The performance of professional roles in sports journalism. Analysis of news content in four media platform in Spain

La performance de los roles profesionales en el periodismo deportivo. Análisis de noticias en cuatro plataformas mediáticas en España

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Abstract

Based on the conceptualization of Mellado (2015, 2021) on the performance of professional roles, manifested in six different dimensions: the interventionist, vigilant, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment and civic roles, a content analysis has been carried out in a sample of 554 sports news published in the year 2020 in twelve Spanish media from four platforms (print press, radio, television and digital native newspapers). The following objectives are addressed: to know which journalistic roles materialize to a greater extent in the coverage of sporting events, to analyze if there are differences in the presence of these roles considering the media platform (press, radio, television and digital native media), as well as to know which intermediate roles are generated by the co-occurrence of pure roles. The results show that the most present roles are the interventionist (M= .26; SD= .20) and the infotainment role (M= .16; SD= .20), especially in digital native media ($M_{interventionist}$= .31; SD= .20; M_{info}-entertainment= .18; SD= .21). In addition, the generation of two intermediate roles has been revealed from the combination of the interventionist and infotainment roles (r=,266) and the loyal-facilitator and infotainment roles (r=,179). It is concluded that the sports journalism model bases on two fundamental functions, that of creating opinion and that of entertaining, while only digital native newspapers move away slightly by being more critical.

Keywords
Professional roles, sport journalism, content analysis, radio, print media, television, digital native newspapers, Spain.

Resumen

A partir de la conceptualización de Mellado (2015, 2021) sobre la *performance* de los roles profesionales, manifestados en seis diferentes dimensiones: los roles intervencionista, vigilante, leal-facilitador, servicio, info-entretenimiento y cívico, se ha realizado un análisis de contenido de una muestra de 554 noticias sobre deportes publicadas en doce medios españoles de prensa, radio, televisión y diarios nativos digitales en 2020. Se abordan los siguientes objetivos: conocer qué roles periodísticos se materializan en mayor medida en la cobertura de acontecimientos deportivos, analizar si existen diferencias en la presencia de estos roles considerando la plataforma mediática (prensa, radio, televisión y medios nativos digitales), así como conocer qué roles intermedios se generan por la co-ocurrencia de los roles puros. Los resultados muestran que los roles más presentes son el intervencionista (M= ,26; DT= ,20) y el rol de info-entretenimiento (M= ,16; DT= ,20), especialmente en los medios nativos digitales ($M_{intervencionista}$= ,31; DT= ,20; $M_{info-entretenimiento}$= ,18; DT= ,21). Además, se ha revelado la generación de dos roles intermedios de la combinación de los roles intervencionista e info-entretenimiento (r=,266) y de los roles leal-facilitador e info-entretenimiento (r=,179). Se concluye que el modelo de periodismo deportivo descansa sobre dos funciones fundamentales, la de crear opinión y la de entretener, mientras que solo los diarios nativos digitales se alejan ligeramente al mostrarse más críticos.

Palabras clave

Roles profesionales, periodismo deportivo, análisis de contenido, radio, prensa, televisión, diarios nativos digitales, España.

Introduction

As pointed out by Rojas Torrijos (2015), sports information in Spain, whether conveyed through specialized publications or in the general media, has growth in recent decades, becoming one of the main elements in the business model of most media. As the General Media Study (2022) points out, among the ten newspapers with the highest influenced, three are sports newspapers (Marca, As and Mundo Deportivo).

This importance as an element of audience acquisition and loyalty has not been related by a positive idea of the professional practice of sports journalism. Since the very creation of the modern press in the 19th century, sports information has been framed in a negative way in relation to other more serious contents or with more public interest, such as politics or economics.

Thus, sports content has been called "toy department" or "conceived out of journalistic wedlock" (Garrison and Salwen, 1989) to indicate its low quality. Thus, sports journalism was seen as a resource to capture audiences (Lowes, 1999) and increase newspaper profits through sensationalism, trivialization and the construction of heroes (Reed, 2018). Functions or roles such as propagandist -also called cheerleaders- belong to this practice of sports journalism far from objective journalism (English, 2017). However, in recent decades, and due to different doping scandals (Armstrong case), corruption (FIFAgate) or recently the celebration of the World Cup in Qatar, sports journalism professionals have had the opportunity to assume new functions closer to the surveillance of power or civic journalism (Cassidy, 2017).

On the other hand, the literature on journalistic sections (Reich, 2012) has pointed out that they embody "microcultures" (Ericson *et al*., 1989), which could lead to differentiated journalistic practices. Thus, Becker and Vlad (2009) state that thematic sections structure news gathering, and authors such as Doyle (2006) associate some thematic sections with the performance of an adversarial role. Also, the literature on professional role performance has shown the important relationship between news topics and the performance of these roles (Tandoc *et al*., 2020; Márquez-Ramírez *et al*., 2020; Humanes and Roses, 2018; Mellado *et al*., 2017; Hellmüller *et al*., 2016; Wang *et al*., 2018). Mellado *et al*. (2021) concluded in their study on press in 18 countries that news topics affect the performance of service, civic and infotainment roles, even with differences according to media and countries.

However, the study of the implementation of professional roles when covering sporting events is a little explored topic, and this is the first study in the Spanish context that based on a content analysis of sports news (N= 554) addresses three objectives: to know which journalistic roles are more materialized when covering sport events, to analyze whether there are differences in the presence of these roles considering the media platform (press, radio, television and digital native media), as well as to know which intermediate roles occur by the co-occurrence of pure roles. This work is part of the research project Models of journalism in the multiplatform context (CSO2017-82816-P), which is included in the international project Journalistic Role Performance (www.journalisticperformance.org).

The performance of professional roles and sports journalism

This paper starts from Mellado's (2015, 2021) conceptualization of the performance of professional roles manifested in six different dimensions that are generated from three axes: the presence of the journalist's voice in the news, the relationship of journalism with power and the way in which the audience is approached (Donsbach, 2012; Hanitzsch, 2007).

The first axis analyzes the more active (interventionist role) or passive (disseminator role) stance of journalists as actors in the news. A passive attitude is based on neutrality and distance between the journalist and the facts, while in the interventionist role professionals express their own opinion in the news, even supporting certain ideologies and/or certain social groups. This dimension has a different nature from the other roles, since it refers to the narrative of the news and therefore is usually more present, in addition to performing the function of meta-role, which we will discuss later (Mellado, 2021).

The literature on sports journalism has pointed out that one of the main characteristics is the move away from objectivity and neutrality (English, 2017; Márquez-Ramírez and Rojas, 2017; Salwen and Garrison, 1987). Scherman and Mellado (2019) in their study on Chilean sports coverage found that the interventionist role dominated such coverage. Based on this evidence, the first research hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Sports coverage in the Spanish media will be characterized by a high presence of the interventionist role.

The second domain of journalistic performance refers to two professional roles through which journalists and the media establish their relationship with the elites of a society. The vigilant role seeks to monitor those in power, calling attention to possible abuses and irregularities. This journalistic dimension is evident when the news includes questioning, criticism or accusations against those in power, including investigative reporting or extensive coverage of external investigations, or also showing the conflict between the media and power. On the other hand, the loyal-facilitator role is materialized in two aspects, either by cooperating with those in power to protect the *status quo*, or by fostering a sense of belonging to one's own country and strengthening national prestige and patriotism.

Traditionally, the scarce presence of criticism in sports coverage has been pointed out (Rowe, 2007; Walsh, 2013), even when addressing issues related to corruption or scandals (Márquez-Ramírez and Rojas, 2017), although other authors also affirm a shift towards a coverage more related to vigilant journalism (Cassidy, 2017; English, 2017; Garrison and Salwen, 1989). There is more unanimity in considering the propagandist, even fan, orientation of sports journalists versus sports actors (Boyle, 2017; English, 2017; Hardin, 2005; Márquez-Ramírez and Rojas, 2017; Rowe, 2007). Boyle *et al*. (2012) questioned whether sports journalists have confused the roles of reporter and fan. Scherman and Mellado (2019) found an important presence of the loyalist role in Chilean sports news. Based on this evidence, the second research hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The vigilant role will have a scarce presence in sports news, while the loyal-facilitator role will guide sports coverage to a greater extent in the media in Spain.

Finally, three roles are differentiated based on different conceptualizations of the audience as citizens, viewers or customers. Service journalism addresses the audience as a customer, providing information, knowledge and advice on goods and services that the audience can apply in their daily lives. Infotainment journalism addresses the public as a viewer, who is primarily looking for relaxation and entertainment. Finally, the civic role is based on offering the audience information and training on demands, rights and duties and other issues related to the exercise of citizenship and their participation in social, political and cultural life (Mellado and van Dalen, 2017).

The main function of sports journalism since its origin was to entertain audiences with the objective of guaranteeing income to the media (Reed, 2018; Lowes, 1999). In this sense, Scherman and Mellado (2019) also confirmed that the infotainment role far exceeds the other two roles in this domain of approaching audiences (service and civic). A third hypothesis arises from these arguments:

H3: The infotainment role will dominate sports information in the Spanish media versus the service and civic roles.

Journalistic practice has been transformed to adjust to the logics introduced by the different types of media. Thus, the influence of media platforms is

undoubtedly also in the materialization of professional roles in the news (Mellado and Vos, 2017). Hallin and Mellado (2018) found that television newscasts not only implemented infotainment role to a greater extent, which was expected, but also showed a greater presence of surveillance and civic roles. A change in the roles perceived by journalists is also observed as digital media have consolidated and developed new work routines, especially in relation to a closer approach to audiences. Mellado *et al*. (2021) found in their analysis of Chilean media differences in the manifestation of roles between print and digital newspapers. In the field of sports journalism, some studies show that journalists have continuously adapted to digitization (Daum and Scherer, 2018; Perreault and Bell, 2020). However, Scherman and Mellado (2019) found no relevant differences when comparing the presence of roles on four platforms.

In this paper, a formal research question is formulated to address possible differences in role embodiment according to media platform:

RQ1: Are there significant differences in the presence of interventionist, vigilant, loyal-facilitator, civic, service, and infotainment journalistic roles between digital native media and other platforms (print, radio, and television)?

Finally, journalistic roles are not mutually exclusive and can be combined generating intermediate roles (Mellado, 2021). For example, given the transversal character of the interventionist role in journalistic practice, one could expect its correlation with the other journalistic roles, generating changes in the other roles, generating a vigilant role more adversarial to the powerful, or turning the loyal role into a propagandist one, giving the civic role the character of a defender of citizenship or more expressive nuances to the infotainment role (Mellado, 2021, pp. 38-39). Humanes *et al*. (2021a) found in their comparative study of six countries two combinations of the interventionist role with the vigilant role and the infotainment role. And in the Spanish context, Humanes *et al*. (2021b) found in their study of the television networks La sexta and Antena 3 the combination of the interventionist role with the vigilant, civic and infotainment roles.

Role co-occurrence can also exist between professional roles from different domains (Mellado, 2021). Regarding the domain of power relations, the roles of vigilant and loyal-facilitator can co-occur. For example, in media systems characterized by political parallelism, the vigilant role could be positively correlated with the support orientation of elites if a news item cri-

ticizes or denounces the wrongdoings of some actors while supporting other political elites.

Different role co-occurrences may also emerge within the audience relationship domain. The first is the co-occurrence of civic and infotainment roles, mixing elements of public life and features of citizenship and entertainment. The second involves civic and service roles. A third overlap between service and infotainment roles can occur.

Finally, it is also possible to address specific combinations of roles between the domains of power relations and audience focus. The former involves civic and vigilant roles, producing a journalistic practice that evokes an audience that criticizes those in power. This combination of roles was shown to be especially strong in American and Greek media in the cited study by Humanes *et al*. (2021a). A second combination could occur between the infotainment and vigilant roles, with news that includes the presence of surveillance and scandal, emotionalization or private life of those in power. In the study on television news in Spain, these combinations were found in the news programs of La sexta (Humanes *et al.,* 2021).

Based on this empirical evidence on the presence of intermediate roles in different journalistic contexts and media platforms, the second formal research question:

PI2: What intermediate roles are activated in sports news?

Methodology

A quantitative content analysis of news stories (n= 554), published in twelve media during 2020, including four media platforms (press, radio, television and digital natives), which were selected both because of their audience influence and because they represent different editorial lines, was conducted. When the sample was designed in 2019, the selected media occupied the top positions according to their platform. In the case of Television, the three networks occupied the top three positions in consumption of minutes per viewer according to the General Media Study (EGM) (2019, third wave), in addition, different types of public-private ownership were combined. In the case of radio, the two stations are among the three with more listeners also according to the EGM, and also represent two different ideological lines (more progressive Ser and more conservative Ondacero). The selected generalist newspapers are

the most read according to the EGM and also represent different editorial lines (El Mundo, right; La Vanguardia, center and El País, center-left). Finally, digital native media were included in the sample because of their influence according to the Digital News Report Spain 2020 (Negredo-Bruna *et al*., 2020) and because of their different editorial lines (El confidencial, center-right; Okdiario, right; eldiario.es, left and Huffpost Spain, center-left).

To compare news on other topics, a sample of 5535 news items on different topics was used, which were analyzed following the same protocol and methodology as the one used to analyze the news on sports. The global sample corresponds to the JRP Spain section carried out within the JRP global project, in which journalistic performance was analyzed.

Table 1

Characteristics of the analyzed media

Media	Year of creation	Ownership	Type of media
El confidencial	2001	Titania Compañía Editorial, S.L.	Digital
Okdiario	2015	Dos mil palabras, S.L.	Digital
eldiario.es	2012	Diario de Prensa Digital S.L.	Digital
Huffpost Spain	2012	PRISA Noticias	Digital
El País	1976	Grupo PRISA	Press
El Mundo	1989	Unidad Editorial	Press
La Vanguardia	1881	Grupo Godo	Press
Ser	1924	Grupo PRISA	Radio
Ondacero	1990	Atresmedia	Radio
Antena 3	1990	Atresmedia	Television
La 1	1956	Estatal	Television
La Sexta	2005	Atresmedia	Television

Sample

To avoid biases derived from daily and monthly variations, the sample was selected by dividing the year into two six-month periods: January-Ju-

ne and July-December. For each period, a constructed week was created by randomly selecting starting dates on a Monday in January and a Monday in July. Using intervals of three to four weeks, each of the following six days were extracted: a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday, a Friday, a Saturday and a Sunday. This procedure made it possible to include seven days in each semester for a total sample of 14 days during the year. This ensured that each of the seven days of the week were analyzed for each semester, and that each month of the year was represented by at least one day, avoiding overrepresentation of any period.

Each national team determined the specific sampling unit to be considered for each selected media according to the following criteria: the sampling unit was the most watched newscast within each selected television channel, the most listened news program within each selected radio channel, the complete number of selected newspapers for print media, and the complete home page of the selected news websites (including the respective links) for online news media.

While our selected newspapers, radio and television news programs are "static" in the sense that they are unique and appear at fixed times, the website news is dynamic and constantly changing. In a second step, the home pages of the websites were "captured" at two fixed points during the sampled days: one at 11:00 a.m. and one at 11:00 p.m., so that the greatest amount of content variability was collected. The home pages and their respective links were opened in real time and recorded.

Finally, the unit of analysis was each news item, defined as the set of verbal elements and, where appropriate, sound and/or visual elements referring to the same fact/subject/person. News items were selected on the following topics: government, politics and electoral campaigns, economy and business, police and crime, courts, defense/national security, education, health, environment, energy, transportation, housing, accidents and natural disasters, religion and churches, labor and employment, demonstrations and protests, social problems, media, sports, science and technology, lifestyle, culture and entertainment, and celebrities. Editorials and opinion pieces, as well as weather news, horoscope, supplements, sponsored content, billboard and hobbies were not included in the content analysis.

Measurements and coding

To carry out the coding, we followed the operationalization proposed by Mellado (2015) to measure the presence of professional roles in the news, which has been validated in previous studies (Mellado *et al.,* 2017; Mellado *et al.,* 2021; Humanes and Roses, 2018, Humanes *et al.*, 2021b).

The coding manual included the operational definitions of interventionist, vigilant, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic role performance. Five indicators were used to measure the presence of the interventionist role, nine indicators measured the vigilant role, eight indicators measured the loyal-facilitator role, five indicators measured the service role, five indicators measured the infotainment role, and nine indicators measured the civic role (see Table 2). Each indicator was measured on the basis of presence (1) or absence (0). For some indicators, we also coded the actor or action toward which the journalist's or source's comment was directed. We transformed these indicators into dichotomous variables to calculate the main roles and place all our measures in the same scale. Additionally, and based on the theoretical foundation of the role performance literature (Mellado *et al.*, 2017), we assumed that journalistic roles could coexist. Therefore, the measures were treated as not mutually exclusive.

Coding was performed by four coders who were previously trained. Pre-test reliability analyses were performed and the coding process was monitored to improve inter-coder agreement. Finally, a post-test was performed to determine the reliability of the coders in the actual coding process. Using Krippendorff's alpha (Ka), the final overall inter-coder reliability was 0.80 (Table 2 includes the Ka value for each role).

Table 2

Indicators for each role and level of inter-coder reliability

Professional roles	Indicator
Interventionist role (Ka=.78)	Journalist's point of view/opinion
	Interpretation
	Call to action
	Use of qualifying adjectives
	Use of the first person

Vigilant (Ka=.79)	Information on lawsuits or administrative proceedings
	Questioning by the journalist
	Questioning by third parties
	Criticism by the journalist
	Criticism by third parties
	Discovery by the journalist
	Third-party discovery
	Reporting based on external research
	Investigative reporting
Loyal-facilitator role (Ka=.87)	Advocacy/support of activities
	Policy advocacy/support
	Positive image of elites
	National progress/successes
	Comparison with other countries
	National triumphs
	Promotion of the country
	Patriotism
Service role (Ka=.85)	Impact on daily life
	Suggestions and advice (complaints)
	Suggestions and advice (individual risks)
	Information for consumers
	Tips for consumers
Infotainment role (Ka=.78)	Personalization
	Private life
	Sensationalism
	Emotions
	Morbid
Civic role (Ka=.75)	Citizens' reactions
	Citizens' demands
	Citizens' credibility
	Education on rights and obligations
	Local impact
	Impact on social communities
	Citizens' issues
	Information on citizens' activities
	Support to social movements

After performing CFA analysis, the individual indicators comprising each dimension were combined to generate a final role score. For descriptive purposes, raw scores (total points divided by total items for each role) were calculated. The individual indicators comprising each role were thus combined on a continuous scale from 0 to 1. A higher score expresses more presence of each journalistic role in the news, and vice versa. Factor scores were used to test differences in the performance of the analyzed roles.
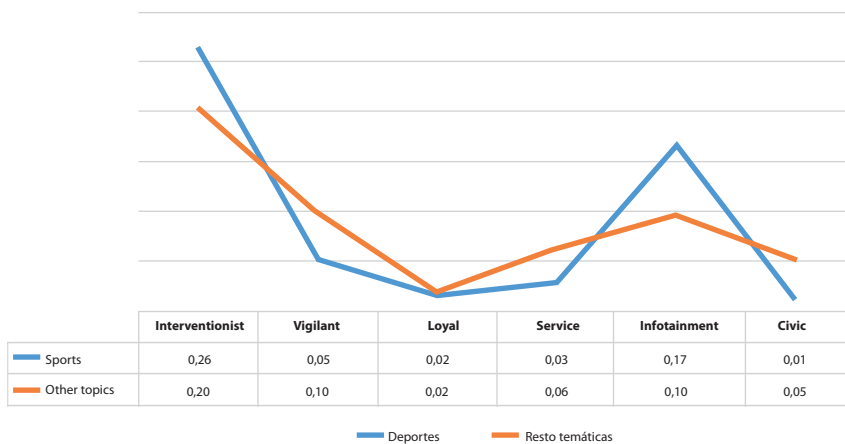
Results

The presence of professional roles in sports information

The two professional roles most present in sports information are the interventionist (Mean=,27; Standard deviation= ,21) and the infotainment role (Mean = ,17; Standard deviation = ,21), followed by the vigilant role (Mean = ,05; Standard deviation = ,11) and the service role (Mean = ,03; SD= ,10), with the loyal (Mean = ,02; Standard deviation = ,07) and civic (Mean = ,01; Standard deviation = ,05) roles being almost non-existent. When comparing the mean presence of the roles in the sports news with their presence in the news on the rest of the topics, statistically significant differences were observed in all the roles $t_{interventionist}$= 6.504, p= ,000; $t_{vigilant}$ = -6.956, p= ,000; $t_{service}$= -5.489, p= ,000; $t_{infotainment}$= 8.654, p= ,000; t_{civic}= -8.277, p= ,000) except in loyalist (t= 1.029, p= ,303). Sports information is more interventionist and includes more infotainment, while it is less vigilant and less citizen-oriented than the rest of the topics (see Figure 1).

The multidimensional scaling analyses for each of the three domains in which the professional roles analyzed are grouped allow to visualize the proximity of sports content to the rest of the topics in a disaggregated way. Thus, in the interventionist-disseminator dimension (see Figure 2), sports information presents interventionism levels close to news about culture, housing or entertainment.
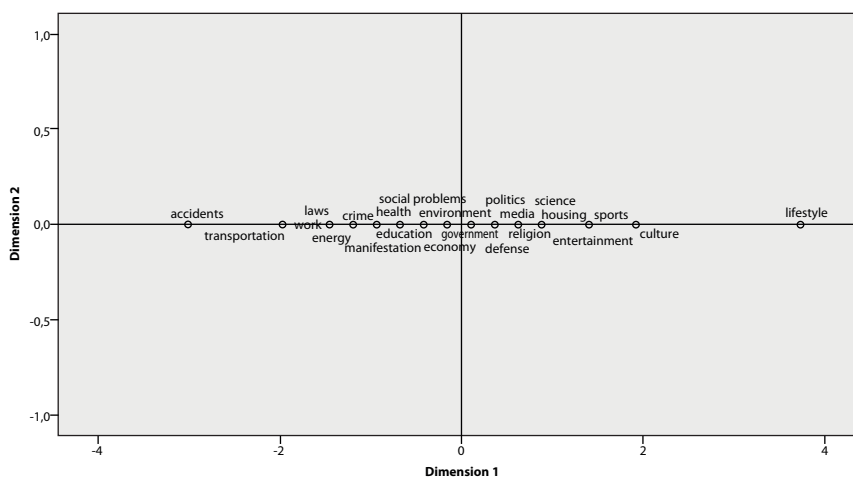
Figure 1

*Comparative presence of professional roles in sports news and in the rest of the topics (means)*

	Interventionist	Vigilant	Loyal	Service	Infotainment	Civic
Sports	0,26	0,05	0,02	0,03	0,17	0,01
Other topics	0,20	0,10	0,02	0,06	0,10	0,05

Deportes   Resto temáticas

Figure 2

Position of the topics with respect to the interventionist-disseminator dimension

Stress = ,00000 RSQ = 1,00000

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In the power relations domain (see Figure 3, where dimension 1 represents the vigilant role and dimension 2 the loyal-facilitator role) sports content is located in the upper left quadrant characterized by low levels in both the vigilant and loyal-facilitator roles, along with entertainment, science, lifestyle or health news.

Figure 3

Position of the thematic areas with respect to the power relations dimension
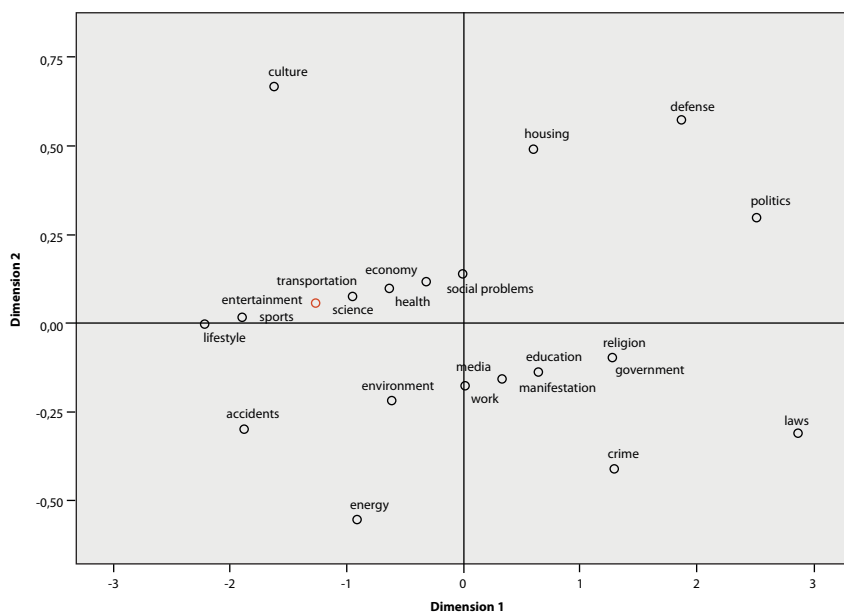
Stress = ,00000 RSQ = 1,00000

Finally, in the audience approach domain (see Figure 4, where the upper left quadrant represents greater presence of the service role, the upper right quadrant represents greater presence of the infotainment role and the lower right quadrant represents greater presence of the civic role), sports contents are close to the culture, religion, crime or courts themes, located in the upper right quadrant, characterized by high levels of the infotainment role, low levels of the civic role and the service role.

Figure 4

Position of the thematic areas with respect to the dimension of audience approach
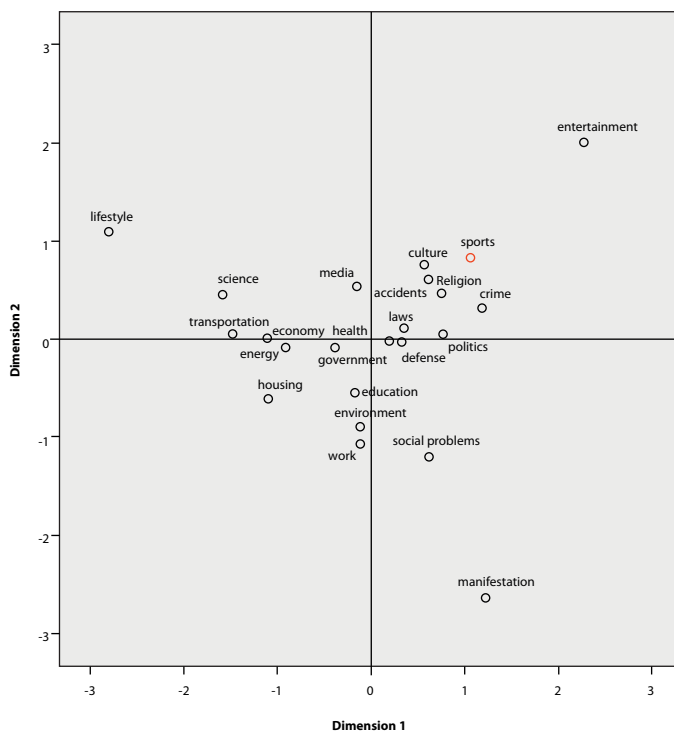
Stress = ,07450 RSQ = ,97961

As indicated, each role is characterized by the presence of individual indicators. We will focus on the two roles with more presence in sports news, and which distinguish it from other news content. The interventionist role is mainly observed in the use of qualifying adjectives, the journalist's interpretation and opinion, following the same trend as in the rest of the news content (Figure 2), although statistically significant differences were found in the presence of opinion ($X2= 36.956$; $p= ,000$) and in the use of qualifying adjectives ($X2= 65.782$; $p= ,000$), which are always higher in the case of sports news.

Figure 5

Indicators for interventionist and infotainment roles (%)
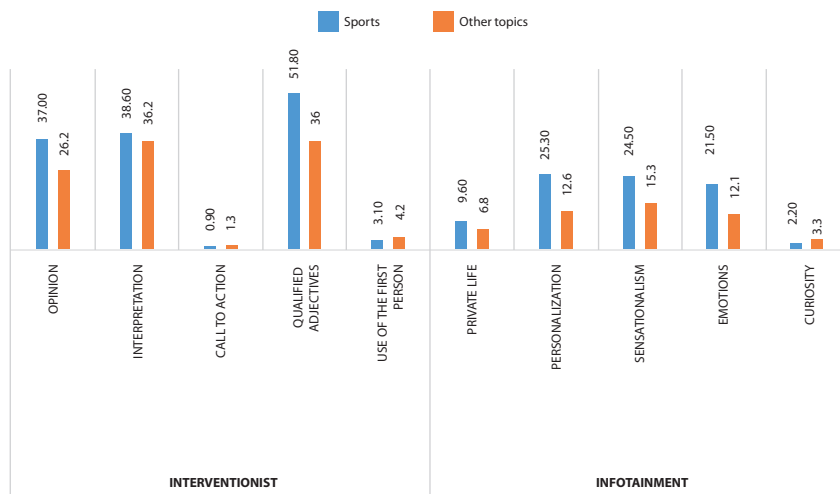
In the case of the infotainment, personalization, sensationalism and the presence of emotions stand out as the most frequent resources. When comparing sports news with the rest of the topics, statistically significant associations were found regarding private life ($X2= 7.060$; $p= ,008$), personalization ($X2= 67.746$; $p= ,000$), sensationalism ($X2= 39.805$; $p= ,000$) and the use of emotions ($X2= 50.363$; $p= ,000$), always with greater frequency in the case of sports information (see Figure 5).

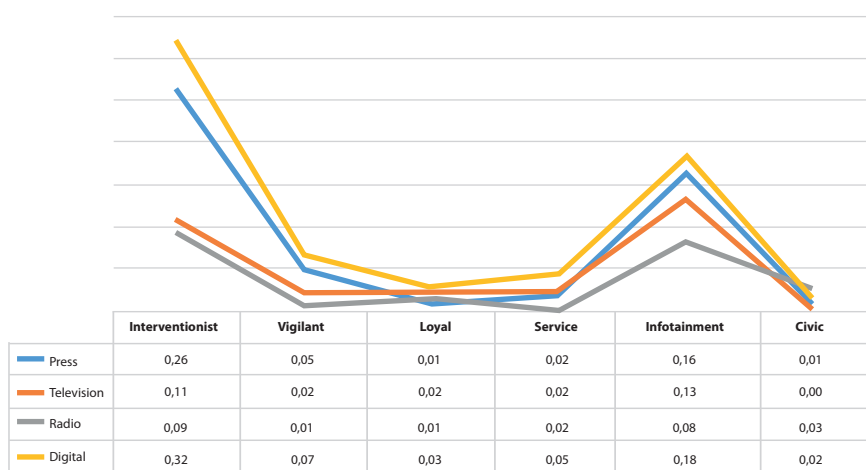## Professional roles, sports information and media platforms

Our first research question posed possible differences in the implementation of professional roles considering the media platform. All roles, except the civic role, are more present in digital media, as shown in Figure 6. Furthermore, statistically significant differences between media platforms were found in the interventionist ($F= 23.308$; $p= ,000$; $\eta2= 113$), vigilant ($F= 4.265$; $p= ,005$; $\eta2= ,023$), loyal ($F= 5.105$; $p= ,002$; $\eta2= ,027$) and service ($F= 3.447$; $p= ,017$; $\eta2= ,018$) roles. Thus, although in most platforms the journalistic role predominates over the other roles, digital native media

are the most interventionist, while radio and television are characterized by a lower presence of journalists and media with their own voice. Also, in digital media the presence of vigilant, loyal and service roles is higher. No differences were found between media types for the infotainment (F= 2.090; p= ,101) and civic (F= 1.482; p= ,218) roles.

Figure 6
Presence of professional roles in sports news
in four media platforms (media)

	Interventionist	Vigilant	Loyal	Service	Infotainment	Civic
Press	0,26	0,05	0,01	0,02	0,16	0,01
Television	0,11	0,02	0,02	0,02	0,13	0,00
Radio	0,09	0,01	0,01	0,02	0,08	0,03
Digital	0,32	0,07	0,03	0,05	0,18	0,02

The emergence of intermediate roles in the sports news

Several intermediate roles emerge from the data as a result of role co-occurrence. The strongest correlation is between the interventionist and infotainment roles (r= ,266), followed by the hybridization of the loyal role with the infotainment role (r= ,179) and the interventionist role with the loyal role (r= ,161). Similarities and differences with the rest of the themes were also found in this case. The co-occurrence of interventionism with infotainment is similar in almost all the analyzed themes, except in entertainment and celebrities, lifestyle, media, work and employment, energy, housing and accidents. Combinations of the loyal role with the infotainment role and with the interventionist role are also found in transportation and health news, while

the hybridization of the loyal role with the interventionist role in education news, and the correlation of the loyal role with the infotainment role in defense and culture.

Discussion and conclusions

In this study on the implementation of six journalistic roles in sports news in the Spanish media, the aim was to address first which of these professional roles materialize to a greater extent in the coverage of these events. The results have shown that two roles, the interventionist and the infotainment role, characterize sports news in Spain, together with a scarce presence of the other roles, confirming hypotheses 1 and 3. These data are consistent with those found by Scherman and Mellado (2019) in Chile, and corroborate the widespread conception in the literature on sports journalism still related with the metaphor "toy department" (Rowe, 2007): a frivolous information and far from objectivity, which seeks to capture the maximum possible audience. Furthermore, when comparing the presence of the roles in sports news with their implementation in other thematic areas, this distinctive character has also become evident, since in none of the other topics analyzed is the dominance of these two roles reproduced over the rest, except in information on entertainment and celebrities. In this sense, when analyzing each of the indicators that make up these two predominant roles in sports information, it has been found that opinion and the use of qualifying adjectives are the most used journalistic resources, and the presence of sensationalism, personalization and emotions is higher than in the rest of the information topics.

The low presence of the rest of the roles should also be highlighted, since it reveals the scarce concern of the media in Spain for taking sports journalism towards new practices closer to vigilant or civic journalism, following what has been stated by the specialized literature (Rowe, 2007; Boyle and Haynes, 2009; Henningham, 1995; Rowe, 2004). Thus, as can be seen in Figures 3 and 4, sports news is far from the topics where both critical journalism (courts, politics or government) and civic journalism (demonstrations and protests, social problems or labor and employment) are most often put into practice. Contrary to one of the most prominent features of sports journalism such as fanaticism (English, 2017; Hardin *et al*., 2009) or "scarf journalism" (Márquez-Ramírez, 2021), the presence of the loyalist-facilitator role in this study

is not higher in sports content than in the rest. These results allow to partially confirm the third hypothesis of this work, which predicted a low presence of the vigilant role, but no more predominance of the loyal-facilitator role.

By domains, multidimensional scaling analyses have also shown the proximity of sports news with those related to entertainment and celebrities, and with topics more related to soft news. Thus, in the two roles that have to do with power relations, sports news is close to those about lifestyle, entertainment, transportation or science.

The second objective of this work (PI1) raised possible differences in the performance of journalistic roles according to the media platform (press, radio, television or digital native newspapers), based on previous studies (Hallin and Mellado, 2018; Mellado and Scherman, 2019; Mellado *et al*., 2021) that have found influences between the type of media and the implementation level of professional roles. In our case, the media platform has marked significant differences especially in the interventionist role ($\eta2$= 113), the vigilant role ($\eta2$= ,023) and loyal-facilitator ($\eta2$= ,027), always with more presence in digital native newspapers, which could be heading towards a journalistic practice that is unique and differentiated from the rest of the platforms, specifically with more presence of vigilant journalism, as can be seen in Figure 6. This finding would coincide with those found by Perreault and Bell (2020) in their study on perceptions of sports journalists in digital media, related with vigilant journalism.

The second research question referred to the emergence of possible intermediate roles resulting from the co-occurrence of pure roles. In this case, the infotainment role is present in two of the three strongest combinations, which could be explained as a resource to get more audience. The combination of the interventionist role and the infotainment role will result in a more narrative and expressive sports journalism, while the combination of the infotainment role with the loyal-facilitator role derives in news, which would be close to what Reed (2018) said: "Sports writers' use of colorful, entertaining styles of writing are still part of modern sports jargon and 'hero creation'"]. The third emerging role combines the presence of the interventionist role with the loyalist role, and although its implementation is not very frequent, it would be an example of "scarf journalism".

Finally, the results of the study allow to conclude that sports journalism in Spain focuses on fulfilling two fundamental functions: creating opinion and entertaining. Only the digital native newspapers differ slightly by being more critical.

However, there are some limitations in the study. Firstly, only general media have been analyzed, so in the future the analysis should be extended to specialized media to compare differences and similarities with the current results. On the other hand, the results in Spain should be compared with similar studies in contexts with different media systems.

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