómén 2021: Pandémia covidu-19 a médiá*. Bratislava : UK, 2021, p. 376-379.

with various experts with different opinions, etc. This implies that the level of education of most news reporters is probably not at a sufficient level, which is a challenge for media education institutions. On the other hand, we are aware that this questionnaire survey was not fully representative, and therefore further research should be conducted, thus increasingly completing and refining the picture of the Slovak media at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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