

The Communication Law and its impact on the materialization of professional journalistic roles in the news of the elite press in Ecuador¹

*La Ley de Comunicación y su impacto
en la materialización de los roles
profesionales periodísticos en las noticias
de la prensa de referencia en Ecuador*

DIANA VIVEROS²

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2169-9813>

CLAUDIA MELLADO

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9281-1526>

This paper analyzes how the presence of different journalistic roles in the news content changed or remained stable after the implementation of the Organic Law of Communication in Ecuador. The results show a significant correlation between the performance of different professional roles in news and the implementation of the above-mentioned law. The greatest variation occurs in the interventionist, watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles.

KEYWORDS: professional roles of the journalist, journalism, communication law, public policies, Ecuador.

Este artículo analiza cómo la presencia de distintos roles periodísticos en el contenido noticioso cambiaron o se mantuvieron estables después de la puesta en marcha de la Ley Orgánica de Comunicación, en Ecuador. Los resultados muestran una correlación significativa entre la presencia de ciertos roles profesionales y la puesta en marcha de la Ley. La mayor variación se da en los roles intervencionista, vigilante y leal-facilitador.

PALABRAS CLAVE: roles profesionales del periodista, periodismo, Ley de comunicación, políticas públicas, Ecuador.

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- ² Universidad Técnica de Machala, Ecuador and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile.

E-mail: dviveros@utmachala.edu.ec and claudia.mellado@ucv.cl

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INTRODUCTION

Although a harsh debate has been generated in connection with the repercussions on the journalistic practice of the Organic Law of Communication in Ecuador, no empirical studies have been carried out to analyze the changes that such law has generated in the news content of the national written press upon its performance in 2013. Likewise, the performance of professional roles in the news has not been a subject of research in Ecuador.

To journalists themselves, the Communication Law in Ecuador marked a milestone in the journalistic development of the country. Besides, journalists have continued doing their work according to their ethical beliefs and editorial lines - more carefully, though - to avoid confrontation with the government and comply with the new legislation that requires the media to provide useful content to the public. According to a previous study of perception of Ecuadorian journalists about their professional roles, one stands out:

The strong influence of the Organic Law of Communication and regulatory entities such as the Council for Regulation and Development of Information and Communication (Cordicom) and the Superintendence of Information and Communication (Supercom). In the light of the results, there is a certain distrust, and even fears, towards this new legislation "(Oller, Chavero, Carrillo & Cevallos, 2015, p. 181).

On the one hand, members of the opposition believe that the above mentioned law was applied in order to control the news content of the media, to silence the journalist's voice, to limit its investigative power on issues that question the public institutions or the power of the State and require the media to become facilitators of government power. How was it done? By publishing news of their sole interest, as well as frighten and restrict the freedom of expression.

On the other hand, supporters of the Government of Rafael Correa, promoter of this regulation, assure that the objective of such law never aimed to restrict the freedom of expression or control the news agenda of the media. Conversely, according to the main arguments, it is deemed

necessary (among other communicational regulations) to ensure that the published information is true, accurate, contrasted and contextualized. In addition, the message that information had no mercantilist purposes was justified, but it would be understood as a public good for service purposes, without privileging the economic elites, building a more citizen-friendly and more inclusive journalism (National Assembly, 2013).

All the aforementioned considerations regarding the way of doing journalism in Ecuador can be directly linked to the implementation of different professional roles that journalism fulfills in society. The doubt of many is whether with the application of the Law, a journalism more oriented to the citizen and the vigilance of those in power was achieved, or if on the contrary, a journalism more linked to the loyal-facilitator role was achieved.

Of course, there may be different influential factors in this change, the purpose of this article is not to intend to prove a causal relationship between the implementation of a law and the changes in the materialization of journalistic roles in Ecuador. However, it is pertinent to analyze the existing correlation between both factors, in order to start finding helpful clues to analyze this phenomenon in depth.

The creation of the Law is grounded on an ethical dispute. The center of the government's criticism started with the questioning of "self-regulation", that is to say, that discourse used by the owners of the private media trying to base their "independence against the powers". Further on, through advertising criticism, the media was pushed, especially the largest and most traditional institutions, e.g. the newspapers *El Universo* and *El Comercio*, to be on the same side of the groups of economic and political power. These groups were discredited and identified as collaborators of decades to the corruption and inefficiency based on capitalism and neoliberalism (Benalcázar Andrade, 2015).

This confrontation paved the way for a next phase: the creation of a law. The background of the current Communication Law in Ecuador comes from the mandate of the Constitution approved in 2008, which established that the National Assembly should approve a legal body for this matter (Benalcázar Andrade, 2015).

Based on that context, this study raises the following research question: How have the journalistic professional roles expressed in the news content of the Ecuadorian written press of reference changed after the implementation of the new Organic Law of Communication?

CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL ROLES IN THE NEWS

Mellado (2015) conceptualizes the performance or implementation of different professional roles in the news; that is to say, how the journalistic roles studied during the last decades by different authors through the application of surveys to journalists (Hanitzsch, 2007, Patterson & Donsbach, 1996; Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). Studies materialized in the informative content produced which finally reaches the public. Considering the inevitable gap between the journalistic ideals and the professional practice (Lynch, 2007, Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014), the research on journalistic roles has directed its interest towards the study of the implementation of said professional ideals (Mellado, & Donsbach, 2017; Tandoc, Hellmueller & Vos, 2013).

Specifically, Mellado (2015) operationalizes six roles in the news, from three major domains when analyzing the journalistic content. The first is linked to the *Presence or absence of the journalistic voice in history* (Patterson & Donsbach, 1996; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996); that is, to what extent the journalist is more active or passive in the narration of the stories. From this domain a unidimensional structure emerges: in one end, a disseminating role, where the journalist is a mirror of the reality and does not participate or include his voice in the news he produces and writes is found; and in another, the interventionist role. When this role is present, the journalist adopts a position in the news, either by opining about certain facts, including interpretation in their notes, proposing or demanding changes, using adjectives or the first person.

The second domain is called *Power Relationships*, linked to the relationships that journalism assumes in relation to the institutionalized or de facto powers in a society (Sparrow, 1999; Waisbord, 2000). Two independent professional roles emerge from this domain: the

watchdog or vigilant role and the loyal-facilitator role. When the watchdog role is present, journalist may reveals hidden facts about the wrongdoing of those in power, through different reporting strategies, such as questioning, criticizing or denouncing institutions, individuals of the political, economic, cultural elite or from the organized civil society, among others. Meanwhile, when the loyal-facilitator role is present, a journalist tends to follow and even promote the agenda of the government or of economic groups with power, highlighting the positive aspects of the elite, or becoming loyal to the state-nation, praising the characteristics and triumphs of the country.

Finally, the third domain is linked to *the way journalism interacts with the audience*: whether it is done as a citizen, as a client or as a spectator (Eide & Knight, 1999; Mellado & Lagos, 2014; Rosen, 1996). Three independent professional roles emerge from this domain: a) the service role becomes present when the journalist reports on topics of daily interest to the public, providing information, knowledge and guidance on goods and services to apply in their daily lives; b) the role of infotainment, linked to the idea of entertaining and excite the public, observed when specific environments or characters are described, either by their physical appearance, psychological or way of dressing, when talking about private life or expressing feelings, using exaggeration or metaphors to create drama, as well as morbidity. Finally, c) the civic role is manifested when the news include the perspective or demand of social groups or citizens who are out of power and who seek the recognition or restoration of a right, providing them with tools and analysis to make political decisions.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICA

A debate on the application of Public Communication Policies in Latin American countries has its history since the seventies of the last century (Beltrán & Fox de Cardona, 1981), when on the one hand, the nations complained on the concentration of US capital by media companies, and on the other hand, that country and international organizations such as the Inter American Press Association (SIP) considered those policies as

an aggression against the freedom of information of private companies, calling the Latin American critics as “fascists” and “communists” (Barranquero, 2009).

A historical event that achieved a balance amid disputes about communication and information issues was the presentation of the document entitled *Un sólo mundo, voces múltiples* (*Many voices, one world*) (MacBride, 1993), delivered to Unesco in 1977. Since the first legal regulations in Latin America were created, especially on issues of foreign investment in communication and advertising (Beltrán & Fox de Cardona, 1981).

In the last decade, new communication laws are embedded in the context of political, economic and sociocultural changes promoted by governments elected with the banners of social justice and inclusion of the masses in the development processes (Moraes, 2011). In Latin America, this is the case of center-left governments such as Nestor and Cristina Kirchner, 2004 and 2010 (Argentina), Ignacio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, 2003 and 2007 (Brazil) and Tabaré Vázquez and José Mujica, 2004 and 2010 (Uruguay). However, the greatest changes in communication occurred in leftist governments such as Evo Morales, 2005 (Bolivia), Hugo Chávez, 1998 (Venezuela) and Rafael Correa, 2006 (Ecuador).

All these governments have in common the taking over of the control in their respective countries, where a highly concentrated media structure was established within a communicational market dominated by few economic groups (Santander, 2014), with a clear ideological tendency to oppose the socialist doctrine. Faced with this reality, the governments had the need to modify or create new communication laws.

THE CASE OF ECUADOR

Prior to the approval of the new Communication Law, the media was considered the fourth power, not only due to its ability to present the agenda setting and define the topics of public opinion, but also because the media was used as a “trench” for powerful economic and political groups to protect their interests, whether by publishing or hiding facts. The power exercised by the journalists themselves could affect the

stability of the government of Rafael Correa, whose opponents were identified as owners of media, friends of shareholders and journalists of private media.

Because of the tension between the media and the government, and along with a strong campaign by the latter, a plebiscite was called in 2011 and Ecuadorians voted overwhelmingly for the elimination of the concentration and influence of the political and economic power over the media. Based on this popular support, the National Assembly approved two years later, in 2013, the new Organic Law of Communication, which currently controls the news content of all media through a Superintendence of Communication that functions as a regulating and sanctioning entity.

The Law presents several articles related to the concepts and characteristics of professional roles. It also expresses the deontological norms of journalism, it tells the journalists and the media what to do and what not to do with regard to the treatment of certain information (National Assembly, 2013). Focusing only on the concepts of professional roles, in summary, the legal regulation expresses the following (article 10, numeral 3, paragraphs a, d, g, f and articles 13, 14, 25 and 27):

- Information should not have mercantilist purposes, it should be understood as a public good for service purposes, non-commercial and that does not privilege certain groups of economic or political power.
- The news content should generate a larger citizen participation; plural and inclusive journalism should be promoted, impartial journalism (disseminator-interventionist role) and the morbid treatment of information should be avoided.

After over four years of the passing of the Organic Law of Communication in Ecuador, little is known about the changes generated in the journalistic practice, while the results have generally been left in the opinions and perceptions of the journalists themselves. Thus, and without knowing the true consequences of the Law, this has been used as a reference in other countries, where the regulation of content is not

regulated yet and it is thought that it is necessary to do so in order to improve the content of the media. Therefore, studying the Ecuadorian case is important to see how such a controversial subject has generated changes in the way of doing journalism and how the role of the journalist varied with the validity of a Communication Law.

Previous studies on the perceptions of journalists in Ecuador on their professional roles show that there is a certain distrust and fear on the part of journalists when performing their duties (Olle et al., 2015), as well as negative changes regarding the freedom of expression and, therefore, with the professional practice of journalism and in the generation of content (Benalcázar Andrade, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The methodological design of this research is framed in a quantitative study with descriptive and correlational purposes, through a content analysis that measures the presence of six professional roles of journalists, in the news of the Ecuadorian written press of reference.

Sample

Among all the newspapers of reference in Ecuador, the two with the largest circulation were selected. Specifically, the newspapers *El Comercio* and *El Universo*, both of national circulation, were analyzed, whose daily print-run is around 125 000 and 112 000 copies, respectively. In both cases, the news content published in the years 2012 and 2014 (one year before and one year after the application of the new Organic Law of Communication) was analyzed. Although, it is true that in the sample both newspapers were considered to be opposed to the government at the time of the analysis, their justification lies in the fact that they were the ones with the greatest readership and influence at a national level, in their field.

For this analysis, we chose to leave out the public newspaper *El Telégrafo*, the only one whose editorial line is related to the government, for two reasons: first, because of its low circulation and print-run, and second, due to the difficulty to find in the archives the news of the years prior to 2015. Of course, this does not mean that the variable “political

orientation of the medium” is not relevant, but for the purposes of this study, the interest was to describe the changes generated in the elite media.

Through the built week method, a systematic-stratified sample was designed, representative of the newspapers (sampling units) analyzed. In each means, a Monday, a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday, a Friday, a Saturday and a Sunday of each semester of each year were randomly selected, making sure that each month of the year was represented by at least one day. This means that two weeks per year were built per media, analyzing a total of 56 copies. Within these 56 copies, this study analyzed the news of politics and economy. The unit of analysis was the informative piece. An informative piece was defined, as all verbal and visual elements written continuously referred to the same subject. That is to say, both the text (title, epigraph, subtitle, and caption) and the photos that make up the piece of news of each selected news item were analyzed.

The units of analysis were the news of two specific sections: Politics and Economics. These sections were chosen because the most controversial news items in relation to the government are contained and because journalists consider that they have had to change their roles in these sections. Thus, the objective of this study was to study the professional roles of the journalist in the daily news; the editorial sections of the newspaper and opinion columns were not considered.

Within the political and economic sections of the respective newspapers, a total of 222 pieces of news were found in 2012, from which, 137 corresponded to the newspaper *El Universo* and 85 to the newspaper *El Comercio*. While, in 2014, 170 news items were counted, 100 corresponding to *El Universo* and 70 to *El Comercio*. In total, 392 pieces of news were analyzed.

Instrumentalization

This study measured the presence of six journalistic roles in the news, based on three main domains or areas of analysis within the professional practice of journalists:

1. *The presence of the journalistic voice*: the role of the interventionist versus the role of the disseminator was measured through the presence

of five indicators in the news: value judgments by the journalist, interpretation of the journalist on the facts, proposals or demands of the journalist, as well as the use of qualifying adjectives and the use of first person by the journalist. For example, in a story where the journalist writes “the government of Rafael Correa has been wrong ...”, the indicator “existence of opinion of the journalist in the news” was coded as yes. The greater the presence of the journalist’s voice, the greater the intervention and vice versa.

2. *The relationship of journalism with those in power*: the presence of the watchdog and the loyal-facilitator roles of journalism was measured. The watchdog journalism is present, for example, when hidden facts related to people in power are revealed or when the public interest is protected, demanding accountability in case of mismanagement, corruption, fraud, etc., by political elites, economic or other type of power. Specifically, through questions, criticisms, complaints, evidence of conflict, investigative journalism, among others (see results section). In a story the following is mentioned:

In the case of an \$ 800 000 credit given by Banco Cofiec to Gastón Duzac, certain issues remain uninvestigated by the Attorney General of the State, giving rise to doubts concerning the intervention of authorities such as Pedro Delgado and his brother-in-law, Jaime Francisco Endara Clavijo along with the CEO of Cofiec Bank, Antonio Buñay. The Office of the Prosecutor has a new task, following the annulment of the process for embezzlement brought against two former officials.

In this case, a vigilant role is being accomplished by the journalist when questioning the actions of the Prosecutor’s Office during an investigation and reporting the progress of court proceedings. Meanwhile, the loyal-facilitator role is identified, for instance, when journalists provide a positive image of the authority and powers in force, or either when they support and defend the activities and policies of the political, economic, cultural or political elite within an organized civil society. Namely, in a story that reads: “the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is one of the most competent and prestigious international organizations”, the journalist is depicting a positive image of said international organization.

3. The way the audience is addressed: here, infotainment and the civic roles of service are included. The service role is present when

a journalist, among other things, provides help, advice, guidance or information about everyday problems. To mention an example, in a news article it is mentioned that: “if the people make their payments by this means (Internet), they will obtain a discount in the interests to pay for their debts.” In this case, the indicator “impact on daily life” should be considered present in the news.

In the case of infotainment, the audience is approached as a spectator. Here, distraction and emotional experiences are under the spotlight, and elements such as personalization, private life, sensationalism and emotions are key. Quoting a piece of news: “Rodas carried a blue folder with sum sheets, but his weapon was also the attack. Noboa used a sheet and put the case of his Rayban glasses on top. He did not stop smiling, even when he was criticized”, this way clear elements of personalization were presented.

Finally, the civic role is characterized by presenting news to social groups outside power, seeking recognition of a claim or the restoration of a right. For example, it is considered as citizens’ demand: “social organizations (indigenous) demand from the regime respect for the Constitution, the approval of a water law for good living, the non-signing of agreements of free trade, among other requests.”

With the materialization of different professional roles in the informative content in mind, the operationalization proposed by Mellado (2015) was used, and validated by different national and international studies (Hellmueller, Mellado, Bluebell & Huemmer, 2016; Mellado & Lagos, 2014; Mellado, Márquez, Mick, Oller & Olivera, 2016; Mellado & Van Dalen, 2016; Wang, Sparks, Lü & Huang, 2016).

Coding and data collection procedure

The copies of issues of the selected newspapers were collected at the Municipal Library of Guayaquil and in the Historical Archive of Guayaquil, Ecuador. The pieces of information from the Politics and Economy sections corresponding to the selected days were photocopied and then printed for their respective analysis.

The coding of each piece of news in the selected copies was made by two codifiers through the application of a codebook and an analysis sheet, based on the instrumentalization of Mellado (2015). At the end of

the coding process, a new analysis on 10% of the processed pieces of information was performed to calculate the overall reliability of the process.

Based on the Krippendorff alpha formula, the intercoder reliability was of 0.79 on average, which is highly satisfactory, considering the complexity of the variables measured in this study.

RESULTS

In order to provide an answer to the formal research question, it was decided to present the results of this study through each of the domains in which the analyzed professional roles are framed. For this, there was a work with contingency tables, the χ^2 test (which measures the discrepancy between an observed and a theoretical distribution) and descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). Meanwhile, to know if there were significant differences in the presence of each role before and after the implementation of the Law of Communication in Ecuador, the statistical test *t-students* for independent samples (which measures the difference of means between two groups) was applied, considering the before and after the passing of the Law in mention as a control group.

Presence of the journalistic voice: The Interventional Role

In global terms, the results show compelling differences in the presence of the interventionist role in the Ecuadorian news coverage between 2012 and 2014 ($t = 4.416$, $df = 390$, $p = .000$).

Specifically, the presence of the interventionist role in the press of Ecuador was significantly reduced between 2012 ($M = .266$, $SD = .201$) and 2014 ($M = .181$, $SD = .174$).

As set forth in the conceptual and methodological sections of this work, the interventionist role is made up of five indicators or journalistic practices: opinion, interpretation, proposal-demand, use of adjectives and use of first person by the journalist.

If the data disaggregated is analyzed, it is possible to observe that although “interpretation” and the “use of adjectives” are the most present indicators, these five styles of reporting decreased their presence in the

Ecuadorian news coverage. However, the practices that significantly decreased were the interpretation (from 67.1% to 54.1%), the use of qualifying adjectives (from 37.8% to 15.3%) as proposals or demands from the journalist (from 9.5% to 3.5%).

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS IN JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES
THAT MAKE UP THE INTERVENTIONIST ROLE

Indicators/Year	2012	2014
Opinion ($\chi^2 = .061$; $p = 0$ n.s)	18.0	17.1
Interpretation ($\chi^2 = 6.87$; $p \leq .01$)	67.1	54.1
Proposal / demand ($\chi^2 = 5.28$; $p \leq .05$)	9.5	3.5
Use of qualifying adjectives ($\chi^2 = 24.24$; $p \leq .001$)	37.8	15.3
Use of first person ($\chi^2 = .124$; $p =$ n.s)	0.9	0.6

Source: The authors

Power relationships:

presence of the watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles

The relationship of the journalist with the power groups was the aspect with the most pivotal variation between 2012 and 2014. In effect, the results show decisive differences in presence of the watchdog role ($t = 5.596$; $df = 346$; $p = .000$) as the loyal-facilitator role ($t = 2.030$; $df = 390$; $p = 0.43$), where both roles reduced their presence in the Ecuadorian news coverage during said period, especially the watchdog role.

TABLE 2
PRESENCE OF THE WATCHDOG ROLE AND THE LOYAL FACILITATOR
ROLE IN 2012 AND 2014 IN THE ECUADORIAN ELITE MEDIA

Roles	2012 (M/SD)	2014 (M/SD)
Watchdog Role	.150 (.131)	.081 (.088)
Loyal facilitator role	.027 (.078)	.013 (.043)

Source: The authors

The watchdog model was measured through 10 reporting practices mentioned throughout this work and operationalized in the annex of this article. Of these practices, those with a significant variation due to the application of the Communication Law were four: the questioning of others, the questioning of journalists, the criticism of others and the information on judicial processes.

The presence of the aforementioned characteristics in the Ecuadorian written elite media decreased in 2014. That is to say, the space given to criticism from both official and citizen sources was reduced, as the questioning of the reporters, and updates on court cases involving wrong actions of members of groups of power in the country. However, it has to be pondered that in general terms, Ecuadorian journalism is not characterized by being eminently vigilant, as seen in Table 2.

In disaggregated terms, it is observed that the “questioning of others” appeared in the news of 2012 to the tune of 46.4% (mainly directed to the State and its powers, in all its public institutions, to the government party and to the government itself), while in 2014 it was reduced to 27.5%. In the case of the “questioning of journalists”, this

TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS IN JOURNALISTIC
PRACTICES THAT COMPRISE THE WATCHDOG ROLE

Indicators / Year	2012	2014
Information on judicial and administrative proceedings ($\chi^2 = 20.94; p \leq .001$)	26.6	11.8
Questioning the journalist ($\chi^2 = 10.48; p \leq .05$)	14.2	5.3
Questioning of others ($\chi^2 = 17.87; p \leq .01$)	46.4	27.5
Criticism of the journalist ($\chi^2 = 3.10; p = n.s$)	1.8	0.0
Criticism of others ($\chi^2 = 18.23; p \leq .05$)	38.1	24.7
Denounce from the journalist ($\chi^2 = .768; p = n.s$)	0.0	0.0
Denounce from others ($\chi^2 = 8.43; p = . n.s$)	19.8	11.6
External Investigation ($\chi^2 = 2.63; p = n.s$)	1.8	3
Conflict ($\chi^2 = 2.32; p = n.s$)	1.4	0.0
Investigative Journalism ($\chi^2 = .768; p = n.s$)	0.5	0

Source: The authors.

declined from 14.2% to 4.3%. The “criticism of others” had a lower presence in 2014, going down from 38.1% to 24.7% in a year. Similarly, the third significant characteristic in the watchdog role “information on judicial and administrative processes” decreased from 26.6% to 11.8%. Curiously, in 2014 it was possible to observe that despite this general decline linked to the information of those in power, the information on judgments of ordinary people increased in the Ecuadorian press from 3.2 to 5.3%, while the external research coverage increased from 1.8% to 3%. Meanwhile, the other characteristics did not have a relevant presence neither a conclusive variation.

Although the explicit presence of this role is minimal in the coverage of the Ecuadorian written press, of all the practices that identify it, the one with the greatest presence in both years was “advocacy / support of activities”, although it tends to fall. According to the results, in 2012 this characteristic was present in 11.4% of the news items analyzed, a figure that decreased to 8.8%. It is also observed that despite the fact that the loyal-facilitator role diminished (even more) its presence in

TABLE 4
PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS IN JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES
REGARDING THE LOYAL-FACILITATOR ROLE

Indicators/years	2012	2014
Defense/support of activities ($\chi^2 = .334; p = n.s$)	11.4	8.8
Defense/support of policies ($\chi^2 = .551; p = n.s$)	1.4	2.4
Positive image of the political elite ($\chi^2 = 1.53; p = n.s$)	0.9	0.0
Positive image of the economic elite ($\chi^2 = 2.31; p = n.s$)	1.4	0.0
Positive image of the organized society ($\chi^2 = .768; p = n.s$)	0.5	0.0
Positive image of the cultural elite ($\chi^2 = .768; p = n.s$)	0.5	0.0
Progress/success ($\chi^2 = 1.54; p = n.s$)	0.9	0.0
Comparison with the rest of the world ($\chi^2 = 3.88; p \leq .05$)	2.3	0.0
National triumphs ($\chi^2 = -- ; p = n.s$)	0.0	0.0
Promotion country image ($\chi^2 = 1.54; p = n.s$)	0.9	0.0
Patriotism ($\chi^2 = -- ; p = n.s$)	0.0	0.0

Source: The authors.

2014, the “defense / policy support” of the State / government increased. Although none of the previous variations is statistically significant, the decrease in “comparison with the world” was indeed crucial, going down from 2.3% to 0. Meanwhile, the other characteristics did not have a relevant presence or a significant variation.

However, it is mandatory to contemplate the indirect use of alternative journalist practices made in order to be loyal to those in power. For example, in the most widely covered topics and the use of sources.

In 2012 the central themes approached in the news sections of politics and economy in Ecuadorian reference newspapers were in connection with business, and secondly to central government affairs. The answers may seem obvious when dealing with the analysis of sections related to those topics; however, the variation shown in these issues in 2014 is alluring.

Economics and business related topics appeared in newspapers in an average of 23.9% and government issues at 18.9%. This occurred in 2012, but in the year 2014 that order changed. Two years later, the subjects of Economy and Business had a slight presence increase in the newspapers reaching 24.1%. However, government related news had a notorious increase, arriving at 29.4%. Central government and legislature affairs were in the front page in 2014.

Going deeper, it is possible to detect several relevant aspects of support. In the case of the Courts, its presence reduced from 17.6% to 7.1%. On this regard, it is necessary to consider the piece of news that in 2012 was followed for several months, the legal dispute between the President of the Republic and the executives and an editorialist of the newspaper called *El Universo*.

With regard to Political Campaign / Elections / Politics, these topics take the fourth place in relevance whereas a decline is detected (from 14.4% to 9.4%). Notwithstanding, such variation makes sense considering the context, 2012 was a year of political campaign in Ecuador for the presidential elections, and in 2014 there was a political campaign for the elections of mayors and province prefects, so it is understood that the first had a greater general coverage.

Another crucial aspect measured in the present study was the use of news sources. The results show that in 2012 the main source was the

TABLE 5
 PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS OF THE MAIN TOPIC OF THE
 ECUADORIAN PRESS AGENDA (POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SECTIONS)

Topic / percentage	2012	2014
Government / Legislature	18.9	29.4
Campaign / Elections / Politics	14.4	9.4
Police and crime	2.7	1.8
Courts	17.6	7.1
Military Defense/ National Security	1.4	0.6
Economy/Business	23.9	24.1
Education	4.5	2.9
Environment/ Climate Change	0.5	1.8
Transport	2.7	0.6
Accidents/Natural Disasters	0.0	0.6
Health	0.9	1.8
Labour and Employment	3.2	2.4
Demonstrations/Protests	1.4	3.5
Social Problems	0.0	5.3
Media	6.8	7.1
Science and Technology	0.9	1.2
Culture	0.5	0.6

($\chi^2 = 36.18$; $p \leq .01$)

Source: The authors

“State, Government or Government Party” obtaining 32.4% of presence in the stories analyzed.

In 2014, this same source increased its presence significantly to 47.1%. The second main source of the private newspapers of Ecuador in 2012 was the political parties in opposition to the government of Rafael Correa, which decreased from 14.9% to 4.1%.

Conception of the audience: the presence of the service, infotainment and civic role.

In general terms, the presence of the service roles ($t = -.676$; $gl = 390$; $p = .499$), infotainment ($t = .155$; $gl = 390$; $p = .877$), and civic ($t = -1.119$; $gl = 390$; $p = .264$) did not show significant differences in the news coverage of the Ecuadorian press between 2012 and 2014.

In other words, the way the audience is approached by Ecuadorian journalists did not vary significantly in macro terms.

Although the service and civic role showed a slight increase in their presence, this is not enough to be deemed statistically relevant.

In general, and in both periods, the role with a greater presence in that field in the press of Ecuador is the civic role, followed by the role of service and the role of infotainment. Yet, if a more detailed analysis of each role is made, it is possible to appreciate interesting differences in their composing practices.

Although none of the reporting practices that define the service role show significant differences in their presence between the two periods,

TABLE 6
PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS OF CURRENT
SOURCES IN ECUADORIAN PRESS COVERAGE
(POLITICAL AND ECONOMICS SECTIONS)

Source / year	2012	2014
Source State or Political Party of Government ($\chi^2 = 10.19; p \leq .001$)	32.4	47.1
Source Companies ($\chi^2 = 3.11; p = n.s$)	13.5	10.0
Source Police or National Security ($\chi^2 = .072; p = n.s$)	0.0	0.6
Source Legal or Court ($\chi^2 = .287; p = n.s$)	14.0	8.8
Source Military Defense ($\chi^2 = 2.77; p = n.s$)	0.5	0.6
Source Health or Science ($\chi^2 = 10.48; p \leq .05$)	0.5	0.0
Source Civil Society ($\chi^2 = .562; p = n.s$)	11.3	11.8
Source Citizens ($\chi^2 = 2.41; p = n.s$)	4.1	2.9
Source Media ($\chi^2 = .667; p = n.s$)	1.8	3.5
Source Parties in Opposition to Government ($\chi^2 = 6.4; \leq .05$)	14.9	4.1
Source Artist/Celebrity ($\chi^2 = 4.28; p = n.s$)	0.5	2.4
Source Anonymous ($\chi^2 = 2.36; p = n.s$)	0.5	0.6
Source Academic ($\chi^2 = 2.33; p = n.s$)	1.8	2.4
National and International Experts, Analysts, Researchers ($\chi^2 = .505; p = n.s$)	2.7	3.5

Source: The authors.

TABLE 7
 PRESENCE OF THE SERVICE, INFOTAINMENT AND CIVIC
 ROLES IN THE ECUADORIAN ELITE MEDIA

Roles	2012 (M/SD)	2014 (M/SD)
Service role	.054 (.105)	.061 (.106)
Infotainment role	.029 (.064)	.028 (.064)
Civic role	.126 (.187)	.149 (.207)

Source: The authors

it is observed that in 2014 the reference newspapers talked more about issues that exert an impact on the concrete / daily life of the public (30.6%), compared to (24.8%) in 2012.

On the contrary, journalists provided less tips and advice to the public on how to defend themselves from their surroundings (see Table 8).

TABLE 8
 PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS IN JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES
 THAT COMPRISE THE SERVICE ROLE

Indicators / Year	2012	2014
Impact on daily life ($\chi^2 = 1.64$; $p = n.s$)	24.8	30.6
Tips and advice (grievances and complaints) reporter ($\chi^2 = 1.70$; $p = n.s$)	4.1	1.8
Tips and advice (grievances and complaints) source ($\chi^2 = .072$; $p = n.s$)	0.9	1.2
Tips and advice (personal risks) reporter ($\chi^2 = 1.65$; $p = n.s$)	0.5	1.8
Tips and advice (personal risks) source ($\chi^2 = .768$; $p = n.s$)	0.5	0.0
Information of consumption ($\chi^2 = .001$; $p = n.s$)	5.9	5.9
Advise of consumption ($\chi^2 = .109$; $p = n.s$)	1.4	1.8

Source: The authors.

Regarding the role of infotainment, and despite none of its indicators had a statistically significant variation between both periods, the use of sensationalism stands out, increasing from 9.9% to 14.1%.

Finally, within the civic role, giving credibility to what citizens perceive or demand, the inclusion of local impact and in the community, as information about citizen activities of different political decisions significantly increased their presence in the news.

TABLE 9
PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS IN JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES
THAT COMPRISE THE INFOTAINMENT ROLE

Indicators / percentage	2012	2014
Personalization ($\chi^2 = .631$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	3.2	4.7
Private life ($\chi^2 = .570$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	0.9	1.8
Sensationalism ($\chi^2 = 1.65$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	9.9	14.1
Emotions ($\chi^2 = .590$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	7.2	5.3
Morbid ($\chi^2 = .768$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	0.5	0.0
Scandal ($\chi^2 = 2.13$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	1.4	0.0

Source: The authors.

TABLE 10
PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS IN JOURNALISTIC
PRACTICES THAT COMPRISE THE CIVIC ROLE

Indicators / percentage	2012	2014
Citizen perspective ($\chi^2 = .003$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	26.1	25.9
Citizen demand ($\chi^2 = .348$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	14.9	17.1
Credibility of citizens ($\chi^2 = 4.30$; $p \leq .05$)	7.2	13.5
Local Impact in the community ($\chi^2 = 4.77$; $p \leq .05$)	25.7	35.9
Education on duties and rights ($\chi^2 = 2.33$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	5.0	8.8
Information of context ($\chi^2 = 1.98$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	29.3	22.9
Questions from citizens ($\chi^2 = 3.17$; $p = \text{n.s}$)	3.2	0.6
Information on citizen activities ($\chi^2 = 8.18$; $p \leq .01$)	2.7	9.4
Support to citizen movements ($\chi^2 = --$; $p \leq .05$)	0.0	0.0

Source: The authors.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to analyze how the materialization of different journalistic roles observed in the elite media varied, after the enactment of the new Organic Law of Communication.

The results showed a close relationship between the approval of the Communication Law and the implementation of journalistic roles. Specifically, from the results obtained it was inferred that the change in the ways the practice of the profession is regulated, influenced to some extent the lower participation of journalists when preparing their stories, leading them to adopt a rather passive voice, and also assuming a less watchdog role towards central government and the powers of the State. On the contrary, the results indicated that through their stories, journalists had a tendency to present more topics and more government sources to promote their activities, after passing the Law than in the past.

These findings show that the Organic Law of Communication in Ecuador, in force since 2013, influenced the performance of some professional roles played by journalists in Ecuador. The main changes are present in the interventionist, watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles. Meanwhile, the presence of service, infotainment and civic roles tend to remain stable, with certain nuances, though.

The data gathered in this study revealed that the main characteristic of the Ecuadorian written press journalist from the elite media is the “interpretation”; that is to say, to explain in writing, for example, macroeconomic data, a political context, based on their own observation of the facts or the background of a news story to be written. Although this characteristic is still the most relevant, its level of interpretation decreased, since a lower interventionism was observed once the Communication Law was in force.

On the other hand, whilst the news produced by journalists, prior to the passing of the Communication Law, were characterized by the presentation of information on judicial or administrative processes, and also by giving space to sources that questioned or criticized the actions or statements by the government, members of the political party supported by the government and state institutions; once this Law came

into force, a decreasing space in the news for criticism and questioning against the government is observed in the sources. In addition, there is less space for information about judicial processes and against groups of power.

The loyal-facilitator role has not had a relatively continued presence in the Ecuadorian newspapers part of elite media, before and after adopting the Law in mention. However, data revealed that after the enactment of this Law, journalists tended to be less loyal to the business sector and economic elites and their role of facilitators with the information provided by the government increased, either promoting or accepting what the State says or does.

As shown in the results, the Law of Communication did not influence how journalists conceive their audience. However, in the news no larger space is allowed for groups or individuals outside the political or economic circle of power to have an active participation as sources of information.

If one of the objectives of the Law of Communication was to achieve an eminent citizen inclusion and achieve more participatory, pluralistic and inclusive news from social groups outside the circle of power, such goal seems not to have been entirely achieved, although there was an increase of indicators that intended to educate and show citizens the implications of certain political decisions.

In sum, the results of the present study tend to reflect that the Law of Communication in Ecuador influenced to some extent the presentation of a more cautiously work by Ecuadorian journalists at the moment of preparing stories and also in their investigation, probably due to a fear of receiving a censure from the Superintendence of Communication or that the media they work at can be economically penalized, affecting their labour stability.

Of course, this does not mean that such changes were directly generated by the Law of Communication, or that this study suggests a causal connection between both parties. In this sense, the results obtained by this research do not allow us to assure that the Law of Communication directly restricts the autonomy or press freedom. However, this study does show the existence of an irrefutable correlation between both phenomena, where it is possible to appreciate

a relationship between the implementation of the Law and the change in journalism work in the country.

Although this is a pioneer study in Ecuador, by analyzing the materialization of journalistic professional roles in a country with scarce empirical research on the subject, it is not free of limitations.

One of the limitations faced by this study was the fact of having considered only the analysis of the printed press, and specifically, the national and elite media. Although the printed press is still a reference and keeps on marking the media agenda in global terms (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013), future studies should compare these results with the analysis of more than one information platform (Mellado & Vos, 2017), to see if the implementation of the Communication Law in Ecuador affected all the media equally, audiovisual, broadcast and written. Likewise, to achieve a more complete analysis of how professional roles have changed in Ecuadorian journalism, studies could be conducted comparing elite press media with popular press media, including national and regional media in the country, not only the two with highest circulation. It would also be interesting to include in a later analysis the public newspaper, *El Telégrafo*, which is aligned to the government, whose editorial line differs from two elite media newspapers taken into account for this analysis.

In turn, this study could be extended to topics not only related to politics and economy, but also to issues deemed as second-order, such as sports, show business, police and crime, which comprehend a relevant space in the national agenda. On the other hand, this research could motivate future studies that would compare the presence of different journalistic roles within the information note format -as this is the case- with the editorials and opinion columns of newspapers.

Considering that this study does not consider a comparison with other countries, it would be relevant that future research could replicate this line, comparing Latin American countries, especially those that have undergone changes in their public communication policies.

For instance, similar studies could be performed in countries like Argentina, Venezuela or Bolivia that have also faced new communication laws. In effect, regulations are a part of the public communication policies that emerged as a trend in many countries of

the region and that, in the case of Ecuador, it was established when the government administration of Rafael Correa was going through a moment of great popularity.

Finally, this study explored changes in professional roles before and after the implementation of the Law, but other factors were not analyzed. It would be interesting that future investigations inquire about the influence that other aspects have on this variation, aspects such as: the presidential election in Ecuador, the judicial problem between the government and various media institutions, changes of editors or journalists, etc. For this, a mixed methodology could be used, whether in-depth interviews or interviews with journalists, where subjects can establish the role of the Communication Law in the change of their journalistic practice.

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