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Pre-professional journalistic cultures of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela: Perceptions of students about ethics and journalism practices

Abstract

This paper analyses the pre-professional journalistic culture of Ecuador, Cuba and Venezuela based on the degree of permissiveness held by Journalism students in regard to controversial ethical practices and their views of the media and the journalistic profession. We surveyed a probabilistic sample of 1,273 students from 21 universities enrolled on their first course (Ecuador=500, Venezuela=390, Cuba=383) in 2016. The results show that future journalists are reluctant to accept questionable journalistic practices, and hold a pessimistic view as to the quality and confidence of the media and the profession. We found that the degree of permissiveness is related to the perceived risk-reward analysis in terms of the quality of journalism in Cuba and Ecuador, and that the student perceptions of ethics differ in Venezuela and Ecuador. We conclude that, despite their political similarities in terms of having left-wing Governments, perceptions in the three countries diverge.

Keywords

Pre-professional journalistic culture, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, ethics, trust, media performance, professional future, students.

1. Introduction

Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela (three Latin American countries with left-wing governments in 2016) has developed as a profession marked by politics, and has acted as a facilitator between the Governments and other social institutions. Its prominent role is probably one of the causes of its being in the spotlight in relation to conflicts of interest with other powerful entities (private companies, governments, religious and civil associations, etc.) and also a reason for its being constantly evaluated by scholars (Oller & Chavero, 2016; García, 2013; Oller, Olivera, Hernández & Argüelles, 2016; Aguirre, 1998). In fact, this comparative study of journalistic cultures aims to explore the profession in different countries and regions of the world by taking into account context and local realities (Donsbach, 2008; Donsbach & Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2007, 2009, 2010). In this area of study, scholars have addressed the analysis of pre-professional journalistic cultures based on the perception of undergraduate students (Bowers, 1974; Ortega & Humanes, 2000; Mellado, 2009; Pastor, 2010; Hanusch, 2013, Mellado *et al.*, 2013; Mellado &

Scherman, 2015; Hanusch *et al.*, 2015, 2016), given that universities are the principal educational establishments for the education of journalists. In journalistic culture research, journalistic ethics is a common analysis variable, because of its collective and individual implications, and its direct relationship with legal frameworks and professional practices (Lee, Skewes & Hanitzsch, 2012, p. 642). This paper details the above mentioned pre-journalistic cultures in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela, filling an empirical 'gap' and focusing on the perceptions held by students in regard to ethics (permissiveness towards controversial practices) and journalism practices (considerations about media and journalism), derived from a comparative international survey undertaken during the second semester of 2016.

2. Perception of media and journalistic practices

The traditional commercial model of journalism is mutating and diversifying due to the exhaustion of the unique and exclusive professional paradigms from the Global North, the global economic crisis that looms over the various capitalist systems, and the "technological storm" that keeps both journalists and the media disconcerted these days. However, as Remler, Waisanen and Gabor (2014) point out, other types of journalism based on public interests are scarce and, increasingly, research and analysis of complex ideas is more at risk. According to these authors, the importance of undertaking research activities in the formative period of "future journalists" lies at this point, something that is rarely implemented. Casero-Ripollés, Ortells-Badenes and Doménech-Fabregat (2013), in their analysis of students undertaking a degree in Journalism at the UJI in Spain, emphasize that at a normative level these research activities are an essential part of the education of Journalism students and are some of the main competences and skills that future graduates should possess. Both students and professionals in the sector, these researchers continue, come to a consensus on the current scenario, in which the journalistic profession is conditioned by new threats and opportunities linked to the economic crisis and the process of digitalization.

This paper analyses the opinions of students of Journalism (also called Social Communication) of three Latin American countries –Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela–, investigating some of the 'black holes' that still define the investigation of future journalists, which, according to Hanusch (2013), is still relatively rare. Despite the shortcomings in the quantity and quality of research in this regard, in recent years authors such as Singh *et al.* (2015) and Salaverría (2016) have stressed the need to reformulate curricula of the faculties of Journalism and Social Communication, to give greater importance to theoretical reflections, fundamentals and communicative processes and new professional scenarios (in Tejedor Calvo & Cervi, 2017).

All these transformations and alterations to the journalistic profession in an environment of generalized crisis contribute to young journalists viewing their future as an uncontrollable, diffuse and unpredictable domain of uncertainty and work anxiety (Goyanes & Rodríguez-Gómez, 2018). The change of the business model of journalism, the new labor demands of its workers and the emergence of new professional profiles directly affect the training of future journalists (Casero-Ripollés, Ortells-Badenes & Doménech-Fabregat, 2013) which, according to Scolari *et al.* (2008), should promote the education of students and adjust their training to the functions required by the media system and the journalistic sector. As an example illustrating what was said by the previous researchers, in Serbia, Milojević, Krstić and Ugrinić (2016) point out that, to address the future of journalism within the information society, Serbian students tend to examine the rapidly growing technological niches, where the profession is expected to change naturally. In addition, terms such as convergence, multitasking, multimedia, Internet television, evolution, collaboration, etc., merge the narrative of the future with the forms of journalistic practices that already exist.

With this understanding, Santos-Sainz (2013), in his work on future journalists in France, indicates that students there consider that, firstly, to guarantee the future of journalism,

professionals should ‘get closer’ to their readers, renewing their relationship and their links with them constantly; secondly, they maintain a critical discourse regarding the type of journalists excessively close to power; thirdly, they are not afraid to find a job; fourth, for them, ethics occupies a very important place in the return of a journalism that is more focused on research and less on commentary and, ultimately, they are aware of the social recognition of the profession despite the criticisms of recent years. In the light of growing convergence, cross-ownership of media and increased digitization, the number of journalists with multiple skills increases in the newsrooms (Aquino *et al.*, 2002), and media companies increasingly demand “convergent” journalists who can supervise others and consider all media types, a challenge for journalism education and training for most journalism schools in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands (Deuze, Neuberger & Paulussen, 2004). Despite the digitization process happening in most countries globally, Rodríguez Pallares, Rodríguez Barba and Pérez Serrano (2015), in a study on perceptions and motivations of journalism students of the Complutense University of Madrid, show that, nowadays, the traditional media are still the most desired and most valued field of work and only one in ten (8%) have among their professional preferences digital media.

In the case of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela, there are some points to address in relation to their political and media systems. Even though the three countries formed a left-wing block in Latin America in 2016, the media structure and legal communication framework differ. Firstly, Cuba, with its radical Communist regime of almost 60 years, has an absolute State-controlled media system where Western standards of freedom of speech do not often apply. In the case of Venezuela, with established Socialist pro-Cuban Governments, it still has a commercial media market, but strongly threatened and pressured by the Government, resulting in an increase of aligned public media and in commercial media shutdowns and a significant shortage of free press. Finally, Ecuador, with a left-wing pro-Venezuelan Government from 2007 to 2017, has also a mixed private/public media sector with recurrent confrontation of the Government by critical media, which also produced damage to the free press, but to a lesser extent compared to the Venezuelan or Cuban example. In this context, we consider:

RQ1. How do the future journalists in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela perceive media and the journalistic profession?

3. Ethics and permissiveness

Ethics orientate the principles and norms of behavior, maintaining professional standards for a good professional performance. In practice though, ethics surpass any scholarly definition and depend on specific contexts as well as on cultural, economic and political factors. The *degree of permissiveness* towards controversial journalistic practices is one of the indicators of the perception of ethics in journalists and journalism students. This section presents an overview of ethics and the factors that model the degree of permissiveness in journalism.

In faculties of Journalism around the world the teaching of journalistic ethics continues to maintain the importance it has always had (Adam, 2001). Hence, the debate around the norms and professional values of journalism maintains its validity in the digital era (Kreiss & Brennan, 2016). Moreover, it is part of the professionalization process of journalism that has been taking place at a global level, through which, according to Splichal and Sparks (1994), the shared universal ethical and occupational standards among journalism students as future journalists are being trained. Some results corroborated in later studies carried out among British and Spanish students (Sanders *et al.*, 2008) and Chinese and American students (Yang & Arant, 2014) give two significant examples in which the students reveal similar attitudes to the functions of journalism and the ethical standards to follow during professional practice, despite being educated in very different environments and political, economic, educational, social systems.

Although Pleasance (2007) and Alysen and Oakham (1996) found that journalistic values and ethical issues of Journalism students change over time years of study, and Sanders *et al.* (2008) and Alisen (1998) showed that students are more relaxed about them in the final years of university education. On the other hand, Hanusch (2013) emphasizes that, in terms of ethical dilemmas, the evidence of these differences during the formal training process is not so clear. Furthermore, Hanusch continues, it could be said that ethical viewpoints can be embedded much more in the newsroom than during their studies due to the specific work circumstances that are difficult to replicate at university. Although journalism education can improve the skills and techniques of students, it is the broader context of the political and social environments that determines what can be achieved in the media (Yang & Arant, 2014). An evident example is that, at present, the economic and financial urgencies of the media are causing the role of ethical and deontological norms to be increasingly precarious (Joseph, 2016).

One of the main difficulties when studying the perception of the professional ethics of Journalism students lies in the divergence of results found in the empirical studies conducted in different countries globally. On the one hand, Hovden *et al.* (2009), journalistic education reduces the level of idealism of students in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. On the other hand, Rodríguez Pallares *et al.* (2015) found that, among the students of Journalism of the Complutense University of Madrid, the most common reasons to start the career are relating to a professional vocation, the conception of the profession as an activity of social relevance and the romantic perspective of journalism.

According to Kumylganova (2017), in her study in Russia, this difference seems to be linked to the change in public awareness –both in Russia and abroad– in respect to “formal morality”, which is characterized by the abuse of ethical terminology in the modern social lexicon. So the protest against the lack of morality expressed in the media, often shows only incompetence and lack of understanding of real problems and, therefore, the provision of theoretical background to students during their training cannot be the only aim behind the inclusion of courses on professional ethics in university curricula. Based on this criticism, Kumylganova (2017) proposes other objectives such as: developing and improving critical thinking; identifying and analyzing contemporary ethical issues; developing a basic capacity to understand a variety of philosophical approaches in order to solve problems in media ethics and to apply basic ethical principles and standards to professional situations; developing an understanding of moral reasoning and skills to use in solving ethical dilemmas, not only individually, but in a team environment and to train students in career-related values.

Without wishing to conduct an exhaustive analysis and without denying what was said in the first paragraphs of this theoretical section about what ethics represents in journalism for students of Journalism, the reality is that the possibility of establishing some common and global ethical standards in everyday practice of journalists is still far away (Weaver, 1998; Waisbord, 2013), both for the Global North and for the South. Hence, the intent of the comparative study presented in this article is to show in a more precise and contextualized way the standpoints that students of Social Communication and Journalism have in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela. This proposal maintains the line of international comparative projects initiated in mid-2000s (Sanders *et al.*, 2008; Mellado *et al.*, 2013; Hanusch *et al.*, 2015; Carpenter, Hoag, Grant & Bowe, 2016; Arcila *et al.*, 2017, among others). This investigative attempt seems pertinent in Latin America because institutions such as LAJP and CELAP have been trying since the early nineties (1993) to produce the first regional code of ethics for Central America (Journalism Training and Institution Building in Central American Countries, 2003) with very limited success.

Further to Gutiérrez Atala *et al.* (2016) analysis of the university education of journalists in Chile, Ecuador and Mexico, it is especially important to provide journalists with relevant tools that enhance their ability to influence and give them a sufficient level of professional

autonomy which allows the required performance of their informative work. Thus, they can adequately address the social, cultural and professional changes generated by innovations and the permanent and continuous reinvention of journalism, with the incorporation of new rules and new values in the debate on the quality of the profession, a requirement that is directly related to values linked to professional ethics such as responsibility, credibility and independence.

Further to the previous discussion, we pose the next research questions:

RQ2. What is the degree of permissiveness of the future journalists?

RQ3. How much influence does the perception of media and journalistic practices (*Media performance, Risks for journalism of quality, Future of journalism, Confidence in mass media*) have over the degree of permissiveness?

RQ4. How much does the degree of permissiveness vary across the countries?

4. Method

4.1. Sample and procedure

We surveyed 1,273 students of journalism in Ecuador (n=500), Venezuela (n=390) and Cuba (n=383) enrolled across 21 different universities in the second semester of 2016¹. We estimated a minimum sample size (95% confidence level and 0.5 of sample error) and selected the most representative universities from each country. The students were randomly chosen from those enrolled in every university, with the correspondent stratification. Most of the students were women (64.3%) of 21 years of age on average (M=20.83, SD=2.16) with favorable socio-economic situations (M=3.08, SD=0.61) when compared with their environments.

4.2. Measures

Based on previous international projects *Worlds of journalism Study* (WJS)² and *Journalism Students Across the Globe*³, and their publications (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017; Hughes *et al.*, 2017; Josephi, 2017; Hanusch, 2013; Mellado & Scherman, 2015; Hanusch *et al.*, 2015; Mellado *et al.*, 2013) we established the next measures:

Controversial ethical practices:

- *Degree of permissiveness*. This variable is formed by 12 items ($\alpha=0.79$) that questioned the students as to their agreement or not with a set of controversial journalistic practices that involve some kinds of ethical conflicts (see table 2). 1-3 scales, being 1 permissive and 3 strict.

Perceptions about the media and the journalistic profession:

- *Media performance*: This variable is formed by 5 items ($\alpha=0.66$) and measures how the students perceive the work of media in their country. 1-5 scales, being 1 extremely poor and 5 extremely good.
- *Risks to journalism of quality*: This variable is formed by 15 items ($\alpha=0.89$) and measures how much internal and external factors threaten the journalism. 1-5 scales, 1 being no threat and 5 extreme threat.
- *Future of journalism*: This single-item variable measures how optimistic students are in relation to the future of their profession. 1-5 scales, 1 being very optimistic and 5 very pessimistic.
- *Confidence in mass media*: This single-item variable measures how much trust students have in media. 1-4 scales, 1 being very confident and 5 not confident.

¹ For more details of the sample see Oller *et al.* (2017).

² Retrieved from <http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/> [recovered 31.7.19].

³ Retrieved from <http://www.jstudentsproject.org/> [recovered 31.7.19].

All variables that included more than one item had acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach's Alphas over -or very near- 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951; Hayes, 2005), ensuring that we can consider our measures reliable. Scales (1-3, 1-4 and 1-5) are based on previous validated studies with comparative purposes.

4.3. Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS v.25. We ran exploratory and descriptive analysis as well as inferential tests. Multiple regression was based on Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) to confirm lineal relations (the absence of collinearity was checked with tolerance values over 0.2 and VIF under 5). We also ran ONEWAY ANOVA to check differences among countries. We established *a priori* error type I (α) in 0.05.

5. Findings

The future journalists of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela have similar perceptions of *media performance*, the *future of journalism* and *confidence in mass media* (RQ1). However, there are some differences in their considerations about the threats or *risks for journalism of quality* (RQ1). As we can see in table 1, in the case of *media performance* (1-5 scales), only the online media (M=3.35, SD=0.92) had a clear positive value; while radio news (M=3.03, SD=0.90), the press (M=2.94, SD=1.00) and the general news media (M=2.94, SD=0.89) had a neutral assessment. We also see that TV news had a more negative perception (M=2.79, SD=0.93). On average these indicators show a neutral view of media performance (M=3.01, SD=0.66). We noticed that regarding traditional media, the radio was the best-valued source, which can be explained given its wide penetration in those countries, its long communitarian tradition and its availability (24 hours, streaming and podcasts). The positive perception towards online media is in line with previous studies in Latin America that found online and social media are replacing traditional media as a source of public and political communication (Latinobarómetro, 2017; Oller *et al.*, 2017).

If we examine the variable *risks for journalism of quality* (1-5 scales), we find that the students perceive high risks or threats in general (M=3.36, SD=0.63), even though we found that this perception is lower in Cuba (M=3, SD=0.63). The future journalists believe that censorship is the biggest threat for their profession (M=4.13, SD=1.07), followed by pressure of Governments (M=3.98, SD=1.07) and self-censorship (M=3.91, SD=1.09). On the other side, foreign ownership of media (M=2.74, DE=1.28) and the growing dependency on freelance journalists (M=2.75, DE=1.15) are considered as small threats. We clearly see that perceived risks are related to the controls of the state, from which arises questions about the real democratic spirit of these left-wing Governments in the region. This is in fact a common and sometimes controversial concern among journalists and civil society (Oller & Chavero, 2016; Instituto Prensa and Sociedad, 2015; García Luis, 2013). Risks related to economic factors including the influence of advertisement (M=2.95; SD=1.18), the concentration of private capital (M=2.98; SD=1.26), the pressures of investors (M= 2.85; SD=1.17) or lobbies (M= 2.96; SD=1.18), are also considered of limited threat, especially in countries like Cuba where most of the media are public⁴. In fact, when compared to the other 2 countries, Cuban students had also less fear of the weakness of professional ethics (M=3.26, SD=1.31), the quality of journalism education (M=2.91, SD=1.35) and physical threats against journalists (M=2.00; SD=1.34). We also found that some threats were of greater importance for Venezuelan students, such as weakness of professional ethics (M=4.06, SD=1.03), the quality of journalism education (M=3.50, SD=1.19), unemployment (M=4.05, SD=0.92) and the practice of a profession by an unauthorized person (M=3.56; SD=1.11).

⁴ Over the last few years there have been some non-public media such as *OnCuba*, *El Toque*, *Periodismo de Barrio*, *El Estornudo* or *Vistar*.

Table 1: Perception of media and journalistic practices.

| | Cuba | | Ecuador | | Venezuela | | TOTAL | |
|---|-------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| <i>Media performance*</i> | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Performance of TV News | 2.64 | 0.88 | 3.05 | 0.87 | 2.61 | 0.99 | 2,79 | 0,93 |
| Performance of Radio News | 2.98 | 0.91 | 3.08 | 0.87 | 3.03 | 0.93 | 3,03 | 0,90 |
| Performance of News Websites | 3.34 | 0.92 | 3.25 | 0.91 | 3.48 | 0.92 | 3,35 | 0,92 |
| Performance of Press | 2.56 | 0.92 | 3.27 | 0.92 | 2.89 | 1.01 | 2,94 | 1,00 |
| Performance of General News Media | 2.68 | 0.82 | 3.16 | 0.88 | 2.92 | 0.91 | 2,94 | 0,89 |
| INDEX | 2.84 | 0.67 | 3.17 | 0.64 | 2.99 | 0.64 | 3,01 | 0,66 |
| <i>Risks for journalism of quality (Threats)**</i> | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Pressures of the Government | 3.73 | 1.07 | 3.91 | 1.08 | 4.31 | 0.99 | 3,98 | 1,07 |
| Concentration of private property | 2.23 | 1.22 | 3.51 | 1.01 | 3.03 | 1.23 | 2,98 | 1,26 |
| Regulations and legal frameworks | 3.23 | 1.11 | 3.36 | 0.97 | 3.62 | 1.08 | 3,40 | 1,06 |
| Growing dependency on freelancers | 2.22 | 1.09 | 2.96 | 1.07 | 3.01 | 1.15 | 2,75 | 1,15 |
| Claim on profits by investors | 2.14 | 1.20 | 3.27 | 0.95 | 3.01 | 1.10 | 2,85 | 1,17 |
| Access to information and sources | 3.43 | 1.28 | 3.17 | 1.17 | 3.45 | 1.20 | 3,33 | 1,22 |
| Rhythm and dynamics of the profession | 2.46 | 1.08 | 2.99 | 1.03 | 2.80 | 1.10 | 2,77 | 1,09 |
| Foreign ownership of media | 2.09 | 1.31 | 3.23 | 1.06 | 2.74 | 1.24 | 2,74 | 1,28 |
| Physical threats against journalists | 2.00 | 1.34 | 3.72 | 1.11 | 4.17 | 1.02 | 3,34 | 1,47 |
| Limited funding resources | 4.13 | 1.02 | 3.63 | 1.03 | 4.08 | 1.02 | 3,92 | 1,05 |
| Market-driven journalism | 2.17 | 1.23 | 3.48 | 1.05 | 3.38 | 1.16 | 3,06 | 1,28 |
| Censorship | 4.20 | 1.03 | 3.87 | 1.13 | 4.42 | 0.93 | 4,13 | 1,07 |
| Public relations and lobbies | 2.33 | 1.15 | 3.21 | 1.06 | 3.27 | 1.13 | 2,96 | 1,18 |
| Adequate professional education | 3.25 | 1.36 | 3.78 | 1.12 | 3.70 | 1.21 | 3,60 | 1,24 |
| New forms of journalism on the web such as citizen journalism | 2.50 | 1.16 | 3.14 | 1.13 | 3.13 | 1.22 | 2,94 | 1,20 |
| Influence of advertisement | 2.29 | 1.17 | 3.26 | 1.01 | 3.19 | 1.15 | 2,95 | 1,18 |
| Involvement of media and politicians | 3.42 | 1.36 | 3.74 | 1.08 | 4.14 | 0.97 | 3,77 | 1,18 |
| Self-censorship | 4.04 | 1.14 | 3.59 | 1.07 | 4.20 | 0.97 | 3,91 | 1,09 |
| Quality of the education in Journalism | 2.91 | 1.35 | 3.42 | 1.07 | 3.50 | 1.19 | 3,29 | 1,22 |
| Political-driven journalism | 3.35 | 1.40 | 3.60 | 1.06 | 3.98 | 1.09 | 3,64 | 1,20 |
| Weakness of professional ethics | 3.26 | 1.31 | 3.78 | 1.05 | 4.06 | 1.03 | 3,71 | 1,17 |
| Unemployment and salary conditions | 3.61 | 1.28 | 3.72 | 1.06 | 4.05 | 0.92 | 3,79 | 1,11 |
| Practice of a profession by an unauthorized person | 3.08 | 1.24 | 3.41 | 1.02 | 3.56 | 1.11 | 3,36 | 1,14 |
| Management of news media | 3.61 | 1.15 | 3.29 | 0.98 | 3.55 | 1.09 | 3,46 | 1,08 |
| Lack of preparation for ICT and networks | 3.30 | 1.27 | 3.33 | 1.10 | 3.46 | 1.18 | 3,36 | 1,18 |
| INDEX | 3.00 | 0.63 | 3.45 | 0.57 | 3.59 | 0.53 | 3,36 | 0,63 |
| <i>Future of journalism***</i> | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Optimistic or pessimistic about the future of journalism | 2.55 | 0.95 | 2.36 | 0.91 | 2.55 | 1.05 | 2,47 | 0,97 |
| <i>Confidence in mass media ****</i> | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Level of trust in mass media | 2.40 | 0.70 | 2.62 | 0.65 | 2.67 | 0.73 | 2,57 | 0,70 |

* 1= Extremely poor; 5= Extremely good. ** 1= No threat; 5= Extreme threat. *** 1= Very optimistic; 5= Very pessimistic. **** 1= High confidence 4= No confidence.

Source: Own elaboration.

Furthermore, we found that the *confidence* of the future journalists *in the mass media* (1-4 scales) is a medium level (M=2.57, SD=0.70), but they are more optimistic (M=2.47, SD=0.97) about the *future of their profession* (1-5 scales). These results indicate a weak perception of the outlets in which they will work but also their hope that the situation will get better in the forthcoming years.

Regarding RQ2, the *degree of permissiveness* (1-3 scales) towards controversial journalistic practices held by the students of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela is low (M=2.41, SD=0.37), meaning that they are less likely to justify unethical behaviors (Table 2). The most rejected practice is that of publishing unverified content (M=2.72, SD=0.58), and, on the contrary, they are more flexible with practices such as applying pressure on sources to get information (M=2.17, SD=0.69) and working in a company or institution to obtain first-hand information (M=2.17, SD=0.66). However, all average indicators are greater than 2, which means that there was not any controversial accepted practice from the list, including: payment to sources for confidential information (M=2.35, SD=0.65), use of confidential information without authorization (M=2.38, SD=0.63), impersonation of someone else (M=2.44, SD=0.64), unveiling confidentiality of sources (M=2.61, SD=0.67), not mentioning the source of relevant information (M=2.29, SD=0.68), use of personal documents (e.g. Letters) without authorization (M=2.54, SD=0.64), use of hidden microphone or camera (M=2.29, SD=0.61), or dramatization of news with actors (M=2.34, SD=0.68).

Table 2: Indicators of the level of permissiveness.

| Degree of permissiveness* | Cuba | | Ecuador | | Venezuela | | TOTAL | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Payment to sources for confidential information | 2.42 | 0.64 | 2.29 | 0.65 | 2.34 | 0.66 | 2,35 | 0,65 |
| Use of Government confidential information without authorization | 2.35 | 0.60 | 2.39 | 0.68 | 2.38 | 0.60 | 2,38 | 0,63 |
| Impersonation of someone else | 2.28 | 0.58 | 2.47 | 0.70 | 2.56 | 0.58 | 2,44 | 0,64 |
| Unveiling of confidentiality of sources | 2.75 | 0.58 | 2.51 | 0.70 | 2.60 | 0.68 | 2,61 | 0,67 |
| Not mentioning the source of relevant information | 2.30 | 0.59 | 2.27 | 0.72 | 2.31 | 0.72 | 2,29 | 0,68 |
| Putting pressure on sources | 1.93 | 0.66 | 2.31 | 0.66 | 2.24 | 0.69 | 2,17 | 0,69 |
| Use of personal documents (e.g. Letters) without authorization | 2.60 | 0.59 | 2.49 | 0.70 | 2.54 | 0.60 | 2,54 | 0,64 |
| Use of hidden mic or camera | 2.29 | 0.56 | 2.27 | 0.64 | 2.32 | 0.62 | 2,29 | 0,61 |
| Working in a company or institution to obtain first-hand information | 2.07 | 0.63 | 2.18 | 0.67 | 2.27 | 0.67 | 2,17 | 0,66 |
| Dramatization of news with actors | 2.43 | 0.64 | 2.21 | 0.67 | 2.44 | 0.69 | 2,34 | 0,68 |
| Publishing of unverified contents | 2.81 | 0.52 | 2.61 | 0.64 | 2.77 | 0.54 | 2,72 | 0,58 |
| Accepting money, gifts or favors from sources | 2.74 | 0.57 | 2.56 | 0.68 | 2.67 | 0.59 | 2,65 | 0,63 |
| INDEX | 2,41 | 0,32 | 2,38 | 0,42 | 2,46 | 0,33 | 2,41 | 0,37 |

*1=It is justified always; 2= It is justified sometimes; 3= It is never justified.

Source: Own elaboration.

In order to determine how much influence, the perception of media and journalistic practices (*Media performance, Risks for journalism of quality, Future of journalism, Confidence in mass media*) has over the degree of permissiveness (RQ3), we ran a multiple linear regression analysis (table 3). The general model suggested that some of the independent factors might affect the degree of permissiveness [F(1208)=2.56, p<0.05], but only explaining 1% of its variance which is clearly insignificant for the model. In fact, we found that only the variable *media performance* had a significant but small weight (B=0.04, p<0.05) in that the better the perception of the media performance, the more strict are their ethical considerations (less permissive). When we analyze the models by country, we notice that the significant factors differ from the general one, with media performance being eliminated as a significant variable. In the case of Venezuela no variable affects the degree of permissiveness [F(364)=1.643, p>0.05]. The models in Ecuador [F(480)=4.84, p<0.01] and Cuba [F(362)=9.28, p<0.000] are significant, explaining 3% and 8% of the variance respectively. In both cases, the significant predictor is now the risks for journalism of quality (perception of threats). The weight is greater in Cuba (B=0.14, p<0.000) than in Ecuador (B=-0.11, p<0.000), but the direction of the coefficients is the opposite. In Cuba, the less the perceived threats, the less the degree of permissiveness; while in Ecuador it is just the contrary. The inconsistency of data leaves RQ3 with only a partial answer, since we cannot identify clear factors that model the degree of permissiveness.

Table 3: Regression models for the variable degree of permissiveness, by country.

| | Ecuador B(ET) Sig. | Venezuela B(ET) Sig. | Cuba B(ET) Sig. | Total B(ET) Sig. |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (Const.) | 1.75(0.19) | 2.05(0.18) | 2.72(0.15) | 2.24(0.09) |
| <i>Media performance</i> [INDEX] | 0.02(0.03) | 0.05(0.03) | 0.05(0.03) | 0.04(0.02)* |
| <i>Risks for journalism of quality</i> [INDEX] | 0.14(0.03)*** | 0.06(0.03) | 0.11(0.03)*** | 0.02(0.02) |
| <i>Future of journalism</i> | 0.02(0.02) | 0.01(0.02) | 0.00(0.02) | 0.02(0.01) |
| <i>Confidence in mass media</i> | 0.02(0.03) | 0.01(0.03) | -0.05(0.03) | -0.03(0.02) |
| Cases | 481.00 | 365.00 | 363.00 | 1209.00 |
| R2 | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.01 |
| ANOVA | F(480)=4.84. p<0.01) | F(364)=1.643. p>0.05) | F(362)=9.28. p<0.000) | F(1208)=2.56. p<0.05) |

*p<0.05. ***p<0.001. Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, we explored how much the degree of permissiveness varies across the countries (RQ4) and ONEWAY ANOVA test found that the differences were statistically significant (F_{welch}(2, 832.33)=5.09, p<0.01). According to the post hoc Dunnett t3 test, the differences arise between Venezuela and Ecuador (p<0.01). This result is consistent with the regression model, where - compared to Venezuela - we observe that Cuba and Ecuador had similar behaviors. This would indicate that in terms of perception of ethics there is not a united group of countries, even when there are political similarities (left-wing governments) and a high regulation of media across all of them. In addition to political factors, there might be other variables (journalistic tradition, education, etc.) to include in order to understand the level of permissiveness and ethics.

6. Conclusions

Students of Journalism degrees in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela show little permissiveness with ethically questionable journalistic practices when covering a story. They would be willing to approve or justify them only on a few occasions and in certain cases. The least permitted professional practice is the publishing of news with unverified content, which is directly connected to the working methods associated to objectivity (Thuchman, 1978; Oller & Meier, 2012). Although pressuring a source reluctant to reveal something and working in an organization or company in order to gain information are journalistic practices that can be accepted in some situations, the truth is that students in these countries show little approval for ethically dubious behaviors. This low tolerance could be also connected to other aspects such as the existing legal frameworks in the cases of Ecuador and Venezuela or the awareness of the need for a new legal framework, as has happened in Cuba over the last five years⁵; it could also relate to the primarily theoretical nature of the third level education, focused on showing theoretical principles rather than the practice in the daily work of the journalist in the newsrooms of media⁶.

Furthermore, it was proved that there is no clear relationship between how perceptions about the performance and trust in media, the future of the profession and the risks that quality journalism faces influence the degree of tolerance shown by journalism students in these three Latin countries. However, this model is significant for Cuba and Ecuador (explaining very little variance), where the variable *risks for the quality journalism* has a significant weight, with a negative regression coefficient in the Cuban case, and positive one in the Ecuadorian.

The main risks to the quality of the profession perceived by the future journalists are related, firstly, to the parallelism between State/politicians and the media/journalists, self-censorship, State interference, complicity between media and politicians, partisan journalism; in second place, to economic and financial precariousness and scarceness –lack of financial resources, unemployment and economic conditions; thirdly, to the lack of codes of ethics and ethical laxity –weakness of professional ethics; and finally, in fourth place, to the educational deficiencies of journalists –inadequate professional preparation. Nevertheless, the difference in the model's behavior for Cuba and Ecuador is expected to be related to how Cuban students do not consider the economic and physical threats against journalists to be important.

The results indicate that in the studied countries other groups of factors –such as cultural, historical, social, educational and those related to economic and political organization– must be considered among the “critical influences” or “dominant” over “the way in which journalists [...] face ethical dilemmas” (Pleasant, Skewes & Hanitzsch, 2012, p. 644). Both the politically left positioned governments and State intervention in the media represent processes in which multiples filters of different nature take place.

The students' perception regarding journalistic ethics is constrained by regulations and local and global change processes. Among them: the propaganda nature of public-funded media, that tend to work as speakers of the respective government; the breaking/continuing momentum of these kinds of journalism due to the economic, political, social, technological and media reforms; the appearance of digital models, media, tools and processes that are changing the nature of the profession; the hesitations and indecisions in the creation, extension and/or derogation of bodies and rules to be applied to the communication field; the

⁵ A strong debate exists around the need for implementing new regulations that govern journalistic activities in this country.

⁶ In the analysis of Cuban data in this project, carried out in the Master Thesis of Odett Domínguez, it was observed that, as the academic years pass –what demands the fulfilling of internships in media and, therefore, a closer look at the daily journalistic work in the newsroom–, students increase their levels of permissiveness regarding these contested journalistic customs.

appearance of new players in the media scenario, including citizens; the strong polarizations, politically influenced positions and attempts to convert media and journalists into tools; and/or the new journalistic practices, inclined to technification, digitalization and diversification of activities carried out in newsrooms.

Nonetheless, independently from valuations in the normative, universalist or localist level of journalistic ethics, it was corroborated at an empirical level how future journalists' perception in the three countries shares similarities and, in at least two of them, this perception is somewhat explained by the perception that they share regarding the threats to the development of quality journalism.

In any case, the interpretation of these findings must highlight the exploratory and primordial condition of the study. It would be required to complement these data with longitudinal analysis, as well as to incorporate new contextual (cultural and institutional) dimensions, among them, the hegemony of the liberal journalistic model as a normative reference in Latin America, the institutional practices of the media related to the way politics is carried out, the socio-cognitive impromptu of the transformations that the progressive political changing processes bring with them and the characteristics of the educational systems, so it would be possible to establish complex explanatory relationships about the constitution of the pre-professional cultures of journalism studies.

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