

The influence of journalistic role performance on objective reporting: A comparative study of Chilean, Mexican, and Spanish news

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Abstract

Most comparative research on journalistic objectivity, and particularly the relation between objectivity and professional roles, has been carried out in the context of Western media systems and from the perspective of journalists' role conceptions. However, the relation between role performance and the implementation of the objectivity norm remains unsolved, especially in countries with no clear-cut journalistic tradition of objectivity. Based on a content analysis of news stories published in Chile, Mexico, and Spain ($N = 7,868$), this study examines (1) the use of four objective reporting methods in newspapers from Spain, Mexico, and Chile, and (2) the influence of the performance of six journalistic roles in those methods. The results show that the materialization of objectivity varies across journalistic cultures, revealing also a significant influence of the performance of professional roles on the implementation of objectivity in news. The study sheds some light on the implication of these results in countries expected to display similar traits due to their historical and cultural affinities but which show very distinctive patterns.

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Content analysis, cross national comparison, Ibero-American, journalism, media system, news reporting, objectivity, professional roles, role performance

Introduction

This study explores the connection between the manifestation of objectivity methods in news content and the performance of journalistic roles. At the evaluative level, survey research involving journalists has concluded that their perceptions about certain roles or functions are positively related to how they endorse and value objectivity (Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Skovsgaard et al., 2013). Likewise, through content analysis, another strand of literature has compared how objectivity varies across contrasting media systems in Western countries (Esser and Umbricht, 2013). However, there is no evidence on how the performance of certain roles also connects to the materialization of objectivity in actual news content, and no evidence yet on the relation between both phenomena in non-Western countries, particularly how certain strategies of objectivity materialize more prominently in certain roles. For instance, given the journalistic contexts of Chile, Mexico, and Spain, there is a need to examine whether news stories that display watchdog reporting are more objective than others by relying on more reliable evidence and experts, whether the use of quotation marks predominates in more loyal type of news as a way to visibilize official sources and those in power, or whether the use of balanced sources may predominate in civic-oriented news to enable diversity and visibility of citizens and other marginal groups. Examining such specific aspects would help provide a better understanding of how objectivity operates at the practical level and how its methods materialize in different types of news content. However, so far, empirical literature tackling both objectivity and professional roles has mostly been restricted to the evaluative level, by either focusing on survey research based on self-declarations of the roles that journalists perceive as important (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Weaver et al., 2007) or to the extent to which journalists endorse specific methods of objectivity (Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Skovsgaard et al., 2013).

At the theoretical level, research on media systems and journalistic traditions asserts that countries with a liberal development of mass-oriented media markets and journalistic traditions—such as the United States—were more likely to develop standards of journalistic objectivity and detached reporting whereas in others like Spain, Italy, or France, interpretive, partisan, and opinionated journalism became prominent (Chalaby, 1996; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). However, except for Spain, very little is known, neither empirically nor theoretically, about the same phenomena across Latin America.

Therefore, this study has two goals. First, to analyze how the implementation of four strategies of objectivity—verifiable evidence, balance, the use of quotes, and the use of expert sources—varies across print content from Chile, Mexico, and Spain in order to explore whether the two Latin American countries are similar

among themselves and resemble the Spanish journalistic culture. Second, to analyze which type of news content is more associated with certain methods of objectivity by measuring the extent to which the performance of six journalistic roles—namely the interventionist, watchdog, loyal, service, infotainment, and civic roles—as well as other content-related variables such as newspaper type, news topic, or newspaper political leaning influence the presence of different objectivity strategies.

In doing so, the study moves forward from the more traditional approach that explores journalists' role *conception/perception* as the predictor of a wide range of news content, to the more recent and discussed approach that examines the *performance* of journalistic roles and its relation with other news content characteristics (Mellado, 2015; Mellado et al., 2017).

The study draws from a combination of three strands of literature: (1) the discussion of objectivity as a journalistic value that manifests itself through distinctive news strategies across different media systems (Esser and Umbricht, 2013), (2) the contribution of studies linking journalistic roles and objectivity (Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Skovsgaard et al., 2013), and (3) a much scarcer body of research on media systems and journalistic cultures in Latin America and Spain (Mellado et al., 2012, 2016).

The three countries in this study are comparable because they share a slow, elite-oriented, politicized, interpretive, and partisan tradition of press development. However, Mexico and Chile are relatively underresearched with respect to Spain, their former ruling power that implemented a Colonial press model across the region and a political, cultural, moral, and social order that in many aspects survives to date, particularly through clientelic press–state relations (Bernedo, 2008; Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez, 2014).

In conducting this study and choosing these countries, we therefore expect to shed some light on two essential issues: the relation between role performance and the implementation of the objectivity norm; and on how widespread is the use of objectivity in Spain, Mexico, and Chile. In the two latter countries, the press is akin, in origin, to the Spanish journalistic culture, and they also underwent extensive periods of dictatorship, authoritarianism, and censorship, and their journalism has allegedly adopted American journalistic standards.

Objectivity as a reporting method

As one of the cornerstones of professional journalism in the Anglo-Saxon media system (Schudson, 2001; Tuchman, 1972), objectivity has gone beyond borders to influence professional practice around the world (Weaver and Willnat, 2012). However, theoretical research on media systems and journalistic traditions indicates that objectivity tends to prevail in countries with more established mass-oriented presses and less in countries with a more politicized, intellectual tradition of journalism, such as Mediterranean and Latin American countries (Chalaby, 1996; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002).

Laying empirical evidence to those claims, comparative content analysis carried out by Esser and Umbricht (2013) used five indicators to analyze the presence of objective methods in newspapers from the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, France, and Italy. Their indicators of objectivity were the presentation of antagonistic points of view, the use of experts, the use of quotes, the inverted pyramid, and the formal separation between facts and opinions. While their findings confirmed suspected clustering of countries according to their similar media system and journalistic traditions (Chalaby, 1996; Hallin and Mancini, 2004), they found that the objective method was more prevalent in the American press (69%) and less prevalent in Italy (48%). German and Swiss newspapers were closer to the American model (64% and 59%, respectively), while British and French newspapers were in an intermediate position (57% in both cases).

This is one of the more recent studies to give proper operationalization of objectivity for the empirical analysis of news content. Methods of objectivity are understood as the way that journalists ‘materialize’ objective reporting to prove the truthfulness of their information and to legitimize their autonomy in relation to editorial or partisan interests (Benson, 2006; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007; Mindich, 1998; Tuchman, 1972; Waisbord, 2006). Tuchman (1972) defined objectivity as a ‘strategic ritual’ that helps to distinguish professional from amateur journalists. This ritual includes diverse practices such as fact verification and accuracy, the presentation of conflicting possibilities, the presentation of supporting evidence, the judicious use of quotation marks, and the structuring of information in the inverted pyramid style.

The strategies, however, have not been free from controversy and debate as Maras (2013) admits. In defending the value of objectivity as an ideal, Lichtemberg (2000) admits that the criticism to the norm is often aimed not to the ideal per se but to the perceived failures of its strategies, such the idea of balance—giving equal voice to different sides of the story—that leaves the reader ill equipped to judge the truth, or to the overreliance on official sources, that helps to visibilize established powers. But if this is the case, to what extent does this occur and in what type of news content?

By linking methods of objectivity and the performance of journalistic roles, we can contribute to the debate on why objectivity is a desirable norm and what kind of journalism it helps to produce.

Objective reporting and journalistic role performance

Studies that have endeavored to explain variations in the implementation of the objective reporting across countries have taken either the single country or media system as the independent variable (Esser and Umbricht, 2013; Van Dalen et al., 2012), the type of media (Deuze, 2005; Mellado and Humanes, 2015; Skovsgaard et al., 2013), or the journalistic traditions of the countries (Benson and Hallin, 2007).

However, fewer studies have considered journalistic roles as independent variables when studying objectivity. Those which do address this relationship have done so at the perceptual level through survey or interview research that analyzes the importance that journalists place both on different reporting methods and on different professional roles (Skovsgaard et al., 2013). A pioneering work by Donsbach and Klett (1993) showed that German journalists who had a greater attachment to the model of impartiality placed more importance on objectivity than those who defended an advocacy role. Also, the importance that journalists gave to the use of hard data correlated with the importance given to the role of impartial journalism.

More recently, also through survey research, Skovsgaard et al. (2013) analyzed the influence of Danish journalists' role conceptions in the importance given to certain methods of objectivity, finding a significant relation between both phenomena: some of their findings show that passive-mirror role is negatively related to the value judgment of objectivity, or that the endorsement of the watchdog role is positively related to balance as well as to the importance given to the factual aspects of objectivity.

Taking a similar strategy—having objectivity as the dependent variable and professional roles as the independent variable—we move a step forward from the journalists' perceptual level to the performative level by looking at the implementation of both the objectivity norm and professional roles in news content.

In the past 10 years, research on professional roles has moved from the traditional role conception focus—the way in which journalists legitimize and give meaning to their societal functions—(Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Weaver et al., 2007) or in other words, what journalists think it is important to do, to the focus on *role performance*—what they actually do (Hellmueller and Mellado, 2015; Mellado, 2015; Mellado and Van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc et al., 2013; Vos, 2005). Role performance has been defined by previous research as the collective outcome of concrete news decisions that put in practice certain roles—what journalists actually do and how that materializes in professional practice—which are under constant and dynamic negotiation (Mellado, 2015). In that regard, the latest studies have shown that since the gap between rhetoric and practice is inevitable (Mellado and Van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc et al., 2013), it is necessary to analyze to what extent different professional roles materialized in news content.

As Mellado (2015: 597) suggests, 'the performance of roles can take the form of actions performed prior to the output' or can also be analyzed through the news outcome made known to the public. In this study, we follow her conceptualization of role performance, analyzing content as the final product in the process of news production. She conceptualizes six dimensions of journalistic role performance based on three main domains: the presence of journalistic voice, the relationship that journalism holds with *de facto* powers, and the way in which journalism approaches the audience. Within the journalistic

voice domain, the interventionist role measures the active stance of journalists in their reporting. Regarding the journalists' position toward institutional power, there are two: the watchdog and the loyal facilitator roles. The first one is the monitorial, often antagonistic position that journalism takes in order to hold institutional powers accountable and unveil wrongdoing. The loyal facilitator role, meanwhile, materializes in two ways. Journalism may cooperate with those in power or focus on the nation-state, thereby helping to highlight and strengthen national triumphs and prestige. Finally, the third domain measures the different ways in which journalism approaches the audience (as clients, costumers, or citizens), namely: the service, infotainment, and civic roles in news content.

Media systems and journalistic cultures in Spain, Chile, and Mexico

Literature about media systems in Latin America is not only scarce but also undertheorized in the same systematic, dimensional, and comparative terms than most Western countries, especially those from the Polarized Pluralist model to which Spain belongs (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Due to their historical, linguistic, and cultural ties, the study focuses on Spain and two of its former colonies rather than on other countries from the Polarized Pluralist model of media systems.

Comparing media content across Chile, Mexico, and Spain is a first step toward shedding light on whether journalistic cultures in Latin America are—or are not—homogeneous and akin to Spain in their reporting styles with respect to objectivity or have developed in their own unique ways. The few studies that have tackled role conceptions and role performance in the region have revealed a great deal of heterogeneity and hybridity across Latin American journalistic cultures, wherein a diverse range of journalistic roles both at the evaluative and performative level coexist (Mellado et al., 2012, 2016).

This is the first study to comparatively assess strategies of objectivity in relation to media content characteristics and models of role performance in the region, and to ascertain how similar are two important countries in Latin America among themselves and with respect to Spain. In the three countries, due to their historical context, the nature of printed publications had been traditionally partisan, as objectivity or factuality did not become professional norms or aspirations until late in the 20th century. The three countries experienced different forms of authoritarian rule and consequently, restricted press freedom and periods of censorship under Franco's Spain, Pinochet's Chile, and the hegemonic party rule in Mexico. Spain was the first to restore a democratic government in 1975, followed by Chile, with the downfall of its military dictatorship in 1989, and finally by Mexico with the electoral victory of the opposition in 2000 that ended a 70-year rule of hegemonic government.

Journalists in Mexico, Chile, and Spain have therefore faced historical restrictions to develop an autonomous profession, tenets such as objectivity

or neutrality as their professional norms, or freedom from governmental interference or political instrumentalization. In fact, authors like Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) have asserted that Latin American media systems resemble polarized-pluralist media systems like Spain; the three countries in the study display newspaper markets with low readerships and orientation toward politicized elites, the prevalence of high political parallelism and a clientelistic political culture that favors the political instrumentalization of media owners and journalists, a low level of professionalization and a high degree of state intervention (Hughes and Lawson, 2005; Martínez Nicolás et al., 2014).

However, there are also aspects that differentiate Chile and Mexico from Spain, such as their presidential political systems, the private and highly concentrated nature of broadcasting services, and the much lower level of partisan identification by both journalists and the audience (De Albuquerque, 2012). Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez (2014) use the term ‘liberal-captured’ model—instead of polarized pluralist—to refer to Latin America’s media systems, arguing that in the highly concentrated private media system models, a clientelistic culture functions as the engine for an exchange of favors and benefits that would explain a lack of overtly critical coverage, selective partisanship, and targeted watchdog reporting.

In spite of low readerships and elite orientation of their press being a common denominator, there is a popular press tradition in Chile and Mexico that has not developed in Spain. Political parallelism in all three countries is also high, albeit with important and differentiated nuances. In the Spanish, more traditional case, media partisanship responds to clear ideological positions of organizations and journalists that resonate with those of their audiences (Fernández Alonso and Santana, 2000). In contrast, the Chilean media structure tends to defend conservative interests and values, whereas in Mexico the media adapt their passive, uncritical coverage to the actors that best suit their economic and political interests (Márquez-Ramírez, 2014).

Another strand of literature also indicates a moving pathway toward the professionalization of journalistic standards such as objectivity, watchdog, and detached reporting in those countries (Canel and Pique, 1998; Hughes, 2006; Lawson, 2002; Weaver and Willnat, 2012).

Empirical evidence suggests that, at the perceptual level, journalists in Chile, Spain, and Mexico have shown their adherence to objectivity with certain nuances. In Spain, Canel (1997) found that even though public service broadcasting journalists declared their attachment to the norm of objectivity, in private television news, writers placed more importance on more analytical coverage. Likewise, Berganza et al. (2010) concluded that Spanish journalists placed more importance to the use of quotes and to the presentation of all sides of the events than to other strategies of the objective method, such as verifiable facts, the inverted pyramid, or the separation between information and opinion. In survey research in Chile, Mellado et al. (2012) found that the

aspects of objectivity that were most important to Chilean journalists were to not let opinions and beliefs interfere with news work (54.5% of interviewees strongly agreed), to stay impartial (49.5%) and to use reliable evidence and sources (46%). In Mexico, the same study revealed that journalists associated objectivity mainly with supporting news with reliable evidence and sources (65%), with not letting opinions and beliefs interfere with work (55%), with being impartial (54%), and with letting facts speak for themselves (48%).

The later findings would reflect a consistent endorsement of objectivity at the perceptual level. With respect to the materialization of objectivity in news content, or the performative level, in the Chilean case, Mellado and Humanes (2015) measured four indicators in political news between 1990 and 2010: balance, verifiable evidence, quotes, and the use of the inverted pyramid. Their results show that the strategy most widely used was the inverted pyramid, followed by the use of quotes, verifiable evidence, and hard facts. Last in the list of resources used was the presentation of diverse viewpoints. Balance, hence, did not materialize highly in the Chilean news.

In Mexico, objectivity has been less explicitly researched, mostly being circumscribed to measure the balance and fairness aspect of objectivity through political or electoral coverage. For example, Hughes' (2006) study of the presidential campaigns in 2000 found that newspaper articles in her sample slightly favored the voices of the governing party (17.1% of the sample) over those of the opposition (15.5%), and that two out of every three articles presented a single perspective.

In the case of the Spanish press, Strömbäck and Luengo (2008) measured descriptive versus interpretative styles in the Spanish and Swedish press during electoral campaigns, finding that 61.3% of information in Spain matched the descriptive style, suggesting a tendency toward objectivity rather than toward opinion. Similarly, Martínez Nicolás et al. (2014) analyzed the presence of the descriptive style in *El País* and *ABC* newspapers from 1980 to 2010, finding a major predominance (60%) over the interpretative style.

The findings would then suggest that in the three countries, at the performative level, objective reporting methods are also common, despite the opinionated and politicized nature of their journalistic origins.

This study will help illustrate to what extent such materialization of objectivity holds true across roles and types of content.

Based on this rationale, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What strategies of the objective reporting method predominate in the news content produced by the Spanish, Chilean, and Mexican press, and to what extent they are similar or different across these three countries?

RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between journalistic role performance and the implementation of objective reporting in news content in Chile, Mexico, and Spain?

Method

To answer our research questions, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of news items published in 11 newspapers from Chile, Mexico, and Spain in 2012 and 2013.

The choice of outlets, as shown in Table 1, is based on their circulation, market orientation—elite versus popular—and their political leanings. Despite the flourishing of new digital media and the advent of social media, we chose the print press because it continues to set the agenda to other media outlets (Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013).

Using the constructed week method, a stratified systematic sample was selected for each newspaper, where two constructed weeks were sampled per newspaper per year.

The unit of analysis was the news item, understood as a group of continuous verbal or visual elements referring to the same topic. For each selected issue of a newspaper, all news items connected with the national and/or country sections were considered (see ‘Measurements’ subsection for details). A total of 2,582 news items from the Chilean press, 3,009 from the Mexican press, and 2,277 from the Spanish press were content analyzed. Of the news items included in this study, 81.9% came from the elite press and 18.1% from the popular press. The imbalance is due to the fact that the popular press contains fewer news items per publication and that the popular press is nonexistent in Spain.

Three coders in Chile, six in Mexico, and four in Spain were trained to apply a common codebook. Several coder-trainer tests were carried out to ensure a similar understanding of the measurement instrument. Krippendorff’s alpha was used to test intercoder reliability. Based on the Ka formula, overall intercoder reliability was .78 for Chile, .76 for Mexico, and .72 for Spain.

Table 1. Characteristics of the newspapers in the sample.

Newspaper	N=	Country	Political leaning	Audience orientation
<i>El Mercurio</i>	1,067	Chile	Right	Elite
<i>La Tercera</i>	879	Chile	Right	Elite
<i>Las Últimas Noticias</i>	381	Chile	Right	Popular
<i>La Cuarta</i>	255	Chile	Right	Popular
<i>Reforma</i>	1,026	Mexico	Right	Elite
<i>La Jornada</i>	1,192	Mexico	Left	Elite
<i>La Prensa</i>	791	Mexico	Right	Popular
<i>El País</i>	709	Spain	Left	Elite
<i>El Mundo</i>	660	Spain	Right	Elite
<i>Abc</i>	520	Spain	Right	Elite
<i>La Razón</i>	688	Spain	Right	Elite

Measurements

Based on previous standardized operationalization of objectivity, we measured four reporting strategies in the news content in the Chilean, Mexican, and Spanish newspapers, namely the presence of quotes, source balance, use of experts, and use of verifiable evidence (Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Esser and Umbricht, 2003; Mellado and Humanes, 2015). Albeit at the expense of more valid measures, each indicator was coded on a presence/absence basis to increase intercoder reliability.

The use of quotes includes the use of any phrase attributed to a source enclosed by quotation marks or paraphrases. Balance is the presence of different sources and points of view in the story. Verifiable evidence is understood as hard data and as information that could be verified by a third party, which was unrelated to the author's or the source's perceptions, feelings, or opinions. Finally, the use of expert sources involves the presence of news sources being approached as specialists in their field, such as academics, think tanks, and researchers (Esser and Umbricht, 2013; Mellado and Humanes, 2015; Tuchman, 1972; Ward, 1999).

The four indicators of objectivity were recoded into an index of objectivity after testing the validity of the scale in the Chilean, Mexican, and Spanish cases so the higher compulsive scores of all items combined were divided by the total number of items (range: 0–1). A higher score (closer to 1) would express a higher presence of objectivity and vice versa.

Our main independent variables were the performance of different journalistic roles in news content in accordance with the operationalization proposed by Mellado (2015) and validated by Mellado and Van Dalen (2014). Five indicators measured the performance of the interventionist role: the presence of opinion, interpretation, proposals/demands, the use of adjectives, and the first person. Four indicators measured the performance of the service role: the presence of impact on daily life, tips and advice (grievance), tips and advice (individual risks), and consumer advice. Six indicators measure the infotainment role: the presence of personalization, private life, sensationalism, scandal, emotions, and morbidity. Six indicators measure the civic role: the inclusion of citizen perspective, citizen demands, credibility in citizens, education on rights and responsibilities, background information, and local impact. Ten indicators measure the watchdog role: the inclusion of coverage of trials and proceedings; questioning, criticism, and denouncement by the journalist; questioning, criticism, and denouncement by sources; coverage of external investigations; conflict, and investigative journalism. Finally, nine indicators measure the loyal facilitator role: the presence of defense of/support for activities, defense of/support for public policies, positive image of the political elite, positive image of the economic elite, progress/success, comparison to the world, national triumphs, promotion of country image, and patriotism.

Each indicator was also coded on a presence/absence basis. After testing the validity of the scales proposed by Mellado (2015) in the Chilean, Mexican, and Spanish data, multi-item scales were created.

The other independent variables included in this study were main topic of the story (Government/Legislature, Education, Religion/Church, Campaigns/Elections/Politics, Energy/Environment, Human Rights, Police and Crime, Transport, Demonstrations/Protests, Courts, Housing/Infrastructure, Social Issues, Defense/Military/National Security, Accidents/Natural Disasters, Economics/Business, Health and others, as possible values), newspaper type (elite or popular), and newspaper's political leaning (left or right).

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses for both the objectivity index and for each analyzed domain on journalistic role performance—journalistic voice, power relations, and audience approach. Each dimension showed a satisfactory goodness of fit with the data. Also, the indicator reliabilities of the items pertaining to each factor (squared multiple correlations) were satisfactory overall. To assess the equivalence of our measures among countries, we carried out different multi-group analyses to test for factorial invariance. The results provided evidence for configural and partial, but not full metric invariance of the factor structure among countries.

Data analysis

For descriptive purposes, we calculated the raw scores (sum of points divided by the total of items for the objectivity index (range: 0–1), so higher scores would express higher presence of objectivity and vice versa. We used the same procedure for each role, where the scale also runs from 0 to 1.

To test for differences in the presence of different objective reporting methods, depending on the presence of different professional roles in news content, while also controlling for other variables, we used the factor scores of each role (1).

As presented in the 'Results' section, we analyze the influence of the performance of different journalistic roles in each objectivity method separately since we found significant differences in the presence of these indicators between and within countries.

To ascertain the importance that Chilean, Spanish, and Mexican journalists place on different objective reporting practices, the percentages and the standardized residuals for each reporting method were analyzed.

We also conducted binary logistic regression analyses for each of the four methods of objectivity as the dependent variable to test for the influence of each journalistic role performance in every method of objectivity. The regressions were performed separately for each country. The independent variables were introduced in three blocks. First, the main topic of the story. Second, the newspaper type and the newspaper's political leaning. Third, the six professional role performance dimensions were introduced in order to explore their impact compared to control variables. The reported table shows the final model, where each block has been introduced into the model.

It is important to clarify that the implementation of the objective method could be measured at the individual journalist level, at the news organization level, and/or at the national media system level. Journalistic role performance could also be studied at different analytical levels. In this context, while we measured objectivity and all our independent variables at the individual and organizational level (i.e., news article and newspaper orientation) we analyzed the data at the country level because we were interested in calculating and evaluating the type of variables with a greater impact in the implementation of the objective method in different media systems.

Results

Objective reporting in the Chilean, Mexican, and Spanish press

Considering the news in Chile, Spain, and Mexico together, the data show that the presence of objective reporting is a little over half of the scale (objectivity index: $M = .51$; $SD = .21$). This value resonates with the level that Esser and Umbricht's (2013) found in the Italian press (.48) using a similar objectivity index.

In global terms, we found that the presence of quotes (90.3%) and verifiable evidence (75.7%) are present at higher level than the use of balance (26.8%) and the inclusion of expert sources (10.3%).

In spite of these initial results, data analysis reveals statistically significant differences on the level of objectivity among countries ($F = 206.883$; $p = .000$), with the Spanish press having the higher presence of objectivity in news ($M = .58$; $SD = .20$), followed by the Chilean press ($M = .49$; $SD = .21$) and finally by the Mexican press, which turned out to be the least objective overall ($M = .47$; $SD = .20$).

Moreover, objectivity is not homogeneous among countries in terms of each of its constituent strategies.

Specifically, chi square tests and a statistical analysis of adjusted standardized residuals indicate significant differences in the presence of balance ($\chi^2 = 125.2$; $p \leq .000$), verifiable evidence ($\chi^2 = 691.5$; $p \leq .000$), use of quotes ($\chi^2 = 151.7$; $p \leq .000$), and use of expert sources ($\chi^2 = 89.1$; $p \leq .000$) in the news content produced by the newspapers in Chile, Mexico, and Spain.

According to the adjusted standardized residuals, Chilean and Spanish newspapers stand apart from Mexico, showing a higher presence of balance in the news. In fact, balance is significantly more present in the Spanish (31%; +5.8) (2) and Chilean (29.4%; +3.7) news, than in the Mexican press (21%; -9).

Nevertheless, the two Latin American countries are more similar among themselves in the remaining three methods of objectivity. Chilean and Mexican newspapers display less verifiable evidence (71.6%; -5.8, and 64.5%; -18.2), fewer expert sources (9.2%; -2.1, and 7.4%; -6.5) than their Spanish counterparts (95%; +25.5, and 15.2%, +9.2), and also higher use of quotes (90%, and 94.8%; +10.5) than Spanish newspapers (85.4%; -11.1)

To rule out distortions resulting from the absence of popular press in the Spanish sample and the absence of left-leaning press in Chile, we performed two separate analysis excluding, for the first test, the Chilean and Mexican popular newspapers and for the other, the samples from left-leaning newspapers in Mexico and Spain, but in both cases, no significant differences with respect to the entire sample were found.

The influence of journalistic role performance on objective reporting

The binary regression analyses supported our expectations about the performance of professional roles being significantly influential in the materialization of objectivity methods. With the exception of the use of quotes, results show that the six professional roles analyzed in this study significantly improved the classification accuracy for each model. Also, the Hosmer–Lemeshow test indicated, in each case, an overall model's goodness of fit (see details in the following tables).

Two important aspects need to be accounted for. In Spain, the model did not include the 'newspaper type' variable because there is no popular press in the country. In Chile, we omitted the 'newspaper's political leaning' variable because all the newspapers are right-leaning.

Source balance

Regarding balance, the results show that professional roles in news are the variables with the strongest influence on the presence of this objective reporting method in Chile, Mexico, and Spain (see Table 2).

Specifically, the greatest influence is exerted by the watchdog role in all three cases, meaning that watchdog reporting is more likely to display source balance in all the countries, followed by civic-oriented news in Chile and Spain, and by interventionist type of news in Mexico. In contrast, what predicts the absence of source balance in the Mexican and Spanish newspapers is, predictably, the loyal facilitator role, although this is not the case for Chile. With regards to infotainment, we found greater balance associated with a higher presence of this role in the Chilean press, whereas the relationship is the inverse in Mexican newspapers, wherein infotainment news are less likely to have balanced sources.

With respect to the topic of the news, only political and social issues news demonstrate a predictive power for the Chilean and Mexican press, albeit with an inverse tendency in the two countries. News items about politics and social issues are associated to a higher presence of balance in Chile but a lower presence of balance in Mexico. In contrast, the topic of the news has no significant prediction value for source balance in the Spanish press. Meanwhile, the type of media does predict source balance in Chilean and Mexican news: in both cases, the elite press has higher source balance than the popular press. Finally, the newspaper's political leaning is only significant predictor of source balance in Spain, where left-wing newspapers tend to manifest greater balance.

Table 2. Influence of journalistic role performance and other control variables on source balance.

Balance Predictor variables	Chile		Mexico		Spain	
	B (EE)	Exp (B)	B (EE)	Exp (B)	B (EE)	Exp (B)
Main topic^a						
Politics	0.46 (.18)**	1.58	-.42 (.19)*	0.65	.13 (.26)	1.14
Police and courts	0.23 (.19)	1.26	-0.36 (.21)	0.69	-.37 (.27)	0.96
Economics and business	.014 (.19)	1.15	-0.09 (.25)	0.90	.26 (.27)	1.30
Social issues	0.41 (.18)*	1.50	-0.63 (.20)***	0.52	.07 (.27)	1.08
Media type (0 = elite; 1 = popular)	-0.36 (.13)**	0.70	-0.65 (.14)***	0.52	-	-
Political leaning (0 = right; 1 = left)	-	-	.204 (.08)	1.226	.38 (.10)***	0.69
Professional roles						
Interventionist role	1.66 (.26)***	5.25	0.75 (.22)***	2.12	-.05 (.25)	0.95
Watchdog role	5.85 (.90)***	347.01	1.85 (.37)***	6.33	3.5 (.39)***	34.57
Loyal facilitator role	-1.47 (1.02)	0.23	-1.37 (.50)**	0.25	-3.2 (.87)***	0.04
Service role	0.29 (.41)	1.33	0.61 (.44)	1.85	.21 (.47)	1.22
Infotainment role	1.12 (.29)***	3.07	-1.61 (.51)**	0.19	-.70 (.67)	0.50
Civic role	3.06 (.63)***	21.31	0.67 (.32)*	1.96	.89 (.42)*	2.44
Constant ^{b,c}	-1.80 (.17)***	0.17	-1.15 (.19)***	0.31	-1.08 (.26)***	0.34

^aReference category = Accidents, natural disasters, and others.

^bHosmer–Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 = 10.404$; $gl = 8$; $p > .05$ for Spain; $\chi^2 = 9.906$; $gl = 8$; $p > .05$ for Chile; $\chi^2 = 14.632$; $gl = 8$; $p > .05$ for Mexico).

^cClassification accuracy for the final model: 79.2% for Spain, 82.9% for Chile and 78.7% for Mexico.

*** $p \leq .001$ ** $p \leq .01$ * $p \leq .05$.

Use of quotes

With the exception of the service role, the performance of the five other roles is also strongly associated with the use of quotes in all three countries. In Chile and Spain, the influence of professional roles on the use of quotes is significantly greater than the influence of all the other factors included in the model (see Table 3), whereas in the Mexican case, news topic is the variable that better explains the use of quotes.

As with the use of balance, the greatest influence is exerted by the watchdog role in all three countries, where a higher presence of this role is associated with a greater use of quotes. It is followed by the civic role in the Chilean and Spanish cases, where a significant positive relationship between the two factors is also observed. In the case of the interventionist role, although the relationship

Table 3. Influence of journalistic role performance and other control variables on the use of quotes.

Use of quotes Predictor variables	Chile		Mexico		Spain	
	B (EE)	Exp (B)	B (EE)	Exp (B)	B (EE)	Exp (B)
Main topic^a						
Politics	.45 (.21)*	1.56	.83 (.29)**	2.30	.44 (.35)	1.55
Police and courts	-.10 (.21)	.91	.12 (.31)	1.13	.32 (.36)	1.37
Economics and business	.41 (.22)*	1.51	1.35 (.53)*	3.87	-.06 (.34)	.95
Social issues	.13 (.22)	1.14	.39 (.30)	1.48	.11 (.36)	1.11
Media type (0 = elite; 1 = popular)	.01 (.17)	1.01	-1.32 (.25)***	0.27	-	-
Political leaning (0 = right; 1 = left)	-	-	-.94 (.25)***	0.39	-.33 (.16)*	0.72
Professional roles						
Interventionist role	2.7 (.39)***	14.88	-2.14 (.41)***	0.12	-1.31 (.38)***	3.27
Watchdog role	8.4 (1.91)***	4,280.96	3.35 (.96)***	28.5	3.4 (.74)***	31.00
Loyal facilitator role	.20 (1.64)	1.22	.77 (.86)	2.16	3.38 (1.33)**	29.31
Service role	.13 (.62)	1.14	1.34 (1.05)	3.83	-1.53 (.59)	0.22
Infotainment role	2.16 (.50)***	8.63	-.08 (.57)	0.93	-1.11 (.82)	0.33
Civic role	4.63 (1.28)***	102.14	1.15 (.78)	3.15	3.83 (1.20)***	45.91
Constant ^{b,c}	.66 (.19)***	1.94	3.2 (.32)***	24.57	1.97 (.33)***	7.20

^aReference category = Accidents, natural disasters, and others.

^bHosmer–Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 = 14.575$; $gl = 8$; $p > .05$ for Spain; $\chi^2 = 8.245$; $gl = 8$; $p > .05$ for Chile; $\chi^2 = 12.706$; $gl = 8$; $p > .05$ for Mexico).

^cClassification accuracy for the final model: 90.4% for Spain, 85.9% for Chile and 94.8% for Mexico.

*** $p \leq .001$ ** $p \leq .01$ * $p \leq .05$.

is significant in all three cases, the orientation of that association changes by country. In Mexico and Spain, a higher presence of the interventionist role is associated with a lower use of quotes in the news, whereas in the Chilean case, a higher presence of this role tends to go hand in hand with a greater use of quotes. In Spain, the influence of the loyal facilitator role is associated with a higher presence of quotes, whereas in Chile, a positive significant relationship is found between the presence of the infotainment role and the use of this reporting strategy.

Within the group of control variables, there is a tendency to find a higher presence of quotes in political and economic news in Mexico and Chile. In the Spanish case once again, news item topic is not a significant factor for predicting the use of quotes. The newspaper's political leaning is a significant factor in the Mexican and

Spanish cases, where left-wing newspapers use quotes less often than the right-wing press. The type of media is only related to the use of quotes in Mexico, where the popular press tends to use fewer quotes than the elite press.

Verifiable evidence

Regarding the use of verifiable evidence as an objective strategy, the results are less conclusive. Of the six professional roles analyzed in news content, four of them—watchdog, interventionist, service, and infotainment—were significant predictors of verifiable evidence, although their influence somewhat differs across countries (see Table 4).

Table 4. Influence of journalistic role performance and other control variables on verifiable evidence.

Verifiable evidence Predictor variables	Chile		Mexico		Spain	
	B (EE)	Exp (B)	B (EE)	Exp (B)	B (EE)	Exp (B)
<u>Main topic^a</u>						
Politics	-.32 (.16)*	.73	-.06 (.17)	.95	.18 (.48)	1.20
Police and courts	.18 (.17)	1.20	.42 (.19)*	1.52	-.10 (.48)	.90
Economics and business	.22 (.18)	1.24	.94 (.26)***	2.56	.36 (.50)	1.43
Social issues	.26 (.18)	1.29	.09 (.18)	1.10	.82 (.54)	2.26
Media type (0 = elite; 1 = popular)	-.01 (.13)	.99	1.64 (.12)***	5.17	-	-
<u>Political leaning</u> (0 = right; 1 = left)	-	-	.99 (.10)***	2.71	.67 (.27)**	1.96
<u>Professional roles</u>						
Interventionist role	-.44 (.26)	.65	-.20 (.21)	.82	-2.27 (.46)***	.103
Watchdog role	-1.85 (.88)*	1.12	1.92 (.38)***	6.83	1.40 (.74)*	4.07
Loyal facilitator role	.49 (1.03)	1.64	.66 (.42)	1.93	-.83 (.98)	.44
Service role	.49 (.44)	1.34	1.20 (.47)*	3.30	-.36 (.96)	.70
Infotainment role	.01 (.29)	1.00	-2.17 (.32)***	.12	-1.78 (.83)*	.17
Civic role	-.31 (.64)	.74	-.13 (.32)	.88	.90 (.14)	.245
Constant ^{b,c}	1.02 (.16)***	2.78	-.39 (.17)*	.68	3.01 (.46)***	20.27

^aReference category = Accidents, natural disasters, and others.

^bHosmer–Lemeshow test (x² = 10.681; gl = 8; p > .05 for Spain; x² = 9.104; gl = 8; p > .05 for Chile; x² = 15.213; gl = 8; p > .05 for Mexico).

^cClassification accuracy for the final model: 95% for Spain, 74.6% for Chile and 70.4% for Mexico.

***p ≤ .001 **p ≤ .01 *p ≤ .05.

The only role being significant predictor of the use of verifiable evidence in the three countries is the watchdog role, which once again becomes the most important factor in the model. In Mexico and Spain, a higher presence of the watchdog role is related to a greater use of verifiable evidence, whereas in the Chilean case, this relationship is inverse and is the only role that predicts this practice. Likewise, in both Mexico and Spain, both the infotainment and the interventionist roles have a negative impact on the use of verifiable evidence in the Mexican and Spanish cases, meaning the more infotainment and interventionism exists, the less verifiable evidence is found. Meanwhile, the service role has a significantly positive influence on the use of verifiable evidence only in the Mexican print news.

Within the group of control variables included in the model, news topic shows a predictive capacity in the Chilean case, where political news show less verifiable evidence than other types of news. Meanwhile, in Mexico, police and courts as well as economy and business news displayed greater levels of verifiable evidence. Newspaper political leaning significantly explains the use of verifiable evidence in Mexico and Spain, where the left-leaning press tends to use more verifiable evidence than the right-leaning press. Finally, the type of media predicts the use of verifiable evidence only in Mexico, where surprisingly, there is more verifiable information in the popular press than there is in the elite press.

Use of expert sources

Finally, with the exception of the watchdog role, professional roles have a significant and generally greater influence than all other variables on the use of expert sources in the printed news from the three countries. However, the orientation of the relationship is different for each case. First, a significant influence of the service role on the use of expert sources is observed in the Mexican, Chilean, and Spanish newspapers. However, while the service role involves the use of more expert sources in Chile and Spain, the tendency in the Mexican case is opposite: there are less experts consulted to give tips and advice in the news. A similar situation is observed with respect to the civic role. In the Chilean case, a higher presence of the civic role is associated with the use of expert sources, whereas in Mexico the opposite happens.

Meanwhile, the loyal facilitator role shows an influence on the use of expert sources in Mexico and Spain, where a higher presence of loyalty and facilitation predicts a higher presence of experts. The data also show a significant influence of the interventionist role on the use of expert sources. In Mexico and Spain, a higher presence of interventionism relates to higher presence of experts in the news. Finally, in Chile, the infotainment role predicts the presence of expert sources.

Within the group of control variables, the explanatory power of news topic is lower, although it does have a significant influence on the use of expert sources in all three countries, especially in the coverage of politics and of police and courts, where there is a tendency to find a lesser use of expert sources. In the Spanish case, a similar situation is observed in the coverage of economics and social issues.

Table 5. Influence of journalistic role performance and other control variables on the use of expert sources.

Use of expert sources Predictor variables	Chile		Mexico		Spain	
	B (EE)	Exp (B)	B (EE)	Exp (B)	B (EE)	Exp (B)
<u>Main topic^a</u>						
Politics	-1.25 (.29)***	.29	-1.59 (.26)***	.21	-2.12 (.26)***	.12
Police and courts	-1.58 (.39)***	.21	-1.52 (.32)***	.22	-1.67 (.26)***	.19
Economics and business	.33 (.24)	1.39	-.52 (.32)	.59	-1.14 (.25)***	.32
Social issues	.05 (.25)	1.05	-.10 (.25)	.90	-.68 (.25)**	.51
Media type (0 = elite; 1 = popular)	.30 (.19)	1.35	-1.02 (.27)***	.36	-	-
<u>Political leaning</u> (0 = right; 1 = left)	-	-	.43 (.18)*	1.54	.15 (.13)	1.16
<u>Professional roles</u>						
Interventionist role	2.71 (.39)***	15.00	.27 (.45)	1.31	.79 (.31)*	2.20
Watchdog role	-1.66 (1.9)	.19	.82 (.56)	2.27	.45 (.49)	1.57
Loyal facilitator role	-1.33 (.138)	.26	1.06 (.59)*	2.89	.99 (.48)*	2.70
Service role	.96 (.48)*	2.62	-1.88 (.49)***	6.57	1.33 (.72)*	3.78
Infotainment role	-.99 (.49)*	.37	-1.13 (.79)	.32	-.58 (.75)	.56
Civic role	1.78 (.89)*	5.92	-1.5 (.50)**	.22	-.47 (.51)	.62
Constant ^{b,c}	-2.82 (.25)***	.06	-1.79 (.25)***	.17	-.68 (.23)**	.51

^aReference category = Accidents, natural disasters, and others.

^bHosmer–Lemeshow test (X2 = 11.026; gl = 8; p > .05 for Spain; X2 = 6.573; gl = 8; p > .05 for Chile; X2 = 6.968; gl = 8; p > .05 for Mexico).

^cClassification accuracy for the final model: 84.6% for Spain, 90.8% for Chile and 92.6% for Mexico.

***p ≤ .001 **p ≤ .01 *p ≤ .05.

Finally, media type and the media’s political leaning only have a significant effect on the use of expert sources in the Mexican case, where the popular press tends to use expert sources less and the left-leaning press tends to use them more (see Table 5).

Conclusion

This study analyzed the presence of different strategies of objective reporting in news content from Chilean, Mexican, and Spanish newspapers. With respect to our first question, the results mainly indicate two ways of implementing the objective method in professional practice.

While Chilean and Mexican journalists’ express objectivity in their reporting mostly through the use of quotation marks, their Spanish counterparts express it

through verifiable evidence. In Spain, journalists might endorse the use of verifiable facts over opinions to distance themselves from their historical partisan tradition, confirming existing findings that suggest a tendency toward American standards (Canel and Pique, 1998). In Chile, the use of quotation marks might be their chosen way to channel and visibilize the newspaper's conservative agendas without compromising their autonomy. In the Mexican case, overuse of quotes might reflect a reporting culture based on the prevalence of 'statement-only' stories to publicize predominantly official sources (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012). In both Latin American countries, political and economic news actually have a significant impact on the use of quotes, but not in the Spanish case.

However, it is worth noting a low presence of source balance in the three countries (26.8% for the total sample), indicating a shortcoming in journalistic practice overall. The lack of source diversity appears to reflect a context of high political parallelism, low levels of professionalization, and/or high political instrumentalization in the three countries (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002).

Another common result is the low use of expert sources (10% of the sample). This result resonates with Esser and Umbrecht's (2013) comparative study, which found that newspaper journalists from the Polarized Pluralist model (Italy and France) turned to expert sources to a much lesser extent than their counterparts in other types of media systems, indicating a deficit in seeking source expertise in the analyzed countries.

The low level of source diversity in the news is one crucial trait of journalistic contexts with a strong tradition of conservative press (in the Chilean case), pro-government press (in the Mexican case), and partisan press (in the Spanish case). Similar to the findings from previous research conducted by Mellado and Humanes (2015) on the Chilean political press, these results reflect a reinterpretation of the liberal ideal of objective reporting method in Mexico, Chile, and Spain, as their newspapers play down—at different levels—both the importance of source balance and the use of expert sources as hallmarks of objectivity.

The second research question posed in this study looked for the influence of journalistic role performance on the implementation of the four methods of objectivity, while also controlling for variables such as news topic, media type, and mediums' political leaning. Statistical regression tests show that the performance of professional roles are the best predictors of the materialization of objectivity methods. This supports existing findings about the significant relationship between the perception and importance given to certain professional roles and the importance that journalists place on the objectivity norm (Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Skovsgaard et al., 2013). In other words, the key previous study linking the perception of roles with the perception of objectivity methods has been supported with this study of the performance of roles and the performance of objectivity.

Specifically, our data show that the watchdog role better predicts the presence of three out of four objectivity methods: balance, use of quotes, and verifiable evidence, indicating the more objective nature of watchdog journalism in Spain, Chile, and Mexico.

In the use of experts in the news it is the service role what matters the most, although the trend is not homogeneous across the countries, hence concluding that different journalistic traditions introduce changes into professional practice.

The relationship between the use of balance and journalistic role performance is the only case in which we found more similarities than differences in the three countries.

The watchdog role has similar influence on use of quotes in Chile, Mexico, and Spain. However, in Spain, the civic role has the greatest influence. Similarly, the use of verifiable evidence is negatively associated with the interventionist role in Spain, whereas verifiable evidence negatively relates to the watchdog role in Chile and to the infotainment role in Mexico. The use of expert sources is influenced by different roles in news content depending on the country: while in Chile it is explained by the interventionist role, in Mexico and Spain it is explained by the service role. Finally, an interesting result for Chile is the influence that the infotainment role has on the presence of balance, quotes, and expert sources, which might reflect a media system that is more oriented toward the market than its Spanish or Mexican counterparts.

The results of this study have important implications for the understanding of Ibero-American journalistic cultures and for the study of objectivity as a global professional value and practice. Latin American presses studied here do appear to share certain characteristics with Spain, but they also have particular features that might begin to delineate their unique challenges and contexts, such as their lack of source diversity and expert sources. The findings support Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) claims of low levels of professionalization and high instrumentalization in the Ibero-American region. The length of their dictatorial/authoritarian regimes, their tardy transition toward democracy, and their slow process of journalistic professionalization may also explain the passive legacy of reporting and a *sui generis* adoption of objectivity in Latin American journalism.

The study also offers insights into how norms and values, such as those associated with objectivity, can be internalized at the rhetorical level (Mellado et al., 2012), but not at the performative level, where the practice of basic reporting techniques such as the use of quotes, balance, the use of experts sources, and the use of verifiable information vary considerably and depend upon the performance of certain roles, the type of media, the topic of the news, or the newspaper political leaning. This suggests that, as a method, objectivity is not implemented by default while reporting the news.

Apart from exploring the relation between role performance and objectivity in other countries, future studies may want to contrast the results obtained from the Ibero-American printed press with those from other types of media platforms, such as television, radio, online news, and social networks, in order to establish whether the influence of journalistic role performance on objective reporting manifests itself in a uniform fashion across platforms, or whether the media platform itself affects this relationship.

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Notes

1. Since each dimension represents a latent variable, the factor score is technically a better measurement of this variable, having weighted the items or indicators according to how much each item contributes to that latent variable (DiStefano et al., 2009). In other words, factor scores are linear combinations of the observed variables, which consider what is shared between the item and the factor. This way of building overall scores helps to address the following problems: it assigns more weight to some items than to others; it avoids the problems of distortion in raw scores when variables have a very low or a very high mean (ceiling and floor problems); it equalizes the relative difficulties of different indicators to within a specific dimension; and it generates standardized scores similar to a Z-score metric, where values range from approximately -3.0 to $+3.0$.
2. We report the means and the statistically significant residual values for each case.

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