



Journalistic performance in Latin America: A comparative study of professional roles in news content

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Abstract

Comparative research across the world has shown that nation-level variables are strong predictors of professional roles in journalism. There is, however, still insufficient comparative research about three key issues: cross-national comparison of journalistic role performance, exploration of how – or whether – organizational variables account for variation in role performance across countries, and the performance of specific journalistic roles that prevail in regions with post-authoritarian political trajectories. This article tackles these three issues by comparatively measuring journalistic performance

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in five Latin American countries. Based on a content analysis of 9841 news items from 18 newspapers, this article reports findings from Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador and Mexico, by analyzing the presence of the 'interventionist', 'watchdog', 'loyal', 'service', 'infotainment', and 'civic' roles. Results show that the region is far from homogeneous and that while 'country' is a strong predictor for most of the roles, other variables such as 'media type', 'political orientation', and 'news topic' are also significant predictors to varying levels.

Keywords

Content analysis, journalism, Latin America, professional roles, role performance

Introduction

In the past decade, the interest in journalists' ideals of their professional roles as well as the contexts that shape them has increased (Christians et al., 2009). Studies on professional roles have focused on the conceptions of journalists based on single-country cases, types of media or news beats, and more recently, on comparing journalists' role conceptions cross-nationally within a global scope (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Weaver and Willnat, 2012). These comparative studies have contributed enormously to the field by mapping differences and similarities across countries, supporting the argument of context-bound journalism cultures, particularly in developing countries and transitional democracies.

However, despite this burgeoning literature, there is still insufficient cross-national research on three key aspects that might help to better understand the way in which such roles are put into practice and vary across countries. First, while a consistent body of research dealing with comparative reporting styles and media content confirms that content variations are connected to national journalistic cultures, such studies deal with professional roles studies only indirectly. In fact, fewer studies address the way in which professional role conceptions materialize in news content through specific indicators of 'role performance' (Mellado, 2015). Highlighting the limitations of comparing journalistic cultures based solely on journalists' conceptions of professional roles, some scholars have long insisted on the need to examine the extent to which professional roles materialize in actual new content (Carpenter et al., 2015; Mellado, 2015; Mellado and Van Dalen, 2014; Pihl-Thingvad, 2015; Tandoc et al., 2013). As Mellado (2015) suggests, while the study of role conceptions deals with the analysis of journalistic culture at the abstract level, the study of role performance deals with 'behaviors (actions, processing or gathering reactions) influenced by reference groups, which leads to performing a task or function in a specific group, organization or society ... as a collective outcome of dynamic negotiations' (pp. 596–597).

Second, most comparative studies on role conception – and the few dealing with role performance – confirm that journalistic cultures do vary across countries and therefore have a strong context-bound element to it. The studies in question mainly confirm existing differences at the media system-level, further visibilizing the strength of literature

about Western media systems. However, there are still opportunities in comparative research about how professional roles vary – or not – across less-studied countries with hybrid media systems and no clear-cut journalistic traditions, such as those in Latin America and other transitional democracies.

Finally, while there exists vast research on the impact of organizational, individual, or national factors in shaping role conception, this is not yet the case for studies on role performance.

This study tackles the aforementioned issues by going a step further from comparative role conception studies and instead focuses on journalistic role performance in an under-researched area in both the English-language and global literature. Taking five countries of Latin America as case studies – most of which share key similarities in their hybrid media systems – this article examines professional role performance in their national newspapers. The study has two aims: first, to analyze how professional roles materialize in news content and map their variation across countries. Second, the article explores whether other organizational and media variables such as newspaper's political orientation, newspaper type, or news topic also predict the performance of roles in news content.

The study comprises the Latin American leg of the *Journalistic Role Performance Across the Globe* project, a larger, cross-national comparative study set to analyze how different professional roles materialize in news content in different political/societal systems. Inspired by the work of Mellado (2015), Mellado and Van Dalen (2014), Tandoc et al. (2013), and Vos (2005), among others, the comparative project proposes six dimensions of journalistic role performance as a framework to analyze news content, all of which are composed of different indicators of professional practice, based on three main domains: (a) the presence of the journalistic voice, (b) the relationship that journalism holds with institutional and de facto powers, and (c) the way journalism approaches the audience.

The first role is the 'interventionist' or active stance of journalists versus their passive stance in their reporting and is connected to the journalistic voice domain. The second and third roles can be identified as the 'watchdog' and the 'loyal-facilitator', and belong to the second domain related to journalists' position toward institutional power. The first one is the monitorial, often antagonistic position that journalism takes in order to hold institutional and de facto powers accountable, bringing attention to wrongdoing. The 'loyal-facilitator' role, meanwhile, materializes in two ways: journalism may cooperate with those in power by portraying political elites in a good light or focus on the nation-state by placing emphasis on national triumphs and prestige. The fourth, fifth, and sixth roles are the 'service', the 'infotainment', and the 'civic', respectively. These roles belong to the third domain that examines the different ways in which journalism approaches the audience. The 'service' role of journalism views the public as a client, providing information, knowledge, and advice about goods and services that are useful for their daily lives. The 'infotainment' role of journalism addresses the public as spectators, relying on different stylistics, often dramatic or sensationalist narrative and/or visual discourses to entertain and thrill the public. Finally, the 'civic' role pursues democratic goals and deems the public as citizens who ought to be empowered, educated, and informed on complex and controversial topics.

From journalistic role conception to journalistic role performance

Survey research on journalists' role conception has one of the most established traditions within the journalistic field. It initially focused on single-country cases such as the United States, and on statements about the functions of journalism that reflect the debates between 'subjectivity versus objectivity, detachment versus advocacy, and observer versus watchdog' (Johnstone et al., 1972: 522). Follow-up surveys by Weaver and colleagues gradually added other roles to capture the complexities and changing nature of media industries and the journalistic workforce (Weaver, 1998; Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Weaver and Willnat, 2012). Their work subsequently served not only as a template for survey research on role conception in other countries but also to the enhanced survey versions in recent cross-national research (Hanitzsch, 2011). This literature, among other studies, confirms the defining importance of 'country' to explain variation in professional roles across contexts, where organizational influences, news beats, and market orientation are also important variables (Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011; Relly et al., 2015; Scherr and Baugut, 2016; Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013).

In Latin America, survey research on journalists' roles has been less consistent than in other countries and has generally focused on single-country samples (Arroyave and Barrios, 2012; Herscovitz, 2004; Mellado, 2012; Oller et al., 2015, 2016). The work by Mellado et al. (2012) is one of the first to analyze role conception cross-nationally, finding contrasting differences across Chile, Brazil, and Mexico.

Research addressing the study of role performance, on the other hand, is scarce. Nevertheless, a number of comparative studies in Western countries found that reporting styles vary across countries, which authors attribute to their respective political and journalistic cultures (Benson and Hallin, 2007; De Vreese et al., 2001; Esser, 2008; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). A study by Van Dalen et al (2012) found that variation in news reporting in Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain was better explained by national and journalistic culture than by media type or the medium's political orientation. Similarly, a study by Esser and Umbricht (2014: 236) comparing objective versus interpretive newspaper reporting in six European countries, confirmed that effect sizes were greater between media systems than between newspaper types.

One of the few existing studies of role performance in Latin America is the work by Mellado and Lagos (2014), who found a direct relation between news beat and the materialization of roles in Chilean newspapers. For example, they found that the 'infotainment', the 'service', and the 'civic' roles were present in different thematic beats at varying levels (see Mellado and Van Dalen, 2016 for a recent theoretical and methodological discussion).

While the vast literature has also shown that news beat, political orientation, or media type are all important predictors of professional role performance, it has been an underexplored line of cross-national research outside traditional Western countries with distinctive media systems, such is the case of Latin America (Mellado, 2015).

Latin American media systems, journalistic cultures, and political contexts

The local contexts of Latin American countries have been crucial to the shaping of media systems in the region (Fox and Waisbord, 2002; Waisbord, 2013) and may also help explain role performance variation across countries. External factors that may account for the context in which professional roles materialize in news content are, for example, deep social inequality, decay of political institutions, weak rule of law, human rights violations, widespread corruption, rising crime, and violence in many countries, as well as social protests. Other media system characteristics that could also help explain at the contextual level the variations of role performance across countries are unique to Latin America, such as high media concentration, high levels of clientelism, high political parallelism, and equally high levels of instrumentalization of journalists (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002).

In a few other regions, private media corporations flourished under the legal, economic, and political protection of dictatorial and authoritarian regimes, and became even stronger with the wave of economic liberalization and political democratization in the mid-1980s (Fox and Waisbord, 2002). This path resulted, on the one hand, in neo-conservative media elites that learned to benefit from negotiating their collusion and support for the status quo in exchange for economic benefits and governmental advertising contracts or paid-for unacknowledged publicity (Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez, 2014; Mastrini and Bolaño, 2000). On the other hand, with changing political contexts – especially with the arrival of radical and populist politics – press-state relations across the region have become volatile and even antagonistic (Waisbord, 2013). Left-wing rulers in some Latin American countries proposed media reforms that, on paper, attempted to counter the power of private media conglomerates and their elites and strengthen ‘state’ media in order to foster diversity and real public service. However, such proposals have raised a great deal of concern about press freedom, as well as social polarization and antagonism between the government and the key media players and journalists, amid fears of the use of ‘public’ service media for propagandist aims or the use of legislation to punish or reward enemies or allies (Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez, 2014; Lugo-Ocando, 2008; Waisbord, 2013).

Despite their overall similarities, selected countries uphold a variety of contextual factors at the national and cultural level that make them different from others: Brazil, for example, has the longest tradition of adopting US values and investigative journalism (Herscovitz, 2004; Matos, 2008). Cuba has a state-media system with salient propagandist roles and interventionist-type missions (Oller et al., 2016). Ecuador is a country undergoing extensive media reform and social polarization due to antagonist press-state relations at the time of the study, which has impacted the role conception of journalists (Oller et al., 2015). Mexico has a very concentrated media system and a long tradition of varying forms of authoritarianism that has resulted in both ‘loyal’ (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012) and ‘civic’ journalism (Hughes, 2006). Chile was the first neoliberal laboratory under dictatorial rule, is the best-ranked democracy in the region, and has the least diverse print press market but also a history of ‘interventionist’ and tendencies toward ‘infotainment’ journalism (Mellado and Lagos, 2014).

With this in mind, at the hypothetical level, the political and social context may prompt ‘watchdog’ and ‘civic’ journalism, whereas either collusive or antagonistic relations between political and media elites, as well as the political instrumentalization of journalists, the growing attacks on the press, or the compromised press freedom in some countries (Hughes and Lawson, 2005) may curtail both roles. A selective or enforced version of political parallelism and varying formality of state intervention – to borrow Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) concepts – may eventually favor an either ‘loyal’ or a more ‘interventionist’ type of reporting. Likewise, the concentrated nature of some media systems and the private, pro-market orientation in others might also facilitate the performance of the ‘service’ and ‘infotainment’ roles.

Therefore, in hybrid media systems, we can expect the actual performance of journalistic roles to be non-clear or ambiguous.

It is worth noting that at the regional level there are no standardized operationalizations or measurements, nor a reliable index of media system variables that enables the cross-country comparison of role conception or role performance. For that reason, the aforementioned context will be only taken into account as a means to contextualize and interpret our results, but not as empirical and measurable variables.

Due to the lack of comparative literature of professional roles in the region and the scarcity of literature on role performance on a global level, there is not enough evidence to predict the performance of specific roles in each country. The study has therefore set the following research questions and one general hypothesis:

H1. The presence of professional roles in news varies significantly across countries.

RQ1. What are the journalistic role performance models that predominate in Latin America and how do role indicators vary across countries?

RQ2. What variables best explain variance of role performance across countries?

Methods

We conducted a content analysis of print news stories published in the most important newspapers from Mexico, Chile, Ecuador, Cuba, and Brazil, based on standardized operationalizations of journalistic roles in news content (Mellado, 2015). Countries included in this study are those also participating in the Journalistic Role Performance global study.¹

Three to four general interest newspapers focusing primarily on national news were content analyzed in each country. They are most influential, better known, or representative of the niche market. Despite the prevalence of other media formats, newspapers still tend to set the political agenda, assign more financial and human resources to the coverage of a wider range of news content, and in theory provide more diverse and nuanced coverage of controversial issues (Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013). Table 1 shows the sample distribution per newspaper, as well as their political and market orientations.

The timeframe for the content analysis was from 2 January 2012 to 31 December 2013. By using the constructed week method, a stratified-systematic sample was selected for each of the newspapers. Our sample included editions from everyday of the week and

Table 1. Newspaper distribution per number of items, country, political and market orientations.

Newspaper	N	Country	Political orientation	Market orientation
El Mercurio	1067	Chile	Right	Elite
La Tercera	879	Chile	Right	Elite
LUN	381	Chile	Right	Popular
La Cuarta	255	Chile	Right	Popular
O Globo	834	Brazil	Right	Elite
O Estado de S. Paulo	745	Brazil	Right	Elite
Zero Hora	310	Brazil	Right	Elite
Folha de S. Paulo	860	Brazil	Center	Elite
Granma	198	Cuba	Left	Elite
Juventud Rebelde	220	Cuba	Left	Elite
Cuba Debate	110	Cuba	Left	Elite
Cuba Hora	99	Cuba	Left	Elite
El Telégrafo	258	Ecuador	Left	Elite
El Universo	255	Ecuador	Right	Popular
El Comercio	361	Ecuador	Right	Elite
Reforma	1026	Mexico	Right	Elite
La Jornada	1192	Mexico	Left	Elite
La Prensa	791	Mexico	Center	Popular

month, to reach the maximum diversity: in total, two constructed news weeks were sampled per newspaper per year. In total, our sample consists of 9841 articles, of which 2582 news articles are from Chile, 3009 from Mexico, 627 from Cuba, 874 from Ecuador, and 2749 from Brazil.

The unit of analysis was the news story, but only stories published in sections associated to the national or main desks, leaving international, regional, science, sports, lifestyle, entertainment, and celebrity news stories aside. Coding teams in each country received training in the application of a common codebook translated from English into Spanish and Portuguese. Different coder-trainer tests were performed to ensure that they had a similar understanding of the codebook. Global Intercoder-reliability post-tests based on Krippendorff's alpha (Ka) was .78 in the case of Chile, .76 in the case of Mexico, .75 in the case of Brazil, .72 in the case of Ecuador, and .79 in the case of Cuba.

Measurements

The coding manual included variables to operationalize the performance of the six roles included in this study, based on previous research on the topic (Mellado, 2015; Mellado and Van Dalen, 2014, 2016).

The six journalistic roles were examined through the explicit presence of specific indicators in news content. Five indicators were used to measure the presence of the 'interventionist' role: *opinion*, *interpretation*, *proposal/demands*, *adjectives*, and the *use*

of first person on the part of the news author. Four indicators measure the ‘service’ role: *impact on everyday life, tips and advice (grievances), tips and advice (individual risks), and consumer advice*. Six indicators measure the ‘infotainment’ role: *personalization, private life, sensationalism, scandal, emotions, and morbidity*. Nine indicators measure the ‘civic’ role: *citizen perspective, citizen demand, credibility of citizens, education on duties and rights, background information, and local impact*.

In total, 10 indicators measure the ‘watchdog’ role: *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*. Finally, nine indicators measure the ‘loyal’ role: *defense/support 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*. Each of these indicators required the coding of manifest content, on a presence (1) or absence (0) basis. The items were recoded, so that higher compulsive scores of all items combined (range: 0–1) would result in a final score for each role for each article. A higher score thus expressed a higher presence of each journalistic role performance dimension, and vice versa.

For descriptive purposes, we calculated the raw scores (sum of points divided by the total of items in each role). Meanwhile, we used factor scores² to test for differences in the presence of the six roles in news content depending on country and organizational level variables.

Data analysis

Prior to our main analyses, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) per domain: journalistic voice, power relations, and audience approach. CFA was performed using Mplus 7.0.³ Within that framework, we empirically tested competing measurement models.

Within the journalistic voice domain, the ‘interventionist’ role showed a very satisfactory fit with the data ($\chi^2=6256.3$, $p<.001$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)=.018 (90% confidence interval (CI)=.010, .025), comparative fit index (CFI)=.997, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI)=.996, weighted root mean square residual (WRMR)=1.032). Within the power relations domain, the ‘watchdog’ and the ‘loyal-facilitator’ roles provided a good fit with the data ($\chi^2=1620.3$, $p<.001$, RMSEA=.031 (90% CI=.030, .034), CFI=.957, TLI=.952, WRMR=1.102).

Finally, within the audience approach domain, the model composed of the ‘service’, ‘infotainment’, and ‘civic’ roles showed a satisfactory good fit with the data: $\chi^2=1023.2$, $p<.001$, RMSEA=.025 (90% CI=.023, .028), CFI=.977, TLI=.971, WRMR=.984.⁴ We identified each solution as providing a better account of the data, than other competing solutions.

Findings

To address our first research question, we compared the presence of the six analyzed professional roles in news content, looking at the mean scores for each role, as well as

Table 2. The interventionist role in Latin American press (percentage of news items).

	Brazil	Chile	Cuba	Ecuador	Mexico
Media/SD	.12/.182	.23/.194	.19/.25	.12/.161	.14/.214
Journalist opinion	8.8%	14.5%	20.3%	12.5%	15.9%
Interpretation	30.2%	24.8%	43.4%	42.2%	13.7%
Proposal/demands	4.0%	6.2%	1.4%	1.9%	4.6%
Adjectives	16.9%	67.3%	24.4%	4.7%	33.9%
First person	1.3%	2.4%	7.3%	1.0%	1.4%

SD: standard deviation.

the percentages for each indicator of each role. The significance of differences across countries was determined through the analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Voice of the journalist: interventionist role

Our data show that within the journalistic voice domain, Latin American journalism is more passive than active, with the 'interventionist' role present to a much lesser degree in the press than the 'disseminator' role in all five countries ($M=.16$, standard deviation (SD)=.20 for the 'interventionist' role). Nevertheless, the presence of the 'interventionist' role significantly varies in comparative terms among the analyzed countries ($F=177,743$; $df=4$; $p=.000$). For this role, the differences in the national context accounted for 8 percent of the overall variance (η^2).

The data show that, in general, the performance of the 'interventionist' role is comparatively more present in Chile than the rest of the countries, closely followed by Cuba and much farther by Mexico. In the opposite pole of the spectrum, Brazil and Ecuador are the countries with the lowest presence of journalistic voice and intervention in the print press (see Table 2).

Specific indicators for the 'interventionist' role in news content tell us a more nuanced story. The use of adjectives, interpretation, and opinion were the most frequent indicators across countries. In contrast, the use of first person, and the proposal or demand for change on the part of the journalist is significantly less present. The Chilean press significantly peaks in the use of adjectives. Cuban journalists rank higher in the use of opinion, first person – which is generally low across countries – and interpretation, giving credit to their historical tradition of an advocacy and militant type of journalism. Finally, the 'proposal and demands' indicator is generally low in all countries, with slightly more presence in Chile, Mexico, and Brazil (see Table 2).

Power relations: watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles

Considering all Latin American data, journalists from the region tend to give almost similar presence in their reporting styles to both the 'watchdog' ($M=.059$; $SD=.112$) and the 'loyal facilitator' ($M=.052$; $SD=.137$) roles. It is an important finding because it reflects the myriad paths that the press is undergoing: while some stories and events do

Table 3. The watchdog role in Latin American press (percentage of news items).

	Brazil	Chile	Cuba	Ecuador	Mexico
Media/SD	.09/.136	.01/.046	.01/.052	.04/.039	.09/.081
Information on judgments	15.9%	2.4%	0.0%	6.1%	10.4%
Questioning: journalist	7.3%	1.1%	2.4%	8.5%	3.6%
Questioning: other	12.7%	3.0%	2.4%	9.0%	15.2%
Criticism: journalist	3.0%	0.3%	1.6%	2.2%	3.1%
Criticism: other	15.2%	5.3%	2.6%	3.5%	18.5%
Denouncement: journalist	3.7%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	3.3%
Denouncement: other	10.4%	1.2%	2.4%	1.8%	15.9%
External investigation	12.7%	1.0%	0.3%	1.0%	9.2%
Conflict	2.0%	0.1%	0.0%	3.5%	0.0%
Investigative reporting	4.9%	0.1%	1.0%	0.7%	3.0%

SD: standard deviation.

appear to merit deep scrutiny, others still display reporting practices oriented toward publicizing the official agenda.

Nevertheless, when comparing national contexts, significant differences emerge in both the 'watchdog' ($F=348,482$; $df=4$; $p=.000$) and the 'loyal' journalistic roles ($F=736,771$; $df=4$; $p=.000$), fully supporting our main hypothesis. The effect size is quite large in the case of the 'loyal' ($\eta^2=.230$) and the 'watchdog' role ($\eta^2=.125$), accounting for 23 percent and 13 percent of the overall variance, respectively.

Brazil and Mexico display the highest presence of the 'watchdog' role in news content, although mainly through the use of indicators such as third-party questioning or criticism, while in Chile, this role is practically nonexistent in news content (see Table 3). These results resonate with the study of Mellado et al. (2012) on Latin American role conceptions, wherein Brazilian and Mexican journalists gave significantly more support to acting as a watchdog of the government than Chileans did. Also, Brazilians have a more steady tradition of 'watchdog' and investigative journalism (Herscovitz, 2004), while in Mexico, some newspapers are known critics of the governing party (Hughes, 2006). Meanwhile, in Ecuador there is a low presence of the 'watchdog' role in general but its press does peak at two key indicators: questioning on the part of the journalist and reporting overt conflict between journalists and politicians, which could be a manifestation of the press' antagonist relations with the government (Oller et al., 2015). As expected, a control-led press system like the one prevailing in Cuba is less likely to exert 'watchdog' journalism, whereas in the case of Chile, there have been historical practices of censorship and self-censorship, and as a result, little investigative journalism in newspapers (Leon-Dermota, 2003).

The results also show that the 'loyal-facilitator' role is, by far, mostly represented in the Cuban press, as expected. In fact, as we shall see in the following section of this article, the variable 'country' is significantly higher to predict this role in Cuba (see Table 4). Cuban journalism, due to its high level of instrumentalization and political parallelism, is at the top of all the indicators for this role, while in Chile, as reported, the performance of the loyal-facilitator role practically disappears, despite its high political parallelism. This

Table 4. The 'loyal-facilitator' role in Latin American press (percentage of news items).

	Brazil	Chile	Cuba	Ecuador	Mexico
Media/SD	.03/.137	.01/.045	.34/.262	.07/.140	.04/.113
Defense/support activities	3.7%	1.9%	51.2%	8.2%	5.3%
Defense/support policies	2.2%	0.9%	48.0%	8.5%	4.8%
Positive image of the political elite	1.2%	1.6%	41.6%	13.2%	8.5%
Positive image of economic elite	2.9%	0.5%	22.6%	2.3%	2.2%
Progress/success	6.2%	1.8%	37.6%	12.4%	5.4%
Comparison to the rest of the world	5.4%	1.7%	8.1%	1.7%	1.8%
Nationals' triumphs	4.0%	1.2%	37.6%	2.5%	1.7%
Promotion of the country's image	3.4%	0.9%	32.4%	8.7%	2.6%
Patriotism	0.8%	0.9%	25.5%	8.4%	1.5%

SD: standard deviation.

Table 5. The service role in Latin American press (percentage of news items).

	Brazil	Chile	Cuba	Ecuador	Mexico
Media/SD	.04/.127	.04/.115	.03/.108	.13/.216	.03/.104
Impact everyday life	6.9%	5.1%	6.7%	23.7%	6.8%
Tips (grievances)	1.6%	1.4%	3.3%	13.3%	1.6%
Tips (individual risks)	1.9%	2.7%	1.0%	8.8%	1.2%
Consumer advice	4.6%	6.0%	0.3%	4.8%	1.6%

SD: standard deviation.

result is consistent with Mellado and Lagos' (2014) claims that the absence of an explicit manifestation of the 'loyal-facilitator' role masks the existence of more implicit or indirect forms of 'loyal' reporting, such as reliance on official sources.

Audience approach: the service, infotainment, and civic roles

Latin American journalism overall, performs the 'civic' role ($M=.055$; $SD=.128$) slightly higher than the 'infotainment' ($M=.049$; $SD=.121$) or the 'service' role ($M=.042$; $SD=.130$). Nevertheless, when comparing by country, significant differences emerge in the presence of these three role performances. The effect sizes were small but still relevant for the 'service' role ($F=90,142$; $df=4$; $p=.000$; $\eta^2=.035$), the 'infotainment' role ($F=94,824$; $df=4$; $p=.000$; $\eta^2=.037$), and for the 'civic' role ($F=40,334$; $df=4$; $p=.000$; $\eta^2=.016$).

The 'service' role is the least present in the Latin American press, but its presence is higher in Ecuador, in all of its indicators, followed by Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and finally Cuba (see Table 5). The predominance of the 'service' role in Ecuador might reflect a strategy on the part of the journalists to avoid confrontation with the government and at

Table 6. The infotainment role in Latin American press (percentage of news items).

	Brazil	Chile	Cuba	Ecuador	Mexico
Media/SD	.05/.107	.08/.153	.01/.009	.05/.123	.04/.109
Personalization	15.6%	12.5%	0.2%	12.9%	1.9%
Private life	4.6%	4.2%	0.0%	3.1%	1.7%
Sensationalism	0.8%	15.1%	0.0%	2.5%	6.9%
Scandal	2.2%	1.1%	0.0%	2.5%	3.0%
Emotions	3.6%	14.7%	0.2%	8.4%	4.7%
Morbidity	0.7%	1.4%	0.0%	0.8%	3.0%

SD: standard deviation.

Table 7. The civic role in Latin American press (percentage of news items).

	Brazil	Chile	Cuba	Ecuador	Mexico
Media/SD	.05/.107	.03/.071	.07/.157	.08/.170	.08/.154
Citizen perspective	4.7%	5.2%	10.4%	19.3%	11.1%
Citizen demand	4.3%	1.3%	7.2%	7.9%	8.8%
Credibility to citizens	1.8%	0.6%	9.4%	8.6%	6.0%
Local impact	7.4%	4.0%	15.6%	15.8%	10.1%
Educating on duties and rights	3.0%	2.0%	2.7%	3.2%	3.5%
Background information	13.6%	11.7%	11.5%	10.6%	16.8%
Citizen questions	2.3%	0.2%	2.9%	4.5%	2.4%
Info citizen activities	2.8%	2.6%	0.8%	2.7%	6.1%
Support citizen movements	1.0%	0.3%	0.3%	1.5%	2.9%

SD: standard deviation.

the same time to comply with new legislation that enforces the media to provide content that proves itself useful to audiences (Oller et al., 2015).

The performance of the 'infotainment' role is much more evident in Chilean journalism, followed by the Brazilian and Ecuadorian press. Mexico is further beyond the trend, while in Cuba this role is nearly nonexistent (see Table 6). However, specific indicators are much more varied. For example, Chile is in the top of sensationalism, the focus on private life and the use of emotions in the news. However, personalization is more frequent in the Brazilian press, while scandals are mostly found in the Ecuadorian press and morbid information in the Mexican press, the latter a reflection of the inclusion of a known tabloid that prints front-page stories and morbid pictures of corpses and crime victims.

Finally, results show the greatest presence of the 'civic' role in the Mexican and the Ecuadorian presses, followed closely by Cuba (see Table 7). In Brazil, and especially in Chile, this role is, comparatively, less existent. Specific indicators for this role also vary across countries, as has been the trend with other roles. While the focus on citizen perspectives, local impact of news, and the addressing of citizen questions are indicators

more frequently found in the Ecuadorian press, news that incorporate citizen demands, provide background information, educate on duties and rights, provide information on citizen activities, and support citizen movements are more present in the Mexican press. The results for Ecuador again might reflect new legislation on journalists' public service mission, while Mexican results can be explained by the fact that two newspapers in the sample are perceived to be pioneers of 'civic' journalism in the country (Hughes, 2006), and by the context of questioned presidential elections during the period of study, as well as drug-cartel violence and human rights abuse. Cuban journalism, in turn, strongly focuses on educational and cultural values as its mission (Oller et al., 2016).

Modeling journalistic role performance in Latin America

Our second research question aims explore how organizational and internal-level factors help to explain variation of journalistic role performance, besides the mere 'country' variation. To address this research question, we conducted a multiple linear regression analysis with each role as the dependent variable and with the following variables as predictors: country, media type, media political orientation, and item topic (Table 8).

The first column presents the results for the 'interventionist' role, with most of the variables having significant effects, explaining 10 percent of the total variance. Controlling for the other variables included in the model, the strongest predictor is 'country'. Specifically, Chilean newspapers are more likely to include the 'interventionist' role in their reporting style. Likewise, the 'interventionist' role tends to be more absent in center and right-leaning media, whereas 'media type' is also a significant predictor as the popular press tends to use this role more than the elite press. Finally, with respect to 'news topic,' social affairs and especially miscellaneous news tend to display an 'interventionist' type of reporting more than political news.

The second column presents the results for the 'watchdog' role, with all the variables having significant effects and explaining 21 percent of the variance. Again, the most important predictor of 'watchdog' journalism is 'country', confirming the most developed tradition of 'watchdog' journalism in Brazil. However, the medium's political orientation is also a very important predictor of watchdog journalism, where right and center-leaning newspapers are less likely to put this role into practice than the left-leaning media. Finally, in comparison to political news, topics such as economy and business, as well as miscellaneous news are less likely to display the 'watchdog' role, while court as well as police and crime news, are more likely to put this reporting style into practice than political news.

The third column presents the results for the 'loyal-facilitator' role, with all the variables having significant effects and explaining 26 percent of the total variance for the model. In this case, the most important predictors are 'country', and media's 'political orientation'. Controlling for the other variables, Cuba and Ecuador, two countries with very interventionist types of government in their media systems, tend to be more loyal in their news media than Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. Likewise, in general, the right and center-oriented newspapers are less likely to be loyal to the government in their reporting style than the left-leaning media. As for news beat, the 'loyal' role tends to be more present in political news than any other topic – with the exception of economy and

Table 8. Predictors of journalistic role performance (*standardized regression coefficients*).

Predictors	Journalistic role performance dimensions					
	Interventionist	Watchdog	Loyal	Service	Infotainment	Civic
Country ^a						
Chile	.252***	-.323***	-.043***	-.026*	.029*	-.062***
Cuba	.020	-.386***	.408***	-.186***	-.222***	-.179***
Ecuador	-.042***	-.214***	.130***	.121***	-.096***	.018
Mexico	.053***	-.109***	-.031**	-.115***	-.225***	-.065***
Media political orientation ^b						
Right	-.056***	-.220***	-.159***	-.311***	-.212***	-.317***
Center	-.147***	-.264***	-.065***	-.263***	-.243***	-.289***
Media type (1 = popular)	.058***	-.066***	.057***	.033**	.294***	-.003
News topic ^c						
Police and crime	.014	.089***	-.094***	.019	.141***	-.007
Court	-.045***	.109***	-.087***	-.032**	-.012	-.022*
Economy/ business	-.039***	-.105***	.016	.134***	-.042***	-.010
Social affairs	.064***	.019	-.062***	.258***	.081***	.276***
Miscellaneous	.150***	-.088***	-.003	.023*	.137***	-.003
Adjusted R ²	.10***	.21***	.26***	.14***	.14***	.14***

^aBrazil does not appear in the model since it was used as baseline category for the dummy-coded country variable.

^bLeft-wing does not appear in the model since it was used as baseline category for the dummy-coded media political orientation variable.

^cThe topic 'politics' does not appear in the model since it was used as baseline category for the dummy-coded news topic variable

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; and *** $p < .001$, for two-tailed.

miscellaneous news, with no significant differences. Likewise, the popular press tends to use this role significantly less than the elite press.

The fourth column presents the results for the 'service' role, explaining 14 percent of the total variance for the model. The most important predictor is the media's 'political orientation'. Left-leaning media tend to perform this role much more than the right and center-oriented newspapers. Regarding 'media topic', economy/business news tend to incorporate this model of reporting style and focus on audiences' specific needs more than political news do, while the popular press tends to be more service oriented than the elite press. 'Country' is also a significant and important predictor. Controlling for the rest of the variables, Ecuadorian press tends to be more service-oriented than Brazil, while all the rest of the analyzed nations tend to be less service oriented than Brazil

The fifth column presents the results for the 'infotainment' role, explaining 14 percent of the total variance for the model. The most important predictor for this role is 'media type', where expectedly the popular press tends to use it much more than the elite press. In the same line, the left-wing press is more prone to display the 'infotainment' role than

the center and right-leaning press. 'Country' is also an important predictor controlling for all the other variables included in the model, with news from Cuba, Ecuador, and Mexico less likely to display entertainment than Brazilians, and Chilean papers being slightly higher than Brazilians in their use. Finally, the 'infotainment' role is more present in news about police and crime, miscellaneous, and social affairs, than in political news. However, political news is more likely to display 'infotainment' elements than news on court or economy and business.

Finally, the last column shows the results for the 'civic' role, explaining 14 percent of the total variance for the model. Overall, the most important predictor is the political orientation of the media, with left-wing oriented media expectedly more likely to include the performance of this role in their news coverage. Likewise, topics like social affairs are more likely to be related to this type of reporting style than political news, while court news is less likely to include this role. 'Media type', meanwhile, is not a significant predictor for this model. Finally, controlling for all these variables, the 'civic' role still tends to be more present in Brazilian news than in the news published in Chile, Cuba, and Mexico.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was twofold. On the one hand, we wanted to test how the performance of different journalistic roles varied across five Latin American countries. On the other hand, the article explored whether variables such as country, media type, media's political orientation, and news beat predicted the performance of different roles and which predictors explained them the most. The results show significant differences in the performance of the six analyzed roles and their indicators across countries, which seem related to the countries' particular contexts and histories, specifically to their hybrid media systems and changing political environments. Our first finding is that there is no clear, prevalent regional model of journalism. Despite their highly instrumentalized nature and political parallelism, Latin American journalism tends to be highly disseminative and more passive than interventionist in nature. The interpretive, militant type of journalism often found in countries of the polarized-pluralist model like Spain and Portugal is not quite replicated across the ocean, in their former colonies, as we found little evidence of a clear-cut advocacy press overall, except in Cuba where the expectations were met regarding its highly intervened and controlled media system. This was the country that mostly manifested the 'loyal' role and key indicators of the 'interventionist' role. Despite this result and apart from Cuba, Chile still has the highest presence of the 'interventionist' role – a likely trace of the overtly partisan press that once existed.

Likewise, while the 'watchdog' and 'civic' roles have an overall low presence across countries, in comparative terms they rank as the second and third among all the six analyzed dimensions of role performance, specially in Brazil and Mexico, probably reflecting the nature of their presses but also the political and social contexts of both countries. The 'service' role is very low across countries, which is nevertheless mostly present in the Ecuadorian press, presumably reflecting the demands of new governmental reforms on the media that want to ensure public service content is met. Finally, the 'infotainment'

role is likely to be more present in popular newspapers, miscellaneous as well as police and crime news, and also in Chile.

The results from our regression analyses helped to support the idea that the nation-level does play a very important part in shaping role performance, specially those that involve the relation between journalism and established powers, such as 'loyalty' vis-a-vis 'watchdog' news, and also when talking about the presence of the journalistic voice in the news story. However, other types of news, which are more audience-oriented, tend to be better explained by either the type of media, the topic of news, or the political orientation of the news outlet.

We believe these findings shed some light on the dynamics of journalistic performance and the multiple factors that shape it. While several organizational variables are important in the prediction of the performance of roles, the article confirms that the 'country' variable continues to be a good predictor of democratic roles.

Nevertheless, there are challenges and limitations that need to be addressed for future research. First, there is a need for theorizing and systematizing media system variables beyond Western countries. Second, the lack of reliable, systematic country-level indexes that can help measure and quantify media system variables – such as those proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) – is a limitation to develop more nation-level indicators of variance, and generally a limitation to comparative research across countries. Third, more longitudinal research is needed to ascertain whether or not variation across countries in the performance of some roles is due to the specific conjunctures of the time period comprising the study or are steady trends that are consistent over time. Finally, future research should also study role performance on different news platforms, to see how this new variable predicts and explains variation.

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Notes

1. The six Latin American countries participating in the project are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, and Mexico. However, the Argentinean team was still at the data collection stage by the time this regional study was conducted and it had to be excluded from the sample.

2. Since each model represents a latent variable, the factor score is technically a better measurement of this variable on 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: first, it assigns more weight to some items than to others; it avoids the problems of distortion in raw punctuations when variables have a very low or a very high mean (ceiling and floor problems), equalizes the relative difficulties of different indicators to within a specific dimension, and generates standardized scores similar to a Z-score metric.
3. The model fit was assessed using the following criteria: chi-square value (χ^2), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; smaller than .05), the comparative fit index (CFI) value (greater than .90), the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) value (greater than .90), and the weighted root mean square residual (WRMR; less than 1.0; Schreiber et al., 2006; Yu and Muthén, 2002).
4. Two indicators were excluded since their factor loadings were non-acceptable and insignificant for the model ('scandal', and 'support of citizen movements').

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