






Spanish Journalists' Perception about their Professional Roles

La percepción de los periodistas españoles acerca de sus roles profesionales

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ABSTRACT

International empirical research on the perception that journalists have of their professional roles and functions has increased considerably in recent years, although not in the case of Spain. The present research, included within the transnational comparative study “The Worlds of Journalism Study”, analyses data from a survey conducted in Spain (representative and stratified by type of media and autonomous community) of 390 journalists from 117 media, who were consulted about their work to detect the professional functions they most identified with. The study establishes six roles: watchdog, citizens’ spokesperson, instructor of the audience, promoter of the status quo, infotainment journalist and disseminator of objective information. In line with recent political, economic and social developments in Spain, professionals feel more identified with the role of citizens’ spokesperson. This function downplays the predominant role of disseminator of objective information reflected in recent studies of a similar nature on the subject of Spanish journalists. A further finding of the research is the existence of two large groups of journalists: the stimulators and the “narcotizers” of public opinion. Moreover, it is observed that some organizational factors (in particular, media ownership) and other individual ones (gender, age and years of professional experience) significantly influence the perceptions of professional roles.

RESUMEN

La investigación empírica internacional sobre la percepción que los periodistas tienen de sus roles y funciones profesionales presenta un notable auge en los últimos años, aunque no en el caso español. Esta investigación, que forma parte del estudio comparativo transnacional «Worlds of Journalism Study», analiza los datos de una encuesta realizada en España (representativa y estratificada por tipo de medio y por Comunidad Autónoma) a 390 periodistas de 117 medios de comunicación, quienes fueron consultados sobre su trabajo para detectar las funciones profesionales con las que más se identificaban. El estudio señala seis roles: el de perro guardián, el altavoz de la ciudadanía, el instructor de la audiencia, el favorecedor del statu quo, el que entretiene a la opinión pública y el difusor de información objetiva. En línea con la evolución política, económica y social de los últimos años en España, los profesionales se identifican más con el papel de altavoz de la ciudadanía. Esta función desplaza en importancia al rol protagonista de los estudios similares más recientes sobre periodistas españoles: el de difusor de la información objetiva. Se hallan también dos grandes grupos de periodistas: los estimuladores y los narcotizadores de la opinión pública. Además, se observa que algunos factores organizacionales (en concreto, la propiedad del medio) y otros individuales (el género, la edad y los años de experiencia laboral) influyen significativamente en las percepciones de los roles profesionales.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Journalism, professional roles, professional attitudes, media, information, quantitative analysis, survey.

Periodismo, roles profesionales, actitudes profesionales, medios de comunicación, información, análisis cuantitativo, encuesta.



1. Introduction and current status

Empirical research on the attitudes and professional roles of journalists has achieved academic recognition. The studies of Cohen (1963), Nimmo (1964), Dunn (1969), Chittick (1970), Johnstone and others (1972), and Janowitz (1975) are pioneers in this field. Spanish academic interest on this matter, although incipient (especially regarding empirical studies with representative samples on a national scale), has increased steadily since the 90s and, more relevantly, since the year 2000 (Canel & Sánchez-Aranda, 1999; Canel & al., 2000; Hanitzsch, 2011, from the survey conducted by Berganza & al., 2010; Gómez-Mompart & al., 2015). The turn of the century has witnessed a rise in the empirical study of professional journalistic attitudes conducted in different Spanish regions (Humanes, 1998, in the Community of Madrid; Martín & Amurrio, 2003, in the Basque Country; and Túñez & Martínez, 2014, in Galicia).

There has also been an increase in international comparative studies in this area of research (Weaver, 1998; Hanitzsch, 2011; Weaver & Willnat, 2012; Willnat & al., 2013; Mellado & al., 2016) which contributes to the consolidation of the subject under study. The present work falls within this last category, developed within the international project *The Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS)* together with 66 other participating countries, sharing the same methodology. This article will only analyze Spanish data, cross-checking it with the roles identified in relevant, previous empirical investigations.

Thus, among the most remarkable empirical research on the professional roles of journalists, it is worth highlighting the study by Johnstone and others (1972) who conducted a survey of 1300 journalists to evaluate the relevance of eight functions. Its subsequent analysis confirmed the existence of two types of journalistic roles the majority of participants identified with: neutral, a mere spectator of the social process who transmits verified and objective information and facts; and participant, a more active role which investigates, contextualizes and interprets news. Another notable contribution of this work is the finding that 75% of the people surveyed firmly supported the monitoring function of government activities, described by the authors as “watchdog”, which would later become a category in its own right (Johnstone & al., 1972).

In a similar vein, a few years later, Janowitz (1975) identified these same journalistic roles, although he labelled them differently. On one hand, this author refers to “gatekeepers” (whose characteristics are consistent with those of the neutral role described by Johnstone & al., 1972). The second category is “advocates”, similar in characteristics to the participant journalist of Johnston and others (1972).

Weaver and Wilhoit (1986), on the other hand, proposed a third additional role to the previously mentioned (neutral and participant, which they termed disseminator and interpreter, respectively): the “adversarial” or “adversary” (which would correspond to the watchdog function of Johnstone & al., 1972), used to describe journalists who exercise this function towards the government and political and economic interests, by adopting a distant and mistrustful attitude. According to Coronel (2008), this role differs across countries and cultures as it adapts to the different information models, in the understanding that journalists cover political corruption, sex and financial scandals, and all types of irregularities (Coronel, 2008: 2).

Weaver & Wilhoit (1996), in a later study, suggested an additional professional category: the “populist mobilizer” or mobilizer of citizens, who perceives him- or herself as a transmitter of citizens’ opinions, provides entertainment and promotes the audience’s cultural interests. Nevertheless, a further contribution of this investigation establishes the roles of disseminator and interpreter as the cornerstones of the profession, and the interpretation of information as a fundamental function. Conversely, the role of “adversary” or critic would have a lower presence, as indicated in their previous study.

Additionally, Mellado (2011) identifies five roles: two in common with previous investigations (the monitor or “watchdog”, and the disseminator or neutral) and three new ones. Thus, he describes the “citizen-oriented” role or advisor of citizens as journalists who provide information necessary to understand reality and make political decisions. On the other hand, the propagandist offers a positive image of political and economic leaders, and supports public policies. Finally, the “consumer-oriented” role or consumption advisor provides information of general interest concerning what people want to know; that is, bearing in mind public requirements.

More recently, Mellado and collaborators (2016) conducted a transnational comparative to determine the predominant journalistic functions in the Latin American media context. Based on the content analysis of 18 newspapers, they established the presence of six roles, some of which had already been identified (Table 3) in previous investigations: interventionist, watchdog, loyal facilitator, service-oriented, infotainment and, finally, civic (Mellado & al. 2016).

Hanitzsch (2011) indicates the existence of four professional roles, including three previously mentioned. The first, “populist disseminator”, refers to journalists who share a clear citizen-oriented function and tend to provide interesting information in order to attract the largest possible audience. The second, “detached watchdog”, describes an impartial monitoring function where journalists are aware of their social responsibilities as impartial observers and remain sceptical and critical towards the political and economic elites. The third role is related to the advocate or citizen advisor: the “critical change agent” also has a monitoring attitude towards the political and economic elites but is a lot more interventionist. The fourth role emerging from this study by Hanitzsch (2011) is the “opportunist facilitator”, a type of journalist who supports official policies and is close to the elites.

Spanish empirical research in this field of study first appeared in the late 90s. Thus, Canel and Sánchez-Aranda (1999) determine four types of professional attitudes: the disseminator or neutral role describes but doesn't analyze; the interpreter or participant role analyses information; the adversary or “watchdog” is mistrustful of official information and critical towards politicians; and the new role of advocate perceives him- or herself as a guide, leader or educator of the public. Other contemporary studies reveal new journalistic functions. According to Gómez-Mompart (1999), these functions have changed so that journalists have become communicators, entertainers as opposed to informers, and mediators instead of intermediaries. These findings are supported by a study conducted in the year 2000 and commissioned by the Catalan School of Journalists, in which Catalan professionals declared that their priority was to entertain and then inform (Humanes, 2003).

In 2014, Túniz and Martínez (2014: 44) focused on Galician journalists to conclude that what companies valued most was the speed with which they developed their duties, and what they valued least was the ability to analyze information as well as journalists having their own list of contacts. Gómez-Mompart and collaborators (2015: 144) also conducted an investigation on the perception of Spanish journalists regarding the quality of contents, based on the theories of “gatekeeping” and “newsmaking”. This online survey of 363 journalists is one of the latest research studies conducted in Spain to take into account the technological transformation brought about by the digitization of media.

On the basis of the most relevant research published on the subject, we set the following research questions:

- RQ1: Which professional roles emerge from the answers given by journalists when asked about the functions they develop?
- RQ2: Are there differences regarding the importance journalists give to each of the identified professional roles?
- RQ3: Is there any type of association between the detected professional roles?

As established in previous literature, some organizational factors (such as type and ownership of the medium) and other individual ones (gender, age and years of professional experience) significantly influence the perception of professional roles. In this respect, Canel and Sánchez Aranda (1999) include both types of factors; Johnstone

The contributions of this investigation allow us to state that the perception of Spanish journalists regarding their function in society is evolving in parallel to political, economic and social developments. This article adds to existing literature by providing six types of professional roles, a modest advance on previous empirical studies on journalistic perceptions conducted in Spain. (...) Three classic roles have been identified: the disseminator; the adversary or watchdog; and the advocate, which would correspond to the instructor of the audience. This work detects three further roles: citizens' spokesperson, the infotainment journalist and the promoter of the status quo.

and others (1972), age and experience; and Hanitzsch (2011), gender, age and experience. The present investigation examines these organizational and individual factors. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

- H1: Differences are established between journalists regarding their perception of the professional roles taking into account individual variables such as: gender, age and years of professional experience; and organizational variables, such as ownership of the medium in which they work and type of medium (traditional vs. digital).

2. Material and methods

2.1. Sample

The survey of 390 Spanish journalists was conducted within the context of the international project The Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS). The design of the sample followed three phases: cluster, stratified and simple random sampling.

Thus, a media list was initially created based on the report by the APM (Press Association of Madrid, 2013) and the Agenda de la Comunicación (Communication Agenda of the Spanish government), with the aim of conducting a first cluster sampling, taking the medium as an aggregated sampling unit. In total, 26 digital and 91 traditional media were selected (newspapers, agencies, TV and magazines); these were stratified in turn by autonomous community and size (large or small). Five journalists were selected randomly for each large organization and three for each small organization in order to complete the final sample of 390 professionals (n=89 of online media; n=301 of traditional media). The result is a probability sample, intended to be representative of the universe of journalists of the country. The sample size was calculated with a 95% confidence and a 5% error, taking as reference the estimated population (n=18,000) in 2014 (Berganza, Herrero, & Carratalá, 2014: 31).

Finally, the interviews were carried out by telephone by a survey team, previously trained to this effect, between the 1st of March 2014 and the 30th of May 2015.

2.2. Measures

Taking as a starting point the survey in tandem with the rest of WJS researchers, of which we are a part, a scale of 21 items was analyzed. The items were related to the importance that journalists give to a series of functions specific to the profession. The answer options for each item followed a Likert-type scale, where: 5=extremely important, 4=very important, 3=more or less important, 2=not very important and 1=not at all important. With a view to reducing the dimensions of this scale, the 21 items were subjected to an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in order to observe the journalistic roles that underpinned the data.

As can be observed in Table 1, each of the 21 incorporated items presents significant weight in one of the six factors suggested by the EFA as latent structure (explained variance=59.46%, KMO=.77; Bartlett's test: $p < .001$). The internal consistency of each factor, or construct, measured with Cronbach's Alpha, showed adequate reliability, as a general rule, in each of the identified journalistic roles¹, and respected the minimum value recommended for exploratory studies: .60 (Hair & al., 1999; Robinson & al., 1991).

3. Analysis and results

3.1. Analysis

All conducted surveys were anonymized and subsequently coded using the statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 22). An index was calculated for each professional role based on the average of the items that composed it, detected in the EFA (Table 1); and these indicators were in turn used to carry out relevant descriptive and inferential analyses, as shown below.

3.2. Results

After treatment of the data extracted from the 390 surveys, we can establish six types of professional roles (RQ1), shown in the Table below together with the specific functions that comprise them and ordered according to the importance they are given by the journalists:

Additionally, and after conducting a repeated measures analysis of variances, it can be observed that the differences between the roles (RQ2) are statistically significant [$\lambda_{VV} = .187$; $F(5, 382) = 332.55$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .813$]. In particular, and in view of the data shown in Table 2, the role of acting as a citizens' spokesperson has the highest mean (Mrole2=4.40; SD=.62); while promoting the status quo is given the least importance by journalists (Mrole4=2.54; SD=.81); at the same time, the differences between them are statistically significant [$t(387) = 36.75$; $p < .001$].

Table 1. Dimensions of professional roles through EFA with varimax rotation and reliability test

PROFESSIONAL ROLES Specific Functions	"Watchdog" (role 1)	Citizens' spokesperson (role 2)	Instructor of the audience (role 3)	Promoter of the status quo (role 4)	Infotainment journalist (role 5)	Disseminator of objective information (role 6)
Monitor/control political leaders	.88					
Monitor/control economic elites	.87					
Establish political agenda	.61					
Be an adversary of the government	.48					
Provide current affairs analysis	.42					
Promote social change	.41					
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity		.79				
Enable people to express their point of view		.69				
Tell stories about the world		.66				
Educate the audience			.68			
Orientate and advise the audience about their daily lives			.66			
Provide citizens with the necessary information to make political decisions			.59			
Motivate people to participate in civic activities and political discussions			.56			
Support government policies				.80		
Offer a positive image of political and economic leaders				.75		
Support national development				.53		
Provide the type of news that attracts the largest number of people possible					.65	
Influence public opinion					.57	
Offer entertainment and leisure					.48	
Be an impartial observer						.77
Report events as they are						.66
Eigen Value	4.56	2.73	1.75	1.20	1.15	1.06
Explained variance	21.75	13.02	8.37	5.74	5.49	5.08
Cronbach's Alpha (α)	.75	.63	.66	.64	.55	.31

(α). Note: the analyses include values >.40.

Therefore, the role of citizens' spokesperson is the one that journalists identify most with in Spain. This role is characterized by the promotion of tolerance and cultural diversity (89.9% of respondents find it extremely or very important), enabling people to express their point of view (88.4%) and telling stories about the real world (82.6%). It is directly linked to the role described by Weaver & Wilhoit (1996) as the populist mobilizer or, more recently, by Mellado and others (2016) when referring to the civic function of journalists. However, this is the first time this role has been identified in Spain, which represents an original contribution that can be used as a starting point for future research.

The role of citizens' spokesperson replaces in importance, although closely, the predominant role found in recent studies on the perceptions of Spanish journalists: that of disseminator of objective information. The functions that comprise this role would be to report events as they really are (96.9%) and act as an impartial observer of reality (70.3%).

Another fundamental role of journalists, cited in the previous scientific bibliography (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996; Canel & Sánchez-Aranda, 1999; Hanitzsch, 2011; Mellado, 2011), is that of "watchdog", structured around the following functions: provide analysis of current affairs (87.9%), monitor and control political leaders (79.2%) and the economic elites (77.7%), promote social change (69.5%), establish the political agenda (37%) and act as an adversary of the government (18.1%). The watchdog emerges, again, as a prototypical professional attitude of modern journalism, put into practice to defend citizens' interests and to alert to the possible abuses of those in power (Casero-Ripollés, 2012).

The role of instructor of the audience (previously indicated by Canel & Sánchez-Aranda, 1999; Hanitzsch, 2011; Mellado, 2011) is fourth in importance for Spanish journalists and involves the following aspects: provide citizens with the necessary information to make political decisions (72.4%); motivate people to participate in civic

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of each of the journalistic roles, together with the specific functions that comprise them

PROFESSIONAL ROLES and specific functions that comprise them	N	M	SD	% say extremely important
Role 1. "Watchdog"	390	3.70	.69	
Provide current affairs analysis	389	4.38	.76	87.9
Monitor/control political leaders	385	4.17	1.04	79.2
Monitor/control economic elites	386	4.14	1.08	77.7
Promote social change	387	3.90	1.04	69.5
Establish political agenda	387	3.13	1.13	37.0
Be an adversary of the government	381	2.45	1.20	18.1
Role 2. Citizens' spokesperson	390	4.40	.62	
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	386	4.52	.76	89.9
Enable people to express their point of view	389	4.46	.76	88.4
Tell stories about the world	385	4.24	.90	82.6
Role 3. Instructor of the audience	390	3.54	.78	
Provide citizens with the necessary information to make political decisions	387	3.97	1.09	72.4
Motivate people to participate in civic activities and political discussions	389	3.71	1.04	60.9
Educate the audience	385	3.35	1.19	46.2
Orientate and advise the audience about their daily lives	387	3.12	1.12	38.0
Role 4. Promoter of the status quo	388	2.54	.81	
Support national development	385	3.60	1.17	56.1
Support government policies	382	2.15	1.05	9.4
Offer a positive image of political and economic leaders	386	1.85	.92	3.4
Role 5. Infotainment journalist	389	3.19	.83	
Influence public opinion	387	3.50	1.09	52.2
Offer entertainment and leisure	388	3.13	1.15	40.7
Provide the type of news that attracts the largest number of people possible	389	2.95	1.20	33.4
Role 6. Disseminator of objective information	390	4.35	.62	
Report events as they are	390	4.79	.55	96.9
Be an impartial observer	390	3.92	1.00	70.3

activities and political discussions (60.9%); educate the audience (46.2%); and, finally, orientate and advise citizens about their daily lives (38%).

The penultimate role is the infotainment journalist, which integrates the following functions: influence public opinion (52.2%), offer entertainment and leisure (40.7%) and provide a type of news that attracts the largest possible audience (33.4%). As suggested by Mellado and others (2016), this would be the role of "infotainer" of the public; promoting, at the same time, a distinct spectacularization of information (Kapuściński, 2002) typical of an era where this represents a merchandise conditioned by the laws of the market.

Finally, the function of "opportunist facilitator" proposed by Hanitzsch (2011) corresponds to the promoter of the status quo, and integrates functions such as: support national development (56.1%) and government policies (9.4%), and offer a positive image of political and economic leaders (3.4%).

As can be observed in Table 3, these six roles have already appeared in similar investigations and are, therefore, consistent with previous scientific literature.

On the other hand, and to measure the degree of association between the six detected roles (RQ3), the following correlation matrix has been developed:

Based on the data contained in Table 4, the highest correlation is produced between the role of watchdog and instructing the audience [$r(388) = .406$; $p < .001$]. We can also see that instructing the audience is related to the role of citizens' spokesperson [$r(388) = .382$; $p < .001$]; while the roles of watchdog and citizens' spokesperson are also considerably linked [$r(388) = .327$; $p < .001$]. In the same way, there is a significant association between promoting the status quo and entertaining public opinion [$r(388) = .397$; $p < .001$]; a fact which suggests two very distinct groups of journalists.

Table 3. List of roles suggested in different investigations

Johnstone and others (1972)	Janowitz (1975)	Weaver & Wilhoit (1986; 1996)	Canel & Sánchez-Aranda(1999)	Hanitzsch (2011)	Mellado (2011)	Mellado and others (2016)	Berganza and others (findings of this study)
Neutral	Gatekeeper	Disseminator	Disseminator	Populist disseminator	Disseminator		Disseminator
Participant	Advocate of a cause	Interpreter	Interpreter			Interventionist	
		Adversary	Adversary	Detached watchdog	Watchdog	Watchdog	Watchdog
		Populist mobilizer				Civic	Citizens' spokesperson
			Advocate	Critical change agent	Citizen-oriented	Service-oriented	Instructor of the audience
					Consumer-oriented	Infotainment	Entertainer of public opinion
				Opportunist facilitator	Propagandist	Loyal facilitator	Promoter of the status quo

Finally, on the basis of previous empirical evidence, we have assumed that there would be differences in journalists' perception of roles depending on individual and organizational variables (H1).

Regarding gender, the role that shows the most significant differences is that of promoting the status quo [$t(386)=3.80$; $p<.001$], with women ($M=2.72$; $SD=.82$) giving higher relevance to this function than men ($M=2.41$; $SD=.78$). Significant differences also arise regarding the role of "watchdog" [$t(388)=2.02$; $p=.044$], with women ($M=3.78$; $SD=.69$) again scoring higher than men ($M=3.64$; $SD=.69$). The rest of roles don't present differences based on gender.

With regard to age², we have detected significant differences in the role of promoter of the status quo [$F(2, 384)=4.33$; $p=.014$; $\eta^2=.022$], with younger journalists ($M=2.72$; $SD=.76$) considering this function more important than adult ($M=2.44$; $SD=.79$) and senior ($M=2.47$; $SD=.86$) journalists.

Another individual characteristic taken into account was the years of professional experience³. Here, the role which showed higher differences between the groups was the promoter of the status quo [$F(2, 385)=3.24$; $p=.04$; $\eta^2=.022$], so that beginners ($M=2.69$; $SD=.80$) tended to prioritize this function when compared with those initiated in the profession ($M=2.44$; $SD=.76$) and experts ($M=2.49$; $SD=.86$). Another role which showed differences was the disseminator of objective information [$F(2, 387)=3.19$; $p=.042$; $\eta^2=.004$], since experts ($M=4.45$; $SD=.55$) give more weight to this function than beginners ($M=4.25$; $SD=.69$) and initiated journalists ($M=4.34$; $SD=.63$). In fact, there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the years of experience and the role of disseminator [$r(388)=.125$, $p=.013$], evidencing that as the number of years of professional experience increases, so does the priority given to acting as an objective informer of reality.

The type of media ownership, public or private, showed significant differences regarding the role of "watchdog" [$t(388)=4.24$; $p<.001$], since journalists working for private media assume this function as more important ($M=3.76$; $SD=.75$) than public media journalists ($M=3.35$; $SD=.81$). In the same way, the situation was repeated in relation to entertaining public opinion, so that private media journalists consider this aspect of their work more relevant ($M=3.25$; $SD=.80$) than their public counterparts ($M=2.87$; $SD=.91$).

Table 4. Correlation matrix between professional roles (Pearson's r)

	Role 1. "Watchdog"	Role 2. Citizens' spokesperson	Role 3. Instruct the audience	Role 4. Promote the status quo	Role 5. Infotainment journalist	Role 6. Disseminate objective information
Role 1. "Watchdog"		.327***	.406***	.251***	.169**	.117*
Role 2. Citizens' spokesperson	.327***		.382***	.062	.149**	.080
Role 3. Instruct the audience	.406***	.382***		.307***	.325***	.089*
Role 4. Promote the status quo	.251***	.062	.307***		.397***	.022
Role 5. Infotainment journalist	.169**	.149**	.325***	.397***		.008
Role 6. Disseminate objective information	.117*	.080	.089*	.022	.008	

* $p<.10$; ** $p<.05$; *** $p<.01$; **** $p<.001$

Finally, the data confirm that there are no statistically significant differences concerning the nature of the medium (digital vs. traditional) in any of the six detected professional roles. Therefore, we can assert that both types of media have the same view of their professional functions.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The contributions of this investigation allow us to state that the perception of Spanish journalists regarding their function in society is evolving in parallel to political, economic and social developments. This article adds to existing literature by providing six types of professional roles, a modest advance on previous empirical studies on journalistic perceptions conducted in Spain. Coinciding with other authors (Canel & Sánchez-Aranda, 1999; Canel & al., 2000; Hanitzsch, 2011), three classic roles have been identified: the disseminator; the adversary or watchdog; and the advocate, which would correspond to the instructor of the audience (Table 3). This work detects three further roles: citizens' spokesperson, the infotainment journalist and the promoter of the status quo.

Spanish professionals identify most with the role of citizens' spokesperson. This can be explained by Spain's recent political and economic developments, brought about by a financial and institutional crisis. The characteristics of this role are closely connected with a type of social journalism (described in the style manual of Servimedia⁴ Agency) which calls for equal conditions for all sectors of society against political and economic actors, since the usual behavior of media provides a scenario where citizens are not given equal opportunity to express their points of view (Rodríguez-Borges, 2011). This function, as indicated in preceding paragraphs, promotes tolerance and cultural diversity, and enables people to express their point of view and tell stories about the real world. It is directly linked to the concept defined by Weaver & Wilhoit (1996) as the populist mobilizer or, more recently, by Mellado and others (2016) when referring to the civic function of journalists, which mainly involves covering the demands of citizens, their rights and duties. However, it is the first time in Spain that this role is empirically identified in a study on journalistic perceptions, which represents an original contribution that may serve as a starting point for future investigations.

The role of citizens' spokesperson replaces in importance, although closely, the predominant role found in recent studies on Spanish journalists: that of disseminator of objective information (in line with the traditional roles referred to in the first research studies on the subject by Johnstone & al., 1972; Janowitz, 1975). Research conducted since the late 90s established that the Spanish journalistic profession was widely committed to the disseminating function (Canel & Sánchez-Aranda, 1999: 158; Martín & Amurrio, 2003: 2; Hanitzsch, 2011: 487).

On the basis of the association produced between certain functions, we can affirm that there are two large groups of journalists. On one hand, those that perceive their functions and work as stimulating or active from a political and social point of view (by monitoring the powerful or encouraging and instructing the audience); and, on the other, those who favour the ruling powers, taming or "narcotizing" public opinion, in line with the dysfunction indicated by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1977). The functions most valued by Spanish journalists belong to the first group.

Some individual and organizational variables have significant influence on journalists' perceptions of their professional functions. Variables of an individual type are especially relevant, although both types should be researched more thoroughly in the future. With regard to gender, the roles of promoter of the status quo and "watchdog" show an imbalance in favour of women. In relation to age and years of professional experience, it is young journalists and those who have fewer years of experience who prioritize the function of promoting the status quo. On the other hand, journalists who have more experience attach greater value to disseminating information in the most objective possible way, consistent with the findings of the pioneering study by Johnstone and others (1972).

Notes

¹ It should be clarified that one of the identified roles, disseminating objective information, had low reliability ($\alpha = .31$). However, and since this role is considered important in previous scientific literature, we have thought it reasonable to assume this methodological limitation in favour of greater theoretical robustness.

² The variable age has been measured in number of years of the journalists and, subsequently, recoded into a different variable termed age groups. The recoding consisted in calculating the 33rd and 66th percentiles of the original variable in order to establish 3 homogeneous age groups: young (22 to 34 years, $n = 126$), adults (35 to 44 years, $n = 133$) and seniors (45 to 74 years, $n = 130$).

³ The variable professional experience, in the same way as age, has been measured in number of years and, subsequently, recoded into a different variable termed groups of journalists, depending on the professional experience. The recoding consisted in, again, calculating the 33rd

and 66th percentiles of the original variable in order to establish 3 analogous professional groups: beginners (1 to 11 years, n=129), initiated (12 to 19 years, n=132) and experts (20 to 55 years, n=129).

⁴ For more information, please consult the following link: <http://www.servimedia.es/LibroEstilo.pdf>.

Funding agency

The present work was conducted within the framework of the international project The Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS, www.worldsofjournalism.org), funded by the University of Munich (Germany) and supplemented by funds from the Project of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness CSO2013-44874-R).

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