





# Conflicts in the professional roles of journalists in Spain: Ideals and practice

Conflictos en los roles profesionales de los periodistas en España: Ideales y práctica

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## ABSTRACT

Based on a survey of 122 journalists from four Spanish newspapers carried out from 2015 to 2016, this paper analyses to what extent these professionals perceive a disconnection –a gap– between their role conception and their perceived role enactment, that is between their professional ideals and their journalistic practice, and which are the most “conflicting” roles in a Polarized Pluralist media system. According to the perceptions of the professionals surveyed, journalists in Spain hold a role conflict when they work in a newspaper. The findings show significant differences between the role conception and the perceived role enactment in six of the seven professional roles. The biggest divergences are located in the watchdog, civic and disseminator roles. The conflict between the professional ideals and their implementation in the news is always resolved in favor of the media organizations. Our results are consistent and support the previous studies that have defined the Polarized Pluralist media system as a media ecosystem where journalists accumulate little power compared to the media organizations, which are in financial debt and dependent on political and economic powers. Results are discussed according to the literature review as well as the context in which the study was developed.

## RESUMEN

A partir de una encuesta realizada entre 2015 y 2016 a 122 periodistas de cuatro diarios españoles, el artículo estudia en qué medida estos profesionales perciben una desconexión –una brecha– entre sus ideales y su puesta en práctica, y cuáles son los roles más «conflictivos» en el contexto de un sistema de medios de pluralismo polarizado. Los resultados indican, a tenor de la percepción de los profesionales encuestados, que los periodistas presentan un conflicto de roles ya que se hallaron diferencias significativas entre la concepción de seis de los siete roles profesionales y la percepción de la puesta en práctica de dichas funciones. Las mayores divergencias se localizan en los roles vigilante, cívico y diseminador. Los conflictos de roles se resolvieron en todos los casos a favor de los intereses de quienes detentan el poder y en contra de los ideales de los periodistas. Estos resultados son congruentes y apoyan los hallazgos de publicaciones previas que retratan al sistema de medios de pluralismo polarizado como un ecosistema mediático donde los profesionales del periodismo, como colectivo, acumulan poco poder frente al ostentado por las organizaciones de medios, endeudadas por una excesiva «financierización» y dependientes del poder político y económico. Los resultados se discuten de acuerdo con la literatura existente, así como con el contexto en que se realizó la investigación.

## KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Journalism, professional roles, professional attitudes, conflict, press, media system, quantitative research, survey.  
Periodismo, roles profesionales, actitudes profesionales, conflicto, prensa, sistema de medios, investigación cuantitativa, encuesta.



## 1. Introduction and state of the art

The watchdog function is part of the DNA of journalists' professional culture. However, the media –which are sometimes allies of political and economic actors– may favour information whose function is to support those in power instead of keeping watch over them. A journalist identified as having a watchdog role may in practice be compelled to play the status quo promoter role. That is the starting point of this article: journalists' perceptions of the existence of role conflicts that give rise to a gap between their aspirations and their professional activity in practice.

The individual ideals by which journalists define and legitimize their functions in society are called 'role conceptions' (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996; Vos, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2007). Roles are therefore central factors of their professional identities (Deuze, 2005). According to role theory (Burke & Reitzes, 1981), journalists try to enact their ideals when constructing their news stories ('role enactment'). Tandoc, Hellmueller, and Vos (2013: 541) stated that "if a journalist perceives his role as being a disseminator, the desire for consistency will lead him to enact the same disseminator role" in society.

However, professional practice goes beyond the individual dimension since journalistic work is the outcome of a collective and relational process subject to negotiation (Mellado, 2015). It is influenced by organisational, political and economic factors (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011), and the vagaries to which a journalist's professional autonomy is prone (Mellado & Humanes, 2012; Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013). The news is shaped in that negotiation, with roles manifesting themselves in news content (role performance) (Mellado, 2015; Mellado & al., 2017). Journalists ultimately perceive how near or far such manifestation is from the enactment of their ideals (perceived role enactment).

Based on these assumptions, this article studies the extent to which Spanish journalists perceive a gap between their ideals (role conceptions) and their enactment thereof (perceived role enactment), and what the most conflicting roles are within the context of a Polarised Pluralist media system like Spain's, which is characterised by weak professionalisation and high levels of political parallelism and instrumentalisation (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). To that end, the conceptualisation of journalistic roles into three dimensions (Mellado, 2015) is taken as the starting point. The dimensions are the presence of journalistic voice in the news item, journalism's power relations, and audience approach. Each of these three dimensions comprises different roles. The first refers to the presence (interventionist role) or absence (disseminator role) of the journalist as an actor in the news. The second refers to relations between the media and economic and political powers and includes the watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles. The third (audience approach) is about how journalistic practices build relations with the audience through three roles: the service, infotainment, and civic roles. Details of the operationalisation of each role can be found in the Materials and Method section (Table 1).

This article is part of the international project entitled Journalistic Role Performance Around the Globe ([www.journalisticperformance.org](http://www.journalisticperformance.org)), which brings together researchers from more than 20 countries worldwide with the aim of comparing journalistic performance in different media systems.

### 1.1. The gap between ideals and practice within different contexts

The tensions and discrepancies between individual and collective aspects may give rise to "role conflict" when journalists feel that there is an inconsistency between their perceptions of what they ought to do and the work they think or say they do for their media outlets (Mellado, Hellmueller, & Donsbach, 2017). As a result of role conflict, it is possible to speak of a perceived gap between ideals and news that is conceptually different from a "real gap" between them (Mellado & van Dalen, 2014). While the former implies a perceived gap between journalists' ideals and the enactment thereof, the latter represents a tangible and certain gap between their ideals and the manifestation of their work in news. Although there is no reason why the discrepancies and the perception of a gap by journalists should inevitably imply that a media outlet is malfunctioning (Mellado, Hellmueller, & Donsbach, 2017), the consequences of such perceptions may damage the profession in the long term (Nord, 2007). Indeed, they may generate frustration among journalists (Sigelman, 1973; Stark, 1962) and chip away at their commitment to a media outlet, causing an inevitable loss of quality in the news they produce (Pihl-Thingvad, 2015).

Regarding the object of study of this work, the perceived gap between a journalist's ideals and the perceived enactment thereof, a number of examples within different contexts can be found.

In the study by Ramaprasad and Hamdy (2006), Egyptian journalists asserted that there was a mismatch between the importance placed on journalistic functions and how often they could manifest such functions in their work. For example, the democracy-sustaining function (second in order of importance) was the one they least

enacted. Weaver, Beam, Brownley, Voakes, and Wilhoit (2007: 233) found a modest link between the roles that American journalists said they defended and the roles present in what they themselves considered their best works. Oi, Fukuda, and Sako (2012: 57) found that Japanese journalists placed considerable importance on the watchdog role. Despite that, they believed they were unsuccessful at “investigating the activities of the government”. In Denmark, more than 60% of journalists considered the watchdog function important or very important, but only 30% of them perceived that they could carry it out to the same levels (Pihl-Thingvad, 2015). Recently, Raemy, Beck, and Hellmueller (2018) found that Swiss journalists established a strong relationship between role conception and the perception of the work they thought they routinely did, with an apparent lack of influence from organisational factors, except in the case of the watchdog role.

None of these studies has specifically explored the perceived gap between journalists’ professional ideals and the perceived enactment thereof in a Polarised Pluralist media system like Spain’s.

### 1.2. Professional roles in Spain: from their conceptualisation to their materialization

Following on from studies on professional role conceptions (Cohen, 1963; Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1972; Janowitz, 1975; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996; Weaver, 1998; Patterson & Donsbach, 1996; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Weaver & Willnat, 2012), many works have helped to shape what we know about Spanish journalists’ ideals (Humanes, 1998; Canel & Sánchez-Aranda, 1999; Martín & Amurrio, 2003; Roses & Farias, 2010; Berganza, Lavín, & Piñeiro-Laván, 2017).

Focusing on the most recent publications, Spanish journalists have been found to identify themselves with the citizens’ spokesperson role more readily than they do with other functions such as the disseminator, adversary, watchdog, audience instructor, infotainment or status quo promoter ones (Berganza, & al., 2017). However, studies on the manifestation of roles in news suggest that the Spanish press is characterised by the prominence of the interventionist role. Roles like the watchdog one are determined, for example, by thematic beats, yet keeping watch over economic issues is dodged in practice despite the ideals that the surveyed journalists habitually manifested (Humanes & Roses, 2018).

Based on the differences found in research projects related to the importance placed on journalistic roles and their presence in news content, this study analyses—for the very first time in Spain—the perceived gap between journalists’ role conception and role enactment.

### 1.3. A context prone to “role conflict”

Is Spain’s media ecosystem prone to confronting journalists with professional role conflict? Previous studies have noted a number of characteristics to suggest that this may be the case.

**The Spanish press system, as a prototypical case of the Polarised Pluralist media system, is prone to creating professional role conflict between journalists and the newspapers for which they work, especially within a context of political and financial crisis. The conflicts were always settled to the detriment of the journalists’ ideals, and the widest gaps were found in the watchdog role (curtailing control over those in power), the disseminator role (lessening impartiality), the civic role (discouraging their social catalyst role) and the service role (curtailing their capacity to advise on day-to-day matters). Likewise, the journalists were compelled to enact more than they considered necessary the loyal-facilitator role –promoting a positive image of the powerful– and the infotainment role–boosting entertainment.**

The Spanish media system has been categorised as a Polarised Pluralist one (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The press is characterised by political parallelism, external pluralism, and an underdeveloped market; the press audience is elitist and ideologically polarised; and the journalistic profession combines an opinion-based style with limited power and autonomy from lawmakers and media firms. To these empirically verified features (Humanes, Martínez-Nicolás, & Saperas, 2013; Casero, 2012), it is necessary to add several others that have become more prominent since the global financial crisis, such as media instrumentalisation and clientelism. The Spanish media are firms indebted to and dependent on economic powers because banks and investment groups are their main shareholders or creditors (Fernández-Fernández & Campos, 2014). Besides this economic weakness, the watchdog function has been eroded due to political pressure on journalists, which has been brought to bear by media groups and media outlets themselves (Casero, Izquierdo, & Doménech, 2014). Indeed, 79% of the news writers who are members of the Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa de España (FAPE, Federation of Press Associations of Spain) acknowledge that they have been put under pressure while doing their job, with three-quarters of them succumbing to it. Moreover, 55% of the time such pressure comes from the directors of their respective media outlets, and 50% of the time the goal is to get them to change the orientation of a news item (APM, 2017).

All the described variables suggest that the framework of action of journalists in Spain is a hotbed of professional role conflict, especially in those roles related to the dimension of detachment from power, such as the watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles. Thus, we have formulated the following hypothesis: H1: The perceived gap between role conception and perceived role enactment would be wider in those roles related to detachment from power, such as the watchdog, status quo promoter and civic roles. In this respect, we expect journalists to perceive that, in journalistic practice, role conflict is settled in favour of those in power.

## 2. Materials and method

### 2.1. Sample

To test the formulated hypothesis, journalists working for the Spanish newspapers “Abc”, “El País”, “El Mundo” and “La Razón” (N=122) were surveyed between April 2015 and February 2016. As mentioned previously, this study forms part of an international project, the aim of which is to measure the gap between perceptions of professional roles and the enactment thereof, as analysed through news content (see instrument validation in Mellado & van Dalen, 2014). The sample design strategy was framed by the above. The journalists surveyed were selected from those who were the authors of news items analysed in the study on the materialization of journalistic roles in the four Spanish newspapers (Humanes & Roses, 2018). In total, there were 526 journalists in the news content analysis. The questionnaire was sent to all the aforementioned professionals, and the response rate was 23%<sup>1</sup>. Of the respondents, 55.1% were men, and they had a mean age of 41 years.

### 2.2. Measurements

The questionnaire contained 17 questions on indicators about journalistic practices, the functions of journalism, level of professional autonomy, and news production techniques, as well as questions about occupational status, educational level, demographic characteristics, and political leaning. This article focuses on the two questions where the respondents were asked to rate—on scales from 1 to 5—firstly, the importance they placed (1=not at all important, 5=extremely important) on each professional role (role conceptions) and, secondly, how often they believed (1=very seldom, 5=very often) those functions were present in the news they wrote (perceived role enactment). Table 1 shows the 23 indicators corresponding to the seven journalistic roles for which the gap between the importance placed on them and their perceived enactment was measured.

To perform the statistical analyses, Cronbach’s alpha was used to calculate the internal consistency of the indicators of both role conception and the perceived enactment thereof.

In the disseminator role, only one item was considered (being an impartial observer), so reliability was not calculated. In interventionist role conception, three indicators (influencing public opinion, defending a particular point of view and influencing decisions on public policies) reached an acceptable level ( $\alpha=.7$ ). In interventionist role enactment, the same three items (influencing public opinion, defending a particular point of view and influencing decisions on public policies) had a value of  $\alpha=.62$ . In watchdog role conception, two items were considered (monitoring political leaders and keeping watch over economic powers ( $\alpha=.63$ )). In the perceived enactment of this role, the same two indicators plus a third one were considered (monitoring political leaders, keeping watch over economic powers and acting as a watchdog for civil society ( $\alpha=.71$ )). In the loyal-facilitator

role, Cronbach's alpha reached a value of 0.86, including the four indicators related to the importance placed on this function, and a value of .92 for the four indicators on role enactment frequency. In civic role conception, the six indicators had a Cronbach's alpha value of .74. In the perceived enactment of this role, the same indicators had an acceptable value ( $\alpha=.71$ ).

In the infotainment and service roles, the Cronbach's alpha values were

below acceptable values. We therefore decided to use only one item for each of these two roles: offering the audience news that a more interesting to them –to measure the service role– and offering the type of news that attracts the largest audience to measure the infotainment role.

### 3. Analysis and results

Taking the data as a whole, the roles on which the surveyed Spanish journalists placed most importance were the watchdog role ( $M=4.60$ ;  $SD=.618$ ) and the disseminator role ( $M=4.05$ ;  $SD=1.164$ ), followed by the service role ( $M=3.76$ ;  $SD=1.137$ ) and the civic role ( $M=3.47$ ;  $SD=.751$ ). They placed the least important at the normative level on the interventionist role ( $M=2.94$ ;  $SD=.652$ ), the infotainment role ( $M=2.48$ ;  $SD=1.180$ ) and the loyal-facilitator role ( $M=1.72$ ;  $SD=.729$ ).

Figure 1 (next page) shows in more detail that the indicators rated most important were monitoring and investigating political leaders ( $M=4.67$ ;  $SD=.612$ ) and economic elites ( $M=4.53$ ;  $SD=.839$ ), providing a current affairs analysis ( $M=4.50$ ;  $SD=.699$ ), being an impartial observer ( $M=4.09$ ;  $SD=1.145$ ), and promoting tolerance and cultural diversity ( $M=4.31$ ;  $SD=.955$ ).

When considering how often the journalists said they enacted the seven roles, the most frequent functions were the disseminator role ( $M=3.46$ ;  $SD=1.287$ ), the watchdog role ( $M=3.37$ ;  $SD=.618$ ) and the service role ( $M=3.30$ ;  $SD=1.137$ ), and the least frequent ones were the civic role ( $M=2.96$ ;  $SD=.751$ ), the infotainment role ( $M=2.85$ ;  $SD=1.299$ ), the interventionist role ( $M=2.84$ ;  $SD=.652$ ) and the loyal-facilitator role ( $M=1.96$ ;  $SD=1.033$ ). Among the specific indicators (Figure 1), four correspond to those rated most important: monitoring and investigating political leaders ( $M=3.79$ ;  $SD=1.092$ ), providing a current affairs analysis ( $M=3.95$ ;  $SD=1.049$ ), being an impartial observer ( $M=3.45$ ;  $SD=1.280$ ), and promoting tolerance and cultural diversity ( $M=3.47$ ;  $SD=1.256$ )<sup>2</sup>.

Our hypothesis proposes that the perceived gap between professional role conception and perceived role enactment will be wider in those roles related to detachment from power, such as the watchdog, status quo promoter and civic roles. To accept or reject our hypothesis, the Student's t-test was performed for paired samples to establish which journalistic roles had statistically significant mean differences between the importance placed on them and the perceived enactment thereof. Table 2 shows that, in six out of the seven roles, the hypothesis test was significant; it was only in the interventionist role that the gap could not be corroborated.

The biggest differences were found in the role of watchdog over political and economic powers ( $M=1.23$ ;

| <b>Roles</b>      | <b>Indicators</b>   |
|-------------------|---|
| Disseminator      | To be a detached observer   |
| Interventionist   | To provide analysis of current affairs                                |
|                   | To influence public opinion   |
|                   | To advocate a particular point of view                                |
|                   | To influence public policy decisions                                  |
| Watchdog          | To monitor and scrutinize political leaders                           |
|                   | To monitor and scrutinize business                                    |
|                   | To act as a watchdog on civic society                                 |
| Loyal-facilitator | To champion national values   |
|                   | To support national development                                       |
|                   | To support government policy  |
|                   | To convey a positive image of political leaders                       |
|                   | To convey a positive image of economic leaders                        |
| Service           | To provide advice and direction in matters of daily life              |
|                   | To provide the audience with the information that is most interesting |
| Infotainment      | To provide entertainment and relaxation                               |
|                   | To provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience        |
| Civic             | To educate the audience   |
|                   | Let people express their views  |
|                   | To motivate people to participate in political activity               |
|                   | To provide information people need to make political decisions        |
|                   | To promote tolerance and cultural diversity                           |
|                   | To be an advocate for social change                                   |

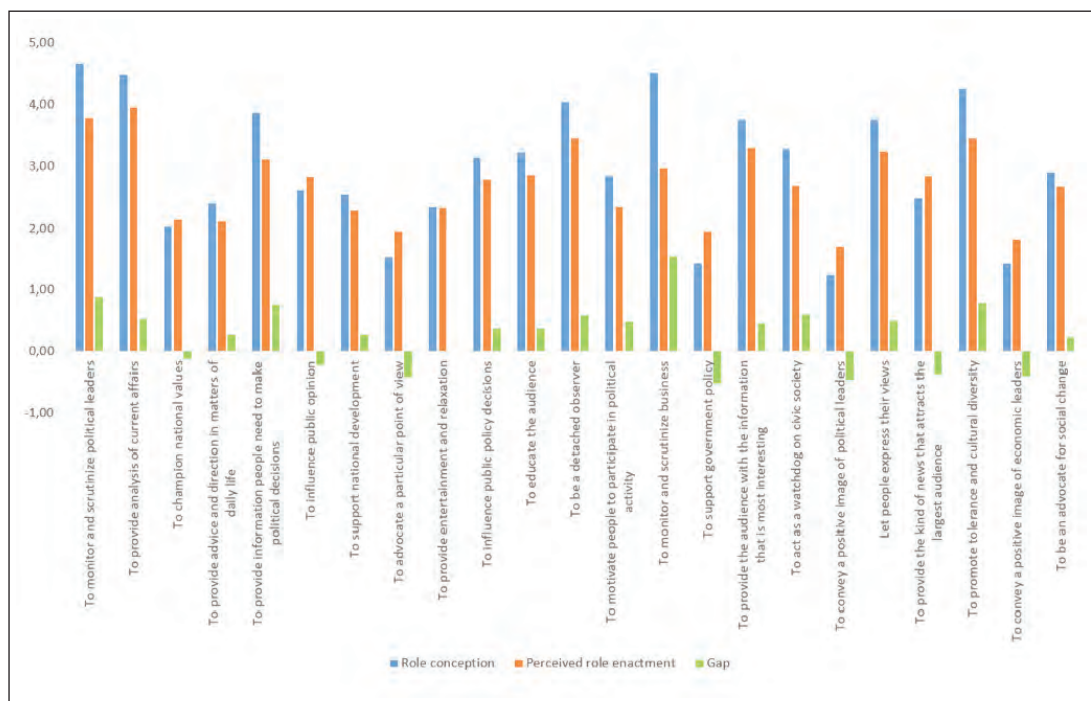


Figure 1. Differences between role conception and perceived role-enactment (indicators mean).

SD=1.06), followed by the disseminator role ( $M=.588$ ;  $SD=1.33$ ), the civic role ( $M=.504$ ;  $SD=.503$ ) and the service role ( $M=.453$ ;  $SD=1.26$ ). In these four functions, the journalists surveyed expressed the same tendency: they perceived that they enacted these four roles less often than they ought to, according to the importance they placed on them at the normative level. The exact opposite tendency emerged in the loyal-facilitator role ( $M=-.235$ ;  $SD=.875$ ) and the infotainment role ( $M=-.368$ ;  $SD=1.32$ ), in which the respondents stated that the frequency of their enactment thereof in news production was not commensurate with the little importance they placed on them.

These results corroborate our hypothesis because the journalists perceived that the role conflict was settled in favour of those in power in news production. If we take a look at the specific indicators, we find that the journalists always manifested bigger differences in those roles that related the media to those holding power more directly. Figure 1 shows that the biggest differences can be found in monitoring political powers ( $M=.899$ ;  $SD=1.09$ ) and, in particular, the economic elites ( $M=1.54$ ;  $SD=1.37$ ). Despite the fact that the journalists believed that such functions were quite important or very important, they only seldom enacted them when producing news. In contrast, the journalists perceived that their news bolstered functions such as supporting government policies ( $M=-.512$ ;  $SD=1.176$ ) and giving a positive image of political leaders ( $M=-.453$ ;  $SD=.966$ ) and of economic elites ( $M=-.391$ ;  $SD=1.027$ ), despite not placing that much importance on them as professional ideals.

Also worthy of note is that the journalists manifested conflict between the normative and practical aspects of the functions that connected them to citizens. For example, the two indicators with the widest gap were: offering information that people needed to make political decisions ( $M=.761$ ;  $SD=1.061$ ) and to promote tolerance and cultural diversity ( $M=.793$ ;  $SD=1.268$ ), both of which pertain to the civic role of journalism.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

This research project is the first to systematically and empirically study journalistic role conflict among press journalists in Spain. It quantifies the size of the perceived gap between ideals and journalistic practice. The data provided will help to gain a better understanding of the news production process in Spain, although the results should be interpreted in line with the characteristics of the media ecosystem within which the journalists surveyed work: daily newspapers in a polarised pluralist media system. Equally important is the need to consider the features of the time period in which the study was conducted: the financial crisis and political corruption scandals, among others.

Regarding the context, it is worth discussing the results of the disseminator/interventionist dimension. On the one hand, the fact that the gap between disseminator role conception and the perceived enactment thereof is one of the widest is consistent with a media system characterised by political parallelism. The journalists placed considerable importance on being impartial observers (persistence of the objectivity myth in the professional culture of Spanish journalism) but acknowledged that the role was not often enacted. Some journalists from the sample felt that although they wanted to inform impartially, they did not always manage to do so because they gave free rein to their own subjectivity. Others were unable to do so because their bosses imposed a certain point of view, thereby stopping them from producing impartial information.

On the other hand, we found a significant gap between ideals and practices in the interventionist role overall. However, this finding can be

nanced if we take a closer look at the items forming part of the measurement index of the variable. For example, the news writers perceived that they enacted the function of defending a particular point of view more often than their ideals would otherwise have dictated. This finding is logical when considering the interpretative and opinion-based tradition of the Spanish press, as well as the hypotheses on clientelism and on the instrumentalisation of newspapers. This nuance suggests that journalists and the media share a similar vision of the importance of functions such as influencing public opinion, influencing decisions on public policies, and providing a current affairs analysis. The root cause of the conflict is therefore located in either defending or not defending particular points of view. It may be the case that journalists attribute negative connotations to this function because of the normative strength of the objectivity myth.

Finally, regarding the initial hypothesis, the results are also consistent with the description of the Spanish media system, in which the main owners of newspaper groups are banks and/or investment funds and where clientelism and media instrumentalisation by political parties is rife. In a period of economic crisis –mainly financial and banking– and the proliferation of political corruption cases, the journalists surveyed perceived a gap between professional role conception and their perceived enactment thereof was wider in those roles related to detachment from power, that is to say, in those functions connected with the media's independence and social responsibility. Furthermore, according to the journalists' testimonies, role conflicts were settled in favour of those holding power in all cases.

A clear example is the role of watchdog over economic and political powers, in which the journalists perceived the widest gap. Within a turbulent political and economic context, the professionals stated that they enacted the watchdog role less often than they wanted to. Similarly, they claimed that they were compelled to write news giving a positive image of political and economic leaders –status quo promoter role– more often than their ideals would otherwise have dictated. In the study by Raemy, Beck, and Hellmueller (2018), Swiss journalists also stated that, while placing considerable importance on the watchdog role, they were ultimately unable to enact it as often as they would have liked to. The tendency was the opposite in the loyal facilitator-role, in which the journalists asserted that they enacted it more often than they considered appropriate. In the absence of data for other countries, we can nevertheless glimpse a tendency for the perceived gap in the watchdog role to be the widest. This may be due to the fact that the watchdog myth gives rise to greater expectations among journalists, who consider it one of the key values of their professional culture overall (Hanitzsch & al., 2011).

**Tabla 2. Differences between role conception and perceived role enactment**

|  | M     | SD   |
|--|-------|------|
| Interventionist role conception                              | 2.94  | .65  |
| Interventionist perceived role enactment                     | 2.87  | .82  |
| <b>Gap in the interventionist role (t=0.906; p≤ .367)</b>    | .069  | .71  |
| Disseminator role conception                                 | 4.05  | 1.16 |
| Disseminator perceived role enactment                        | 3.46  | 1.29 |
| <b>Gap in the disseminator role (t=4.078; p≤ .000)</b>       | .588  | 1.30 |
| Watchdog role conception                                     | 4.60  | .62  |
| Watchdog perceived role enactment                            | 3.37  | 1.10 |
| <b>Gap in the watchdog role (t=10.779; p≤ .000)</b>          | 1.23  | 1.06 |
| Loyal-facilitator role conception                            | 1.72  | .73  |
| Loyal-facilitator perceived role enactment                   | 1.96  | 1.03 |
| <b>Gap in the Loyal-facilitator role (t=-2.477; p≤ .015)</b> | -.235 | .87  |
| Service role conception                                      | 3.76  | 1.14 |
| Service perceived role enactment                             | 3.30  | 1.08 |
| <b>Gap in the service role (t=3.33; p≤ .001)</b>             | .453  | 1.26 |
| Infotainment role conception                                 | 2.48  | 1.18 |
| Infotainment perceived role enactment                        | 2.85  | 1.30 |
| <b>Gap in the infotainment role (t=-2.596; p≤ .011)</b>      | -.368 | 1.32 |
| Civic role conception  | 3.47  | .75  |
| Civic perceived role enactment                               | 2.96  | .83  |
| <b>Gap in the civic role (t=6.950; p≤ .000)</b>              | .504  | .50  |

Equally revealing is the perceived gap in the civic role. Again, we find that news writers wanted to enact functions such as encouraging people to take part in political activities and decision-making, defending social change and promoting tolerance and cultural diversity much more often than they did. Nor were the journalists' expectations met in relation to their service role conception since the job of guiding and advising consumers was curtailed in practice. This highlights a tension between a professional culture interested in empowering citizens –at a time when inequalities had become more acute, and the abuses of the powerful had been uncovered– and certain journalistic firms who were inclined not to fuel the critical momentum against those holding power. Indeed, it is striking to find that the journalists acknowledged that they enacted the infotainment role more often than they wanted to. This finding can be interpreted in several ways: first, that those in power –through the instrumentalisation of the media– were interested in “dulling the senses”, in distracting the critical consciousness of citizens during that period by offering entertaining content; and second, that it was a symptom of the tendency towards commercialisation (the hypothesis of a shift from a Polarised Pluralist media system towards a Liberal media system introducing by Hallin and Mancini in 2004). However, regardless of the possible interpretations, the study data provide evidence of the fact that, at the height of the financial and political crisis and according to the news writers' own accounts, journalists were not the citizens' spokespersons as much as they would have like to be. Indeed, they mobilised citizens, politically educated them and promoted social change (civic role) less often than their ideals would otherwise have dictated. Conversely, they were compelled to entertain citizens more often than they considered fitting for their role in society.

We can conclude that the empirical tests support the assertion that the Spanish press system, as a prototypical case of the Polarised Pluralist media system, is prone to creating professional role conflict between journalists and the newspapers for which they work, especially within a context of political and financial crisis. The conflicts were always settled to the detriment of the journalists' ideals, and the widest gaps were found in the watchdog role (curtailing control over those in power), the disseminator role (lessening impartiality), the civic role (discouraging their social catalyst role) and the service role (curtailing their capacity to advise on day-to-day matters). Likewise, the journalists were compelled to enact more than they considered necessary the loyal-facilitator role –promoting a positive image of the powerful– and the infotainment role–boosting entertainment.

Among future developments of this line of research, the following should be considered: a comparative analysis of the gap in other countries; a replication of the design with a sample of professionals working in other media (radio, television, native digital newspapers and social media); and an observation and analysis of the real gap between professional role conception and role manifestation in content.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The sample is comparable to those used in national and international studies on professional roles. For example, Berganza, Lavín, and Piñero-Laván (2017) surveyed 390 journalists working in 26 native digital media and 98 traditional media (newspapers, agencies, radio, television, and magazines). Mellado and van Dalen (2014) interviewed 75 Chilean journalists. And Tandoc, Hellmueller, and Vos (2012) used a sample of 56 American journalists.

<sup>2</sup> Linear regression analyses were performed, taking into account sociodemographic variables (gender, age, educational level) as well as the perceived level of autonomy, ideology and professional experience to determine potential variations in the dependent variables. No acceptable models with explanatory power were found.

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