

Towards quality journalism in Ecuador: perspectives of journalists and media consumers

Hacia un periodismo de calidad en Ecuador: perspectivas de periodistas y audiencia

Para um jornalismo de qualidade no Equador: perspectivas de jornalistas e da audiência

JAVIER ODRIOZOLA-CHÉNÉ, Universidad de Los Hemisferios, Quito, Ecuador (javiero@uhemisferios.edu.ec)

IVÁN RODRIGO-MENDIZÁBAL, Universidad de Los Hemisferios, Quito, Ecuador (ivanr@uhemisferios.edu.ec)

ABSTRACT

This report identifies the positions of Ecuadorian citizens and journalists regarding the professional practices that lead to quality journalism, since in recent years the social context of the country has affected the credibility of both professionals and media. To deepen into this estrangement, we conducted a survey that measures the credibility of journalists and media and identifies the indicators associated with responsible journalism; in addition, we conducted in-depth interviews with forty journalists to identify the conditions for the development of quality journalism. Thus, the different conception that journalists and audience have over what composes the latter explains the gap between them.

Keywords: journalism; audience; journalist; Ecuador; contents; credibility; quality.

RESUMEN

Este informe identifica las posturas de los ciudadanos y periodistas ecuatorianos sobre las prácticas profesionales que derivan en periodismo de calidad, ya que en los últimos años el contexto social del país ha afectado la credibilidad de los profesionales y medios. Para profundizar en este alejamiento, se aplicó a los ciudadanos una encuesta que mide la credibilidad de periodistas y medios e identifica los indicadores asociados a un periodismo responsable, y se entrevistó en profundidad a cuarenta periodistas para identificar los condicionantes para el desarrollo de un periodismo de calidad. Así, la diferente concepción que periodistas y audiencia tienen sobre qué lo conforma explica la brecha entre ambos.

Palabras clave: periodismo; audiencias; periodistas; Ecuador; contenidos; credibilidad; calidad.

RESUMO

Este artigo identifica as posições de cidadãos e jornalistas equatorianos sobre práticas profissionais que levam a um jornalismo de qualidade, uma vez que nos últimos anos o contexto social do país afetou a credibilidade dos profissionais e dos meios. Para aprofundar esse tema foi realizada uma pesquisa que mediu a credibilidade dos jornalistas e da mídia e que identificou indicadores associados ao jornalismo com credibilidade, e entrevistou em profundidade quarenta jornalistas para identificar as condições para o desenvolvimento de um jornalismo de qualidade. Assim, a concepção diferente que os jornalistas e a audiência têm sobre o que o faz um jornalismo ser de qualidade explica a diferença entre as percepções desses dois grupos.

Palavras-chave: jornalismo; audiências; jornalistas; Equador; conteúdo; credibilidade; qualidade.

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INTRODUCTION

The impact of the criticism generated by the government and society since 2007 to the media in Ecuador –validated after by the Organic Law of Communication– is unquestionable. The relationship between the former president of the Republic, Rafael Correa, and the media in his ten years of government was marked by a continuous tension. After the approval of the Organic Law of Communication in June 2013, the media are regulated by the Superintendence of Information and Communication (Supercom, by its Spanish acronym). This body, in its first two years of existence, set “342 sanctions against television channels, radio stations and newspapers in the country” (Carvajal, 2016). The application of the law has provoked a confrontation between those who consider it an advance in the effective exercise of freedom of information and citizen participation and those who consider that it supposes an excessive political control to the journalistic practice (Magdaleno-Alegria, 2016).

This phenomenon can be related to the change of the way of reporting in the journalistic field, since the criticism and regulations had effects on the credibility of the Ecuadorian media and journalists and their informative work (Rodrigo-Mendizábal, 2014a, p.60). There are different reports on the changes in the media landscape in Ecuador in recent years: Banegas and Rivera (2012) and their perspective of the functioning of digital and conventional media; Checa-Godoy (2011) and his analysis of the political and legal tension in the formation of the media system; Punín-Larrea’s (2011) text on the criticism of the governmental sector to the media. In the context of the culture of journalistic routines we find the study of Oller, Chavero and Pullas (2015); Oller and Chavero (2015) also issued a study on the influences that determine the journalistic practices in the country.

In this article, we combine the results of two research projects of the Faculty of Communication of the Universidad de Los Hemisferios (Ecuador) related to the media landscape and journalistic practices, considering, in addition, the aforementioned.

The first project, Credibility of media, journalists and sources in Ecuador, began in 2009. The longitudinal research has delivered, up to now, credibility indexes of the Ecuadorian population on media and journalists, delivering to the community of researchers and to those who are part of the mass media a data system that allows them to improve the quality of information. We can mention Váscónez-Dávalos (2010) and his vision of

quality journalism in Ecuador; Rodrigo-Mendizábal (2010) and the analysis of the information quality on the global economic and financial crisis and the editorial opinion of the press, as well as its report on the quality of information and the credibility of media and journalists in Ecuador (2012). There is also an analysis of the editorials discourse in the Ecuadorian newspapers, written by Dávila-Zabala (2012); another, by Cárdenas (2014), on changes in the profiles of journalists, media and sources, product of the fluctuation of media credibility in Ecuador between 2009-2011, and one on the quality of the opinion discourse on the global economic crisis in five Ecuadorian newspapers, written by Gaibor-Aspiazu (2013). More recently, Rodrigo-Mendizábal (2014a) has released a study on the presence of the media in the current democracy, reflecting the trends of credibility in Ecuador; he has also created a report on the credibility of media and journalists in Ecuador in 2013 and its relationship with the political (2014b).

The second project is the Study on journalistic routines. This, of a transnational nature, detects and compares the conditions that affect the work of journalists in Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia and Mexico. It is an initiative of the Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción (Chile) with Fernando Gutiérrez-Atala, as lead investigator. The project began in 2014; it analyzes and establishes the importance of the different conditions that determine the journalistic work, thus configuring the routines and the quality of the journalistic information (Gutiérrez et al., 2015; Gutiérrez-Atala, Domínguez-Panamá, Odriozola-Chéné, & Ferreira-Jiménez, 2017; Gutiérrez-Atala, Ferreira-Jiménez, & Pajoni, 2015; Gutiérrez-Atala, Odriozola-Chéné, Ferreira, Anaya-Ávila, & Pajoni, 2016; Gutiérrez-Atala, Odriozola-Chéné, & Domínguez-Panamá, 2017; Odriozola-Chéné, Aguirre-Mayorga, & Roa-Chejín, 2016; Odriozola-Chéné, Bernal-Suárez, & Aguirre-Mayorga, 2016).

The previous frame serves as a reference for this article, which seeks to compare the perception of the sectors of society that compose the Ecuadorian public opinion with the opinion of national journalists about the factors that determine their professional work. The aim is to identify the similar or different points of views of both audience and journalists regarding the professional practice that leads to quality journalism, which explains the break in the confidence of the audience in the journalistic work. The different positions highlight the traditional debate on the role of the media as diffusers “of the discourses of the dominant

ideology (...) [or as] a place where diverse interests converge" (Igartua & Humanes, 2004, p.31).

The main hypothesis states that the credibility granted by citizens to the Ecuadorian media and journalists is affected by the different ways that audiences and journalists have of understanding journalistic communication and the information process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

THE AUDIENCE'S CREDIBILITY OF THE INFORMATION

Credibility is considered as "the effect that information has on people" (Rodrigo-Mendizábal, 2012, p. 55); this is determined by the inferences and decisions that readers make based on the published information. On the other hand, credibility is also related to how information is presented, knowing that this information, while considered objective, has an orientation, biases, a framing that may imply emphasis or exclusions of data, making reality appear in a certain way.

Thus, the published information is one thing, and the reception that is made of it is another. Barrios-Rubio, revisiting Miquel Rodrigo Alsina, points out that although there are three factors in the act of communication, namely, "the emission, the construction and circulation of senses (message) and the reception, [the latter would suppose a] conscious, active act, [that] does not refer only to the moment of exposure of the subject to the media, in particular to the artifact, but it is done when it uses the information received in its daily life, appropriates it, resignifies it, creates new senses and makes it recirculate by converting it into its own discourse" (Barrios-Rubio, 2009, pp. 269-270). In this sense, the way in which the news is constructed, its context of circulation and its reception is a reflexive act by which the reader can also take courses of action.

Nowadays, the media in Ecuador are –to use an expression popularized in certain critical sectors–, "on the spotlight"; i.e., they are inscribed in a context that they cannot avoid, especially when the object of their publications is the social, public, political reality of the country and the world. It cannot be said that the media are outside of this context, even more so when this can be seen as a field of opposing discourses –regarding the notion of field, we follow the debate proposed by Bourdieu (2008)–: those of the government, of social sectors, of the media, of diverse actors in social networks, etc. In this field, there is a diversity of voices that fight to circulate certain meanings or senses. Thus,

reception and credibility is influenced by such tensions and by legal determinations that, on the other hand, conflict with what is considered freedom of expression (Cerbino & Ramos, 2009; Punin-Larrea, 2011), and show to what extent there are responsible journalistic practices (Abad-Ordóñez, 2012, p. 5).

INFLUENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JOURNALISTIC PROFESSION

When studying the conditioning factors that influence the development of the journalistic profession, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) identify five layers of influence: (a) the journalist's own psychology; (b) journalistic routines; (c) the organizational guidelines of the media; (d) external sources, and (e) the predominant social ideology. These influences do not develop horizontally, but are established following a hierarchy of influences "that proposes important distinctions between the levels of analysis and places the individual journalist in a network of organizational and ideological limitations" (Reese, 1999, p. 48). In this system, "these forces act simultaneously at different levels (...) And even when it is tempting to place the explanation in a single cause, reality shows that, in a network of interconnected forces, our analysis options are a matter of emphasis" (Reese, 1999, p. 57). Therefore, the ideological constraints of journalists are limited by a series of organizational constraints, related to the hierarchical organization of the media and the journalistic routines, which in turn depend on the social context in which the information professionals and the media unfolds. In short, the contextual influence of journalistic work can be studied from three levels: systems, institution and actor (Oller, 2012, p.54).

Meanwhile, when analyzing the influence of the different determinants on Ecuadorian journalists, we should highlight the research conducted by Oller and Chavero (2015). In their study, through 31 in-depth interviews with active Ecuadorian journalists, they found that: (a) the main internal influences are new technologies, ethical convictions, superiors and news deadlines, and (b) the main external influences refer to the legislation of the media, the audience, the news sources and the Government, and the organizations in charge of controlling and regulating the media (Oller & Chavero, 2015, p. 95).

THE CONCEPT OF JOURNALISTIC QUALITY

The other issue that underlies the question of the credibility of media and journalists is the quality of the

information. And not only in terms of their perception, but also in terms of its production.

When dealing with journalistic quality, we find multiple factors that mark the journalistic work: ethics, journalistic rigor, multiplicity of sources, professional criteria, journalistic research, training, responsibility, pluralism, deontological instruments, contributions to the democratic system, among the most relevant aspects (Foro de Periodismo Argentino, 2008, p. 5). As McQuail (1992) states, the standards used to measure journalistic quality are very diverse.

In a general way, it can be affirmed that there are three meanings that have reached a greater relevance when investigating quality journalism: journalistic quality, news quality, and news content quality (Ramírez de la Piscina, González, Aiestarán, Zabalondo, & Aguirre, 2014, p. 50). This heterogeneity is also reflected in the very configuration of research focused on the analysis of quality journalism. Thus, we find that the factors that determine journalistic quality vary in name and number in the different investigations conducted (Bogart, 1989; De Pablos-Coello & Mateos-Martín, 2004; Gómez-Mompart & Palau-Sampio, 2013; McNerney & Bird, 2005; Pellegrini, Puente, Porath, Mujica, & Grassau, 2011; Red de Periodismo de Calidad, 2006; Shapiro, 2010; Teramo, 2006; Wimmer & Dominick, 1996).

Regarding journalistic quality, Shapiro establishes five basic principles that help to a better performance of the profession: (a) discovery –search for information–; (b) examination –scrutinizing that information–; (c) interpretation –decipher the story told by the facts–; (d) style –use of a language appropriate for the story–, and (e) presentation –engaging the community with the story constructed– (Shapiro, 2010, p. 104). When analyzing the informative process, Pellegrini, Puente, Porath, Mujica and Grassau (2011) differentiate between the selection of the event that will become a journalistic story and the elaboration of the product itself (p.26). Regarding the selection process, which would fit with the concept of news quality, quality is determined by indicators such as the type of news, the origin of the information, the topic, the sources consulted or the magnitude of the event (Pellegrini et al., 2011, p. 31). Teramo (2006) refers to a set of indicators that show the quality of the messages in the context of informative communication: reliability –linked to the media pluralism–, relevance –or importance of a topic–, interest –in relation to the needs of the readers–, proportion –space or time dedicated to a

topic–, adequacy –or context–, transparency –or type of framing–, precision –linguistic accuracy–, clarity –comprehensibility–, integration –correlation with other resources such as images, etc.–, incidence –correspondence with the readers– (p. 76). Many of these are intricately intertwined, which is evident in the final journalistic product and, as such, in the reconstruction of the reality transmitted by that information. Hence, in terms of credibility, quality –that is, the fundamental aspects that make information considered relevant, truthful, objective, transparent, etc.– lead people to construct images about the facts and situations; in addition, they are useful so that readers value not only the objectified reality but also the published material, considering it of preeminence for their daily life. In a way, it is possible that the transgression of certain quality indicators becomes the central argument of the sectoral critique that has recently been unleashed in the field of media in Ecuador. The of this is that “the audiences are [not] duly informed and can exercise their citizen’s right to participate and make decisions in matters of public interest” (Villamarín-Carrascal, 2013, p. 24).

Finally, as for the observable indicators regarding the quality of news content, the thematic variety and the depth of the agenda has been used as an instrument to measure the quality of journalistic content (Bogart, 1989), in contrast to the homogenization of content that undermines journalistic practice nowadays (Boczkowski & de Santos, 2007; Odriozola-Chéné & Llorca-Abad, 2014). Other indicators of the news content quality would be: the ability to generate stories without depending on information agencies (Lacy & Fico, 1991); the diversity in the use of genres that allows different approaches to the same event (Martínez-Albertos, 2004); the variety in the use of informative sources that prevents certain subjects from being configured as legitimized actors in the reconstruction of social reality (Casero-Ripollés, 2008, p.120) and the style, content and emphasis of journalistic products in their creative process (Alessandri et al., 2001, p. 118).

METHODOLOGY

What is exposed in this article is based on a mixed research approach, to understand the credibility and journalistic quality from the perspective of the Ecuadorian audiences and journalists.

To obtain the credibility indicators of the Ecuadorian population on the media and journalists between 2009

and 2014, an annual national survey was conducted in the cities of Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca, considering them as the most important cities in Ecuador as they are in the economic and productive axis. The relevance of these cities in the survey also lies in the fact that they are at the center of the current population flows from other Ecuadorian cities. The data collection period through the survey was preferably between the months of May-April. The survey was operationalized with a structured questionnaire of 20 multiple-choice questions, which up to now allows to obtain several indexes. What is exposed in this article is a range of data. For the selection of the sample, we used the following formula: $n = 0.25 * N / (a/z)^2 (N-1) + 0.25$. The values applied are the following: n =population size; a =5%; z =1.959; N =95%. According to the formula, the population surveyed in each city was 384, with a total of 1152 individuals between 18 and 55 years old. The range of respondents corresponded to professionals, non-professionals and university students. Once the data were collected in each of the cities, they were verified taking random samples and making telephone calls to some individuals in the sample. Then the data was refined using Excel; once those were consolidated, we used SPSS.

On the other hand, in order to determine the conditions considered by journalists as the most relevant for the development of a quality journalistic practice, we conducted in-depth interviews, defined "as a questionnaire with less structure that combines predefined response alternatives questions with open ones, in which the interviewee answers with total freedom" (Vieytes, 2004, p.122). First, journalists were asked in an open manner what they considered to be the main determining factors for the development of quality journalism. The answers were located in one of the ten determining factors: ideological, political, hierarchical, economic, labor and salary, training, technology, social pressure, journalistic routines and working conditions (Odrizola-Chené, Gutiérrez-Atala, Ferreira-Jiménez, & Domínguez-Panamá, 2017, pp. 160-161). In a second part, the interviewee was asked if he/she identified any of the categories established as conditioning factors in his/her professional performance. The sample was of 40 information professionals working in different Quito media: Internet, press, radio and television (table 1). The interviews were conducted between October 2014 and February 2015. Given its anonymous nature and because this research is part of an international project, the range given to Ecuadorian journalists interviewed ranges from Subject 121 to Subject 160.

RESULTS

The credibility of media and journalists in Ecuador

The data on the credibility of the Ecuadorian media (figure 1) show that television and the press are the most credible media for the audience, while the credibility of the radio has started to establish itself in recent years. On the other hand, the cybermedia show an index inferior to the one of the traditional media, but in constant growth.

The credibility of Ecuadorian journalists (figure 1) is lower than that of their own media; there is a downward trend in the credibility of journalists of traditional media, and an upward trend in that of cyberjournalists, although still lower than that of television and radio journalists.

Credibility factors and determinants of journalistic work

Figure 2 reflects the problematic factors that affect credibility. The two values that stand out the most throughout the longitudinal survey are independence, honesty and truthfulness, as well as impartiality, transparency and objectivity. Although these are associated with the individual characteristics of the journalist, they are conditioned both by pressures external to the media and by the hierarchical pressures of the media institution. The category on ethics and responsibility could also be framed in this vein. Other factors are associated with the journalistic routines –investigation and informative rigor or quality of the contents–; the training received –training and professional experience–, or directly with the external pressures of political and economic agents –economic factors and sectoral interests or political factors and struggles with the government–.

When relating the data with the answers of the Ecuadorian journalists (table 2), we observe that, within the different factors that affect the optimal development of their profession, journalists consider that the most important determining factors are: (a) political pressures (65%); (b) journalistic routines (37.5%), and (c) working conditions, linked both to the provision of the necessary resources and to the conditions of work climate and interpersonal relations (30%). It should be noted that the determinants derived from the hierarchical pressures of the media (12.5%) and the journalist's own ideology (10%) are of little importance for the professionals interviewed. Above them are other issues such as the training received (17.5%) or the economic situation of Ecuador (20%).

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Gender	
Male	67.5% (27)
Female	32.5% (13)
Edad	
Average	37.5
Nationality	
Ecuadorian	97.5% (39)
Spanish	2.5% (1)

LABOR VARIABLES

Type of media *	
Cybermedia	30% (12)
Press	30% (12)
Television	30% (12)
Radio	32.5% (13)
Organizational role	
Writer	45% (18)
Head of section	25% (10)
Manager position/Owner	30% (12)
Exclusive dedication	
Yes	82.5% (33)
No	17.5% (7)
Type of contract	
Full time	82.5% (33)
Part-time	7.5% (3)
Owner	2.5% (1)
N.A.	7.5% (3)

TRAINING VARIABLES

Degree in Communication	
Yes	80% (32)
No	20% (8)
Another degree	
Yes	35% (14)
No	65% (26)
Master/Ph.D. in Communication	
Yes	35% (14)
No	65% (26)
Master/Ph.D. in other disciplines	
Yes	7.5% (3)
No	92.5% (37)
Continuous training	
Yes	57.5% (23)
No	42.5% (17)

Table 1. Sociodemographic, labor and training characteristics of the journalists interviewed

*The total percentage of the variable "type of media" is greater than 100%, since journalists sometimes work in different media.

Source: Own elaboration.

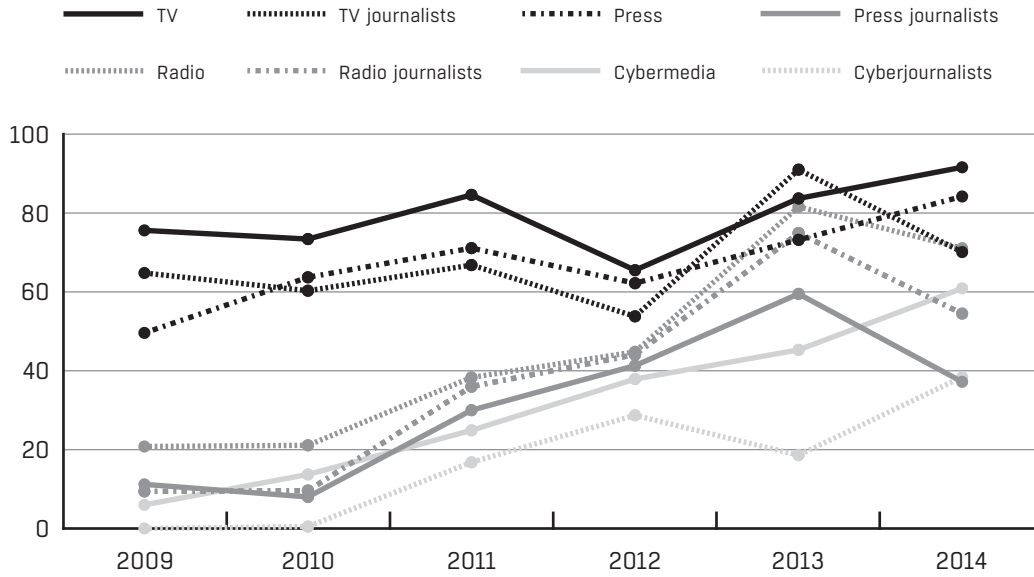


Figure 1. Credibility of media and journalists (2009-2014) (%)

Source: Own elaboration.

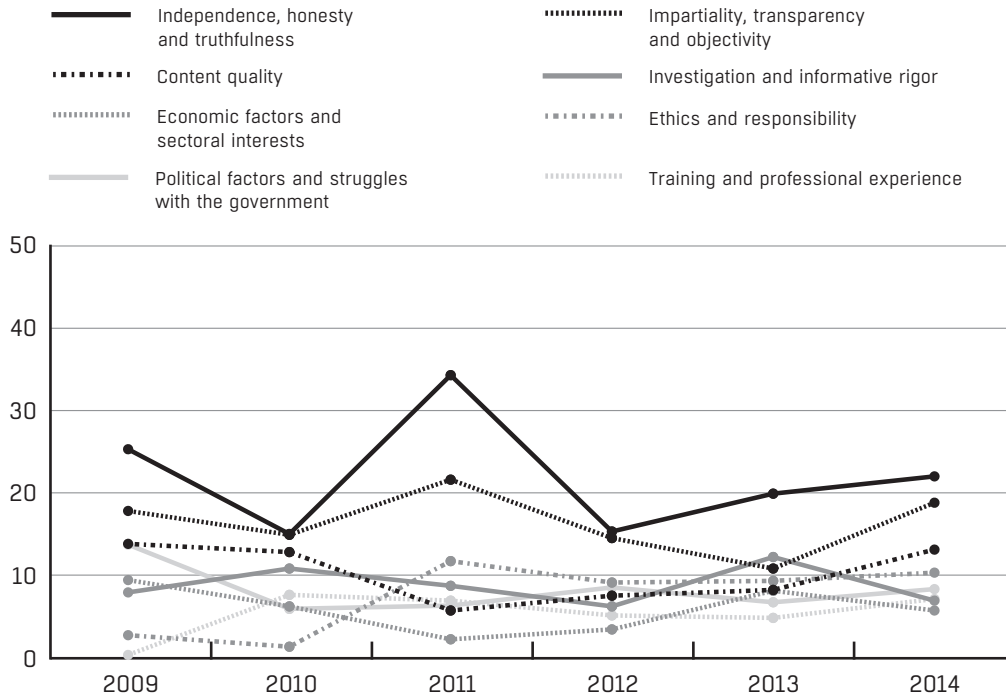


Figure 2. Factors affecting the credibility of media and journalists (2009-2014) (%)

Source: Own elaboration.

Determinants	Presence (n=40)
Politics	65%
Journalistic routines	37.5%
Working conditions	30%
Economic	20%
Training	17.5%
Hierarchical	12.5%
Wages/labor	12.5%
Technological	12.5%
Social pressure	12.5%
Ideological	10%

Table 2. Determinants affecting the development of quality journalism

Source: Own elaboration.

Therefore, the factors that contribute most to strengthen credibility (independence, honesty and truthfulness, and impartiality, transparency and objectivity) are derived from the very figure of the journalist and the media. However, professionals do not perceive the determinants that emanate from their own figure and the environment in which they work as important. In this way, there is a first gap between the perception of journalists and that of the citizenship/audience.

In addition, citizens also consider the research and information rigor, and the quality of the contents, important in determining the credibility of journalists and the media. From the journalistic profession, the development of quality journalism is also directly associated with journalistic routines, that is, there is agreement between both visions.

SECTORS THAT INFLUENCE JOURNALISTIC WORK

Government and political influences

Considering the data from figure 2, we could assure that, for citizens, the index of political factors and conflicts with the government as a problem affecting the credibility of media and journalists is not that high. However, in figure 3, the citizens interviewed show the existence of political pressures.

For the Ecuadorian public opinion, government pressures are present regularly (18.8%), almost always (31.7%) or always (25.9%). But, in addition to the government, there are the political parties, which also exert an influence on the media and journalists, although to a lesser extent: regularly (26.5%), almost always (26.7%) or always (19, 5%).

Political pressures are perceived, by journalists, as the main conditioning factor for professional development (65%). When analyzing their responses on political conditions, three aspects stand out: (a) political pressures, (b) the new legal environment that arises with the approval of the Organic Law of Communication, and (c) the problems of access to Government sources.

In this context, the interviewees reflect the “fear of being persecuted, prosecuted and sanctioned” (Subject 139), creating “a restrictive, sanctioning and alienating institutionality that seeks to place government officials above the work of journalists” (Subject 138). These pressures are translated into “entire campaigns to discredit journalists who do their job well (...), there is continuous monitoring of all media or at least of a very high percentage” (Subject 141) and “systematic political strategies of communication and marketing, in order to affect the noble mission of informing and entertaining” (Subject 150).

One of the most mentioned aspects by journalists within the political pressures is the Organic Law of Communication, in force in Ecuador since June 24, 2013. It is noted that an effect may occur “due to ignorance of the laws that frightens the journalists” (Subject 136) and it is stated that the “law ends up being a subjective law in many aspects, or with a subjective approach, which determines sanctions and limitations for the journalistic exercise” (Subject 154). However, the journalists interviewed also consider that it has positive effects by enhancing “being much more responsible in the information that is delivered” (Subject 143) and making a greater journalistic effort.

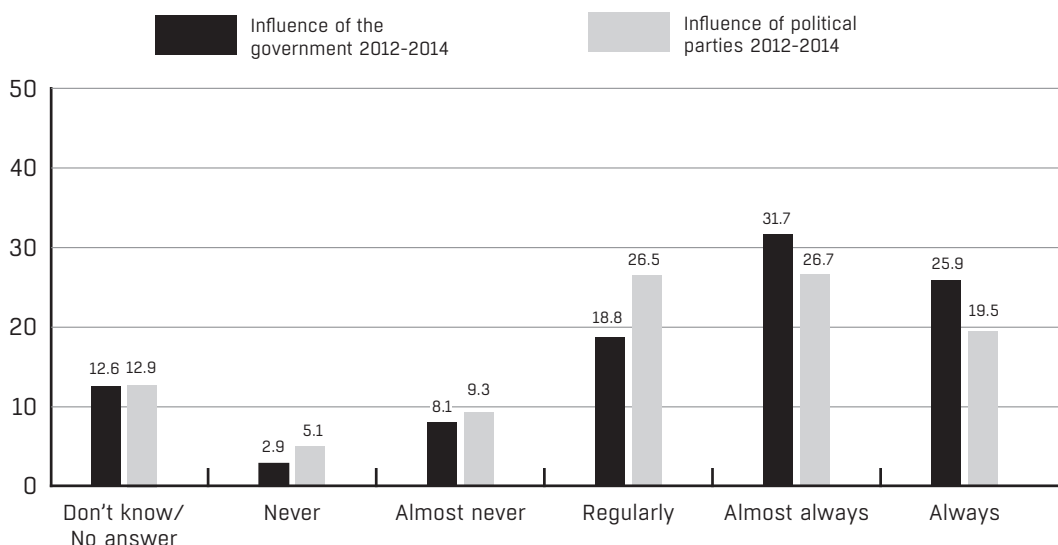


Figure 3. Perception of citizens about political influences (2012-2014) (%)

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, Ecuadorian journalists highlight the difficulties of accessing institutional sources. These problems derive from a global problem, since “there are political forces, there is a manipulation of information in general, in the whole world” (Subject 158). In Ecuador, “it is very complicated to get the official source” (Subject 159). Thus, “it is more a question of prior censorship, that is, we are know that the government does not speak, does not give interviews, so it becomes complicated to investigate issues that require contrast, necessarily” (Subject 129).

The pressure of political institutions on the media and journalists is recognized both by the citizenship/audience and by the journalists. Therefore, there is a similar perception from both positions.

Other influences: business sectors, unions, civil organizations and citizens

The influence of other sectors does not show a constant dynamic. For citizens, pressures from private companies exist on a regular basis (31.4%); however, their presence is not as important or continuous as in the case of political pressures: almost always (18.7%) and always (8.4%). In the case of unions and civil organizations, something similar happens. Citizens consider that the influence is regular –unions (30%) and civil organizations (27.2%)–, but their importance

decreases considerably regarding political and business influence –in the values almost always, unions (14.3%) and civil organizations (15.4%), and always, unions (5.7%) and civil organizations (5.9%)–. Finally, citizens show an awareness of their ability to influence the media similar to that of private companies, unions and civil organizations, but with a different distribution within the values: regularly (19.1%), almost always (25.3%) and always (9.9%).

Social pressure, understood as the pressure that society (through its various groups) exerts on the journalist and in the media, to place their demands in the information scenario, is considered as a fundamental condition for 12.5% of the journalists interviewed.

However, deepening into the determinants in the second part of the semi-structured interview, it is observed that, from the Ecuadorian journalism profession, pressure attempts are perceived from “all sides, but they never influence your work” (Subject 128), both “public and private organizations try to give you the frame” (Subject 125). Thus, “if there is a group or a sector that has criteria against or is conducting some measures about it, we take its version and immediately contrast it” (Subject 152).

As for the pressure exerted by the citizenship/audience, journalists consider that, despite the fact

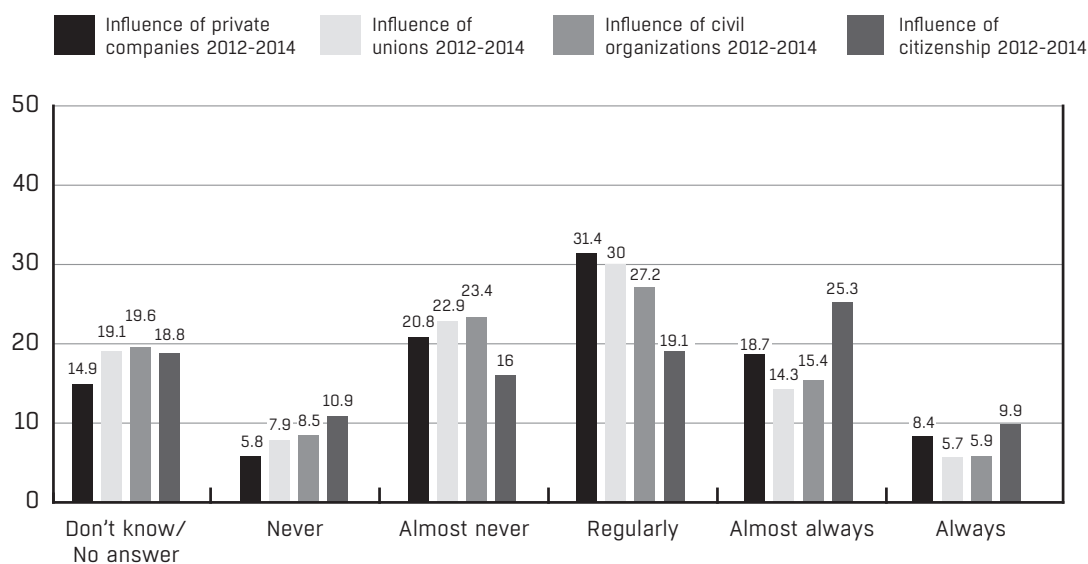


Figure 4. Perception of citizens about the influences of other social agents (2012-2014)

Source: Own elaboration.

that their work is under pressure from different areas, “the strongest pressure is that of public opinion. People demand that we publish the information” (Subject 137). Derived from this, different perspectives of how journalists should act to fulfill this social function are reflected. The first builds its journalistic stories considering that “we work for the public and its interests, our obligation is to interpret those interests, to know what it is that people want to know, to satisfy that need” (Subject 154). From this perspective, not considering the interests of the audience can provoke “a gradual process of that ‘outcasts’ them, taking them away from society as a whole, thus they try to locate themselves on the scale with public authorities, socially recognized actors...” (Subject 153). From the opposite perspective, it is stated that “there are issues that people should know, even if they do not want to know them” (Subject 134). Thus, the journalist must act as an intellectual filter, since “you cannot get carried away by pressure, because sometimes social pressure can be an error and you make the mistake (...) Sometimes you have pressure on why you do not say this, why you do not report this, you should report this... but you do not have the bases, you do not have the arguments” (Subject 155).

When comparing the perspective of journalists and citizens, we observe that, despite the ability that citizens grant to certain sectors, such as private

companies, trade unions or social organizations, to influence journalists, they do not believe that the pressure exerted by them influences the development of their journalistic products. Here we see again a different conception between the vision of citizenship and that of journalists. Regarding the ability of the citizens, as media audience, to influence the media, the citizens surveyed consider that they have the capacity to influence. This possibility of influencing journalistic work depends on the journalists’ own conception of the importance of reflecting the interests of the audience in its products. Therefore, on this occasion, we observe that the vision of citizenship and journalists can converge or diverge, depending on the journalists’ own conception of the profession.

THE JOURNALISTIC QUALITY SEEN FROM THE AUDIENCE AND FROM THE PROFESSION

Figure 5 analyzes journalistic quality considering the audience and the professionals.

The Ecuadorian citizens consider that the elements that determine the quality of the journalistic products show an unequal presence in the information of the Ecuadorian media.

In the first place, for the respondents, the information disseminated by the Ecuadorian media is timely usually (39.6%), almost always (23.8%) and always (8.8%). This fact is related to the journalists thinking that it is

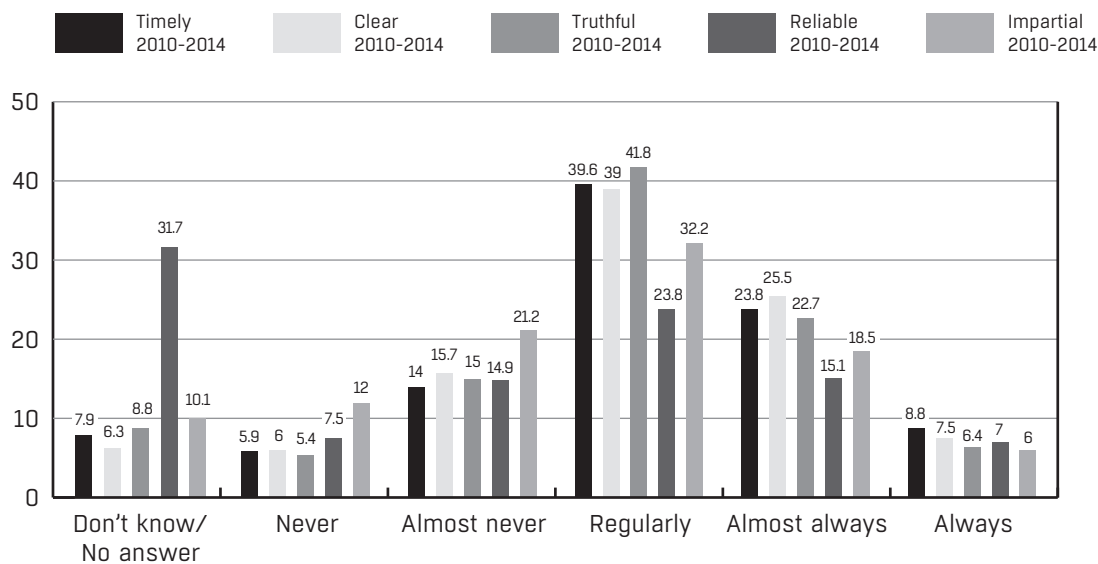


Figure 5. Perception of the citizenship on the elements that determine the quality of journalistic products (2010-2014)

Source: Own elaboration.

necessary “to make a journalism a little closer to the people, so that people can have more proximity to the work we do, to make it easier to read” (Subject 122). The journalists begin to be aware of the paradigm shift in media communication, which reinforces “the public’s need and desire to interact” (Subject 138).

Second, citizens surveyed consider that clarity is also present in information regularly (39%), almost always (25.5%) and always (7.5%). The journalists interviewed also establish a relationship between clarity and quality. The communicative clarity is based, for some journalists, on the bases obtained in their university academic training, which endowed them with “everything that has to do with writing, grammar, genres...” (Subject 122), causing that there is “a new wave of people who come from classrooms, with much more capacity to be able to communicate and inform” (Subject 143). Many of the journalists surveyed believe that the necessary bases for the performance of the profession are acquired in the university, although there are journalists who detect a “gap, the gap between the training process and the activities that a journalist develops in a media” (Subject 148).

Truthfulness is the third characteristic, related to quality, which is usually present in the stories of the Ecuadorian media, according to the respondents, regularly (41.8%), almost always (22.7%) and always (6.4%). For journalists, this is based on the fact that “you

have to have sources to publish contrasted information” (Subject 121). Thus, “if you do not attribute the statements it means that you started inventing things. What you are looking for is to approach the truth, the more you investigate the actors, the more real your vision will be” (Subject 135). However, journalists also note the handicaps of “contemporary digital reporting: there is no longer field work, verification” (Subject 153). The Organic Law of Communication has become an element that increases the importance of truthfulness, since “it obliges to have all possible sources” (Subject 151).

The impartiality and reliability of the Ecuadorian media does not show such high values in the responses of citizens: regularly (23.8% impartiality and 32.2% reliability), almost always (15.1% impartiality and 18.5% reliability) and always (7% impartiality and 6% reliability). These aspects must be related to the conditioning factors derived from the personal opinion of the journalist and the media in which he/she works, both ideological and hierarchical. Journalists affirm that “to speak of impartiality in journalism is quite naïve” (Subject 123). The ideological determinants of the journalist are present in most of the interviewees, since “the journalist is not a refrigerator, he is a human being, who has a cultural vision of the world, society and politics” (Subject 146). Journalists are aware of the influence of their points of view when dealing

with information, although they try to limit it by means of ethics and the responsible exercise of the profession. When these principles are not met, the journalistic profession falls into “polarization and simplicity. Looking at the facts, at the stories, as good or bad, in black and white, for or against” (Subject 138). When talking about pressures from the media, some journalists consider that these do not exist and that “the ideological position of the media is more a university issue” (Subject 159) or that they work “in media that do not have this type of ideological conditioning” (Subject 146). The contrary point of view considers that this vision contributes to sustaining the “alleged non-political position of the media and the supreme deception that an objective journalism is possible” (Subject 153). However, despite the fact that journalists do not give great importance to this type of determinants, they state in their responses the importance of hierarchies in the media: “All the media have a way of managing themselves hierarchically, thus, directors are the ones that assign the themes at the end” (Subject 157).

When comparing the presence of the values linked to quality that citizens consider present in the journalistic stories of the Ecuadorian media with the importance that the journalists grant them, there are both coincidences and divergences. The importance granted by journalists and citizens when talking about timely, clear and truthful information is similar. This shows that citizens and journalists share a set of values when it comes to determining what is important, that journalistic stories share the usual language of the whole citizenry and that the correct identification of sources contributes to citizens’ perception that the news are representative of the events reported. However, for citizens, values such as impartiality or reliability are not usually so present in journalistic stories. This fact is motivated because, for journalists, these values vanish in the set of personal, professional, hierarchical and external conditions.

DISCUSSION

The credibility granted by citizens to the media and journalists is an element that is inexorably linked to the evaluation of the professional development that citizens make of them. But, beyond evaluating the productive-informative process, the measure of this journalistic task is fixed by the final product: the journalistic stories.

The credibility granted by the citizenship/audience to the Ecuadorian media and journalists shows some remarkable elements. First, that the credibility indices are not low and seem to have settled in recent years. Within the media, television is configured as the most credible, followed by print media. When talking about the construction of the Ecuadorian social reality, it is evident that television is the current place where information is broadcast with contents that are often more impressive and instructive about certain reality. The effect caused by television information is clear, due to the use of images that go beyond the rhetoric of print media. In the case of the latter, it is noted that the sector has had to reposition itself considering that it was the most combated and criticized for the quality of its contents. Its credibility indexes have gradually improved, recovering the good perception of the public.

In turn, there is a continuous growth in the credibility of cybermedia. The fact that the Internet is a freer territory of information shows that, in relation to the credibility of the media in Ecuador, readers and audiences need a variety of information, diversity of voices, and richer content; the traditional media, despite their repositioning, do not necessarily deliver those to the audiences.

Finally, it is noteworthy that, in all media, the credibility of the media is always superior to that of its own journalists, which leads to think about the conception that the audience has about the figure of the journalist, because, as shown by Shoemaker and Reese (2014), the opinions and personal characteristics of journalists are always subject to a series of influences emanating from the profession itself, the environment in which they work and their relationships with different social agents.

Regarding the factors that determine the credibility of the Ecuadorian media and journalists, citizens cite values that, at first glance, seem to emanate from the media and professionals themselves (independence, impartiality, informative rigor). However, in many cases, these values are conditioned by other factors derived both from external pressures and from the media itself and from the professional practice, which is being modified and questioned due to the vertiginous increase in production rates since the arrival of the Internet.

At first, citizens do not seem to give importance to external pressures or influences received by the media. However, when asked specifically about these, they reflect its importance, placing the political sectors at

a first level, and giving less weight to the influence of other social actors such as the business world, trade unions, civil organizations or the own audience. On the other hand, for journalists, political pressures are configured as the main conditioning factor in the development of quality journalism. The social pressure that can be exerted by other social sectors is much less and highlights how a big number of journalists is more conditioned by what their audiences expect than by the pressures that these other social actors try to exert on them.

Finally, when examining the values linked to journalistic quality that are present in the Ecuadorian journalistic products, the citizens determine as the most common the opportunity, the clarity and the veracity. As has been said, Ecuadorian citizens and journalists share a series of values when it comes to determining what is important: sharing a common language and giving meaning to events through data based on clearly identified sources. However, other values such as impartiality or reliability, which had already been underlined by citizens as fundamental when determining the credibility of media and journalists, are not so present in the information products, according to the respondents. Journalists reject the existence of these values, to which objectivity could be added, since they are aware that in the development of the information process, influences come not only from their personal characteristics, but also from others that emerge of the media themselves and of social actors with which journalists and their organizations must relate in the development of the journalistic profession.

CONCLUSION

Resuming the objective and hypothesis raised at the beginning of this investigation, it is noted that the credibility granted by citizens to Ecuadorian media and journalists is affected by the different ways of understanding journalistic communication and the information process by audiences and journalists.

While it is true that there is a tendency to consolidate the citizenship's credibility in Ecuadorian media and journalists, there are a number of factors related to how to understand the specificities of the journalistic profession which sometimes causes a clash between how the audience thinks that the information process should be developed and how journalists consider that they should act in a world marked by influences of all kinds.

Thus, based on common values such as the need for journalistic rigor, professional ethics, truthfulness, etc., citizens consider necessary the existence of other values such as impartiality or independence for the realization of a higher quality journalism that increases the credibility of the journalistic scenario. Faced with this, journalists do not consider these values important or possible due to the own subjectivities that arise not only from themselves, but also from the institutions in which they work, although at first they are not aware of the journalistic practices and of the social actors, fundamentally political, with which they relate continuously. We might wonder if this clash when defining the journalistic profession is one of the reasons why the credibility of journalists is inferior, in all cases, to that of the media in which they work.

FOOTNOTES

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Javier Odriozola-Chéné, Ph.D. in Journalism from the University of the Basque Country. Director of the Master of Research in Digital Communication and professor at the Faculty of Communication of the University of Los Hemisferios (Quito, Ecuador). He has participated in projects focused on the configuration of media agendas, influences for the development of the journalistic profession, digital journalism, environmental journalism and Internet consumption.

Iván Rodrigo-Mendizábal, Ph.D. candidate in Latin American Literature from the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (Ecuador). Master's degree in Culture Studies from the Andean University Simón Bolívar (Ecuador). Postgraduate director and professor of the Communication Faculty of the University of Los Hemisferios (Quito, Ecuador). Director of the Ibero-American journal of Communication Studies, *Razón y Palabra*. President of the Ecuadorian Society of Communication Investigators (SEICOM). Author of several scientific papers and books.