

Journalistic Role Performance in the Spanish National Press

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Based on a content analysis of 2,278 news items from four Spanish newspapers, this article reports the findings of a study that examines the presence of the interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic roles in news content as well as the factors that predict the presence of such roles in news content. We find that journalistic practices in the Spanish national press are characterized mainly by an interventionist profile, a high presence of the watchdog role, and a conceptualization of the audience as citizens—manifested by a higher presence of the civic role. The study also reveals differences in journalistic role performance across newspapers, indicating that a homogeneous model of journalism does not exist. The best predictors for the presence of the roles in the Spanish press are reporting methods and news topics; editorial identity (organization, political leaning, and religious commitment) is also important. The findings are contextualized within the cultural and political particularities of the Spanish media system and discussed accordingly.

Keywords: role performance, journalism, content analysis, professional roles, Spain

News media fulfill important functions within democratic systems: They are watchdogs of power, passive observers of reality, or spokespersons for citizens. Citizens perceive and identify those functions by drawing on news content published by the media, so analyzing the materialization of professional roles in news content will enable us to learn about the journalistic models that characterize a media system.

Research into journalistic roles has traditionally sought to elucidate the perception of professional roles as expressed by journalists through surveys (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). In recent years, however, the approach taken to the study of professional roles has shifted from the evaluative to the performative (Mellado, 2015; Mellado & van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos,

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Date submitted: 2017–09–12

¹ Research for this article received funding from the Spanish Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad Grant No. CSO2017-82816-P.

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2013; van Dalen, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2012)—a shift that entails interest in the materialization of professional roles in news content. This perspective of analysis considers that the roles manifested in news stories are not only a faithful reflection of journalists' perceived roles; they are also determined by internal and external influences that ultimately shape the news item (Mellado et al., 2017b).

This article focuses on news content, understood as an artifact in which a certain journalistic culture manifests itself (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 369). In addition, the implementation of professional roles is influenced by the media system's characteristics. That is, the presence of certain journalistic practices linked to different roles—such as criticism or the projection of a positive image of elites—might vary depending, for example, on the degree of political parallelism, it being understood that roles are situational, specific to historical contexts, and constantly negotiated according to the needs of specific reference groups (Lynch, 2007).

The main purpose of this article is to examine the performance of six journalistic roles in the press in Spain, a country with a high degree of political parallelism and external pluralism, which are both characteristic of a polarized pluralist media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). We first examine the presence of professional roles in news items based on a content analysis of four national newspapers. Second, we study the factors that predict the presence of the six roles in news items. This study helps us understand the functions of the press in countries whose media systems can be classified under the polarized pluralist model.

The article is part of the Journalistic Role Performance Around the Globe project (<http://www.journalisticperformance.org/>), a cross-national comparative study set that analyzes how different professional roles materialize in news content in different media systems.

Conceptualization of Journalistic Role Performance

For decades, research has centered on the study of role conception; only recently have studies focusing on role performance in news content been published (Mellado, Hellmueller, & Donsbach, 2017a). Various authors have noted obvious inconsistencies between journalists' self-perceptions and what journalistic practice actually reflects (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). That is why the approach taken to the study of professional roles in recent years has shifted from role conception to role performance.

Although Shoemaker and Reese (2013) considered that the way journalists conceive of their roles shapes the news content that they produce, some studies do not empirically support that notion (Mellado & van Dalen, 2014; Patterson & Donsbach, 1996; Tandoc et al., 2013; Vos, 2002; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). According to Mellado and Lagos (2014, p. 2092), those studies that initially undertook to examine the presence of roles in news content (e.g., Tandoc et al., 2013; Vos, 2002; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996) had methodological limitations because they did not use standardized scales to measure role performance. However, several more recent studies (e.g., Mellado, 2015; Mellado & van Dalen, 2014; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013; Tandoc et al., 2013; van Dalen et al., 2012) have endeavored to connect two lines of research: the sociology of news and studies on professional roles. As a result, a conceptual migration from

role conception to role performance has occurred. The role performance concept is, therefore, different from others such as role enactment or role perception (Mellado et al., 2017a).

According to Mellado and colleagues (2017a, p. 5), role performance is understood as the collective outcome of decisions—and of different journalistic styles and narratives in particular—while taking into consideration the restrictions that shape journalistic practice. As Mellado (2015, pp. 596–597) has suggested, whereas the study of role conception entails an analysis of journalistic culture at an abstract level, the study of role performance deals with behaviors (actions, processes, and reaction gathering) influenced by reference groups, which lead to the manifestation of a role or function in a specific group, organization, or society as a collective outcome of dynamic negotiations. Thus, journalists, news outlets, and media organizations struggle over discursive authority about journalism's identity and locus in society (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017).

Mellado (2015) has asserted that role performance manifests itself in three conceptual dimensions: the presence of journalistic voice in the news item, the power relations domain, and audience approach. Each of these dimensions plays a different role, which can be measured in journalistic practice.

The journalistic voice dimension places emphasis on the presence or absence of the journalist as an actor in news. The disseminator-interventionist model uses indicators to measure the degree to which a news item contains the journalist's interpretations, opinions, proposals, or demands and the use of qualifying adjectives or the first-person point of view. It refers to the journalist's active or passive attitude (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004). According to Mellado (2015), this role has a special status because it measures the way in which the news is told, so generally it has a higher presence than other roles. The two poles (disseminator-interventionist) form a one-dimensional structure where a higher presence of journalistic voice implies a higher level of interventionism, and vice versa.

The second dimension refers to the power relations that the media establish with political and economic elites. Two professional roles have been differentiated: the watchdog role, which implies power relations based on watchfulness, questioning, criticism, and even countervailing power; and the loyal-facilitator role, which is more oriented toward either supporting the power structure and maintaining the status quo or promoting national unity and patriotism (Mellado, 2015).

The audience approach dimension entails the way in which journalistic practices build their relationships with the audience: a commercial relationship or a public service relationship. In other words, it is about how the audience is seen: as citizens, spectators, or clients. Three roles have been differentiated: the service role, linked to the provision of advice for the audience/clients in their daily lives; the infotainment role, which is based on sensationalism, emotions, morbid fascination, and curiosity to entertain the audience/spectators and help them relax; and the civic role, which provides information and education on the audience's/citizens' demands, rights, and responsibilities as well as other issues linked to their ability to exercise them and to get involved in social, political, and cultural life (Mellado, 2015).

These six professional roles are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, indicators of different roles can be found in the same news item. This conceptualization of journalistic role performance has been successfully applied to several journalistic contexts (Hellmueller & Mellado, 2016; Mellado, Márquez-Ramírez, Mick, Oller Alonso, & Olivera, 2016; Mellado et al., 2017b; Mellado & van Dalen, 2014, 2017; Stępińska, Jurga-Wosik, Adamczewska, Selcer, & Narożna, 2016; Wang, Sparks, Lü, & Huang, 2017). In this article, we analyze the presence of roles in the Spanish press using this conceptualization.

Mellado and Lagos (2014) have reported on the Chilean case, where the most common role in news items was the disseminator role, followed by the infotainment role and the civic role. In contrast, the watchdog role, the service role, and especially the loyal-facilitator role were hardly present at all in news items. In a study on China (Wang et al., 2017), the civic role did not appear in the analysis, whereas the most important roles in order of presence were the interventionist, infotainment, loyal-facilitator, watchdog, and service roles.

In the first comparative study on role performance, Mellado et al. (2016) found that the materialization of roles in Brazilian, Chilean, Cuban, Ecuadoran, and Mexican newspapers was far from homogeneous, with the disseminator role being more predominant than the interventionist role despite the instrumentalized nature and the political parallelism of their media systems.

Based on these previous studies, and given the lack of research examining the materialization of journalistic roles in news content in Spain, we formulate the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the level of presence of the six professional roles in news content in the Spanish national press?

RQ2: Are there significant differences in the presence of the six journalistic roles across Spanish newspapers?

Predictors of Journalistic Role Performance

Our second objective is to analyze the variables (political leaning, religious commitment, news topics, and reporting methods) explaining the different presence of professional roles in the news content of four Spanish newspapers. Although much research has underscored the influence of different variables on professional role conception (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011; Relly, Zanger, & Fahmy, 2015; Scherr & Baugut, 2016; Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013), few studies have examined which variables explain the materialization of professional roles in news content (Mellado et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

Studies on journalists' role conceptions have explored the relevance of the professionals' individual characteristics (e.g., political leaning, beliefs, age, educational background) to the perception of their professional roles. In the case of role performance, it makes sense to examine the potential influence of the newspapers' characteristics. This argument ties in with political parallelism and partisan selective exposure (Humanes, 2014). Therefore, issues such as a newspaper's journalistic style, political leaning, or religious commitment—as an expression of the media outlet's cultural identity—deserve attention from role performance research.

Mellado and Lagos (2014) discovered that the presence of roles in Chilean print news varied according to the media type (popular press vs. elite press). Whereas the elite newspapers more commonly exhibited the disseminator and watchdog roles, the popular press favored the infotainment, civic, and service roles.

In their study on the Chinese press, Wang et al. (2017) used the traditional distinction between the pro-government press and the commercial press. They found a higher presence of the interventionist role and the loyal-facilitator role in the pro-government newspapers, whereas two of the three commercial newspapers in their sample introduced the watchdog role to a greater extent.

Furthermore, in their comparative study, Mellado et al. (2016) found that the newspapers' political leaning was the strongest predictor of the service role and the civic role; it was the second most important predictor of the watchdog, loyal-facilitator, and infotainment roles; and it was also significant in the case of interventionism.

In the literature, however, no studies have examined the potential influence that the media outlets' religious leanings have on the role performance. Godler and Reich (2013b) found that ideas about religion affected the journalists' epistemological beliefs. By analogy, and taking into consideration that some Spanish newspapers have strong religious commitments (see Table 1), it would be reasonable to explore whether that trait could also determine the manifestation of certain roles in news content.

Assuming that the role performance is also situational, contextual, and relational (Lynch, 2007), researchers have looked for differences in its presence in different newsbeats, since different topics require differentiated journalistic roles. Van Dalen et al. (2012) considered that professional roles might manifest themselves in a differentiated manner by journalistic specialization. In this respect, at a performative level, Mellado and Lagos (2014) discovered that the main topic of a news item had a greater influence on the watchdog, service, civic, and loyal-facilitator roles than any other variable did. Among other evidences, there was a high presence of the infotainment role in news items on the topics of police, courts, national affairs, and politics.

In the Latin American countries of the study by Mellado et al. (2016), the interventionist role had a greater association with news items on social issues and miscellaneous news; whereas in China, Wang et al. (2017) found a high presence of the interventionist role in news items on energy, environment, economy and business, and education.

At a conceptual level, the journalists' epistemological thinking could be considered a dimension of their professional culture (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 369); "the professional roles of journalists are strongly linked to knowledge, legitimation, and justification of knowledge" (Örnebring, 2017, p. 75). Likewise, at a practical level, reporting methods (Örnebring, 2017, p. 86) should be associated with the materialization of professional roles in news content. In the Spanish case, with an interpretative-oriented journalistic culture, the far-from-objective reporting methods could better predict some professional roles such as the interventionist or watchdog roles.

Most studies of the relationship between journalists' professional roles and their reporting methods have a methodological focus based on surveys. Those studies maintain that professional roles are an independent variable of the importance attributed to reporting methods. Donsbach and Klett (1993) found that German journalists who were strongly committed to the impartiality model gave greater importance to objectivity than did journalists who defended an advocacy role. More recently, Skovsgaard, Albæk, Bro, and de Vreese (2013) reported that support for the watchdog role was positively related to the balanced presentation of all parties involved in the news item.

Without wishing to detract from the value of those studies, the journalists' survey answers might be somewhat divorced from the reality of their daily practice (Godler & Reich, 2013b). Consequently, reporting methods observed in news content may be considered a more accurate expression of a journalist's epistemological thinking and, again according to Örnebring (2017, p. 77), the procedural aspects of objectivity and epistemology would be the most important ones for understanding journalism's role as a social institution. That is why it is also expedient to observe the nature of the association with roles at a performative level.

The first study addressing that association at a performative level was based on a comparative approach. Mellado, Humanes, and Márquez-Ramírez (2017c) found that the manifestation of roles predicted the manifestation of objectivity in Chile, Spain, and Mexico. In the Spanish case, the civic role strongly influenced the use of quotes, whereas the use of verifiable evidence was negatively associated with the interventionist role, and the use of expert sources depended mainly on the occurrence of the service role.

Since most of the research has examined these factors (political leaning, religious commitment, news topics, and reporting methods) as possible determinants of professional roles, we pose our third research question:

RQ3: What variables explain variance of role performance across Spanish newspapers?

Journalistic Role Performance in a Polarized Pluralist Media System

Numerous studies have used the classification of media systems by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as well as the characteristics of the three models (liberal, corporatist, and polarized pluralist) in research on the perception of professional roles (van Dalen et al., 2012) and in content analyses of journalistic styles (Benson, Blach Ørsten, Powers, Willig, & Zambrano, 2012) or reporting methods (Umbricht & Esser, 2014). Some studies have analyzed the differences in the materialization of professional roles in news content using media systems as a comparison criterion (Mellado et al., 2017b).

In Spain, journalism has been identified as having, among other features, high levels of political parallelism—which has become entrenched as a result of clientelism articulated through the granting of licenses in the audiovisual sector since the 1990s and press assistance in the form of institutional advertising and subsidies—and a low level of professionalization. In particular, the press is characterized by external pluralism and political polarization (Humanes, Martínez Nicolás, & Saperas, 2013), public

television has been instrumentalized by successive governments (Humanes & Fernández Alonso, 2015), and the journalistic style is oriented toward commentary (Humanes et al., 2013), in which journalists serve as representatives of parties' ideological positions (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Martínez-Nicolás, Humanes, & Saperas, 2014). In fact, the important historical weight of the two largest political parties—the conservative Partido Popular and the socialist Partido Socialista Obrero Español—has led to references to an antagonistic bipolarization of the Spanish media (Sampedro & Seoane Pérez, 2008). This is especially obvious in print media, because by targeting the elites, they become representatives of the elites' interests in a horizontal negotiation. According to Humanes et al. (2013), on major topics of political confrontation, the newspapers usually act as political players, too, either (1) by supporting or opposing the political proposals of the political parties or of the government or (2) through investigative journalism, by making the public aware of corruption cases or political scandals. That is why Spanish newspapers are the political and electoral news media outlets that are most affected by the selective exposure provoked by readers' political stances (Humanes, 2014).

In view of the weak professionalization of journalism in Spain, Casero (2012) has posited that such political control of the media mainly entails corporatist pressures that emanate from the media outlet itself and then move toward its journalists. Therefore, according to Casero, it is not a matter of journalists being partisan or having a defined political affiliation that they implement in their professional practice; rather the journalists are politicized by the media outlet and the firm supporting it. This blurring of political and media spheres may affect the conceptualization of journalists' roles in a number of ways.

Within this context, professional roles at both the evaluative and performative levels are affected by the nature of media systems. Analyzing journalists' role perception, Hanitzsch et al. (2011) found that Spanish journalists fit into the so-called Western journalistic culture category (alongside Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and the United States). The functions with which Spanish journalists expressed a higher degree of agreement were: to be an absolutely detached observer, to provide interesting information, to provide citizens with political information, to act as a watchdog of the government, and to motivate people to participate in civic activity. In a comparative study of European countries, van Dalen et al. (2012) stated that Spanish journalists "saw their role as sacerdotal rather than pragmatic, and partisan rather than impartial" (p. 916). Humanes et al. (2013) found that the political journalists they interviewed maintained that the most important function was "providing information . . . combined with other journalistic roles . . . to interpret events, to enable citizens to have informed opinions on which to base their decisions" (p. 725). Recently, Berganza, Lavín, and Piñeiro-Naval (2017) have found that Spanish journalists perceive six types of professional role, which, in descending order of importance, are: citizens' spokespersons, information disseminator, watchdog, audience instructor, infotainment journalist, and promoter of the status quo.

Our analysis tested whether the most important roles for Spanish journalists were also those that had a higher presence in the news content of the four Spanish national newspapers analyzed (RQ1).

Method

Sample

To answer our research questions, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of news items published in 2012 and 2013 in the Spanish newspapers *Abc*, *El País*, *El Mundo*, and *La Razón*. The four newspapers represent different ideological tendencies, which are reflected by the fact that the audiences of the four publications display a high degree of ideological parallelism with the newspapers they read (Humanes, 2014). *El País* is the only center-left newspaper. *Abc* and *La Razón* are conservative and highly pro-monarchy newspapers, and they openly declare themselves as Catholic.² *El Mundo* is right-leaning politically and liberal-leaning economically.

Table 1. Newspaper Distribution by Number of News Items and by Political and Religious Leanings.

Newspaper	<i>n</i>	Political leaning	Religious leaning
<i>Abc</i>	521	Right	Catholic
<i>El País</i>	709	Center-left	Secular
<i>El Mundo</i>	660	Right	Secular
<i>La Razón</i>	388	Right	Catholic

Every news story connected with the national or country sections was considered a unit of analysis (opinion articles and editorials were not analyzed). The sample of news items ($N = 2,278$) was selected using the constructed week method: a Monday, a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday, a Friday, a Saturday, and a Sunday for every half year of the study period. We ensured that every month of the year was represented by at least one day, thus preventing an overrepresentation of a particular period. Four people who had received the necessary training coded the units of analysis. A Krippendorff's alpha value of .72 was obtained.

Measurements

To analyze the presence of the six journalistic roles in the news content, several indicators were operationalized in accordance with the method proposed by Mellado (2015). Each indicator was measured on a dichotomous scale, where 1 = *presence in the news item* and 0 = *absence from the news item*. There could be more than one role in a news story. Table 2 lists the indicators corresponding to the six journalistic roles.

² For example, *La Razón* opens its religious beat with this sentence: "Live the Christian faith through the latest news from the newspaper *La Razón*."

Table 2. Operational Definitions of the Role Indicators.

Role	Indicators
Interventionist	Opinion, interpretation, proposal/demands, qualifying adjectives, use of the first person
Watchdog	Information on judicial/administrative processes, questioning on the part of the journalist, questioning on the part of others, criticism on the part of journalists, criticism on the part of others, denouncement on the part of the journalist, denouncement on the part of others, reporting of external investigation, reporting of conflict, or investigative reporting
Loyal-facilitator	Defense/support of activities, defense/support policies, positive image of the political elite, positive image of the economic elite, emphasis on progress/success, comparison to the rest of the world, emphasis on national triumphs, promotion of the country's image, and patriotism
Service	Impact on everyday life, tips and advice (grievances), tips and advice (individual risks), and consumer advice
Infotainment	Personalization, private life, sensationalism, scandal, emotions, morbid fascination
Civic	Citizen perspective, citizen demand, credibility of citizens, education on duties and rights, background information, local impact

An index was constructed for each role by adding up the presence of each indicator and dividing the sum by the number of indicators for each role. This process led to the creation of a 0–1 scale, where 1 = *maximum presence of the role* and 0 = *absence of the role*.

The following items were considered independent variables:

- The newspaper in which the news item was published
- The news topic: government/legislature; campaigns/elections/politics; police and crime; courts; defense/military/national security; economy and business; education; energy, environment, and climate change; transportation; housing, infrastructure, and public works; accidents and natural disasters; health; religion and churches; human rights; demonstrations and protests; and social problems (Mellado & Lagos, 2014)
- Reporting methods: balance, argumentation, verifiable evidence and use of the conditional tense, measured on a presence/absence scale (see the operationalization in Mellado et al., 2017c)
- Political leaning: left-right
- Religious leaning: Catholic-secular

Results

The Presence of Professional Roles in News Content

The first research question seeks to determine the level of presence of the six professional roles in news content in the newspapers analyzed. Our results reveal that 80% of the news items matched the disseminator role of the dimension relating to the journalistic voice. However, the presence of the

interventionist dimension was higher than that of the other roles. As shown in Table 3, almost two out of every 10 news items contained elements of a less neutral and more active journalistic style ($M = 0.19$, $SD = 0.23$). When considering the specific indicators of this domain, interpretation (39.7%) and the use of adjectives (34.1%) were the most used resources, though it is also worth noting the inclusion of opinion in the news items (19%).

In the power relations domain, and bearing in mind that the Spanish media system is characterized by a high level of political parallelism (Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, & Castro, 2014), we would expect the roles relating to the detachment from or proximity to power (watchdog and loyal-facilitator) to have a notable presence as a strategy for the media outlets to interact with the power structures. As shown in Table 3, the watchdog role had the second highest presence ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.15$). When Spanish journalists acted as watchdogs, they basically did so by including criticism on the part of people other than themselves (24.6%), by their own questioning of power groups (22%), by publishing denunciations on the part of other people or groups (17%), and by reporting on judicial processes against those exercising power (15.9%). The loyal-facilitator role had very little relevance ($M = 0.03$, $SD = 0.07$) when compared to the watchdog role. It manifested itself as support for public policies (4.9%), the promotion of political elites (4.3%), and publicizing improvements in some aspect (4.2%).

Table 3. Presence of Roles in the Spanish Press.

Role	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Disseminator	0.81	0.23
Interventionist	0.19	0.23
Watchdog	0.12	0.15
Loyal-facilitator	0.03	0.07
Service	0.03	0.10
Infotainment	0.01	0.08
Civic	0.04	0.11

In the Spanish newspapers analyzed, the three roles relating to the audience approach had very little presence in the news and were no higher than 4% (see Table 3). The civic role was the most apparent in news content ($M = 0.04$, $SD = 0.11$)—in particular, expressing citizens' opinions (8.1%), demands (6.5%), and activities (6%). The service model of journalism was present in three out of every 100 news items ($M = 0.03$, $SD = 0.10$), and it mainly involved coverage of the impact of events on people's everyday lives (6.5%). The infotainment role came last ($M = 0.01$, $SD = 0.08$), with the personalization of information being the most used resource in that role (4.4%).

These results are consistent with a media system such as Spain's, where the commercialization of content in the daily national press is low, and strategies to reach readers are based on political orientations—hence, the greater preponderance of the civic role in the audience approach domain or, for example, the relevance of the interventionist and the watchdog roles.

The second research question asked whether there are any significant differences in the presence of the six journalistic roles across newspapers. The analysis of variance revealed statistically significant differences between the four newspapers for four of the six roles: interventionist ($F = 41.0149, p \leq .000$), watchdog ($F = 29.8086, p \leq .000$), loyal-facilitator ($F = 43.800, p \leq .000$), and infotainment ($F = 18.0575, p \leq .000$). The presence of the service roles ($F = 2.4147, p \leq .065$) and civic roles ($F = 0.4259, p \leq .734$) was similar in the four newspapers analyzed. The most important differences were found in the interventionist ($\eta^2 = 0.05$) and loyal-facilitator roles ($\eta^2 = 0.05$), although the effect size was very small.

As shown in Figure 1, the presence of the interventionist role was higher in the newspapers *Abc* (right-leaning) ($M = 0.26, SD = 0.24$) and *El Mundo* (right-leaning) ($M = 0.22, SD = 0.24$) than in *El País* (center-left-leaning) ($M = 0.16, SD = 0.22$) and *La Razón* (right-leaning) ($M = 0.11, SD = 0.19$). Dunnett's T3 post hoc test ($p \leq .05$) did not show any homogeneous subgroups, thereby indicating statistically significant differences in the presence of that role among the four newspapers analyzed.

Regarding the watchdog role, Dunnett's T3 post hoc test ($p \leq .05$) showed three homogeneous subgroups, the first formed by *Abc* and *El Mundo*, whereas *La Razón* and *El País* constituted two separate groups. As shown in Figure 1, *Abc* and *El Mundo* had the highest levels ($M = 0.15, SD = 0.17$ and $M = 0.14, SD = 0.16$, respectively). *El País* ($M = 0.11, SD = 0.13$) came after those two newspapers. Finally, *La Razón* was the newspaper with the lowest presence of that role ($M = 0.06, SD = 0.10$).

Regarding the loyal-facilitator role, Dunnett's T3 post hoc test ($p \leq .05$) showed the existence of three groups. *Abc* and *La Razón* formed the first group, which had the highest value for news items with the loyal-facilitator role ($M = 0.05, SD = 0.11$ and $M = 0.05, SD = 0.08$, respectively). The newspaper *El País* ($M = 0.006, SD = 0.03$) formed the second group, and *El Mundo* ($M = 0.01, SD = 0.06$) formed the third.

The differences among the newspapers in the presence of the watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles could be explained by the closeness to or distance from those in power. In other words, it was dependent on a greater or lesser concurrence of interests among media groups, economic powers, and governments. The conservative newspapers *Abc* and *La Razón* showed the highest levels of the loyal-facilitator role, whereas *El Mundo*, whose director was in dispute with the governing Partido Popular (conservative), had a high level of the watchdog role.

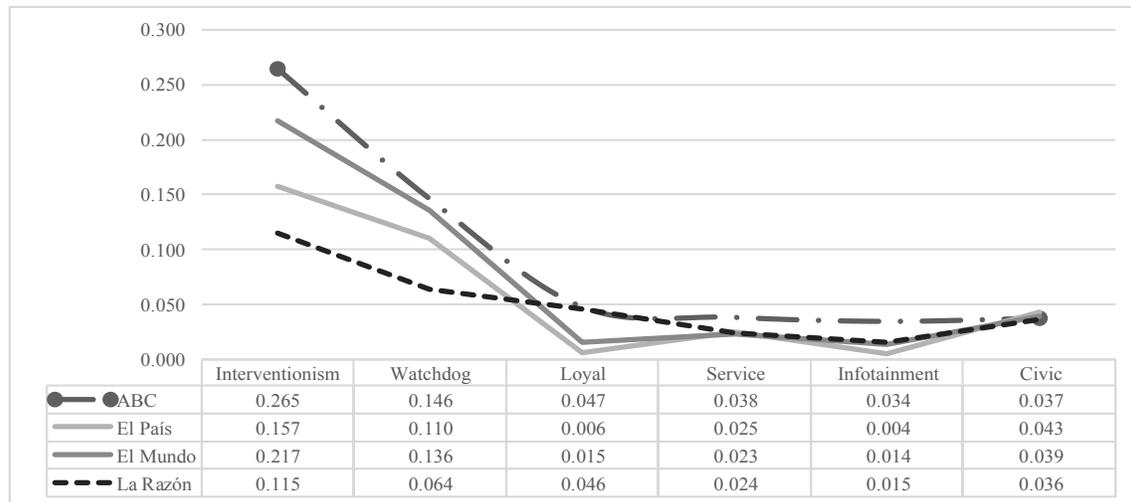


Figure 1. Mean Presence of Roles by Newspaper.

Finally, in the infotainment role, Dunnett’s T3 post hoc test ($p \leq .05$) showed the existence of three subgroups. The presence of that role was similar in the newspapers *El Mundo* ($M = 0.001$, $SD = 0.01$) and *La Razón* ($M = 0.002$, $SD = 0.06$). *El País* stood apart from the other three newspapers because the infotainment role was practically absent from it ($M = 0.004$, $SD = 0.03$), whereas *Abc* ($M = 0.034$, $SD = 0.11$) formed the subgroup with the highest presence of that role. Conservative newspapers might be incorporating infotainment as an element to compete for the same audience.

Modeling Role Performance in the Spanish Press

Stepwise linear regression analysis was performed to answer the third research question, which asked which factors explain variance of role performance across newspapers. All six models are statistically significant (see Table 4). The model for the interventionist role explained 39% of variance. The predictors that best explained the presence of that role were reporting methods—specifically the use of argumentation (.531) and of the conditional tense (.114), followed by the resource of presenting verifiable evidence in news items (-.059). However, in the latter case, the interventionist role was associated with a lower presence of verifiable evidence. In the newspaper *La Razón* (-.227), the presence of that role was lower than in the other three newspapers. There was a higher presence of the interventionist role in the conservative media (.120) as well as in news items on religious topics (.035).

The regression model for the watchdog role (see Table 4) explained 24.1% of variance. Reporting methods had considerable explanatory power—especially argumentation (.279), the presence of different viewpoints (.194), and, to a lesser extent, the use of the conditional tense (.044). The news item topic formed the second block of predictors with greater predictive power—specifically news items on police and crime (.218), courts (.094), election campaigns (.086), and demonstrations and protests (.070). Only

news on economic topics ($-.066$) predicted a low presence of the watchdog role. The presence of this model was high in the newspaper *Abc* (.074) and very low in *La Razón* ($-.119$).

The percentage of variance explained for the loyal-facilitator role was 8.4% (see Table 4). The most important predictors were news topics and religious leaning. News items on government (.146) and economy (.127), followed by national defense (.048), were the ones that most influenced the loyal-facilitator role. The Catholic newspapers promoted that model of journalism more than the secular newspapers did (.192). Two predictors had lower explanatory power in that role: the newspaper—its presence in *El País* was lower ($-.065$)—and reporting methods—its presence in news items devoid of diverse viewpoints was higher ($-.045$).

In the service role, regression analysis explained 20.6% of variance (see Table 4). News topics were the best predictors of this journalistic role—especially topics that were more social and related to everyday life, such as health (.388), accidents and natural disasters (.161), social problems (.152), education (.121), transportation (.078), and energy and environment (.046). Of the reporting methods, only the use of the conditional tense explained a higher presence of the service role (.046).

Regression analysis yielded a model for the infotainment role that explained 18.9% of variance (see Table 4). In that role, news item topics were the best predictors: police and crime (.155), accidents and natural disasters (.138), health (.103), social problems (.099), human rights (.080), other topics (.078), religion (.061), and demonstrations and protests (.044). The infotainment role was higher in the conservative newspapers (.067) and, more precisely, in *Abc* (.086). Low presence of verifiable evidence ($-.044$) and the use of the conditional tense (.070) were reporting methods particular to the infotainment role.

For the civic role, a model was obtained that explained 21.8% of variance (see Table 4). As is the case in the other two roles of this dimension, the news topics influenced its presence in news content. In this role, the topics that had higher explanatory power were demonstrations and protests (.363), social problems (.173), education (.158), human rights (.112), health (.108), accidents and natural disasters (.092), national defense (.089), police and crime (.046), and transportation (.041). The presence of diverse viewpoints (.096), argumentation (.062), and the use of the conditional tense (.038) were associated with the civic role.

Table 4. Predictors of Journalistic Role Performance (Standardized Regression Coefficients).

Predictor	Professional role					
	Interventionist	Watch-dog	Loyal-facilitator	Service	Info-tainment	Civic
<i>Newspaper</i>						
<i>Abc</i>		.074***			.086***	
<i>El País</i>			-.065**			
<i>El Mundo</i>						
<i>La Razón</i>	-.227***	-.119***				
<i>Reporting method</i>						
Balance		.194***	-.045*			.096***
Argumentation	.531***	.279***				.062***
Verifiable evidence	-.059***				-.044*	
Use of conditional tense	.114***	.044*		.046**	.070***	.038*
<i>Topic</i>						
Government/ legislature			.146***	.041*		
Campaigns/ elections/politics	.094***	.086***				
Police and crime		.218***			.155***	.046**
Courts		.094***				
Defense/military/ national security			.048*			.089***
Economy and business		-.066***	.127***			
Education				.121***		.158***
Energy, environment, and climate change				.046**		
Transportation				.078***		.041*
Accidents and natural disasters				.161***	.138***	.092***
Health				.388***	.103***	.108***
Religion and churches	.035*				.061**	.070***
Human rights					.080**	.112***
Demonstrations and protests		.070***			.044*	.363***
Social problems				.152***	.099***	.173***
Others					.078***	
<i>Ideological leaning</i>	.120***				.067**	
<i>Religious leaning</i>			.192***			
Adjusted R ²	.390	.241	.084	.206	.090	.218

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

Conclusions

Through an analysis of the Spanish case, this study expands the literature on journalistic roles performance in countries classified as having a polarized pluralist media system, and particularly on the predictors explaining the presence of these roles in news content. According to the empirical data collected, the journalistic practices in the Spanish national press can be characterized mainly by: (a) an interventionist profile; (b) a higher proportion of the watchdog role than the loyal-facilitator role; and (c) a conceptualization of the audience as citizens, as manifested by a higher presence of the civic role than the infotainment and the service roles.

In addition to these general findings, the study also reveals differences in the materialization of journalistic roles in news content among the newspapers analyzed, which indicates that it is not a homogeneous model of journalism; rather, it is one nuanced by the editorial lines of each media outlet.

Taking into consideration the levels of presence of each of the six roles, the newspaper *El País*—the only center-left publication—stood apart from the other three in every role, as highlighted by the post hoc tests of the analysis of variance. The role performance of the newspaper *El País* was characterized by the presence of all but one of the roles; the exception is the civic role, which was lower than the overall mean of the sample. Also notable is the fact that the newspapers situated ideologically in the center-right and on the right—*El Mundo*, *Abc*, and *La Razón*—did not display any similarities in the level of presence of the six roles. Indeed, they did not form a homogeneous group in any of the roles apart from the service and civic roles, in which no statistically significant differences were found. This may be due to the need for these newspapers to differentiate their editorial offerings within the same ideological spectrum.

If we consider the three domains separately (journalistic voice, power relations, and audience approach), we can take a more in-depth look at the differences found. The most important differences among the newspapers were in the journalistic voice domain. Regardless of its political ideological leaning, each newspaper stood apart from the others in terms of the level of presence of the interventionist dimension. *Abc* and *El Mundo* were more interventionist than *La Razón*, yet all three newspapers are conservative.

In the power relations domain, to understand the presence of the watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles in a media system such as Spain's, which is characterized by political parallelism and external pluralism, it is necessary to put the sample of news items analyzed into a chronological and political context. The period when the sample was taken coincided with the conservative Partido Popular (center-right) being the governing party in Spain, a major financial crisis, and a rising tide of corruption cases within the party. At the same time, two of the most populous regions were governed by opposition parties (Andalusia by the socialist Partido Socialista Obrero Español and Catalonia by the conservative nationalist Convergència i Unió).

Within that context, all the right-leaning newspapers apart from *El Mundo*—which has a counterpower editorial identity—had a high presence of the loyal-facilitator role. In fact, the newspaper *La Razón*, whose director was an advisor to the current president of the government and was questioned in

relation to a case of coercion and of belonging to a criminal organization in a political countercorruption operation against the Partido Popular, was the media outlet with the lowest presence of the watchdog role—three times lower than the other newspapers on its ideological spectrum—and the highest presence of the loyal-facilitator role. The higher levels of watchdog journalism in *El Mundo* and *Abc* can be explained by *El Mundo's* editorial identity and commitment to investigative journalism³ and by *Abc's* closer monitoring of corruption cases allegedly involving the opposition parties (the case of statutory layoff proceedings in Andalusia, a region where the socialist party governs) and the case of embezzlement at the Palau de la Música Catalana in Catalonia, in which the nationalist party *Convergència i Unió* was allegedly involved. That would explain why the newspaper that was less aligned with the government and closer to Partido Socialista Obrero Español, *El País*, did not top that role within a context of the Partido Popular government.

The data suggest that the presence of the infotainment role in the Spanish press could be explained by the need for the right-leaning press to differentiate itself competitively for potential readers on its ideological spectrum. That may be the reason that the infotainment role was not present in *El País*, the only progressive national daily newspaper, but was present at varying levels in the other newspapers.

Beyond the interpretations focusing on the Spanish case, these results enable us to confirm the findings of earlier studies conducted within other journalistic contexts, and to clarify why there are different tendencies in journalistic practice around the globe. The overall picture of the role performance in the Spanish press has similarities with and differences from the depiction provided by Mellado and Lagos (2014), and by Mellado et al. (2016) for Latin American countries with political parallelism, and mainly dissimilarities when compared to the Chinese case (Wang et al., 2017).

The disseminator-interventionist dimension was shown to have higher presence in news items in Latin American countries and in China. Here, the prevalence of news items with a disseminator profile (80%) and a passive profile coincides; comparatively, however, in terms of the percentage of news items with an interventionist profile, the figures for the Spanish press are similar to those for Cuba and slightly below those for Chile and China. Likewise, interventionism in news items is quantitatively similar to that of Latin American countries in certain respects: The presence of adjectives is similar to that of Mexico, the use of interpretative elements is only slightly lower than that of Cuba and Ecuador, and the inclusion of opinion in news items is once again similar to that of Cuban newspapers. These similarities could be explained by the cultural and political ties between Spain and Latin America.

The differences lie mainly in the press's position with regard to power, which is manifested by a higher presence of the watchdog role or the loyal-facilitator role in news items. In the Spanish press, the number of news reports with a presence of the watchdog role was considerably higher than the examples of loyal-facilitator journalism (12% and 3%, respectively); this quantitatively describes it as a press that is

³ In 2014, the director of *El Mundo* alleged that the reports in his newspaper of the Partido Popular government's corruption cases caused the Spanish prime minister to press to get him fired (Ramírez, 2014).

much more detached from power than the Brazilian press (9% and 3%, respectively) and, in other parts of the world, than the pro-government Cuban press (1% and 34%, respectively) and the Chinese press.

Regarding the roles in audience approach, their presence was much lower in the Spanish press. In this respect, the similarities with Latin American countries are apparent in the civic role, which is the most prevalent. The dissimilarities lie in the facts that the weight of news items with a service role is comparatively lower than the mean for the Latin American press and that the weight of news items with a presence of the infotainment role is practically irrelevant compared to other countries (1% in Spain, 5% in Latin America, and 3% in China). The nonexistence of the popular press in the Spanish media system needs to be taken into account.

Finally, the data provide a group of factors that explain the presence of professional roles in the Spanish press. The results support the contributions made by other studies that had used methods that did not control for the effect of the set of variables on the manifestation of the role. Thus, the data support the incidence of all the groups of variables studied on journalistic performance.

Reporting methods and news topics emerged as the most important predictors of role performance in the Spanish press. In fact, both factors were present in all the roles analyzed. On the one hand, the idea that reporting methods are a predictor of the manifestation of roles was supported. In this respect, the primacy of argumentation over verifiable evidence explained the emergence of the interventionist role in Spain. Similarly, it nuanced and shaped the manifestation of the watchdog role, which, in the Spanish national press, was explained not by the use of verifiable data but by the presentation of diverse viewpoints and argumentation.

On the other hand, when compared to earlier studies (Mellado & Lagos, 2014; Mellado et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2017), the idea that roles are situational and contextual was supported, and the news topic was shown to be an explanatory variable of the presence of professional roles. In addition to the tendency for events to serve purposes of entertainment—something that has already been observed internationally—of particular note among the findings is that when the effects of the financial crisis hit the population hard, the economy and business topic became a negative predictor of the watchdog role. That may be a symptom of the Spanish media's collusion with and dependence on the financial sector, especially given the fact that this topic is a predictor of the loyal-facilitator role. The watchdog role also emerged in news items on political contests (campaigns, elections, and politics) but not on government actions (government/legislature), which could be understood as yet another reflection of political parallelism and external pluralism. The watchdog function serves to criticize the adversary, which is one of the characteristics of the watchdog role in the polarized pluralist model.

The cultural identity of the media outlet, and specifically one of its three predictors (newspaper, political leaning, and religious leaning), predicted the emergence of four of the six roles (interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, and infotainment). Given that the media outlet (newspaper) was itself a better predictor than political or religious leaning in the interventionist and watchdog dimensions, in future works it would be meaningful to conduct a more demanding study of the media outlet's cultural identity to identify and operationalize specific aspects thereof. In addition, the interpretation of results such as these

in an environment of political parallelism, as has been shown, need to be put into a chronological and political context because the functions of the media—mainly the watchdog and loyal-facilitator functions—may be situational and interchangeable depending on which political or social group is in power. In other words, the question arises as to whether the percentage of news items with a watchdog profile would increase in *La Razón* (right-leaning and Catholic) if the party Podemos (left-leaning and anticlerical) were to govern. Although the study by Godler and Reich (2013a) found more interpretative journalists among those presenting strong religious convictions, such a tendency was not reflected in this study when it considers the religious tilt of the newspapers.

Future approaches to this topic must continue to identify variables to increase the predictive power of models for the presence of each journalistic role examined. It would also be expedient to explore role performance in television, radio, online newspapers, and social media to offer a broader explanation of the journalistic landscape in the contemporary multiplatform media context. Furthermore, future studies should address the journalistic role performance from a qualitative perspective. New contributions to a quantitative content analysis or new approaches based on linguistic analysis could provide a more precise evaluation of the intensity with which dimensions such as interventionism manifest themselves.

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