



[en] When one is not enough. Professional Perception of Traditional Ethical Mechanisms for New Times in Journalism¹

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to analyse the perception of Spanish journalists in relation to the greater or lesser effectiveness of traditional self regulation mechanisms in comparison to new mechanisms that have recently emerged with the arrival of digital technologies. Results from surveys (n=420), in-depth interviews (n=30) and focus groups (n=6) confirm the acceptance of these mechanisms whose greatest impact requires the operation of all of them as a “system”, because considered individually, none are as effective in securing more ethical behavior in the company which decides to use them. The instrument that receives the highest score (7.5) is the public pressure through social networks. The concept of a seal of ethical quality has been valued in line with the existing mechanisms. In any case, it seems that neither the seal nor the rest of the analyzed instruments may ever replace the personal ethics of the journalist that appears as the bedrock of the strata that determines ethics in journalistic outlets.

Keywords: Ethics; self regulation mechanisms; journalism; perception; seal; Spain.

Cuando uno no basta. La percepción profesional de la eficacia de los mecanismos tradicionales de autorregulación periodística en el nuevo contexto del periodismo

Resumen. El propósito de este texto es analizar la percepción de los periodistas españoles respecto a la mayor o menor eficacia de algunos mecanismos tradicionales de autorregulación periodística en comparación con otros mecanismos nuevos que han surgido en los últimos años especialmente a partir de la llegada de las tecnologías digitales. Los resultados de las encuestas (n=420), entrevistas en profundidad (n=30) y los grupos de discusión mantenidos (n=6) confirman la aceptación de estos mecanismos si bien esta aceptación tiende a ser mayor en la medida en que todos ellos funcionen como un sistema, puesto que considerados individualmente ninguno de ellos resulta ser tan efectivo como para asegurar automáticamente un comportamiento más ético. El mecanismo más eficaz parece

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ser la presión ciudadana a través de las redes sociales mientras que la existencia de un posible sello o certificado de sostenibilidad ética recibe una evaluación parecida a la de otros mecanismos más clásicos. Por encima de todos, ellos la ética personal de cada periodista resulta irremplazable.

Palabras clave: Ética; mecanismos de autorregulación; periodismo; percepción; sello; España.

Summary. 1. Towards New Mechanisms for the Promotion of Ethical Journalism. 2. Methodology. 3. Results; 3.1. Acceptable Evaluation of the Different Mechanisms; 3.2. Better Institutionalisation of the Mechanisms Does Not Guarantee a Perception of Improved Effectiveness; 3.3. Pressure by Means of Social Networks is Perceived as the Most Efficient Mechanism; 3.4. Only Moderate Evaluations for Fines, Style Books and RSC Codes and Policies; 3.5. Variations of Perceptions in Relation to Age, Training and Professional Category; 3.6. Moderate Confidence in an Ethical Seal or Certificate; 3.7. Personal Ethics, Irreplaceable; 4. Conclusion; 5. References.

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1. Towards New Mechanisms for the Promotion of Ethical Journalism

Observers agree that the quality of media has to be monitored because of their unique function for democratic societies (McQuail, 1992): they create a public sphere where controversial arguments regarding political (and other) matters are being exchanged (Fengler, 2012: 175). In this sense, although the classic values which have always been an integral part of ethical journalism continue to be salient⁵, the traditional instruments seem today to be insufficient to face the new challenges brought about by the arrival of the Internet and, more specifically, the explosion of social networks. Karmasin and Litschka (2008) for instance, state that “we can easily observe that media companies lag behind other sectors of the industry in engaging in accountability measures”. In a similar vein, González Esteban, García Avilés, Karmasin and Kaltenbrunner (2011) have denounced the fact that “professional self-regulation doesn’t always advance at the same pace as the development of journalism in the XXI”. According to Fengler, Eberwein, Alsius, et. al (2015):

“[...] the key question behind both the Leveson recommendations and the High Level Group report is obvious: does the traditional model of media self-regulation dating back to post-war times, with press councils as its core institution, still suffice for today’s converging media world –which is so much more competitive? Can the new accountability instruments emerging online –like newsroom blogs, online ombudsmen and media criticism on the social web –

⁵ Tomás Delclós, ombudsman of the newspaper *El País*, recently referred to this topic with the objective of regulating the participation of journalists in social networking: “[...] the general principles that establish ethical codes, although they date back to analogical times, are still equally applicable. Media journalists have to keep in mind that, whatever the subject, they may or may not be identified as members of the writing profession, as in fact are many of their followers; therefore, they should remember that prudence in social networks will never be a mistake, particularly if they are writing about topics which they also discuss professionally” (Delclós, 2014).

successfully support, or even replace, these traditional instruments of media self regulation? And are participative models of media accountability a potential alternative to co-regulation models foreseeing a greater role for the state, as discussed by media policy scholars like Gottwald et al. (2006), McGonagle (2022) and Puppis (2007) in past years?” (Fengler, Eberwein, Alsius, et. al, 2015: 250).

On this point, several scholars (Evers, 2009; Whitehouse, 2010; Fengler, 2012; Deslandes and Painter-Morland, 2012) point out to the urgent need of completing and updating the classical repertoire of traditional mechanisms to promote ethical journalism with other more innovative and creative instruments that respond to the new ethical challenges raised by social networks. In this claim, the very existence of Internet reveals itself “as much about challenge as about opportunity” (Heikkilä, Domingo, Pies, Glowacki, Kus and Baisnée, 2012: 3). As a challenge, given the amount of information, being generated:

“The costs for monitoring the quality of journalism in the 24/7 news cycle with its constant output of news indeed are high, even more so in the digital age, since a massive and steady flow of journalistic information is being produced which would overwhelm any actor or institution aspiring to monitor the full range of journalistic products being put out by newsrooms” (Fengler, 2012: 180).

But it also represents an opportunity, since “the Internet now offers an almost endless array of new venues for pluralistic debates about journalism, at high speed and low cost” (Fengler, Eberwein y Leppik-Bork 2011: 14). From a more particular perspective, the emergence of new and rapid forms of low cost communication and research is without doubt, excellent news⁶.

“For example, something as simple as a letter to the editor –which means that a media user gives ‘voice’ to his dissatisfaction with a journalistic product (Hirschman, 1970)– involved high production cost for the media user, including the time to write the letter, to buy the stamp, and to carry the letter to the mailbox. Therefore, many people might have preferred to choose the ‘exit’ option instead of the ‘voice’ option if they did not like or did not trust the media content. In the digital age, the cost of the ‘voice’ has been reduced dramatically. At the same time, maintaining media accountability instruments is no longer too costly for media companies: restrictions of space and time do not apply any more” (Fengler, Eberwein and Leppik-Bork, 2011: 314).

In a similar sense, Fengler states that before the arrival of the Internet it was rather costly for an unsatisfied media user to voice his criticism. He could write a letter to the editor, call the newsroom, or –at best– contact the ombudsman, but all options were time-consuming and frequently left users frustrated. Also calling a strange editor in a newsroom required some degree of personal stamina:

⁶ To revise any of these possibilities, it is possible to look at some of the examples in Heikkilä, Domingo, Pies, Glowacki, Kus and Baisnée (2012).

“Before the development of the Social Web, the vast mass of media users therefore was a ‘latent group’ (Olson, 1971) –plenty of people who maybe had an opinion about the quality of journalism, but no forum to coordinate their interests. Journalists and even more so media owners as a comparatively small group (ibid.) instead could much more easily agree on common goals and pursue their strategic interests. Today, technological development –the advent of the Internet and the Social Web– has lowered the cost of monitoring and ‘punishing’ the media for an individual media user to almost zero for the first time in history. An infinite ‘crowd’ of users can share the burden of media monitoring online, and in the web 2.0 era, suddenly there is a plethora of fast, low-cost options to (if you wish, anonymously) ‘voice’ criticism and protest –via email, chats, commentary functions, Twitter, Facebook and the like–” (Fengler, 2012: 184).

At the same time, the use of these new possibilities so that citizens can insist in greater quality news media could lead to the notable transformation of the power of the individual citizen, as opposed to the “apathetic or unorganized” character (Bertrand, 2000, 19) which has on occasions been attributed to him or her. A transformation of this kind would be highly desirable because media responsibility should not only include state institutions or links to the political system, but also, it must respect the maturity of a civil society in all its dimensions (Karmasin, 2005), and entitle the public to their right to information. With this in mind, Deslandes and Painter Morland have named the concept “relational credibility”⁷ as a “new form of professional accountability that makes journalists, publishers and readers co-responsible for the editorial content” (2012: 12-15)⁸:

“In a universe overrun with news, where quasi-undifferentiated and excessive information has become the rule for everyone, the ‘sovereignty’ of the mediator/journalist as the sole mediator between the facts and the public, has become an outdated notion. It has to be replaced with the creation of a participative space within which media professionals and their audiences are co-responsible for establishing a more rigorous form of accountability” (Deslandes and Painter Morland, 2012: 15).

In this context, the objective of this article is to understand the perception that Spanish journalists have of the efficiency of various mechanisms aimed at developing a more ethical behaviour in journalistic media. More implicitly, we are also interested in finding out to what extent they consider the current instruments to be sufficient or if, on the contrary, it would be desirable to supplement them with other, newer ones that, in line of what we have just seen, take into account the need to engage the public as an additional way of ensuring the quality of ethics. In Germany and the United States a similar study has been carried out (Kepplinger,

⁷ In similar terms, Groenhart and Bardoel (2012, 11) state that “audience interaction is not the subject of transparency, but rather a mechanism that fosters transparency”.

⁸ This would be scholars’ proposal after confirming that “there is a need for a new form of democracy that makes the best of the speed and interactivity that may have caused threats to the profession” (Deslandes and Painter Morland, 2012: 15).

1993 and Northington, 1993) regarding the impact on practitioners of the various instruments of accountability. However, this analysis was undertaken on a very small scale and its results are already seen as being out of date⁹.

In this regard, it is also important to remember the outstanding work in recent years by Media Act¹⁰, a European research project carried out between 2010 and 2013 which made comparative analysis of accountability and transparency systems in various countries in the European Union, the United States and the Arab world¹¹. The project originated from the necessity that “in an era of international media concentration, ever-growing lobbying –from the nuclear industries to Attac– and increasingly sophisticated public relations, to monitor journalistic independence and quality will be greater” (Fengler; Eberwein; Leppik-Bork, 2011: 7). With the aim of contributing to increase the number of mechanisms, this project offers, for example, a guide to better practices in accountability (Bichler, Harro-Loit, Karmasin, Kraus, Lauk, Loit, Fengler and Schneider-Mombaur, 2012).

However, we are more interested in one of the other results of this study: the one that deals with the impact of traditional accountability on the behaviour of journalists. In the survey, the participating journalists were given eight mechanisms to evaluate on a scale of one to five: one, if the instrument inspired little confidence and five if the mechanism inspired total confidence. The mechanisms which received the highest evaluations –the regulations of the journalist’s own company (3.74) and the laws that regulate the media (3.70)– are precisely the two most normative; that is to say, those that can have direct consequences on the journalist if they are not observed. The results are shown in the following table (Table 1):

Table 1. Confidence of European Journalists in Different Traditional Accountability Mechanisms (1 to 5) (Average figures for all participating countries). Source: the authors; based on the survey carried out by the Media Act project (2010-2013)

⁹ The concept of media accountability is very similar to our generic term “mecanismos de promoción de la ética periodística”/ “mechanisms for the promotion of ethical journalism”, if we share with Bertrand the definition of “media accountability instruments” as “any non-state means of making media responsible towards the public” (2000, 18). Moreover, the author continues, the purpose of these instruments is “to improve the services of the media to the public; restore the prestige of media in the eyes of the population; diversely protect freedom of speech and press; obtain, for the professional, the autonomy that he or she needs to play their part in the expansion of democracy and the betterment of the fate of mankind” (Bertrand, 2000, 151).

¹⁰ <http://www.mediaact.eu/>

¹¹ More specifically, this project analysed accountability and transparency systems in the media in the following countries: Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Rumania, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Jordan and Tunisia. Cfr. <http://www.mediaact.eu/>

Mechanism	Evaluation
Style books	3.74
Regulatory laws	3.70
Professional Codes of Ethics	3.44
Press advice	2.96
Media critics	2.73
Regulatory authorities	2.70
Ombudsmen	2.32
Journalistic magazines	2.22

What would be the situation in Spain if we were to ask, in addition, for other, more modern mechanisms? This is a diagnostic which to date remains unpublished¹². However, it seems particularly urgent; both for its implications for professional practice and for the possible ideas that it could offer us in terms of designing a seal or a certificate of ethical quality, the ultimate goal of the research project that frames this paper. In addition, we would like to pay special attention to the concept of effectiveness, understood, in a literal sense, as the “ability to achieve the desired effect”¹³; in this case, the achievement of more ethical behaviour in media companies. Following González Esteban, García Avilés, Karmasin and Kaltenbrunner (2011) we stress the need for effectiveness because it is not enough for media and communication-related institutions to establish self-regulatory mechanisms, if in practice they do not update mechanisms, as different studies have shown (Weischenberg et al., 2006; Alsius, 2010; Fernández Martínez and López de Ayala, 2011).

2. Methodology

As we laid out in the abstract, the objective of this article is to analyse the perception of Spanish journalists in relation to the greater or lesser effectiveness of the range of instruments we have presented.

¹² In the previous project -“*Ética y excelencia informativa. La deontología periodística frente a las expectativas de la ciudadanía en Madrid*”, “Ethics and Information Excellence. Journalistic deontology against Public Expectations in Madrid” financed by the Spanish Ministry for Science and Innovation (SEJ2006-05631-C05-03)- we only asked about the usefulness of the codes (“Do you believe that ethical codes are useful in journalism?": Yes, No, Dk/Nr) and about the participants knowledge of press ombudsmen (“Do you know who print media / television ombudsmen are?": Yes, No, Dk/Nr) On that occasion, we focused more on the perception of Spanish journalists of the ethical nature of several common journalistic practices. Cfr. Maciá, C. and Herrera, S. (2010): Ethics and Information Excellence: *Ética y excelencia informativa: los conflictos y retos en el quehacer periodístico desde la perspectiva de los profesionales de la Comunidad de Madrid.* / The Conflicts and Challenges of Journalism from a Professional Perspective in the Autonomous Region of Madrid. *Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid* / Madrid Press Association.
http://e-archivo.uc3m.es/bitstream/handle/10016/12595/etica_APM_2010.pdf?sequence=1

¹³ Cfr. *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española* / Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, available at <http://www.rae.es/>

With this aim in mind, and within the framework of a larger research project¹⁴, we have carried out a total of 30 in-depth interviews with directors of Spanish journalistic companies.

Secondly, we organized 6 discussion groups with the objective of focusing on the interaction between the participants. We then completed the study by carrying out 420 on-line surveys with active journalism professionals in the Autonomous Region of Madrid. In these surveys, we also asked about the validity of other measures; for example, the establishment of a new business model to facilitate greater profitability for journalistic companies; especially relevant given that job insecurity is one of the most serious problems affecting the profession according to Spanish journalists¹⁵. Additionally we asked about the position of upper management in media companies in relation to taking a hands-on approach to the profession as opposed to working exclusively as managers and directors¹⁶, editorial advisory boards, fines and sanctions and the offer, by the company, of on-going training in ethical issues¹⁷.

Specifically, the participants had to evaluate from 1-10 the effectiveness of the following “traditional” mechanisms:

- a) Codes of ethics
- b) Style books
- c) Print media, television and radio ombudsmen
- d) Editorial advisory boards
- e) RSC policies
- f) Ethical committees of professional associations
- g) Audio-visual advisory councils
- h) Social media policies and company directives regarding the use of social networks

And on the same scale, the participants were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the following new mechanisms:

- a) Fines and sanctions

¹⁴ “*Deontología y excelencia informativa: implantación y consolidación de prácticas éticas en la empresa periodística*” / “Ethics and Information Excellence; Implementation and Consolidation of Ethical Practice in Journalistic Companies” (CSO2010-15575/COMU). The project was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness’ National R&D&I Plan; its Principal Researcher is Professor Carlos Maciá-Barber (Carlos III University of Madrid).

¹⁵ This has been highlighted on many occasions, both in the previous research project “Ethics and Information Excellence” and in the current one. The seriousness of this problem has also been evident in the latest editions of the *Informes Anuales de la Profesión Periodística* / Annual Reports of the Journalistic Profession; extracts are available on the FAPE website.

¹⁶ In this project, we asked the participants to evaluate, from 1-10, the ethical performance of several collectives. Among them, directors and advisors of journalistic companies; the first group received an evaluation of 3.73 from the advisory and directive staff and from the core staff, 3.12. The advisors were evaluated more severely, obtaining 3.31 from advisory and directive staff and 2.73 from core staff.

¹⁷ Often, not so much through specific legislation but by judgements handed down by the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court regarding issues related to the right to honour, privacy, fame, and by violations of child protection regulations.

- b) Lobbying, pressure groups and reporting unethical practice by means of social networks
- c) The work of media watchers
- d) The work carried out by Consumers' and Media Users' Associations
- e) Possible agreements between companies to ensure minimum, inviolable ethical requirements
- f) The establishment of a new business model which facilitates greater profitability for journalistic companies
- g) Upper management in media companies taking a hands-on approach to the profession, as opposed to working solely as managers and directors
- h) Academic critics
- i) Recognition and prizes for ethical performance by journalists
- j) The offer, by the company, of on-going training in ethical issues

With the objective of obtaining as complete as possible an overview of the profession, our sample consisted of men and women of different ages, academic backgrounds and professional categories. This procedure allowed us to isolate these independent variables in order to see to what extent, if any, they conditioned the perceptions of the participants. These were the results.

3. Results

3.1. Acceptable Evaluation of the Different Mechanisms

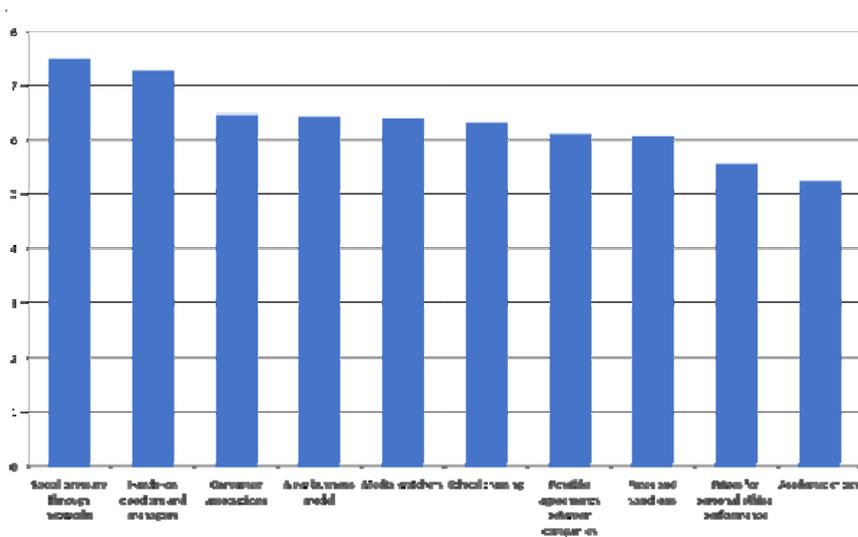
With a score of between 5 and 7 out of a possible 10, the Spanish journalists who participated gave an "acceptable" evaluation of the different mechanisms to promote more ethical behaviour in their companies. In the opinion of the respondents, it appears that none of these instruments are irrelevant, but, at the same time, none of them is sufficient to ensure that the companies applying them demonstrate *much more ethical* behaviour than those who are not. Rather, the data seems to suggest that it requires the existence of all of the mechanisms so that the benefits of some overcome the limitations of others and by their interaction they will help to increase the quality of the media. In this way, in their discussions, the journalists reinforced the idea, as expressed by some theorists, that journalistic ethics has to be more a "system" rather than a collection of juxtaposed, independent instruments:

"In recent years, communication scholars have emphasized the network character of media accountability. They emphasize that while each single media accountability instrument may be too weak to have any considerable (even measurable) impact on the quality of journalism, media accountability instruments may exert some influence as a system of 'infrastructures'" (Russ-Mohl, 1994).

3.2. Better Institutionalizations of the Mechanisms Does Not Guarantee a Perception of Improved Effectiveness

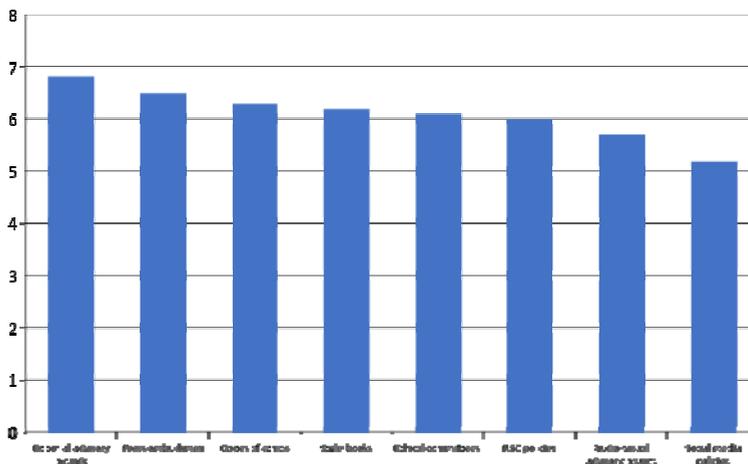
Despite what might seem to be evidence to the contrary, greater institutionalization of a mechanism does not necessarily guarantee that professionals believe that that makes it more effective. Thus, several of the most innovative instruments receive evaluations which are higher than others that are more widely used. From a more specific perspective, the average score of these “other” instruments was 6.3, while the most used received an average evaluation of 6.1. The breakdown of the perceptions of these “other mechanisms” is shown in the following graph (Graph 1):

Graph 1. How would you evaluate these “other mechanisms” as tools to promote more ethical journalistic performance?. Source: the authors.



While the breakdown of the perceptions of more “traditional” self-regulatory mechanisms are shown in this graph (Graph 2):

Graph 2. How would you evaluate these self-regulatory mechanisms as tools to promote more ethical journalistic performance?. Source: the authors



As we have indicated, the two instruments which, according to respondents, are more effective -reporting unethical behavior through social networks and managers and directors having a hands-on approach to the profession- belong to these “other” less formal mechanisms. On the other hand, instruments that have a more formal definition such as style books, codes of ethics and ombudsmen are perceived as less effective.

It is also interesting to mention here the results of another of the questions in the survey; we asked the respondents to indicate any other mechanisms they considered to be effective in promoting more ethical behavior. Although there were only a few responses, they included nine references to the possible creation of a media watcher observatory with regulatory functions to ensure the rights of workers¹⁸, and another nine to the introduction of a similar organization, focused on tracking the editorial lines of the media. Another four alluded to the possible publication of the names of generally ethical media, and four more to the establishment of independent public media; the same number mentioned rewarding ethical behaviour in the profession through remuneration and bonuses.

¹⁸ In this regard, it should be remembered that the job insecurity has, on several occasions, been brought up as one of the most dysfunctional problems currently affecting the profession. In Maciá and Herrera (2009) it was identified as “very important” by 61% of the 400 professionals from the Autonomous Region of Madrid who took part in the survey. For 4.4 % of the respondents it was an “unimportant” subject, while only 2.2 % answered that it was “not important at all”. This perception has also been recorded in the *Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística 2013 / Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession, 2013*, which surveyed 455 Spanish journalists and, for the second consecutive year, emphasized that the rise in unemployment and job insecurity were perceived as the main problem for 49.6% of the respondents. See: http://www.apmadrid.es/images/stories/informe_profession_2013.pdf

3.3. Pressure by Means of Social Networks is Perceived as the Most Efficient Mechanism

All things considered, the most effective instruments prove to be social pressure through the reporting of unethical behaviour (7.5 out of a possible 10), hands-on management approaches (7.3), editorial advisory boards (6.8) ombudsmen (6.5) and the work of consumers' and media users' associations (6.5).

With regard to social pressure from citizens, one of the respondents referred to the greater maturity of the public:

“[...] readers, the consumers, are not stupid and although we deceive them time and again, if the press is so little respected and so much despised, it is for a reason. And if people no longer trust us, then our profession is at an end. And I think that with time, there are more media who think, or who aim to think, or who are serious and are starting to treat consumers, the readers, as they deserve to be treated” (9P).

On the other hand, respondents perceive that the less efficient mechanisms are awards and recognition for exemplary ethical performance (5.6 out of a possible 10), academic critics (5.3) and the guidelines that regulate the behavior of journalists in social networks (5.2). The respondents were quite sceptical about these documents, however several executives insisted on their importance and necessity because they felt that common sense alone was not enough when dealing with social media.

3.4. Only Moderate Evaluations for Fines, Style Books and RSC Codes and Policies

In an intermediate position between the more and less effective instruments, the Spanish journalists' support for fines and penalties was limited. In this regard, the participants, in general, felt that existing legislation is sufficient. If there were more, they stated, it would diminish the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. However, at same time, several members of the discussion groups were critical of the laxity of the law in some respects. The most questioned were:

1. The excessive permissiveness of the law and, above all, the poor degree to which rectification sanctions are applied. Witnesses confirmed that media businesses are not rigorous in correcting their errors, or especially sensitive to the distress they can cause to people in the news.

2. The excessive slowness of the judicial process which, on occasions, can impede the genuine repair of damage done, given that the harm arising from an improper publication can stigmatise the victim if their only recourse is the company's own tribunals.

3. The existence of few sentences passed against the press, in comparison to what can be seen in the news sector in other countries. Very close to this approach, although always referred to as external institutions by the respondents, we find the

claim that some media outlets prefer to violate the law in order to gain publicity, since the penalty is often more than offset by the financial gain of the publicity received.

Along with fines and sanctions, style books were also evaluated as just “sufficient”. In the interviews, many of those questioned -including those working for companies that did not have style books- were in favour of them as a way of promoting ethical behavior in business. However, at the same time, there was no shortage of critical voices from those participants who saw style books, especially those of the competition, as nothing more than marketing devices.

Similarly, one of the respondents questioned the effectiveness of codes of ethics, which also received an average evaluation:

“[...] it is important to introduce a journalistic culture into writing, and that in this writing there are journalistic ethics, albeit only on a sheet of paper. It is not so much a question of having a code of ethics of 46 pages where it says: 'When you talk about invalids, you should say people with disabilities and so on, but an explanation of the basic rules’ (GD2).

Neither are the policies of social and corporate responsibility, or business management mechanisms that ensure more ethical behaviour perceived as highly effective tools in promoting information excellence. Rather, they are understood as “social work” a medium whose activities are carried out outside, without a direct impact on the work of journalists. One of the respondents who was most critical, questioned them in the following terms:

“You can sponsor many cultural exhibitions, but you end up lying to the readership, or putting the newspaper at the service of spurious interests, and such, don't you? But, also, the fact is that they do not create corporate social responsibility which I believe is an interesting concept. What I believe is that a mess has been constructed, from which ... well, there are television channels that, seemingly, have corporate social responsibilities but then they make trash television programmes” (26P).

3.5. Variations of Perceptions in Relation to Age, Training and Professional Category

Perceptions vary depending on age, training, professional category, job title, company size, media type, or having been under pressure from the company to behave in a way that was felt to be unethical.

a) Regarding the age, the distrust with which the respondents perceived the usefulness of the different mechanisms increased with their age. Even so, it must also be stated that, in the opinion of professionals over 50 none of the mechanisms “failed” in their evaluations. The differences are particularly significant for instruments such as fines and sanctions (with a difference in the assessment of their effectiveness of nine tenths of a point between professionals under the age of 30 and those over 50), and a hands-on approach by

management, the establishment of a new business model, the work of consumer and media users' associations and lobbying and pressure from social networks (all showed divergences of seven tenths of a point). There was also a difference of six tenths of a point with regard to potential agreements between companies to ensure minimum, inviolable ethical standards, with older respondents tending to question the possibility of these pacts. As we have said, in general terms, scepticism increases proportionally to age.

b) The level of education correlates with an increasing confidence towards the various mechanisms; although this is only true for some of the instruments analysed. Among them are fines and sanctions, a tool that professionals without a university degree granted an effectiveness value of 5.2; however, this increases to 6.6 among professionals that have a Master's degree or a Doctorate in journalism. The more educated also evaluated, with a difference of nine tenths of a point, the effectiveness of the establishment of a new business model. A difference of eight tenths of a point was also recorded for lobbying and pressure through social networks and with the same figure for hands-on managers and directors. The differences for the remaining instruments are barely significant.

c) With regard to the media sector, we find notable differences in the evaluation of the ethical committees of professional associations. Workers in newspapers and magazines evaluate this mechanism lower than any other group; an interesting fact, since, as a whole, they are more likely to belong to associations and to a greater number of them. At the other end of the scale, we find radio and television professionals, who most appreciate this mechanism. Also, we found significant variations in the evaluations of senior media managers and directors having a hands-on approach. Professionals working in newspapers are the most likely to support this instrument (7.5), and at the same time to distrust social media policies. Radio journalists repeated this trend with ratings of 8.2 and 5.3 respectively. Those who work in television, the Internet and communications offices show even more enthusiasm for lobbying and pressure through social networks (with ratings of 8, 7.6 and 7.7, respectively); these same workers question the effectiveness of academic critics. Professionals working on magazines are supporters of the social network pressure (7.8) but more wary of social media policies (4.7). Those who perform their work in agencies valued a hands-on approach from senior managers but they had less support for the effectiveness of academic critics (5.6).

d) Regarding professional status, there are ones some significant differences but only for some of the mechanisms. The greatest differences were in consideration of social and corporate responsibility policies. Those who perform management and leadership tasks (a recoded category that now includes news directors, editors, executives, managers, CEOs, CFOs, heads of section, writing, design and creative directors) are more supportive and give these policies an effectiveness evaluation of 6.7. Those who do not carry out this type of work (editorial assistants, editors, graphic designers, photographers, illustrators, sales marketing employees and those working in public relations, accounting, or technical areas such as camera, sound and lighting) give five tenths of a point

less. We find the same difference in evaluations of social media policies, a mechanism to which the directors granted an effectiveness of 5.6; this is quite low given that they are the ones usually responsible for drafting said policies. Those who do not hold management positions gave a score of 5.1. On the contrary, core staff evaluated impact of the audio-visual advisory boards with five tenths of a point more, while managers were more critical of this instrument (5.3).

e) If we look at types of company, we find that the perceptions of workers in public and private companies are very similar. We only find differences in relation to social media policies, which are held in higher esteem by public sector workers (5.7 against 5.1). Those working in the private sector are more appreciative of hands-on directors and managers, a mechanism whose effectiveness was evaluated with an overall 7.4, while journalists working in public sector companies gave an evaluation of 6.9.

f) With respect to the size of the company, in general, freelance workers were more sceptical than salaried employees as far as all the analysed mechanisms were concerned; above all in relation to academic critics, (4.9), potential agreements between companies to ensure minimum, inviolable ethical requirements (5.3), consumer and media users' associations (5.3) and fines and sanctions (5.6). For their part, workers in medium sized companies, that is, between 26 and 100 employees, were more critical of small and large companies with respect to the offer of on-going ethical training.

g) The χ^2 test indicates that there is a correlation between having suffered frequent pressure and evaluating "traditional" mechanisms as effective. The "pressured" respondents are less likely to value codes of ethics and style books (5.8 and 5.5 against 6.4 y 6.3, respectively). Those workers who say they have been put under pressure with a "high level of frequency" are very favourable towards hands-on managers and directors (9.1) and also towards lobbying and reporting via social networks (7.6) and the work carried out by consumer and media user's associations (7.3). These same professionals were very critical of potential agreements between companies to ensure minimum ethical requirements (4.3) and, above all, of prizes in recognition of personal ethical performance by journalists (3.4).

3.6. Moderate Confidence in an Ethical Seal or Certificate

In this context, confidence in a seal or certificate that promotes ethical quality would be in line with the existing mechanisms, both the more formal ones and the least. As to the question about whether it would make sense to grant a seal or certification of exemplary ethics, the Madrid professionals responded with an average rating of 6.4 out of a possible 10. There were no large differences according to professional category. The assertions which gained greater consensus were those relating to the difficulties in determining who would grant such a seal, which content to evaluate, and how to motivate the companies to put themselves forward for evaluation. In the interviews, one of the most enthusiastic went as far as to outline the contents of the above-mentioned seal:

(There is the need to) “assess the quality of information as to its thoroughness, credibility ...in the news ...eh, the style, the spelling mistakes, in short the more formal aspects of the information; but I think that it should also be evaluated, on another level; to evaluate the ethical behaviour of the company, in terms of employees, in terms of the working conditions which are developed, what advertisements are also fashionable now, what kind of advertising is going on to their websites or into their programmes” (16A).

On the other hand, another respondent was extremely critical of this type of certification:

[...] “No, that would be bad because the whole world would be against it in no time, and all the press would be against this type of certificate and would kill it off, without any reservations. You can imagine that I would be refused the certification of ethics, so I would immediately begin to work to remove that system [...] then... you’d be putting us in a very dangerous place. It wouldn’t even be allowed by professional organizations, the Federation of Associations of Journalists, or the Press Association of Madrid, and they could be those required to put this into effect, and as for those that have professional journalistic ethics they wouldn’t dare” (7P).

3.7. Personal Ethics, Irreplaceable

Be that as it may, none of the mechanisms analysed seemed viable to replace the personal ethics¹⁹ of the professionals who, as we learned in an earlier project, turn out to be the ultimate criteria on which ethics depend in journalistic companies. In both the in-depth interviews and the discussion groups, there were accumulations of data that support the thesis that self-regulation of the journalists and senior managers is the first step to ensure the ethical behaviour of news companies, despite Bertrand’s statement confirming that not all journalists are “endowed with a moral sense” (Bertrand, 2000: 41)²⁰. However, in all the discourse it appeared to be that the journalist remains the bedrock of the strata on which ethics in media companies depend, despite the widespread existence of self-regulatory mechanisms, such as style books, editorial advisory boards, codes of ethics, ombudsmen and so on:

¹⁹ From an academic perspective, this personal ethics would correspond to the first of the four levels in the analysis of journalistic ethics in the process of self-regulation (Funiok, 1996; Karmasin, 2002). The first level corresponds to the individual ethics which, following Funiok (1996, 98), result from the exercise of the journalistic virtues and self-criticism and involves efforts to increase the quality and professionalism. This journalistic responsibility arises from primary and secondary socialization processes, personal experience and motivation, and values linked to professional ethics.

²⁰ According to the author this is the reason that justifies the existence of media accountability instruments to “effectively enforce” the codes and norms adopted in a given journalism culture (cited by Fengler, 2012, 179).

“I believe that as journalists, what we have to be clear about is what we are and what is our function and our mission; and I believe that too many of my colleagues, or at least more than there should be, are attracted on the one hand by the smell of money, and on the other hand, by the battle for readers and viewers or for distribution or sales or to be number one or to win or to move on to the next big thing ... and this often blinds them to reality and leads them into making big mistakes” (9P).

And in the opinion of another respondent:

“In general, these mechanisms have advantages, they are thought of, fundamentally, as means to correct errors; they're mechanisms that have advantages. But ... let's see ... I'm coming back somewhat to my original thesis, the key to ethical journalism, to ethics, lies in the hands of each journalist” (8T).

Besides this, there is the fairly generalised perception that ethics cannot play a minor role in journalism and, in fact, it should be the factor which determines the survival of media.

“Ethics in the profession is probably our Achilles heel. If we do it well, it is our future, and if we do it badly, we have no future; and more so now with social media and especially the Internet. And I think that, if we don't do it well, we are going to disappear” (GD1).

4. Conclusion

Spanish journalists evaluated as “acceptable” the various self-regulatory mechanisms whose greatest impact requires the operation of all of them as a “system”, because considered individually, none are as effective in securing more ethical behaviour in the company which decides to use them. Another more critical interpretation could lead us to think that one way to not do anything significant for journalistic ethics would be to support all of the mechanisms in a partially, thus, reducing the possibility of committing errors. In any case, it seems clear that the scale of the ethical dilemmas facing journalists today requires the introduction of more than one instrument.

At the same time, the greater institutionalization of these mechanisms does not necessarily guarantee that they will be perceived as more effective. This seems to point to a certain exhaustion of traditional mechanisms -at least those which existed until a few years ago-, to the need to upgrade to the new circumstances in which journalism is developing today; and also to the convenience of completing the current repertoire with the latest tools which have already emerged. This would be the case of public pressure through social networks, an instrument that receives the highest score (7.5), when the profession of journalism is submitted to the scrutiny of a more mature audience and better coordinated through specific functionalities such as hashtags on Twitter.

Perceptions vary depending on the age, educational level, job title, the size of company or level of pressure at work, although the differences are not equally significant for all instruments. The concept of a seal or certificate of ethical quality has been valued in line with the existing mechanisms: the respondents do not show high hopes that this will improve the ethical behaviour of journalistic enterprise in a radical way, but at the same time nor are they, as a whole, especially critical of its possible implementation. In any case, it seems that neither the seal nor the rest of the analysed instruments may ever replace the personal ethics of the journalist who, in a recurrent mode, both in the interviews and in the discussion groups, appeared as the bedrock of the strata that determines ethics in journalistic enterprise. It therefore remains to find out how media outlets can increase the aforementioned personal ethics of their professionals; especially in a context of high job insecurity, as demonstrated by the data.

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