



**Analysis of professional perceptions relating to the effectiveness of codes of ethics for journalists in Spain**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Information, Communication &amp; Ethics in Society</i>
Manuscript ID	JICES-11-2019-0123.R1
Manuscript Type:	Journal Paper
Keywords:	Journalism Ethics, Codes of ethics, Media ethics, Journalism, media accountability, Spain

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## Analysis of professional perceptions relating to the effectiveness of codes of ethics for journalists in Spain

### **Abstract**

Codes of ethics are important instruments in journalism, since they promote transparency and self-regulation of media, in addition to monitoring the quality of information. The aim of this research is to analyse the perceptions that Spanish journalists have of the effectiveness of codes of ethics and to evaluate the different personal and professional variables which condition this vision. The results show that journalists are largely confident in the effectiveness of codes of ethics in their profession. Likewise, it has been detected that variables such as age, professional experience or the media where they work influence in the perceptions that these professionals have of these instruments.

**Keywords:** codes of ethics, journalists' perceptions, media ethics, journalism, Spain

### **Professional responsibility and journalists' perceptions**

The task of a journalist or communicator is to ensure that citizens' rights of information and of expression are met, whilst balancing this against fulfillment of a series of professional responsibilities (Rodríguez-Martínez, et al., 2017a). The media, as principal agents in configuring agenda-setting and public opinion, have a responsibility for the transmission of values to society (Hardy, 2008), and to inform with the classic criteria of veracity, selection, hierarchy, interpretation and contextualization (Diezhandino, 2012). They are also required to guarantee rights to information and expression according to the principles of professional

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3 responsibility and, moreover, to facilitate the participation of citizens in democratic public  
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5 debate (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).  
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8 Traditionally, journalism has been closely related with professional and civic responsibility.  
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10 In order to fulfill its unique democratic role, the media needs to be monitored for quality  
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12 (McQuail, 1992). The recent arrival of the Internet within journalism has posed problems  
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14 related to quality control and the veracity of information and, hence, a further obstacle to  
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16 ensuring credibility and ethics within the profession (Cabrera, 2005; Moretzsohn, 2006).  
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18 However, the digital era may allow for new ways to monitor media output in relation to  
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20 democratic roles (Esser & Neuberger, 2019).  
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25 According to the literature on journalists' perceptions of ethical standards in journalism,  
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27 attention has been paid to several aspects such as editorial autonomy in the newsroom  
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29 (Hamada et al., 2019; Hanusch et al., 2019) or journalists' awareness of pressures on their  
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31 work (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). In this sense, the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) project is  
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33 an unavoidable reference: since its inception in 2007, the researchers who are part of the  
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35 project have produced analysis that assess the professional understanding of journalists at a  
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37 national and international level (WJS, 2019).  
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42 Based on responses from journalists working in 67 countries, Standaert, Hanitzsch and  
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44 Dedonder (2019) maintain that the normative core of journalism around the world is still  
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46 invariably built on the news media's contribution to political processes and conversations,  
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48 while other areas, such as the management of self and everyday life, remain marginalised.  
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51 Nevertheless, differences have been observed between countries and regions, especially if  
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53 we consider the west-east axis. Rollwagen et al. (2019), for instance, when analysing  
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3 Canadian journalists' self-perception noted that their "credo" is focused on neutral reporting  
4 and oriented towards perceived public interest rather than business or audience interests.  
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8 In the same line, Ahva et al. (2017) remark that Nordic journalists see themselves as detached  
9 watchdogs and renounce the role of opportunist facilitator. Moreover, Väliverronen  
10 (2018:62), maintains that Finnish political journalists show strong support for their role as  
11 detached analytical watchdogs and base their decisions on the industry code of conduct,  
12 "which further highlights their independence".  
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20 Digital journalists from three other European countries (Belgium, Spain and Italy) argue that  
21 the ethical exercise of journalism depends on external factors of a commercial, economic,  
22 political and technological nature. They place an emphasis on personal and professional  
23 values of journalists (Suárez-Villegas, 2015).  
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30 However, as we move east, journalists' perceptions change. Köylü (2006), for example, has  
31 highlighted that codes of ethics and standards are not being followed in the Turkish media  
32 because of commercial constraints underlined by an emerging monopoly in the media.  
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38 In China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, journalists themselves are receptive to freebies in the form  
39 of small gifts, meals and trips, although they almost unanimously agree that monetary  
40 benefits from news sources are unacceptable (Lo, Chan & Pan, 2005; Lo & Wei, 2008).  
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42 According to Motlagh et al. (2013) the majority of Malaysian journalists think they can use  
43 any method or technique to obtain news if it is of paramount importance to the public,  
44 including unethical methods like hidden camera and hidden voice recorder.  
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52 In view of this changing landscape, authors such as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001:181)  
53 suggest that all journalists need a professional ethics framework within which to work for the  
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3 public interest and to provide information in a true, accurate and honest way. Such  
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5 professional ethics form the basis for communication based on excellence and quality  
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7 information (Mauri-Ríos & Ramon-Vegas, 2015). Professional ethics should be firmly based  
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9 on principles which allow for compliance with correct professional practice.  
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13 It should also be taken into account that professional culture plays an important role in  
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15 influencing journalists' ethical decision-making, as Lee and Coleman remark (2018:12):  
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19 The fact that journalists' perceptions of the ethical climate are influenced by FPP  
20 [first-person perception; according to it, individuals perceive a greater effect for self  
21 than others] and TPP [third-person perception; according to it, people tend to perceive  
22 that mass media messages have a greater effect on others than on themselves] is  
23 evidence of the importance of this culture and suggests that emphasizing an ethical  
24 organizational culture may help journalists resist occasional peer pressure to behave  
25 unethically.  
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31 Media accountability is an important ally when dealing with these pressures. As Alsius  
32 (2010) explain, it is a concept that refers to the willingness of the media to be transparent  
33 with society in the activity they carry out. Media Accountability Instruments (MAI) are key  
34 indicators of pluralism and transparency of the media in a democratic state (Bertrand, 2000;  
35 2003). This is so to the extent that its essential function is to monitor, control, criticize and  
36 examine the evolution and quality of journalistic information, and more in a context of sector  
37 crisis and media concentration (Eberwein, 2010).  
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47 Therefore, to implement MAI in the media "is usually linked to accepting certain  
48 responsibilities, tasks or objectives" (Christians, et al., 2010:132). Real Rodríguez (2018)  
49 points out that there are three main tasks in media accountability: first, the media must  
50 publicly disclose the ethical and deontological norms behind journalists' activity. Secondly,  
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3 that journalists must be able to apply these norms in their daily work and social life without  
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5 conditioning or retaliation. Lastly, journalists should reflect on their work and ensure that, in  
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7 those cases where there has been failure, they should be accountable to the public so as to  
8  
9 prevent re-occurrence. Thus, if media complies with these three conditions, it can be  
10  
11 considered that it exercises accountability vis-à-vis its audience and general public (Puppis,  
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13 2009; Díaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, 2014).  
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17 In recent years, with the development of digital environments, new forms of transparency  
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19 and quality control for information have emerged (Mauri-Ríos & Ramón-Vegas, 2015).  
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21 Traditional instruments for accountability (deontological codes, style books, internal codes  
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23 of practice, etc.), continue to have a strong presence in journalism (Ramón-Vegas & Mauri-  
24  
25 Ríos, 2020: 72) although they need stronger presence. In the next section we will focus on  
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27 ethical and deontological codes, which are the main object of study in this article.  
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### 31 32 **Codes of ethics and journalism: an overview** 33 34

35 The codes of ethics are one of the most widely used accountability instruments in journalism.  
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37 Eberwein et al. (2018: 287) consider that “on the professional level (...) codes of ethics are  
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39 crucial”. However, its definition is complex because there are a variety of models, each of  
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41 them focused on certain aspects of journalism and adapted to the different media where they  
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43 operate (Aznar, 2005). In general, a code of journalistic ethics (or a code of professional  
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45 conduct) should be understood as an instrument of social responsibility that establishes an  
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47 implicit contract between informants and citizens, an essential element to promote the quality  
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49 of the information and, therefore, increase the democratic texture of a society (Mauri-Ríos,  
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51 2015). In other words, they are a resource through which the most substantial and  
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3 fundamental aspects of professional practice may be addressed and, specifically, in relation  
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5 to its ethical dimension.  
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8 The professional codes refer to a set of principles intended to guide the daily conduct of the  
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10 informants, or so-called professional routines, and to reveal, preserve and defend the core  
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12 values of journalism as manifested in a series of responsibilities of concern to professionals,  
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14 to companies and executives, to directors, and to other institutions involved (Mauri-Ríos,  
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16 2015). As Himelboim and Limor explain, "codes of ethics are valuable for understanding  
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18 journalistic roles at the organizational level and provide a means of comparing" (2010:76).  
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20 Although they have traditionally been in the media, codes of ethics are still present today. As  
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22 Porlezza and Splendore (2016) point out, they are found not only in traditional media, but  
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24 also incorporated into more recent digital native media, as a formula for transparency towards  
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26 the public.  
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32 It is worth noting that codes of ethics have always been considered as an internal character,  
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34 both in their functioning and in their elaboration, since they served as a self-regulatory  
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36 mechanism to guarantee the social right to receive information. However, the most  
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38 widespread origin of these ethical codes lies in the efforts of journalists' organisations,  
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40 Official Associations of Journalists, or journalists' trade unions to ensuring media  
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42 responsibility for society (Soria, 1984:87). These organizations focus their work on  
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44 controlling communication professionals and offering them recommendations to carry out  
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46 their work responsibly and guaranteeing the fundamental rights of citizens. In other words,  
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48 these are external instruments to control the work and functions of professionals and the  
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50 media, which seek to raise awareness among journalists of their ethical responsibility  
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52 according to the moral values of the profession (Aznar, 1999).  
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3 Despite having a long tradition, ignorance of these tools by the profession can be a problem.

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5 In the research carried out by Herscovitz (2004, 2005) in Brazil, respondents who did not  
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7 know the code of ethics or who knew it but did not employ it totalled 70% of the sample.  
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10 Zalbidea et al. (2011) also pointed to an important ignorance of the codes of ethics by  
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12 journalists in the Basque Autonomous Community.  
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15 The attitude of journalists towards codes also vary by region and country. According to Pratt  
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17 (1990) and Pratt and McLaughlin (1989), in the beginning, countries in the Middle East,  
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19 Latin America and Asia showed positive attitudes towards in-country codes of ethics, whilst  
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21 other countries opposed such codes.  
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25 In Spain, where this study takes place, there are two ethical codes of reference, the content  
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27 of which is developed and complemented by other instruments of professional self-  
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29 regulation. The earliest of the two appeared within the *Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya*  
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31 (Official College of Journalist of Catalonia) in 1992 and constitutes the first effort to  
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33 democratize the profession. A year later, in November 1993, the Federation of Spanish Press  
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35 Associations (FAPE) published its own code. However, this accountability instrument has  
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37 been a core factor in the regulation of the profession.  
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42 It has been adopted by a multitude of established associations and international unions such  
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44 as the Union of Journalists of Portugal (Code of Ethics), the Society of Professional  
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46 Journalists of United States (SPJ Code of Ethics) or the American Society of Newspaper  
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48 Publishers and the Poynter Institute (Asne /Poynter Ethics Tool), among others (Micó, et al.,  
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50 2008).  
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3 This has led to a multitude of studies focused on the analysis of the role of ethical codes  
4 within the media, both in Spain (Aznar, 1999; Alsius; 2010; Pérez-Fuentes; 2004) and other  
5 countries in Europe, America or Asia (Nordenstreng & Hannikainen, 1984, Weaver &  
6 Wilhoit, 1986; Bertrand, 2000; Hafez, 2002; Fengler & Ruß-Mohl, 2008; Himmelboim &  
7 Limor, 2010). The general objective of these studies has been to ascertain the main values  
8 comprised within the ethical codes and to compare different aspects of their content.  
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18 In relation to this, Alsius (1999, 2010) analysed more than 100 Spanish and international  
19 codes in order to establish a classification of their content. This research suggests that the  
20 principles of journalistic ethics, including the main Spanish and international codes, can be  
21 classified into four sections (principles of truth, justice, responsibility and freedom).  
22 Himmelboim and Limor (2010) analysed 242 ethical codes from 94 countries around the world  
23 and identified a number of different roles: dissemination of information; commitment to the  
24 public interest; commitment to the public's right to know; promotion of pluralism in media;  
25 promotion of public trust in media; promotion of social values; and active participation in  
26 building society, amongst others. The media also has a role in seeking/pursuing truth; being  
27 free in a democratic society; serving as media watchdog and protecting public rights, amongst  
28 other priorities. Other recent studies in this field are those of Ikonen, Luoma-aho and Bowen  
29 (2017), where 40 codes from the United States and Finland are analysed to verify to what  
30 extent the separation between editorial and commercial content is highlighted. Yang, Taylor  
31 and Saffer (2016) study 66 journalistic and public relations codes from 33 countries to  
32 analyse the ethical values they contain and to reach the conclusion that shared values exist.  
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53 However, one aspect that these studies do not address is the perception that journalists have  
54 of these instruments. Studies that focus on this perspective are still scarce (Herrera-Damas,  
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et al., 2018; Real Rodríguez, 2018). Considering the importance, timeliness and relevance of values in journalistic ethics and, by extension, the codes that reflect these values, there is a need to study the presence and impact of ethical codes in journalism alongside the views of journalists directly involved.

The main objective of this study is to understand Spanish journalists' perception of the efficiency of codes of ethics as a tool to develop a more ethical behaviour in journalistic media. In particular, it is keen to explore the perception of these instruments by journalists on the basis of two research questions.

**RQ1:** What are the personal variables that most affect the perception that journalists have of general ethical codes?

**RQ2:** What are the professional variables that most influence the perception that journalists have of the general ethical codes?

## **Methodology**

The methodology used in the present study is based on quantitative content analysis using the survey technique. This technique makes it possible to obtain empirical data on various key aspects of the profession that are determining factors in ascertaining journalists' views of one of the instruments of accountability that is external to the media: general ethical codes. In order that we might carry out an in-depth analysis of the issues that shape journalists' perceptions, our questionnaire was based on a total of 29 questions, which reviewed general aspects about instruments of accountability. Of these questions, those focused on determine perceptions of the effectiveness of mechanisms imposed by organisations and institutions

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3 outside the media, such as journalists' associations or official schools, were selected.  
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5 Specifically, this investigation starts with a classification of thirteen external instruments  
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7 divided into two groups: on the one hand, those who have a recognized tradition in the  
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9 journalistic profession and, on the other hand, those who have been incorporated recently as  
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11 tools of self-regulation in the media thanks to the emergence and application of the internet  
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13 in the journalistic field (Table 1).  
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17 The list of external instruments to the media on which the present study was based was  
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19 established according to a classification devised by Mauri-Ríos (2015) for traditional  
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21 instruments (those in existence before the emergence of the internet and social networks),  
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23 such as general or specific ethical codes, media watchdog groups, or professional clubs,  
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25 amongst others. In relation to innovative instruments, it was based on another classification  
26  
27 by Mauri-Ríos and Ramón (2015), which focuses on those instruments that appeared during  
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29 the internet era, such as blogs on media, or criticism of the media in blogs or on social  
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31 networks.  
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### 37 **Table 1**

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39 At the same time, in order to delve deeper into the aspects that most influence journalists'  
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41 perceptions of general ethical codes, the present research presents an analysis of two types  
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43 of variables, personal variables and professional variables, which are divided into five  
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45 categories (Table 2). Although (under personal variables) data do exist on the territorial  
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47 distribution in Spain of the surveyed journalists, no significant differences were found among  
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49 different territories, and this variable was therefore discarded.  
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### 56 **Table 2**

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3 Regarding the number of people who are professional journalists, in contrast to other  
4 countries such as France, Germany, Finland and Switzerland, in Spain there are no official  
5 data on the demography of journalism professionals, nor is there any group directory or  
6 census (Rodríguez-Martínez, Mauri-Ríos & Fedele, 2017b; Fengler et al., 2015). Due to this  
7 structural limitation, and within the framework of the European project *Media Accountability*  
8 *and Transparency in Europe* (MediaAcT, EU SSH-2009-5.1.1), it was decided to carry out  
9 a classification based on three criteria: (1) the number of journalists who are members of  
10 professional associations; (2) the different types of media; and (3) the approximate number  
11 of journalists per region, given an estimated total population of 25,000 professional  
12 journalists in Spain. In the project mentioned above, it was decided that, in order to guarantee  
13 a representative sample of Spanish journalists, any sub-sample should include a minimum of  
14 100 participants (Eberwein, et al., 2014).

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17 With regard to the profile of those surveyed, Weischenberg, et al. (2006: 227) suggest three  
18 basic characteristics: (1) working for a journalistic medium (thus excluding professionals  
19 who carry out public relations tasks); (2) conducting journalism (thus excluding those who  
20 carry out technical or organizational tasks within the media industry); and (3) having full-  
21 time employment or, at the minimum, receiving 50% or more of one's income from being a  
22 journalist. It is worth noting that journalists who work freelance are also included in the third  
23 category, provided that 50% or more of their income comes from journalism.

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26 Following these criteria, the final sample for the purposes of the present research consisted  
27 of 228 journalists, a total that constitutes a significant sample with data from professionals  
28 throughout Spain. Of these 228, 52.2% (n=119) were women and 47.8% (n=109) were men.

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3 Additionally, 71.1% of those surveyed had university-level training in journalism. Finally,  
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5 53.1% stated that they belonged to a journalists' association or professional club.  
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## 10 **Results**

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12 An analysis of the data obtained in the present study demonstrates that general ethical codes  
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14 are considered by journalists to be the most highly valued instruments of accountability  
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16 external to the media. These codes, characterized by guaranteeing that professionals do their  
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18 work responsibly and with basic rights, scored 5.69 out of 10 from the 228 journalists  
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20 surveyed for being the most effective tool for controlling the profession of journalism (Table  
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22 3).  
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26 These data are complemented by others that point to specialized ethical codes as the second  
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28 most valued external instrument of accountability among journalists, who rated them at 5.66  
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30 out of 10 (Table 3). Specialized ethical codes concur with general ethical codes in  
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32 guaranteeing journalism that is both responsible and in line with basic rights. Nevertheless,  
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34 their use in newsrooms is primarily for defense and protection of certain roles or social issues,  
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36 such as minors, gender violence or immigration.  
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### 42 **Table 3.**

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44 Laws regulating the media show similar results (5.57), as do media/audiovisual councils  
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46 (5.40). Both are considered by journalists to be the third and fourth most effective  
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48 instruments, respectively (Table 3). These data are especially significant for two basic  
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50 reasons. First, the present legislation that regulates journalism in Spain is the 1966 Press Law,  
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52 which has been in effect for more than fifty years. Additionally, in Spain there are no specific  
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54 territorial norms regarding freedom of the press, and the few that do exist in the autonomous  
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3 regions regulate the duties and responsibilities of public media (Rodríguez-Martínez et al.,  
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5 2017a). Secondly, Spain currently has no Media Council or Audiovisual Council at state  
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7 level. There are only two Audiovisual Councils with an established record, the Audiovisual  
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9 Councils of Catalonia and the Audiovisual Council of Andalusia, whose spheres of influence  
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11 are limited to their own territories. In the remaining autonomous communities, on the one  
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13 hand the creation of such institutions and the approval of legislation to regulate them are still  
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15 in their initial stages or, on the other, they have similar institutions of which the sole function  
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17 is to guide and advise journalism, but which lack disciplinary power. Thus, although the two  
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19 instruments under consideration are evaluated positively by journalists, they have a limited  
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21 effect on journalism in Spain.  
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31 *Perceptions of the effectiveness of general ethical codes according to the personal variables*  
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33 *of the journalists*  
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35 In response to RQ1, the results of the present study reveal that personal variables such as the  
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37 age of journalists are determining factors in the perception they have of general ethical codes.  
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39 Thus, the older the professional in question, the greater his or her confidence in the  
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41 effectiveness of these instruments of accountability. In fact, all journalists aged 45 or over  
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43 agree in regarding this instrument as the most effective in applying accountability to media  
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45 companies, over and above the twelve external instruments considered in the present study  
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49 (Table 4).  
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54 **Table 4**  
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3 In contrast, the younger age groups, between 19 and 44 years of age, do not consider general  
4 ethical codes to be the most effective instrument of accountability, since in all cases they  
5 place it below other instruments examined in the present study (Table 4). It is relevant that it  
6 is the younger journalists, those between 19 and 24 years of age, who have a more negative  
7 perception of general ethical codes, given that they place them as the fifth most effective tool  
8 of accountability, below other tools like Media watchdog groups (mean of 6.56), Criticism  
9 on social networks (6.44), Media Councils or Audiovisual Council (5.78), Academic analysis  
10 of journalism (5.78), and Laws regulating the media (4.89) (Table 4).  
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24 Regarding the second personal variable considered in the present study, the level of training  
25 in journalism of those surveyed, the results reveal a distinct tendency in data referring to age.  
26 In this case, the lower the level of education, the greater the level of confidence in general  
27 ethical codes. Thus, those surveyed who have no formal education in journalism, those who  
28 have completed an internship within a single area of media, and those who have been  
29 apprenticed in journalism are those who rate the effectiveness of this instrument most highly  
30 (Table 5). Among journalists with little or no training in journalism, it is only professionals  
31 who have no official qualifications who are most opposed to this instrument, ranking it  
32 behind other traditional ones such as Press Clubs (6.25) and Professional Unions (6.00), and  
33 behind innovative ones like Criticism on social networks (6.00) (Table 5).  
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#### 49 **Table 5**

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51 With respect to professionals who have done official studies in journalism or communication,  
52 only those who hold a university degree in journalism (Bachelor's Degree) consider general  
53 professional ethical codes to be the most effective instrument. Nevertheless, their level of  
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confidence in the effectiveness of this instrument is lower than those of the other groups mentioned above (Table 5). Professionals who hold a Master's or other postgraduate degree and especially those who have completed their doctoral dissertation on journalism have a lower opinion of the effectiveness of ethical codes compared to other groups (Table 5). Those who hold a doctoral degree in Journalism/Communication rate it as the seventh most effective instrument, after other classical instruments like Academic analysis of journalism (mean of 6.63) and Laws regulating the media (6.00), as well as after emerging ones like Blogs about the media written by citizens or academics (5.75), among others (Table 5).

*Perceptions of the effectiveness of general ethical codes according to the professional variables of the journalists*

In response to RQ2, work experience is one of the professional variables that has the greatest effect among the journalists surveyed on perceptions about the effectiveness of ethical codes. Specifically, professionals who have more than 20 years of experience are the only ones who consider this instrument to be the most valid when applying accountability to a medium (Table 6). Similar results were found among professionals who have between 1 and 5 years of experience and those who have worked for a journalistic company for 11 to 20 years. In this case, both groups believe that general ethical codes are the third most effective instrument for controlling and guaranteeing that the media fulfill their function in society (Table 6). In contrast, journalists who have less than a year of experience and those with 6 to 10 years of experience have the least confidence in general ethical codes compared to the effectiveness of other instruments, rating them as the sixth and seventh most useful instrument, respectively, when applying accountability to journalistic compositions (Table 6).

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3 At the same time, data reveal two significant tendencies in groups that do not have more than  
4  
5 20 years of experience. First, groups with less work experience (from less than one year to 5  
6  
7 years) have the most confidence in innovative instruments of accountability. Thus, both of  
8  
9 these groups believe that criticism through social networks is an optimal and effective tool  
10  
11 for controlling the media. And second, professionals who fall into the groups with 6 to 20  
12  
13 years of work experience grant their most positive rating to tools with a longer tradition in  
14  
15 accountability, such as Media Councils or Audiovisual Councils or legislation charged with  
16  
17 regulating the media (Table 6).  
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#### 23 **Table 6.**

24  
25 Another of the professional categories that have the most influence on journalists'  
26  
27 perceptions of general ethical codes is the one regarding the type of medium in which the  
28  
29 journalist works. Thus, professionals who work for private companies are the most likely to  
30  
31 evaluate general ethical codes within the journalistic company positively. These include, for  
32  
33 example, professionals who work on weekly publications, on magazines, and in private radio  
34  
35 and television (Table 7). On the other hand, although journalists who work in public radio  
36  
37 and television evaluate the effectiveness of this instrument positively, they place it after other  
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39 instruments, such as Laws regulating the media and Media Councils and Audiovisual  
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41 Councils (Table 7). In this instance, it is workers in news agencies who have the worst  
42  
43 perception of the functions exercised by general ethical codes on the profession of  
44  
45 journalism, since they place them in seventh position, after other traditional instruments like  
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47 Media Councils and Audiovisual Councils and Media watchdog groups, as well as after other  
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49 innovative ones like Criticism on social networks (Table 7).  
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**Table 7.**

Finally, it is important to note that, in the case of professional variables such as the position held by the journalist within the journalistic company, the present results reveal that journalists working in practically all jobs consider general ethical codes to be of great assistance in accountability. In fact, it is noteworthy that journalists holding positions that have greater responsibility, such as director or media representative (6.64) or head of news or news editor (5.73) are precisely those that have the greatest confidence in these instruments (Table 8). At the same time, section heads were found to rate general ethical codes as the second most effective instrument (5.26), following only specialized ethical codes (5.53), a result that demonstrates that journalists with this professional profile also assign special relevance to the functions of self-regulation and control exercised by ethical codes in the profession (Table 8).

Freelance workers and writers have a similar perception and place only Media Councils and Audiovisual Councils (5.67) above general ethical codes (5.20). The only exception is found in the case of interns, who place the effectiveness of instruments such as Criticism on social networks, Information/Audiovisual Councils, and Professional clubs and unions, among others, ahead of general ethical codes (Table 8).

**Table 8.****Discussion**

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3 If we understand journalism as a profession whose mission is to guarantee the citizenship  
4 their right to information, it is essential to be familiar with the tools provided by the  
5 profession itself in order to be accountable to the public regarding this professional mission.  
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8 Hence the importance of instruments of accountability and the perceptions of the  
9 professionals themselves regarding their effectiveness.  
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12 When analysing the perceptions of journalists we should not ignore the effect of first-person  
13 and third-person perceptions. Regarding Lee and Coleman (2018), for example, US  
14 journalists believe that colleagues in their same organisation act unethically significantly less  
15 often and act ethically significantly more often than those at other organisations and in related  
16 industries.  
17  
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19 In times of profound change in the journalistic profession, such as following a severe  
20 economic crisis entailing the closure of media and the proposal of new business models that  
21 are very different from those traditionally introduced in the area of communication, it  
22 becomes especially relevant to verify that professionals continue to have confidence in  
23 ethical codes as the most effective instruments of accountability external to the media. These  
24 data are consistent with results reported in the previous literature, in which it was noted that  
25 the academics, and especially professionals in journalism, consider deontological codes to be  
26 a basic tool in the self-regulatory media system (Real Rodríguez, 2018).  
27  
28

29 Although thanks to new technologies, recent years have seen the appearance of new  
30 instruments that take advantage of the potentialities of the internet to apply accountability,  
31 professionals continue to have confidence in an instrument that has more than a century of  
32 tradition as the most effective in dealing with the public. In contrast to results reported by  
33 Herrera Damas, et al. (2018), the present study demonstrates that Spanish journalists continue  
34 to support the effectiveness of traditional instruments, such as codes of ethics, above other  
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3 innovative instruments of accountability that are the fruit of the emergence of the internet.

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5 The fact that this tool, which could be defined as a guide to help journalists resolve the  
6 deontological issues that can arise in the profession, is the most highly valued is an indication  
7 of the importance that professionals grant to essential ethical principles (McQuail, 1992;  
8 Alsius, 2010).

9  
10 Nevertheless, Grynko (2012: 261) points to a possible shortcoming when he mentions that  
11 the codes may also represent “serious difficulties” in inculcating substantial ethical values in  
12 individual journalists and in the profession as a whole. Following Grynko, these difficulties  
13 may cause “a gap” between “moralistic” codes, which imply “general precepts,” and  
14 “specific practices occurring in reality”. This is also reflected in the study by Motlagh et al.  
15 (2013) according to which more than half of the respondents believe that journalism codes  
16 of ethics do not decrease the journalists’ mistakes effectively, and cannot be formulated in a  
17 canon or set of principals.

18  
19 Together with this result, the present study intended to demonstration how personal variables  
20 (age, level of education) and professional variables (years of work experience, type of  
21 medium in which the journalist works, present position in the communications company)  
22 influence the assignment of more or less impact on deontological codes as an instrument of  
23 accountability. This research demonstrates that there are three categories that are especially  
24 influential on the positive perception of the effectiveness of general ethical codes. First, with  
25 respect to personal variables, the age of the journalist was found to be a determining factor  
26 in the regard that he or she has for ethical codes (RQ1). Specifically, the older the  
27 professionals, the greater their confidence in ethical codes in accountability. Second, the  
28 present study demonstrates that work experience and the type of medium in which the  
29 journalist works are the professional variables that have the greatest impact on journalists’  
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3 perceptions of this instrument (RQ2). Specifically, the longer the professional career of those  
4 surveyed, the greater their confidence in ethical codes. This result coincides with that  
5 indicated by the study by Motlagh et al. (2013) according to which there is a significant  
6 correlation between journalists' ethical perception and their work experience; the more  
7 experience they have, the more favourable perception they have regarding journalism codes  
8 of ethics. Likewise, coinciding with studies such as Suárez-Villegas (2015), it is observed  
9 that the ethical exercise of journalism depends especially on personal and professional values  
10 of journalists.

11  
12 Additionally, those who work in private media rate the effectiveness of ethical codes above  
13 that of other instruments. Furthermore, although the youngest journalists and those who have  
14 worked the fewest years have a high opinion of ethical codes, they have greater confidence  
15 in other more innovative instruments.

16  
17 Finally, another significant finding must be kept in mind. When codes of ethics are not rated  
18 as the most effective instrument, the surveyed journalists tended to favor Media Councils and  
19 Audiovisual Councils. Given this result, it is interesting to note how two entities with very  
20 little influence in Spain (if we compare them with the solvency of Media Councils such as  
21 the Independent Press Standards Organization in the United Kingdom, the Ordini dei  
22 Giornalisti in Italy, or the Julkisen sanan neuvosto in Finland; or with Audiovisual Councils  
23 such as the French Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel, or British OFCOM, for example) are  
24 viewed as very effective, which would suggest that Spanish journalists favour these entities  
25 having a greater presence in Spain.

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**Table 1.** Instruments of accountability external to the media

Traditional instruments	Innovative instruments
General ethical codes	Criticism of journalism by journalist bloggers
Specific and thematic ethical codes	Blogs about the media written by citizens and academics
Laws regulating the media	Criticism on social networks (for example, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
Press clubs	
Professional unions	
Media watchdog groups	
Media/audiovisual councils	
Audience associations	
Sector journals on the profession of journalism	
Academic analysis of journalism	
Others	

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**Table 2.** Demographic and professional variables examined in the present analysis

<b>Personal variables</b>	<b>Professional variables</b>
Age	Years of experience working as a journalist
Level of education	Type of medium in which the journalist works
	Present position in the communications company
	Years of experience working as a journalist

**Table 3.** Journalists' perceptions of the effectiveness of accountability instruments external to the media

	<b>Valid</b>	<b>Missing</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Laws regulating the media	228	0	5.57
General ethical codes	228	0	5.69
Specific ethical codes	228	0	5.66
Press clubs	228	0	4.92
Professional unions	228	0	4.81
Media/audiovisual councils	228	0	5.40
Audience associations	227	1	4.51
Sector journals on the profession of journalism	228	0	3.73
Media watchdog groups	227	1	4.59
Criticism of journalism by journalist bloggers	228	0	4.47
Blogs about the media written by citizens	228	0	4.16
Criticism on social social media	228	0	5.08
Academic analysis of journalism	227	1	4.85
Other	22	206	2.73

**Table 4.** Journalists' perceptions according to age

	<b>19-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Laws regulating the media	4.89	5.60	5.81	4.98	6.03	7*
General ethical codes	4.78	5.53	5.54	5.81	6.24	7.5*
Specific ethical codes	4.44	5.53	5.58	5.83	6.03	7*
Press clubs	4.44	4.78	5.24	4.77	4.76	6.5*
Professional unions	4.67	4.88	5.10	4.51	4.47	7*
Media/audiovisual councils	5.78	5.62	5.36	5.06	5.50	6.5*
Audience associations	4.11	4.59	4.56	4.75	3.97	5*
Sector journals on the profession of journalism	3.00	3.48	3.96	3.98	3.32	6*
Media watchdog groups	6.56	4.57	4.92	4.36	3.71	6*
Criticism of journalism by journalist bloggers	4.33	4.45	4.57	4.57	4.24	3.5*
Blogs about the media written by citizens	4.00	3.91	4.42	4.32	3.88	3*
Criticism on social media	6.44	5.79	4.92	4.70	4.50	4.5*
Academic analysis of journalism	5.78	4.56	5.04	5.08	4.21	6.5*
Other	0*	3.14	1.57	5.40	0*	0*

**Table 5.** Journalists' perceptions according to level of education

	No formal education	Practicum in one medium	Unofficial studies	Journalism school	University degree in journalism	Master's degree in journalism or communication	Doctoral dissertation in journalism or communication
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Laws regulating the media	5.80	5.67	4.50	6.57	5.49	5.69	6.00
General ethical codes	7.80	8.17	5.25	7.57	5.54	5.53	5.00
Specific ethical codes	6.80	7.50	6.00	7.43	5.51	5.58	5.25
Press clubs	7.80	5.67	6.25	6.14	4.72	4.97	4.75
Professional unions	7.40	5.83	6.00	5.00	4.69	4.67	4.75
Media/audiovisual councils	7.00	6.33	5.00	6.14	5.28	5.53	5.25
Audience associations	6.20	5.17	4.25	6.14	4.35	4.69	4.00
Sector journals on the profession of journalism	4.60	4.83	3.75	4.71	3.55	3.72	5.13
Media watchdog groups	6.00	5.83	3.75	6.14	4.29	5.28	4.88
Criticism of journalism by journalist bloggers	5.60	6.33	4.75	6.00	4.15	4.69	6.38
Blogs about the media written by citizens	3.20	6.17	3.75	5.43	3.96	4.31	5.75
Criticism on social media	4.60	6.33	6.00	5.14	4.98	5.42	4.63
Academic analysis of journalism	6.20	5.67	4.00	6.29	4.65	4.81	6.63
Other	2.5*				2.36	3.67	

**Table 6.** Journalists' perceptions according to years of work experience

	<b>Less than 1 year</b>	<b>1-5 years</b>	<b>6-10 years</b>	<b>11-15 years</b>	<b>16-20 years</b>	<b>More than 20 years</b>
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Laws regulating the media	5.80	5.67	4.50	6.57	5.49	5.69
General ethical codes	7.80	8.17	5.25	7.57	5.54	5.53
Specific ethical codes	6.80	7.50	6.00	7.43	5.51	5.58
Press clubs	7.80	5.67	6.25	6.14	4.72	4.97
Professional unions	7.40	5.83	6.00	5.00	4.69	4.67
Media/audiovisual councils	7.00	6.33	5.00	6.14	5.28	5.53
Audience associations	6.20	5.17	4.25	6.14	4.35	4.69
Sector journals on the profession of journalism	4.60	4.83	3.75	4.71	3.55	3.72
Media watchdog groups	6.00	5.83	3.75	6.14	4.29	5.28
Criticism of journalism by journalist bloggers	5.60	6.33	4.75	6.00	4.15	4.69
Blogs about the media written by citizens	3.20	6.17	3.75	5.43	3.96	4.31
Criticism on social media	4.60	6.33	6.00	5.14	4.98	5.42
Academic analysis of journalism	6.20	5.67	4.00	6.29	4.65	4.81
Other	2.5*				2.36	3.67

**Table 7.** Journalists' perceptions according to the medium in which they work

	Daily	Weekly	Magazine	Public radio	Private radio	Public TV	Private TV	Digital daily	News agency	Freelance
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Laws regulating the media	5.10	6.20	4.38	6.44	5.12	6.16	5.67	4.81	5.29	5.61
General ethical codes	5.33	7.00	5.50	6.24	5.76	5.89	6.44	4.81	5.43	5.44
Specific ethical codes	5.50	7.00	5.13	6.32	5.40	5.76	5.89	5.00	5.57	5.33
Press clubs	4.60	6.00	4.50	5.07	4.44	5.58	4.44	3.67	5.52	5.50
Professional unions	4.12	4.60	4.25	5.34	4.64	5.34	3.56	4.67	5.05	5.11
Media/audiovisual councils	4.67	6.20	3.50	5.80	4.40	6.18	6.22	5.57	6.05	5.22
Audience associations	4.27	4.60	3.75	5.05	3.84	4.61	4.89	3.81	4.95	5.00
Sector journals on the profession of journalism	3.79	6.00	2.75	4.34	3.16	3.84	3.33	2.57	3.95	3.83
Media watchdog groups	4.24	6.00	3.25	4.80	3.60	5.08	4.56	4.24	5.60	4.78
Criticism of journalism by journalist bloggers	4.07	4.60	2.88	5.15	4.24	5.08	4.11	4.05	4.52	4.17
Blogs about the media written by citizens	3.71	5.80	2.50	5.02	4.08	4.50	3.56	3.57	3.95	4.11
Criticism on social media	5.07	5.40	4.00	5.00	5.28	5.42	4.00	4.95	5.86	4.50
Academic analysis of journalism	4.83	6.80	4.00	4.98	5.16	5.05	4.00	3.67	5.48	4.61
Other	1.57	7*			2.5*	.25	7.5*		3.67	3.33

**Table 8.** Journalists' perceptions according to the position they hold in their company

	Other (specify)	Editor in chief / Head of news / News editor	Section head	Director / Community media representative	News writer	Intern	Freelance
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Laws regulating the media	5.54	4.85	5.37	6.21	5.78	8*	5.07
General ethical codes	5.73	5.73	5.26	6.64	5.68	7*	5.20
Specific ethical codes	5.69	5.45	5.53	6.64	5.69	7*	5.00
Press clubs	5.62	4.52	4.32	5.57	4.88	8*	4.93
Professional unions	5.31	3.85	4.56	4.86	4.93	8*	5.13
Media/audiovisual councils	5.85	4.97	4.68	5.36	5.48	9*	5.67
Audience associations	4.54	4.24	3.58	4.79	4.65	7*	4.73
Sector journals on the profession of journalism	4.31	2.91	3.16	4.43	3.81	5*	3.87
Media watchdog groups	4.69	4.39	3.67	4.50	4.68	8*	5.13
Criticism of journalism by journalist bloggers	4.58	4.15	3.53	5.79	4.50	7*	4.53
Blogs about the media written by citizens	4.12	4.03	3.68	4.86	4.18	6*	4.20
Criticism on social media	5.19	5.67	4.63	4.93	5.07	9*	4.20
Academic analysis of journalism	4.62	5.03	5.16	5.57	4.76	7*	4.33
Other	5.00		1.83	7*	2.45		0*