

Pride and Anxiety: British journalists' emotional labour in the Covid-19 pandemic

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Funding details

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under Grant AH/V00543X/1.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for support in project's data collection and comments on an earlier version of this paper that I received from Professor Kurt Barling.

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Abstract This study aims to identify and explore forms of emotional labour, i.e., efforts to manage emotions which labourers perceive as experiencing in their work life, that British political journalists experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic and the perceived consequences of this labour. It is argued the examination of journalists' emotional labour matters as it can impact journalists' workplace wellbeing and mental health, but also work commitment and quality of journalism. In order to answer the research question, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 34 British journalists covering politics in the spring of 2021. The findings indicate that journalists experienced a range of negative emotions working in the pandemic, with anxiety and frustration being among the most commonly reported ones, but also important was the feeling of pride in their work. The inability to access established, albeit informal, support systems, tied primarily to a physical newsroom space, but also other socialisation spaces, such as working on location, removed opportunities for emotion management and induced new, and often persistent, emotions of anxiety, frustration, loneliness and nervousness related to work.

Keywords: journalist, emotional labour, pandemic, trauma reporting, newsroom, interviews

In just a few weeks in the spring of 2020 the working lives of journalists were turned upside down. In those countries worst affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, persistent lockdowns have transformed the practice of journalism from a face-to-face to a predominately virtual working existence. Also, given how omnipresent the topic was, and that many fields, such as sports and arts, stopped their activities, many journalists changed beats and started reporting on the coronavirus story, which contained elements of health, science and economy, among others, they might have been unfamiliar with. Further, many of these stories contained an element of trauma, which reporters covering crime and courts might have been accustomed to, but many others faced the challenge of trauma reporting for the first time. The (trauma) reporting was coupled with personal experience of living through it, and anxiety about the loved ones at risk from the virus. At the same time, there was seemingly never higher demand for journalists to perform at their best, with the bar to provide reliable, trustworthy, relevant and timely information set very high.

This article reports the study of journalists' emotional labour during the Covid-19 pandemic. In other words, it examines the emotions that journalists experienced while performing their jobs in the above-described circumstances, the ways in which

they managed them and consequences of this process. As Thomson (2021) explains, there are at least three important reasons why journalists' emotional labour is worth exploring. One, the negation and/or suppression of emotions in journalism can influence the quality of journalistic output. Two, ignoring or marginalising journalists' emotional labour can negatively impact their mental health and wellbeing. And three, normalisation of conversations about emotions in journalistic work can benefit journalists' mental health by development of better support systems which can help them manage their emotions and consequently, improve wellbeing. Indeed, even pre-pandemic journalism has been classed as one of the most stressful occupations (Monteiro & Marques-Pinto, 2017) with journalists found to be at particular risk of stress and burnout (Gascón et al., 2021). Further, early studies of journalists' work in the Covid-19 pandemic indicate high levels of anxiety and work-related stress (Crowley, 2020; Selva & Feinstein, 2020), which appear higher than in the workforce in general (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2020). Hence, further insight into triggers and consequences of these negative effects of work are needed in this particular industry.

Consequently, this study aims to explore the lived experience of journalists' emotional labour during the pandemic, unpacking the activities that induced emotions, emotions that were experienced, ways they have been managed and consequences of this labour. With this, it contributes directly to the literature on the role of emotions in journalism, and emotional labour more specifically, as well as growing our understanding of a range of issues in journalism, including workplace wellbeing, organisational support, trends transforming the sector and trauma reporting. Specifically, the findings presented here highlight journalists primarily perceive their emotional labour as having an impact on their mental health, wellbeing, and job satisfaction, rather than journalistic process and output. In addition, they also suggest that the digital transformations in journalism, such as the use of virtual newsrooms and digital newsgathering, which have been accelerated by the pandemic, have not only been emotion-inducing, but have also hindered journalists' ability to apply individual-level emotion management strategies and accentuated insufficiencies in organisational support.

Emotional labour in journalism

Emotional labour, as defined by Hochschild (1983), refers to the labourers' management of emotion based on the requirements of their job or profession. Historically, it has been researched in journalism with reference to journalists covering conflict and traumatic events, where it seemed appropriate to inquire about the ways in which journalists dealt with negotiating their emotional responses, primarily with demands of objectivity in their reporting, and ways in which this affected them (e.g. Feinstein, Owen, and Blair 2002; Dworzniak, 2006; Dworzniak-Hoak, 2020). More recently scholars in the field started examining journalists' emotional labour beyond that tied to conflict and trauma reporting, acknowledging the importance of emotions in journalism generally and emotional labour more specifically. For example, Hopper and Huxford (2015) interviewed newspaper journalists in the US who revealed that they engage in emotional labour in the stage of news production by suppression and deferment of emotions with the aim of achieving objectivity in their work. Similar findings were revealed in the study of British journalists, who also reported managing their emotions in the pursuit of objectivity, but additionally also considering emotions to play an important part in dealing with sources (Richards & Rees, 2011). Thomson (2021), importantly, found that journalists experience and manage emotions in all stages of the journalistic production process, from pre-production to publishing/broadcasting.

Hence, existing scholarship, which most often seemed to focus on journalists' emotional labour in newsgathering and production processes, and defined emotional labour with reference to organisational and professional norms, might be masking the extent and importance of emotions, and their management, in journalists' work. Specifically, interview-based studies indicate that journalists perceive emotional labour as not restricted to story production process, output nor workplace. For example, it was found that journalists use emotions to motivate themselves for work, that emotions evoked at work can be intertwined with those from personal life, work-related emotions can also persist during off work periods (Dworznic-Hoak, 2020), they can be evoked outside of the story production process, such as in dealing with audiences and harassment (Miller & Lewis, 2020), as well as be induced by working conditions (e.g. precarious pay, working hours, job insecurity), work relationships (e.g. within newsroom, with editors), competitive nature of work (Fedler, 2004) etc. Thomson (2021, 963) sums it up by noting: 'emotions are not limited to any defined workplace or schedule. They transcend artificial boundaries and permeate many

facets of their life, including their dreams.’ This perspective chimes with Deuze and Witschge's (2018) claim that journalists nowadays go ‘beyond journalism’ in their work. Hence, emotional labour should capture the efforts to manage emotions which journalists’ tie to their work life even if they are felt beyond the story production process and their management does not necessarily aim to meet organisational or professional standards. In other words, scholarship should evolve from solely or excessively focusing on instances in which journalists show emotions when this is not deemed appropriate, such as CNN’s Sara Sidner crying on air in January 2021 while reporting on the pandemic, or those in which journalists suppress their emotions to meet professional standards, which we observe regularly when war correspondents report from conflict zones. Consequently, this study conceptualises emotional labour as an effort to manage emotions which journalists perceive as experiencing in their work life. It is suggested that the process starts with an activity/event (or a lack of it), which leads to an emotional response, which journalists manage by applying chosen strategies with a range of consequences.

Several studies have looked at the management strategies that journalists employ when experiencing emotional labour (albeit not always framed in such a way), classing them as problem- or emotion-focused (Hughes, Ilesue, de Ortega Bárcenas, Sandoval, & Lozano, 2021), internally or externally sourced (Monteiro, Marques-Pinto, & Roberto, 2016) etc. Among the most common strategies found across studies are *verbal processing* with peers and personal networks (e.g. debriefing, seeking support, using black humour), *internal processing* (such as introspection, acceptance, perspective-taking, positive reappraisal, rumination), attentional deployment (e.g. following routines; diversionary activities such as exercise), boundary setting (e.g. not checking emails on days off), as well as more formal strategies of counselling and therapy (Hughes et al., 2021; Miller & Lewis, 2020; Thomson, 2021). The entire process is likely to have one or multiple consequences - on the quality of journalistic output (Thomson, 2021), journalists’ job satisfaction and work commitment (Barnes, 2016), and/or their mental health and wellbeing (Gascón et al., 2021; Monteiro & Marques-Pinto, 2017).

Journalists’ work in the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic came at a time when journalism was already struggling with the difficulties posed by a decline in revenue, increasing platform competition,

technological changes etc. Affected media companies have reacted, among other things, with mass redundancies, downsizing, converged or virtual newsrooms, introduction of AI, and rethinking relationships with audiences, particularly on social media. For journalists, this often meant increased job precarity, manifested in declining pay, job insecurity, multi-platform production, as well as the added work of dealing with audiences on social media, and working on commercial activities alongside editorial duties (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Hayes & Silke, 2019; Kramp & Loosen, 2018). In other words, many journalists have been found to work more, often going 'beyond journalism', for less pay and little to none support with their emotional labour, which is thought to be correlated with higher levels of stress and burnout in the profession (Miret, 2021).

The lockdowns that started in 2020 across the world can be seen to have changed how journalism is produced almost overnight, or at least accelerated the processes that have already been ongoing in some places. First, instead of working in physical newsrooms, journalists started working remotely, from their homes (Hoak, 2021; Majid, 2021). And while around a third of the British workforce was found to be working fully remotely during the pandemic (Parry et al., 2021), the trend was significantly more present among journalists with data showing that three out of four journalists worked from home in the early 2021 (Majid, 2021). Physical newsrooms are often described as busy, chaotic and noisy spaces designed for journalists and editors to collaborate and work together, characterised by camaraderie, but also conflict (Goyanes & Cañedo, 2021; Plesner & Raviola, 2016; Zaman, 2013). Experiments with digital newsrooms pre-pandemic have received mixed responses from journalists. For example, Bunce, Wright and Scott (2018) have found them perceived as an efficient tool for collaboration and story-production among geographically distant journalists, but not as effective in facilitating relationships among journalists as might be the case in a physical newsroom. Journalists also reported difficulties in 'switching off' and balancing private and work life when assigned to virtual newsrooms (ibid.). Additionally, during the pandemic, for many parents among journalists in countries where schools were closed during lockdowns, the remote work presented an additional challenge of balancing home and work life due to childcare and home-schooling responsibilities during the workday (Tobitt, 2020). Further, a study of journalism students who worked in a virtual after physical newsroom, found some have embraced the virtual newsroom describing it as

offering them more freedom, independence and opportunities for creative work, while others felt the lack of structure and resources, as well as regular feedback from editors in the digital environment, hindered their ability to produce good quality work (Wall, 2015). Other changes that many journalists experienced during the pandemic were the switch to digital newsgathering, i.e., finding, reaching and interviewing sources via digital tools, instead of face to face (Hoak, 2021); covering new beats (Maas, 2020); and working longer hours (Majid, 2021; Selva & Feinstein, 2020).

And while these changes to journalists' working practice have been coming into effect at high speed, the demand for quality journalism was increasing as audiences relied on media to keep them informed about a worldwide health crisis that was being experienced for many on a very personal level (Newman, 2020). It doesn't surprise, then, that one of the first peer-reviewed studies on journalists' emotional labour in the pandemic indicates that journalists felt *vulnerable*, fearing for their health and jobs, but also felt *responsibility* to push on and deliver information to the public to help it cope with the crisis (Perreault & Perreault, 2021). This seemed to have come at a cost as early studies warn of a crisis of mental health and workplace wellbeing among journalists, which have experienced significant levels of anxiety, stress and depression during this period (Crowley, 2020; Selva & Feinstein, 2020; Tobitt, 2020). The study of the Press Gazette from 2021, one year on from the first UK lockdown, revealed that British journalists felt they have been more productive working remotely, but less happy and creative in their work, apparently triggered by the inability to work in a physical newsroom (Majid, 2021; Tobitt, 2021). Research from the US also highlights that journalists have been missing their newsrooms, feeling more lonely working remotely, missing the interaction with their colleagues and feedback from managers (Hoak, 2021). Interestingly, stressors tied to the newsroom were not listed in surveys, meaning they were not on researchers' agenda, but came to prominence due to their mentions in free comments.

It seems that while media companies worked hard on reimagining their business operations, they, at least initially, paid little attention to how the new circumstances would impact their journalists' mental health and wellbeing (Crowley, 2020; Posetti, Bell, & Brown, 2020; Selva & Feinstein, 2020). That said, some media organisations did rise to the challenge, some did so with time, and some did so partially. It is notable, though, that there seems to be more focus on journalists' mental health and emotional wellbeing since the pandemic started, and there are

several individual and collective initiatives launched to raise this issue on the agenda and support journalists in their emotional labour. The importance of this, both for journalists as individuals, but also the media industry, is highlighted by Hoak's (2021) study in the US, which found that better organisational support was correlated to lower levels of stress experienced by journalists, and increased work commitment and work quality.

In sum, the early evidence suggests that journalists have experienced high levels of work-related anxiety and stress while reporting during the Covid-19 pandemic, arguably contributing to a range of mental health issues, and perhaps even affecting the quality of media output. Given most existing evidence comes from online surveys, there is a gap in a more in-depth understanding of journalists' lived experience of working through this pandemic. Consequently, this study aims to answer the following research question: What forms of emotional labour have journalists experienced in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic and with what perceived consequences?

Research design

In order to answer the research question, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with British journalists covering politics. The focus on this group of journalists is motivated by several reasons. One, the United Kingdom has been one of the countries most severely hit by the pandemic; in May 2021 it had the highest death toll from coronavirus in Europe, and the fifth highest in the world (Worldometers, 2021). Further, journalists covering politics have been at the centre of coronavirus reporting, alongside those covering health and science. While it may be reasonable to focus on the latter group of reporters, who were arguably front and centre in reporting about coronavirus and have faced exposure to the virus while reporting on location, the reasons for focusing on political journalists are threefold. First, the Covid-19 pandemic came on top of several intense years for British political journalists, as the UK has had three General Elections, the EU referendum and several years of Brexit process within five years of the pandemic. Second, political journalists have regularly been faced with uncivil and abusive behaviour from other political communication actors in this period, particularly on social media, which resulted in unremitting stress having a negative impact on their mental health even

prior to the pandemic (Šimunjak, 2022). And third, while health and science reporters mainly remained within their beats, political journalists had an added pressure as they came to forefront of coronavirus reporting, with health and science topics regularly outside of their specialism. Given all this, and in light of the early studies suggesting British journalists have had not only a difficult pandemic, but also demanding few years before it hit, with severe mental health consequences for many, it is suggested that getting an insight into their emotional labour and its consequences is both important and urgent.

The interview method was deemed the most appropriate method as it allows exploring journalists' experiences, emotions and perceived consequences of their emotional labour (King & Horrocks, 2010). The semi-structured format of interviews allowed for identification of commonalities and outliers among data, at the same time empowering interviewees to speak about topics they thought relevant regarding their emotional labour and work in the pandemic (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The question that interviewees have been asked directly was: Have you noticed any changes in your emotional labour during the pandemic, for example, either in which work activities induce emotions, or which emotions are being experienced and managed? Hence, the study aimed to capture specific forms of emotional labour that were experienced due to work in the pandemic, rather than more general forms of emotional labour. The question was part of a larger-scale interview which aimed to investigate journalists' emotional labour¹, and several interviewees have referred to emotional labour in the pandemic while answering other questions as well. Also, while emotional labour has been loosely defined to interviewees in the briefing stage as the effort required for managing work-related emotions, they have been encouraged to speak about it as they saw fit in order to capture the bottom-up understanding of what they themselves consider as emotional labour and the perceived effects of it.

Journalists have been invited to participate in the project through several public calls, as well as direct emails. Regarding the former, the call for participation was published by, among others, National Union of Journalists and the Press Gazette. As to the latter, more than 200 personalised emails have been sent to British journalists covering politics inviting them to participate in interviews. The final sample consists of 34 interviewees from 15 different media organisations (see Table 1 for characteristics of the sample). While the aim of qualitative research such as this

is not to be representative, the sample does somewhat reflect British journalist workforce (Spilsbury, 2018) and gives an insight into experiences of journalists working on different platforms, covering different geographical areas, with different seniority levels and years of experience in the industry.

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample

Gender	Position	Experience in industry	Primary platform	Focus
Male (n=20)	Editor (n=14)	Senior, >20 y (n=14)	Broadcast (n=14)	National (EN, SC, WS, NI), regional and local topics (n=10)
Female (n=14)	Chief reporter / Correspondent (n=10)	Mid-career, 10-19 y (n=10)	Print (n=13)	UK-wide topics (n=19)
	Journalist / Reporter (n=10)	Early career, <10 y (n=10)	Digital (n=7)	International topics (n=5)

The interviews were conducted from February to May 2021 over Zoom video conferencing platform. On average they lasted 40 minutes, with the longest interview taking 72 minutes, and the shortest 21 minutes. Interviewees have been briefed about their rights and project details, presented with an information page detailing how their data will be collected, handled and protected, and asked to sign an informed consent form on Qualtrics ahead of the interview. In order to protect interviewees' identities, their names and personal information have been anonymized, which is common practice in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Transcribed interviews, which were redacted where identifying information has been mentioned, have been analysed using NVivo software for qualitative analysis. In this, principles of thematic analysis have been employed. Specifically, interview segments have been in the first instance assigned codes, which have consequently been organised into meaningful themes (Ayres, 2008; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2013). Given the exploratory nature of the study, codes have been induced

from the data, rather than generated from the literature. In sum, four key themes emerged from the thematic analysis: the home, the newsroom, the field and the journalism. Each is explored in detail in the next section.

Findings

Of the four themes that were induced from the data, references to emotional labour related to working from home have been most frequent (n=24), followed by those relating to newsroom/office (n=15), fieldwork (n=15), and journalism (n=10). Each of these themes captures several forms of emotional labour that journalists have reported experiencing, referring to activities and spaces inducing emotions, ways in which these have been managed, and perceived consequences of the labour. As will be discussed in detail below, journalists primarily spoke about negative feelings and effects of their emotional labour, but importantly, there were positive elements in their emotional labour during the pandemic too. In addition, two interviewees reported no impact of the pandemic on their emotional labour, while another one said that the effect was negligible.

The Home

Interestingly, instead of focusing on emotional labour which could be considered journalism-specific, the majority of journalists spoke about emotions that were tied to remote working, which appears to have triggers and consequences very similar to those in the general UK workforce. For example, journalists found the longer working hours, difficulties of maintaining boundaries between work and home life, isolation from peers and lack of support from line managers in this form of work to induce feelings of anxiety, worry and loneliness, with reported negative effects on their mental health and wellbeing. Similar observations have been made regarding the wider UK workforce as well (Parry et al., 2021).

And while on balance the majority of references to work from home are related to negative emotions, six interviewees spoke about the positive aspects of work from home. They reported to have been feeling more relaxed, flexible and free, and less tired, having been working from home, which is in line with the findings of the British Press Gazette's survey (Majid, 2021; Tobitt, 2021). Often mentioned as an enabling factor in this regard has been the lack of commute, particularly for those

who had several hours of commute a day going into the office or on location. For others it was more a sense of agency and freedom to manage their time that made the difference, as Wall (2015) previously observed in her research on the benefits of virtual newsrooms. A digital journalist (early career) described it like this:

Because of the flexibility and the freedom, I get to go at my own pace, rather than to having to be on all the time, you know, and get a bit fatigue. I can have a nap if I want and then come back with more energy and inspiration and ideas, rather than to get burnt out like I used to do before the pandemic.

Several interviewees positioned themselves as introverts in explaining why the remote work did not affect them particularly. Interestingly, the data from the analysis of the UK workforce suggests that remote working on average hurt introverts' mental health, speculating this to be due to demands for constant interaction via digital technologies (Parry et al., 2021). However, journalists who self-identified as introverts reported having issues concentrating in newsrooms, which are usually noisy open-plan spaces, hence found it easier to focus and concentrate working from home, resulting in less stress and better productivity.

Interestingly, one reporter found himself not only happier and healthier working from home, but also found it easier to switch off after work.

Digital chief reporter (mid-career)

I think I'm probably... I guess happier and less tired, I would say, because of the change in working practices, and I think that's probably had an effect. And I think it's therefore easier, you know, at the end of the day... Rather than sort of finishing work and then getting on a train and you kind of still check your emails on the train home and stuff like... I think, maybe I found it easier to just close my laptop and that's kind of it. Which is, you know, I think is healthier.

However, this was not a sentiment widely shared, as more interviewees actually reported that working from home led to blurring of the home and work life, making them feel more tired and having difficulties switching off both from work and news in general. This reportedly increased their anxiety and stress levels, and led to burnout.

Similar effects of working from home for journalists have been found across the world (Crowley, 2020; Selva & Feinstein, 2020; Tobitt, 2020).

Anxiety, as well as worry, was also expressed by several editors who were *concerned for their staff*, as well as journalists worried about their colleagues' wellbeing. Adding to the feelings of concern for staff and colleagues in the remote form of work was the inability to pick up non-verbal cues signalling they need support, which was managed by strategically and regularly checking in with others. Particular emphasis was reportedly placed on supporting colleagues with (child)care obligations and those living on their own. And indeed, both issues – stress relating to the need to balance work and family life, particularly childcare and home-schooling, and the feelings of loneliness and isolation – have been mentioned in the interviews. The former primarily by journalists with children who reported trying to establish boundaries, such as working to contracted hours and disconnecting from digital technologies when off-work in order to manage their anxiety and related stress. However, several reported problems with maintaining these boundaries, leading to further stress. Feelings of loneliness were often reported by early-career journalists, mostly younger individuals, in line with the research from the US (Hoak, 2021). They report trying to use digital technologies for work-related social interactions, but as Parry et al. (2021) found in the study of the general UK workforce as well, these often felt short of enabling emotion management and hindering negative effects on workers' wellbeing, as well as job satisfaction.

Several interviewees mentioned that their organisations put a range of measures in place during the pandemic to support their emotion management in the remote form of work, such as introducing contact support lines and mental health first-aiders, as well as securing access to mental health mobile apps and online wellbeing training sessions. However, some interviewees felt that the support offered by Human Resources was 'box-ticking' and not particularly useful in supporting their emotion management. Five interviewees explicitly spoke about the lack of emotional support they felt in the remote form of work, which was found in other studies as well (e.g. Hoak, 2021; Parry et al., 2021). The lack of institutional support for emotion management was reported to cause frustration which, usually following internal processing, contributed to decreased job satisfaction and even considerations to change jobs.

The Newsroom

While many of the interviewees, particularly broadcasters, continued working in physical newsrooms at least to an extent, there was little mention of emotional labour related to operating in these during the pandemic. Instead, interviewees who referenced physical newsrooms did so in the context of elements they were missing from not being in them, causing them feelings of insecurity, frustration, nervousness, anxiety, and/or loneliness.

A frequently mentioned element that interviewees missed by not being in a shared physical space with peers was brainstorming with colleagues, which, particularly for early-career journalists, caused frustration, insecurity and nervousness. However, the feeling of frustration was shared by several more experienced journalists who believe that teamwork and brainstorming are important elements of the job that increase the quality of journalism.

Broadcast editor [mid-career]

I think the best ideas often come from interacting with other people. And... When you're sitting in a newsroom and a story breaks and you have five people around you that you can shout across to like, 'Oh, who could we interview?' or, 'Where can we go?' and you get four ideas back... That really sparks creativity. Whereas if you're working from home and a story breaks, often... You know, you can only have one phone call at a time, and I mean you can do multiple zoom meetings, but you just don't get the same dynamic in terms of creating ideas.

Several of these journalists reported feeling like freelancers, i.e., working on their own without access to a physical newsroom, which they saw as a space enabling collaboration, as well as generating and sharing ideas. Also, the strategies that were put in place to manage this and other elements of newsroom work, and arguably then also emotions tied to it, such as Zoom rooms, Slack channels and WhatsApp groups, were not deemed to be adequate, or at least as efficient, in mitigating the lack of presence in the newsroom. Interestingly, journalists did not explicitly mention that this frustration had an impact on the quality of their output. Rather, it appears that the frustration with the perceived lack of ability to brainstorm was an emotion associated with the inability to apply preferred practices in story-production process. This was also evident by the emotion management strategy often being internal

processing such as acceptance and perspective-taking of the current situation with a view that production processes would at some point return to 'normal.'

Early-career journalists reported missing two other aspects of physical newsrooms – *professional reassurance* and *team identity*, which contributed to feelings of anxiety, nervousness and lack of confidence. Regarding the former, several interviewees reported it was the casual, informal (positive) feedback and developmental guidance they were missing, which made them more insecure and anxious about their work. Interviewees who spoke about the lack of team identity mentioned they felt like freelancers, often leading to feelings of loneliness. This seemed to be the case particularly with those who started new jobs during the pandemic and have not had the chance to socialise with their colleagues. In particular, this finding seems to chime with the research on virtual newsrooms not being as conducive to building relationships among team members as are physical newsrooms (Bunce et al., 2018).

These last two triggers of emotional labour were not mentioned in relation to the quality of journalism, but they can be seen as having a potentially negative impact on journalists' job satisfaction, work commitment and wellbeing. Importantly, it does not appear that mentioned emotions are regularly being managed, leading to them persisting over a longer period of time. Indeed, it is precisely the physical newsroom that has often been mentioned as the space in which this emotion management would normally take place through verbal processing with peers. In the above cases, as well as others, many interviewees spoke about the lack of access to a physical newsroom resulting in the inability for *emotional release to, and support from, colleagues*, leading to feelings of frustration, anxiety and worry. For example, interviewees spoke about how the lack of emotional release, for example, speaking about problems with a story, manager, reactions on social media etc., caused frustration, and the lack of support led to negative feelings persisting longer and influencing their personal life.

Print correspondent [early career]

[...] you know, it's easier to say take a phone call with somebody shouting at you in an office with colleagues, where you've kind of got that immediate emotional support, compared to at home, where it's kind of like the professional life intruding on personal life, and those feelings and emotions are experienced in the private home,

rather than in an office that you can leave and... Can more easily separate from your personal life.

Overall, interviewees have framed the physical newsroom as a space enabling a range of emotion management strategies, primarily emphasising verbal processing with peers and managers. Without access to it, negative work-related emotions that arise might not get adequately managed.

The Field

Anxiety, frustration and loneliness were also most frequently mentioned feelings by interviewees who spoke about fieldwork, i.e., work on location. Again, interestingly, while a couple of interviewees, particularly those who reported on the pandemic, reported anxiety around trauma reporting related to covering coronavirus stories and interviewing sources who experienced trauma, the majority of emotional labour related to the fieldwork seems to be associated with the lack of work on location. In this context, particularly senior journalists spoke about the frustration of not being able to report from the field, while journalists of all levels of seniority and experience reported the lack of personal interactions with sources making the job more lonely and less enjoyable.

A broadcast editor (senior) explained the frustration with the *inability to report from location* in this way:

I'd say I've experienced deadening of emotions. [...] Because for me, the job of being a foreign correspondent, which I've done for... [...] My whole life, practically. And the whole process is tied up, for me, with going somewhere. The whole point about it is to be a witness. And if you're doing it remotely, which I've done 90% of the time in the last year... More than that, 98% of the time... [...] To be honest, it's really unstimulating.

Here, too, journalists engaged in internal processing, mainly coming to accept the situation as one that had no alternative at the time but is expected to change in the future, and continued producing output by employing new practices. And, as with the frustration with the lack of brainstorming, journalists did not see it as necessarily affecting the quality of their output, but rather with the inability to perform their roles

as they have internalized and previously practiced them. Consequently, this frustration can be seen to affect journalists' job satisfaction. However, there were also cases where frustration was evident in accounts of journalists who saw the lack of fieldwork as detrimental to journalists' ability to act as the fourth estate and hold power to account.

Print correspondent (senior)

We're not meeting people, we're not out there having casual conversations with people over coffee or at a conference where you run into people and get leads for story ideas, you get gossip that might seed an idea. It's been a terrible time. You know, while there has been a huge amount of news, it's been a great loss for journalism in this pandemic. [...] You would find in the corridors of power ways to kind of push buttons that might achieve what you want to achieve, which is getting the facts. And it's been an extraordinary, extraordinary... I've never come across this in my life and I've been reporting on very big subjects for many, many years.

These journalists usually highlighted they are still able to find stories and information that those in power do not want them finding but felt that they could be able to better perform their job if working in the field, which could be seen as affecting their job satisfaction.

As mentioned, *lack of personal interactions* in the field was also one of the elements that journalists identified as inducing emotions, describing it as less rewarding, less fun and more lonely. Some have tied these feelings to the lack of their everyday routines and the use of journalistic skills on location.

Broadcast editor (senior)

You know, body language, physical cues, the serendipity of bumping into someone, reading people, watching, using your eyes journalistically as well as your ears and your brain is, or has been, a huge part of my career. And that has all been on hold in the last year or much of it has been on hold. That has made the job more lonely. Less fun.

It is evident through the use of 'on hold' phrase in the quote above that the action, or actually lack of it, is considered temporary. Hence, it appears that the emotion of

loneliness in this context has been internally processed and accepted as something short-term that would disappear with the return to 'old' journalistic practices. It could, though, be seen as, at least short-term, affecting journalists' job satisfaction.

Some others have framed the interactions with sources as an emotion management strategy, which, once removed, led to increased stress, and negative impact on job satisfaction and mental health. As a digital senior journalist (senior) put it:

I would say that the fact I've been incarcerated for so many months has increased the levels of stress because... One of the outlets of that stress is to actually go out and see people and do your job... I'm very much a people person and very... You know, I love people; I love being out there... That's one of the reasons I do the job. And not seeing people and not being on the inside of what's going on, in a face-to-face sense, where they can see the whites of your eyes, is quite... Tough. It got a big effect. It's been quite tough. I've lost some of the reward elements of the job, for me.

Not surprisingly, several journalists also spoke about the *anxiety around covering coronavirus stories* and interviewing people who were affected by the pandemic, particularly those who haven't been doing trauma reporting previously. This appears in line with previous findings on trauma reporting (Barnes, 2016; Dworznik-Hoak 2020; Feinstein et al. 2013), and reflects the vulnerability which Perreault & Perreault (2021) found among American reporters.

Digital journalist (early career)

The last year I had a few phone calls with people who [have] just recently been bereaved. With people, you know, people who'd lost people to covid... That was a whole other step up in the emotional level of doing interviews with people. [...] I absolutely hated it. Really, really hated it and felt terrible doing it.

Some of these journalists reported processing these emotions of anxiety from trauma reporting through attentional deployment (e.g., focusing on journalistic routines and procedures) and internal processing, in particular through positive reappraisal. In this regard, one interviewee spoke how they came to realise that while they felt like intruding on grieving families, they could see they welcome the

opportunity to share their experiences and speak about the loved ones they lost. This, then, reassured them about their roles and actually increased their job satisfaction.

Also, two interviewees mentioned they felt that doing trauma reporting over the phone or video conferencing has made this form of work perhaps less emotionally challenging, as it was easier to manage their emotions and distance themselves from the interviewees and the story.

The Journalism

Those journalists who spoke about the journalism itself during the pandemic most frequently emphasised the feelings of responsibility to deliver quality information to their audiences, pride in the role that journalists played in the pandemic, but also that they felt they had to manage audiences' emotions that were coming their way, both positive and negative.

Six journalists of all levels of seniority and experience talked about the sense of responsibility and pride in their job and journalism more generally during the pandemic, but seemed to have felt the need to hide these emotions from others, particularly in the light of the very public failings of the industry in the past, and a low level of trust in the media in general. However, it is evident that the feeling of pride had a positive effect on these journalists' job satisfaction. As a broadcast editor (mid-career) put it:

I do think what we do is incredibly important, and I think across the industry, you know, our reporting on the pandemic saved lives and I'm not ashamed of saying that, you know. There's all this... There's a lot of false modesty out there about that because journalists don't like to pat themselves on the back and I certainly wouldn't say this if it wasn't anonymized but.... I do think our reporting on the pandemic saved thousands of lives and holding the government to account about the mistakes it was making was vital in that.

As mentioned, another aspect of emotional labour that journalists felt was heightened during the pandemic was dealing with emotions from the audiences. For example, on Twitter there was usually a heated discussion of journalists' questions posed at the daily government coronavirus press conference, which were regularly

watched by millions of viewers (Lawson, 2020). Users expressed a range of emotions at journalists, quite often anger and frustration.

This is how a broadcast editor (senior) explained experiencing these emotions:

[...] people have felt very afraid and out of control, and that makes them quite angry. And then, sometimes, the people who are reporting the news become the lightning rods for the anger or frustration. And I think that that has... Well, it has, you know, it has two sides of it. [...] I get a lot of love from the public and people that like the work I do. But there's also the engagement – so, so many emails, messages, people are... Yeah, people are switched in. So, in a way, it makes you feel your work's more valuable, which is good. In another way, it's quite a lot... You kind of feel like a lot of other people's emotional energy is coming at you. That's quite... That could be quite hard.

Journalists speaking about this issue mentioned using internal processing, particularly perspective-taking in rationalising why the audiences may be behaving in such a way, as well as attentional deployment in form of engaging in diverting activities, such as exercise, to manage their emotions. However, again, several journalists who often relied on diversionary activities as their key emotion management strategy found themselves unable to effectively regulate their emotions given the restrictions on movement and activities one can perform during the pandemic, leading to these emotions persisting over time and reportedly negatively affecting their mental health.

Discussion and conclusions

This study suggests that for journalists the work in the pandemic was characterised primarily by negative emotions, such as anxiety and frustration, often leading to stress and burnout, as was found in research across the world (Crowley, 2020; Selva & Feinstein, 2020). It is interesting to note that the most common trigger of emotional labour that interviewed journalists emphasised was the remote form of work, with the emotions and their consequences being similar to experiences observed in the British workforce in general (Parry et al., 2021). On the other hand, it perhaps isn't surprising that remote work was so high on journalists' list of emotional labour

triggers, given that data indicates that 74% of British journalists worked remotely during the 2021 lockdown (Majid, 2021), which is significantly higher than what data suggests for the general workforce (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2020). In other words, for journalism as an industry, this appears to be one of the key changes in working practices during the pandemic, as was observed in the US as well (Hoak, 2021), and consequently, one that demanded significant emotional labour which should not be overlooked or minimised. This finding could potentially have implications for other sectors relying on *knowledge workers*, i.e., those who think for a living, as they were found to be among those most likely to have worked remotely in the pandemic (Cameron, 2020) and have the most potential to continue working in this mode (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika, & Smit, 2020). Previous research has already warned that a significant section of these workers finds remote work hindering creativity, collaboration, and teamwork (Nguyen, 2021). The study presented in this article indicates that there are also important emotional labour implications of remote work which should be considered by employers wanting to support their employees and retain talent, particularly in the light of the so-called 'Great Resignation' that depicts an increased willingness of workers to resign their jobs in search of higher job satisfaction.

The emotion management strategies that journalists reported applying - from internal processing, such as perspective-taking, acceptance and positive reappraisal, to attentional deployment, boundary setting and verbal processing with peers and family - have been documented previously by similar research (e.g., Miller & Lewis, 2020; Thomson, 2018). However, importantly, journalists reported that due to the pandemic they frequently could not rely on their regular emotion management strategies, in particular verbal processing with peers, which usually occurs in physical newsrooms and is deemed highly effective. Boundary setting and attentional deployment in the form of engaging in diversionary activities proved challenging as well. This hindered journalists' ability to manage their emotions and invoked new emotions of frustration and anxiety which seemed to persist longer, affecting their wellbeing and mental health, as well as job satisfaction.

Indeed, this study found *the physical newsroom* to be one of the key elements in journalists' emotional labour. Compared to a virtual newsroom, physical newsroom was even pre-pandemic found to be more effective in supporting the development of relationships, as well as providing structure and developmental feedback for career

entrants (Bunce et al., 2018; Wall, 2015), which the analysis presented here echoes. On the trail of findings by Hoak (2021) and the Press Gazette (Tobitt, 2021), this study also revealed that journalists perceive the physical newsroom as a significant space for emotional labour - one that influences the quality of journalism, enables emotional release and support, and for early-career journalists also provides professional reassurance, which helps build confidence, and contributes to creating team identity. As such, the newsroom plays an important part as a space that enables journalists to effectively manage their emotions so they can perform their jobs. The lack of being in this physical space with their colleagues has reportedly induced emotions of anxiety, frustration and nervousness/insecurity, removed an essential support system which helps journalists manage emotions, and might have even affected the quality of journalism. Hence, this study echoes the caution expressed by Hoak (2021) that the developments in media industries, which see the rise of virtual newsrooms and a move towards hybrid working, should be done carefully and with consideration of the importance of physical newsroom for both journalists' wellbeing and the quality of journalism, particularly in the light of comments made by journalists in this study concerning the ineffectiveness of digital systems put in place to substitute physical newsrooms.

Further, the study revealed the importance of on *location reporting and personal interactions* with sources for emotion management, job satisfaction and perceived quality of journalism. In other words, the inability to conduct fieldwork and speak to sources face-to-face has reportedly made journalists frustrated in their attempts to get information and removed the rewarding, enjoyable element from work. This might be important if post-pandemic some of the remote newsgathering practices, and the sources' information sharing and remote working practices, remain permanent. The loss of direct and consistent access to locations and/or sources could be detrimental to journalism and journalists' job satisfaction.

In addition, journalists, and in particular editors managing teams, have expressed *worry about their colleagues' and team members' mental health and wellbeing*, which caused anxiety due to perceivably diminished ability to recognise the need for support, but also opportunities and skills to provide it. From interviewees' comments, it appears that managing these situations, and their own emotions tied to them, have been to a large extent improvised actions with often limited organisational support beyond establishment of digital communication

channels, particularly in smaller and local newsrooms. This reflects some of journalists' comments made elsewhere about the lack of organisational support for wellbeing and mental health during the pandemic (Crowley, 2020; Posetti et al., 2020; Selva & Feinstein, 2020). In the light of Hoak's (2021) finding that lower organisational support is correlated with higher levels of stress and lower degrees of work commitment, media organisations might consider paying more attention, and invest more, in support systems for journalists, in order to not only benefit their wellbeing, but also keep and attract quality staff and ensure their commitment to organisational values and goals. For example, two respondents in this study reported considering changing jobs due to the lack of organisational support during the pandemic.

In sum, this study aimed to identify and explore forms of emotional labour that British political journalists experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic and the perceived consequences of this labour. It revealed that journalists experienced a range of negative emotions working in the pandemic, with anxiety and frustration being among the most commonly reported ones. Also, the lack of institutional support, as well as access to established, albeit informal, support systems, tied primarily to the newsroom, but also other socialisation spaces, have removed opportunities for emotion management and induced new, and often persistent, emotions of anxiety, frustration, loneliness and nervousness related to work. Overall, by redefining and expanding on the notion of emotional labour in journalism, the study furthers our understanding of workplace wellbeing, organisational support, trends transforming the sector (such as digital newsgathering and virtual newsrooms) and trauma reporting.

While the study is limited by its qualitative nature and the size of the sample, its value derives from the sample structure reflecting the diversity of journalist workforce in the UK, and the fact it supports, clarifies and advances many of the initial findings of early studies on the topic. Future research could attempt to quantify the extent to which the forms of journalists' emotional labour revealed in this study are experienced among the workforce and, given some discontent with the support they received in the pandemic, shed more light onto the organisational support systems that journalists would welcome in safeguarding their wellbeing.

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¹ The interview contained 4 groups of questions focused on: emotional labour in everyday work; emotional labour specific to the pandemic; emotional labour specific to work with social media; and the perceptions of support systems in journalism.