

Between a rock and a hard place. Citizen journalism and journalistic ethics in Mexico

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Abstract

This article analyzes and discusses the degrees of functionality and usefulness of the codes of journalistic ethics in the professional practice of citizen journalism in Mexico. At the end of 2016 this country ranked third in the world in index in homicides against journalists, behind only Iraq and Afghanistan. It implements an integrated model of research based on the interdisciplinary perspective and uses a non-experimental quantitative methodology of descriptive scope. The questionnaire measures, based on a scale of evaluation type Likert, fundamentally the construct of the general principles of journalistic ethics, from which the particular ethical values that characterize the exercise of the citizen journalist in Mexico emerge. The article closes discussing, refining and articulating new research questions as a result of the evidence gathered in the group of citizen journalists under study, and in relation to their positions on credibility, trust and quality around the context of which they are part and of which they account.

Keywords: Ethics. Research. Participatory journalism. Interdiscipline. Mexico.

Introducción

In Mexico, even a publishing house or journalism company can work with some economic success without ethics or without consulting ethical codes (LEÓN DUARTE et al, 2017). However, the most overwhelming is the verdict when we place ethics in the practice of high quality journalism and we see that, in this country, it has also been an issue that lies at the edge of the unanalyzed and unquestioned. Just as we believe that carrying out a study that aspires to analyze the ethical dimension in the practice of journalism is an arduous task, making a high quality newspaper under the parameters of the journalist's codes of ethics is undoubtedly equally complex. Among other reasons, Restrepo (2009), affirms that this duality is complicated because it fundamentally is a question of harmonizing, on the one hand, ethics and money in a context of loyalty of the readers – whether they are daily subscribers or buyers – since they represent the fundamental asset for every newspaper. On the other hand, even the most lucid media entrepreneurs have realized that it is impossible to offer products of high journalistic quality if professional identity is not imbued with ethical values. When we talk about credibility, trust, quality, but also about a solid professional

identity, we are entering into the areas of the main values that define journalistic ethics (RESTREPO, 2009).

Furthermore, it is recognized that all production of knowledge in the journalistic field resides, according to Bourdieu (1997; 2000), under specific social conditions of production. These conditions nest precisely in a given state of the structure and functioning of the journalistic field. The production of knowledge in a professional and academic field such as journalism in Mexico, comes from what is supposed to be a specific form of interests on the part of the information professional. Particularly, from a decade to now in Mexico, these interests are also sustained by a climate of insecurity in the journalistic practice. We are talking about the constant attacks against the exercise of journalism in Mexico: according to the last report presented in July 2017 by the main independent and non-partisan organization of Mexico and Central America in favor of the rights for freedom of expression, Article 19 (2017), 2016 was the worst year for the Mexican press, with 11 murders and 426 government espionage attacks, 72 threats through social media and a 99.75% impunity rate. 2017 does not look better: the seven murders of journalists perpetrated until July 12, 2017 mark a point of no return. As far as the federal administration of Enrique Peña Nieto, 34 journalists have been killed. That is, the press has not ceased to be a “side effect” of violence for Mexican government. This situation is even more worrying when 53% of attacks against the press in 2016 were committed by public officials of several levels of government. Thus, at the end of 2016, Mexico was ranked third in world in number of journalists killed, only behind Iraq and Afghanistan (ARTÍCULO 19, 2017).

Faced with this sad and complex problem, the journalistic field in Mexico, society, academy and the journalistic company in México ask themselves if there is indeed journalistic ethics in Mexico: Is it possible to report under professional deontological criteria in this country? And if so, how useful are journalistic codes of ethics for Mexican press? How reliable are the information sources used by the journalist in Mexico? Is the citizen journalist in favor of receiving a special informative treatment because of the situation of violence that Mexico and the journalistic collective in particular are experiencing? Should coercive instruments exist to enforce codes of ethics in journalism? In any case, what would be the ethical commitment that will distinguish digital citizen journalism in Sonora from print and digital communicators at general?

This text presents a first approach to the practice of citizen journalism in Sonora, in the Northwest of Mexico. Sonora is one of the thirty-two states that make up the United States of Mexico. Geographically it is distanced more than 2.000 kilometers from the center of Mexican political power, Mexico City. A seal of social and cultural Sonoran identity it is its status as a border entity: it has the active presence of organized crime groups that participate in smuggling and human traffic to the United States of America, in addition to being the scene of distinct tragic events, such as the fire of the Guardería ABC (2009)

and the spill of toxic wastes carried out by Grupo México (2014), both cases linked to the national political class as well as to international capital. In this context, the article aims to offer a descriptive analysis of the ethical values exercised by the citizen journalist in his professional practice.

The practice of citizen journalism is understood here as the act of a citizen or a group of citizens who play an active role in the process of collecting, transmitting, analyzing and disseminating information. According to Bowman and Willis (2003, p.9), the “intention of such participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires”. Espiritusanto and Rodríguez (2011) affirm that concepts such as the collaboration of the citizenry and the fact of informing issues that traditional media ignored were key in the birth of citizen journalism as promoted by the Indymedia collective between 1999 and 2006. Besides, the use of technology and tools that allowed any citizen to participate and generate content was added.

This article deals with the antecedents that helped growing of citizen journalism and which gave it characteristics of social participation. The empirical analysis seeks to contribute knowledge about the ethical values from which the citizen journalist in Mexico interprets and intervenes in the public sphere (HABERMAS, 1989). That is, in spaces of discussion and deliberation of public use of rational meaning and those that questions, discuss and influences the political and social system. Specifically, the article seeks to identify concrete perceptions of journalistic practices, positions and strategies in the face of a complex problem that necessarily challenges not only trust and credibility of a professional activity, but also its independence, impartiality and professional quality of citizen journalist in Mexico compared with practice of the professional of the information. Consequently, the article ends discussing, refining and articulating new research questions as it seeks to establish unprecedented relationships between theory and practice as a result of the evidence gathered in the collective of citizen journalists under study, in context of which they are part of it.

Research perspective

The growth of citizen journalism as social phenomenon and object of study is linked from its emergence to two factors: the lack of legitimacy of professional journalism composed by five phases of crisis between 1920 and the year 2000, according to Aladro Vico (2013): ethics, socio-professional, political, technological and financial, and mass access to digital technology, which provides one or more means of distribution. From an interdisciplinary perspective, both factors are inscribed in the development of social processes related in a wide spectrum to information and the exercise of citizenship, in context of digital convergence. At the outset, it is necessary clarify that references to citizen journalism and its emergence in a certain date is for practical purposes, since it drags the gradual passage of digital tools

from private sphere to public scene, from the presentation and open use of World Wide Web in 1991, as evidenced by some episodes in the history of journalism and numerous arrhythmic efforts of citizen participation. For this reason, different authors may set different dates of their birth. Among three factors (journalism, technology and citizenship) that make up citizen journalism, the history of radio (popular, educational, communal and citizen), which presents a parallel development in the now called “traditional” media (radio, print and television). This point is pertinent because academic literature frequently takes citizen journalism starting point as the definition made by Bowman and Willis (2003), in which citizen journalism occurs in digital environment through blogs, social networks, forums etc. However, this definition creates a gray zone in which antecedents of similar exercises in the way of finding and constructing legitimate and independent expression spaces are excluded because they have grown on a different platform. For example, between 1975 and 1998, Davis Merritt was editor of the Wichita Eagle newspaper¹, one of three journals, along with Wisconsin State Journal and The Charlotte Observer, who participated in the takeoff of Public Journalism, an important antecedent of citizen organization linked to the press and also one that starts strategies of media approach to society as a way to face the crisis of credibility on journalism. During 1990 elections in Kansas, Wichita Eagle newspaper started the “Your Vote Counts” project, in which they asked citizens to determine issues of their interest. With that information, editors elaborated the agenda for coverage of the electoral campaign. According to Pew Center for Civic Journalism reports, between 1994 and 2001, nearly 20 percent of 1.500 daily newspapers in United States practiced some form of civic journalism. “And almost everyone said they had a positive effect on the community” (BOWMAN; WILLIS, 2003, p.9). According to Merritt (1997), it is necessary to understand that public journalism is an idea and a philosophy. He argues that it is not an established practice or a series of techniques. It is an idea that journalists and non-journalists discuss and explore, seeking answers to three related questions: what is the role of citizens in a democracy? What is the role of journalists in a democracy? And how do these two roles relate with one another? “In other words, what obligations do journalists have towards citizens and how can these obligations be fulfilled” (MERRITT, 1997, p.52). According to Merritt (1997), the main objective is to learn how to transform journalism so that citizens participate more deeply in public life. In 1994, New York University professor Jay Rosen, during a meeting at the American Press Institute, shares a wide open definition of public journalism that should not be taken badly. After all, it comes from one of its founders: “The most important thing anyone can say about public journalism I will say right now: we’re still inventing it. And because we’re inventing it, we do not really know what ‘it’ is” (ROSEN, 1999, p.19). Rosen’s pragmatism is also shown in another definition, published on his PressThink blog on June 27, 2006: “When people

1 Available at: <http://www.kansas.com/>. Accessed on: July 12, 2017.

formerly known as the audience use the journalistic tools they have available to inform each other, we are talking about citizen journalism” (ROSEN, 2006, p.2). This pragmatism is also on Merritt (1997) when he refers to public journalism as a theory in search of a practice, while citizen journalism has emerged as a practice in search of a theory. However, if there is no consensus on how to call it, most will have no difficulty in recognizing the term public or civic journalism, which denotes a simple but controversial premise: the purpose of the press is to promote and improve, not only inform or complain about public life (GLASSER; CRAFT, 1998). The most complete version, which is considered the clearest explanatory motive, is from 1999. In it, public journalism is understood as a movement endowed with a strong ethical dimension of its own as an alternative to renew the moral votes of professional journalism; this way of conceiving is very useful now to contextualize the development of citizen journalism anchored in a technological and social dimension. According to Rosen, public journalism is an idea that occurred and if we try to understand what it implies, we have to look at several simultaneous issues:

The idea is hiding somewhere at that simultaneity. Public journalism is an approach to the daily business of the craft that calls on journalists to (1) address people as citizens, potential participants in public affairs, rather than victims or spectators; (2) help the political community act upon, rather than just learn about, its problems; (3) improve the climate of public discussion, rather than simply watch it deteriorate; And (4) help make public life go well, so that it earns its claim on our attention. (ROSEN, 1999, p.43).

When building on dynamic and moving pillars, of which we consider that public journalism is one of them, the definition of citizen journalism assumes a complex character. In our view, studies on the phenomenon have separately addressed the relationship between technology and journalism from an instrumental and mono-disciplinary approach. As a result, it is stated that “only reporting an experience about an event does not necessarily make someone a journalist” (REAL; AGUDIEZ; PRÍNCIPE, 2007, p.199); or that citizens “do not have the duty, the commitment or the possibilities of access to the information that allow them to fully comply with the social responsibility that defines journalism” (PUENTE; GRASAU, 2011, p.152). Thus, a trend can be found that characterizes it via the analysis and scope of the technical processes involved; and another that focuses on their professional limitations compared to the standard of professional journalism (and of which it does not come out well). These two positions occur even though citizen journalism is generally recognized by the potential that it represents by incorporating a panorama of the use of information for democracy, as well as its impact on the practice of journalism in a problematic social context.

While in the first two positions citizen journalism is analyzed from a reductionist perspective in which it is subject to other prevailing practices, an interdisciplinary

approach seems more appropriate to us, once it is in an integral approach, it incorporates the contribution and evolution of the previous ones and at least two or more disciplinary theoretical nuclei for a more comprehensive explanation of the social phenomenon under study. In summary, the number of analyzes dedicated to the participation factor with a socio-political component is smaller and, while references to precursor projects and success stories are abundant, perceptions of the subjects that are producing it are less well known, so are the studies about productive routines in median communities and small projects. Having these interdisciplinary descriptions (of composition, criteria, values etc.), would pay to the best understanding of their contributions.

In any case, what we want to make clear is that communicative interactivity involves more complex relationships because the actors are the individuals or groups of citizens that come into contact in different contexts. It contributes to the constitution of the so-called virtual communities, that is to say, these new spaces of collective symbolic production of represented and shared worlds. This modality of interactivity generates new, more agile and dynamic spaces of communication between the readers and the journalists, the sources and the journalists, the readers with other readers, the readers with the advertisers, and the readers with the characters of the present, among others. To clarify this relationship and differentiation is important to establish the meanings that are used when referring to citizen journalism, as part of an emerging scenario in definition and evolution.

From this article perspective, citizen journalism is approached as a form of social participation that is exercised in the field of the media. Therefore, we analyze it by stating that their contribution is precisely the mixed nature of the practice: even if it is obvious or seems simplistic, the greatest wealth in this subject is that they are citizens doing journalism. Not just in a civil or a professional side separately, but in the mixture of the journalistic practice not being exempt from perceptions of the subject as an inhabitant of a popular sector, user of services, employee, victim, student, affected or beneficiary of public policies etc.

The main assumption with which we start this study is that the citizen journalist in Mexico, in addition to being within the digital environment, is motivated for socially participating and for being an agent of change, even when the contexts are complex and hostile. In search of precision, our approach considers that the subject's interest in contributing to the debate and expressing his opinion on public affairs (which is a product of the tensions in the relationship between society and government) is a distinctive component of citizen journalism. However, this aspect is often overlooked in the academic literature because the term "participatory", as a trait of interactivity in virtual communication since the evolution of treatment that it had received, can be taken as a substitute of social participation within the processes of democratic construction and public opinion. By recurrence, the first is imposed on the second. To assume it like this, explicitly and not implicitly, has the objective of highlighting a minority sector of non-professional citizen journalists who, in general

exchange of information on Internet, resorts to digital tools and exercises their freedom to participate in public life, to manifest him/herself and contribute to collective dialogue that should act as an impetus for discussion of public affairs. In this collaboration one can also find routes to occupy and recover spaces, which is valid to achieve a dynamic, proactive, ethical and professional journalism, as well as a society reduced to traditional spaces that now access (or can access) to a new land.

Of course, applying a monolithic definition would be a contradiction to the very opening of technology. Depending on the context each subject or group defines the method, profile, and working routines: a rural community will adjust resources to its own context, as well as a media created among all the powers of a medium or large city. An intermediate model of collaboration, amateurs and professionals, can be functional but not the only one. The important thing is the existence of multiple mechanisms to inform the other, in a relationship of peers and with a perspective of their own. In any case, our hypothesis is that the citizen journalist in Mexico uses digital tools as a form of motivated participation to influence public issues, and adds a routine, regularity, organization and professional performance. Then, citizen journalism would imply a philosophy and professional ethics, so that its exercise is not solved by the sum of technology, the subject and journalism; or the journalist plus social networks, personal web pages and blogs. Our approach is inclined to review and analyze the citizen who is incorporated into the production and dissemination of information with clarity that their role contributes to the better social life development:

In a greater degree of involvement, citizens can become government and media watchmen. These are citizen journalists committed to a situation of injustice, censorship, etc. These users often have greater knowledge about the use of participation tools and technology. (ESPIRITUSANTO; RODRÍGUEZ, 2011, p.16 - Our translation).

In Mexico, collectives of radio and Internet communicators joined Indymedia in regions of Chiapas, Yucatan, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Sonora, Quintana Roo and Baja California, although currently only the last three are active. In the case of Quintana Roo, it is a website dedicated to gather information on the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization, held in September 2003. From a regional perspective, the experience of state of Sonora, in the northwest border of Mexico, also stands out for its collaboration with Indymedia through the extinct project of *Radio Bemba*. When this one disappeared, two initiatives of citizen media arose among old members: *Libera Radio*, that broadcasts by Internet; and *Política y Rocanrol Radio*, which occupies the frequency 106.7 FM with coverage in the city of Hermosillo, and which after the Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFT) confiscated the transmission equipment in March 2014 and a legal pilgrimage through the appropriate instances, in 2015 obtained the first concession for social use of

a fully community radio granted by the IFT in Mexico. On Indymedia, Espiritusanto and Rodríguez (2011) affirm:

In anticipation of what citizens would be in the future, Indymedia establishes a global network of journalists whose mission is to report on issues of political or social content, from several countries, throughout the world. This global network of media introduced a particularity of special importance since it decided to have citizen participation, that is to say, for the first time, we are faced with a truly democratic and open content publishing model. (ESPIRITUSANTO; RODRÍGUEZ, 2011, p.119 - Our translation).

Methodological design

This phase of the research is presented in a quantitative, non-experimental mode, with descriptive scope, under the technique of the questionnaire. The type of sample is intentional or convenience. The most notable characteristics of inclusion of journalists in the study are: (1) Unlike the vast majority of information production in print, radio and television, the citizen journalist is non-official and makes a critical observation of the public administration. Apart from journalistic practice that has a close relationship with governments and sponsors for advertisement, the citizen journalist is accustomed to confront the official version and makes visible excluded sectors and events in the agenda of uncritical journalism; (2) In different extents, they combine professional or amateur training, which is a product of their participation in journalism workshops, academic studies, work experience, or personal interest and skills; (3) Their professional work is often frequent, almost constant; and (4) all the journalists included in the study have another source of income, so that the exercise of journalism is not necessarily their only or main source of income. As an exclusion criterion, independent media that do not cover the social agenda and those citizens who broadcast only occasionally were considered. Regardless of the inclusion or exclusion criteria, the number of journalists in Sonora who can be considered independent or citizens is very low. Although there is no study that supports the data, approximately 30 journalists can be located throughout the Sonora region. The selection of informants is driven by a conceptual approach that tries to see the phenomenon in different subjects, at different times and places. The selected final sample is distributed in three different municipalities of Sonora (Mexico): Hermosillo, Nogales and Caborca. All the selected journalists are active and collaborate in news websites and Internet broadcasters as well as in social media aimed at the dissemination of general and specialized information on citizen movements and social causes. Within the limitations of the study we want to emphasize that contents (analysis and results of the study) of the present article only apply to the practice of citizen journalism and specifically to the practice of citizen journalism located in the northwest region of Mexico. The questionnaire used measures the construct of

ethical values from a Likert-type scale. The evaluation scale consists of options: 1 (never), 2 (poorly), 3 (frequently), 4 (almost always) and 5 (always). The duration of the application is approximately 90 minutes. It is important to mention that the survey questionnaire is previously validated and undergoes a contextual adaptation to the originally used one in the important study by Barber and Damas (2010), which measures ethics and informative excellence. The most important adaptation is to place the model in context of ethical observation for citizen journalism in Mexico (MARTÍNEZ, 2016); and the integration between disciplinary contributions of communication and sociology: first, through the work of Martinez (2016) defines the five general principles of journalistic ethics, from which derive particular ethical values. Then, based on Habermas' proposal (1987), the characteristics of veracity, credibility and rectitude of the validity claim in the theory of communicative action are established. With the bridge between both theoretical nuclei, we relate information and communication actions in the collective under study, as initiatives that aim at maintaining the social fabric. In addition, we focus our attention on measuring the professional practice of journalism in Sonora and whether its values can be consistent with social theory (Table 1).

Table 1 – Impact of the ethical dimension of citizen journalism in Mexico

Social Theory: Validity claim	Ethical dimension: Values of journalistic ethics
Propositional truth Subjective veracity Normative righteousness	1) Truthfulness 2) Independence 3) Responsibility 4) Professional integrity 5) Service to the community

Source: Own elaboration based on data from: Martínez (2016); Habermas (1987).

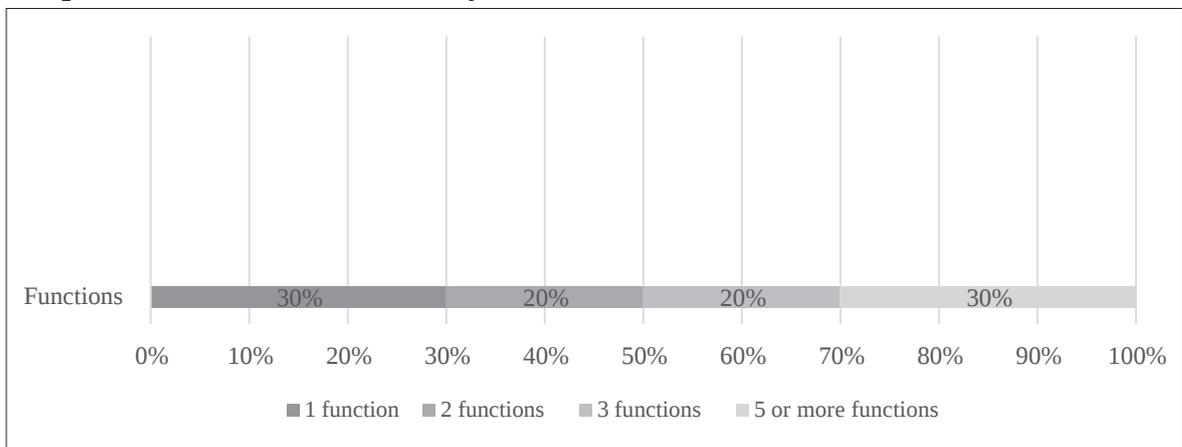
Results: The journalistic ethics of journalism citizens in Sonora, Mexico

With regard to socio-demographic characteristics, by age range all citizen journalists surveyed are above 30 years old. The groups that are between 30 and 40 years old, as well as between 40 and 50, present a percentage of 40% each, while the remaining 20% is between 50 and 60 years old. By sex, the distribution is 52% female and 48% male. Regarding the level of studies, 70% have a bachelor's degree and 30% have a master's degree. Among the university careers that the survey showed, stand out Journalism, Communication, Sociology and Cultural Studies. In relation to the medium in which they work, 80% recognized to do it through digital media in Internet exclusively; while 10% report on radio and 10% on magazines. No one collaborates with print journals. Regarding the level of income, 70% receive between \$ 1.000,00 and \$ 3.000,00 pesos per month and only 30% obtain income

higher than \$ 6.000,00 Mexican pesos (more than the \$320 US dollars). These data are consistent in analyzing the current employment situation they maintain as journalists, since 50% are independent, collaborating or freelancing, while 40% are unpaid employees. The remaining 10% is recognized as part of a collective of citizen journalists. With respect to the scope of the media, 50% has regional diffusion; 20%, national; another 20%, international; and 10% is maintained with local circulation.

In order to establish activities and functions, respondents chose from a list of activities and could select several options. According to the functions performed by each participant, 20% perform two functions (text writing and social networks); 20% make three (text writing, photography or video camera and social networks); while 30% can play between 5 and 7 different tasks (text writing, photography or television camera, general production, multimedia production, computer graphics or design, social networks and locution). The remaining 30% performs only one activity (text writing, social networks or locution). The most frequent functions among the respondents are: social network management (80%), text writing (80%) and photography or television camera (50%); locution (30%); and production (30%). The function that appears less frequently is the one that refers to elaboration of infographics and design, with 20% (Graph 1).

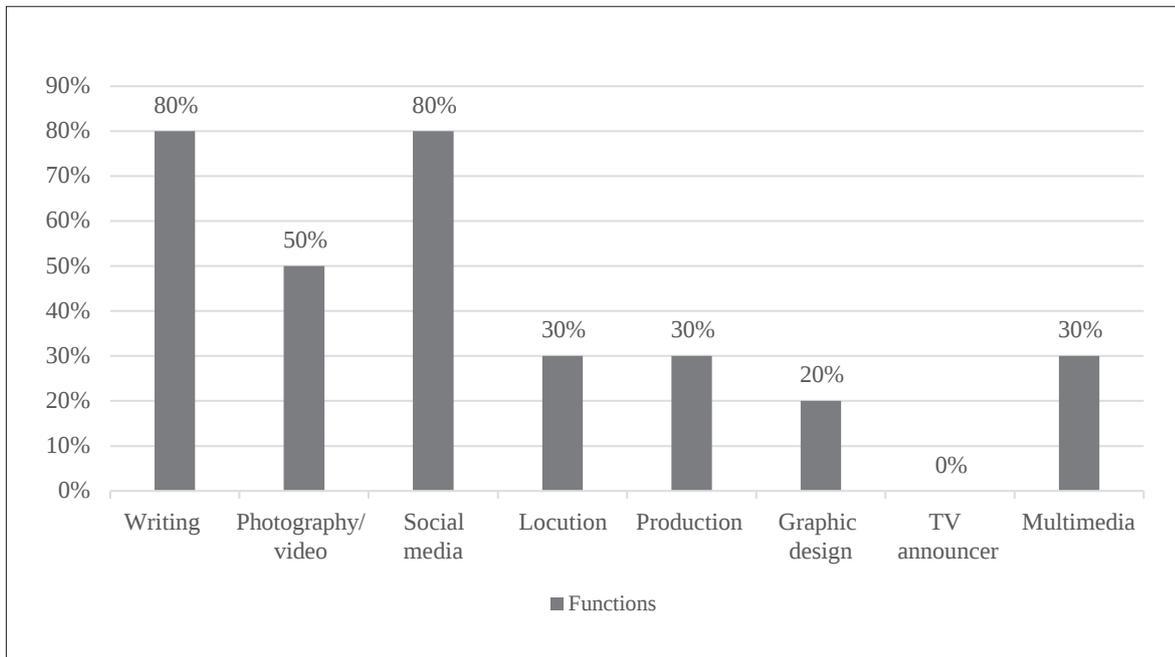
Graph 1 – Functions of the citizen journalist. Mexico



Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the professional category, the results yield interesting data when identifying or clearly recognizing themselves within a professional role and taking into account their visualization of the structure. 10% consider themselves editor; 20% is recognized as editor or equivalent; and 70% is assumed within other categories. When analyzing this data against the functions they actually perform, it is inconsistent with the fact that 80% is dedicated to writing texts, the function that most appears among the activities that the subjects develop (Graph 2).

Graph 2 – Functions by frequency of occurrence. Mexico

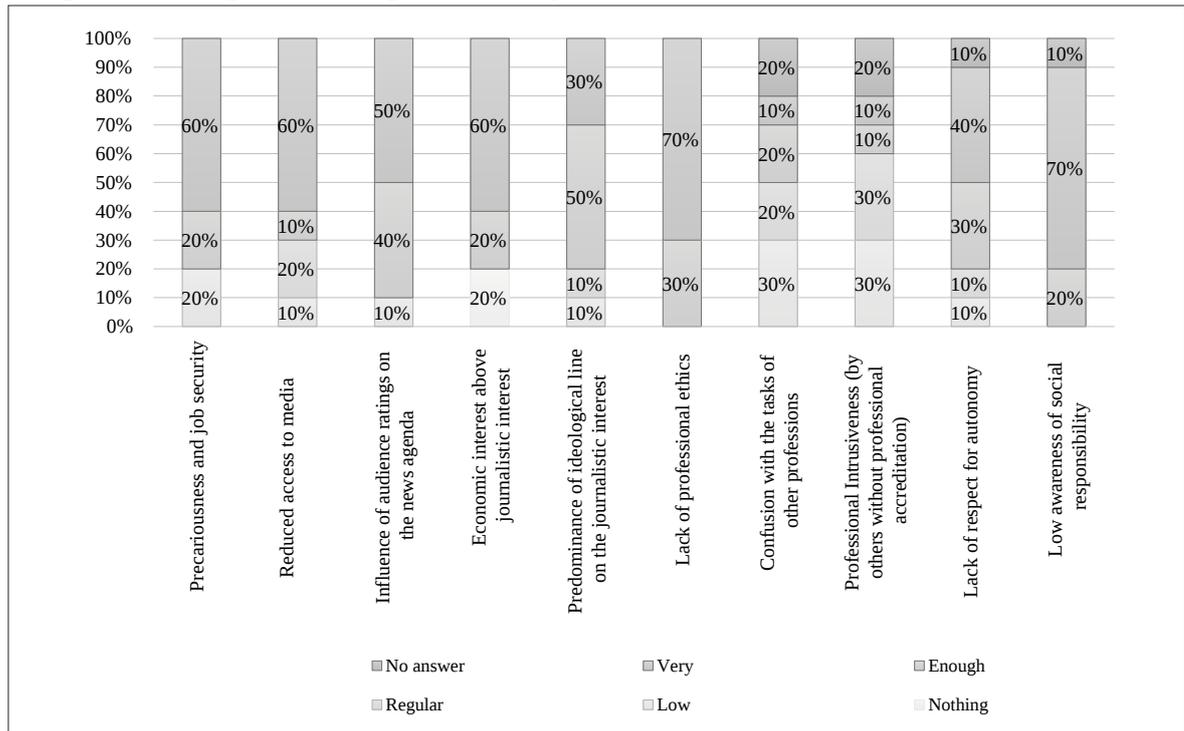


Source: Own elaboration

In our opinion, this factor can be explained from the absence of formal and vertical structure. In citizen media, horizontality is common to delimit the roles and the lack of experience in professional media that dictate routines and procedures for the control of the production. On the other hand, it is also striking the conformation by age groups, combined with the schooling variable that shows a high degree of professional and postgraduate studies. In addition, the highest percentage earns the lowest income, and half do not receive one. The diagnosis of the problems of the press from the perception of citizen journalists is as follows. In the first place is the low awareness of the social responsibility of the journalist as well as the lack of professional ethics. Both issues obtained percentages of up to 70% recognized as very important, combined with valuations of “fairly important” between 20 and 30 percent. In addition to the above-mentioned degrees, the Likert scale measured from the lowest level referred to as “not important”, “low importance” and “moderately important”. Secondly, it is perceived as a problem the precariousness of labor faced by journalists, the lack of open media openness and the influence of ideological and commercial interests on the integration of the news agenda. This perception coincides with some of the factors that are part of the current crisis of journalism, an expression of what was indicated by Aladro Vico when referring to the five crises of journalism: the disuse of ethical codes and principles; the impact of the economic crisis on advertising, that is gradually lowering; the labor union’s lack of credibility and the low quality of information

due to commercial degradation when serving to political interests (Graph 3). In the opinion of several citizen journalists, these factors, as in the case of ethical codes and principles, become evident from the void that exists in programs of journalism education in Mexico and is clearly perceived in the classroom as it is in the professional in-the-field practice.

Graph 3 – Perception of the problems of journalism

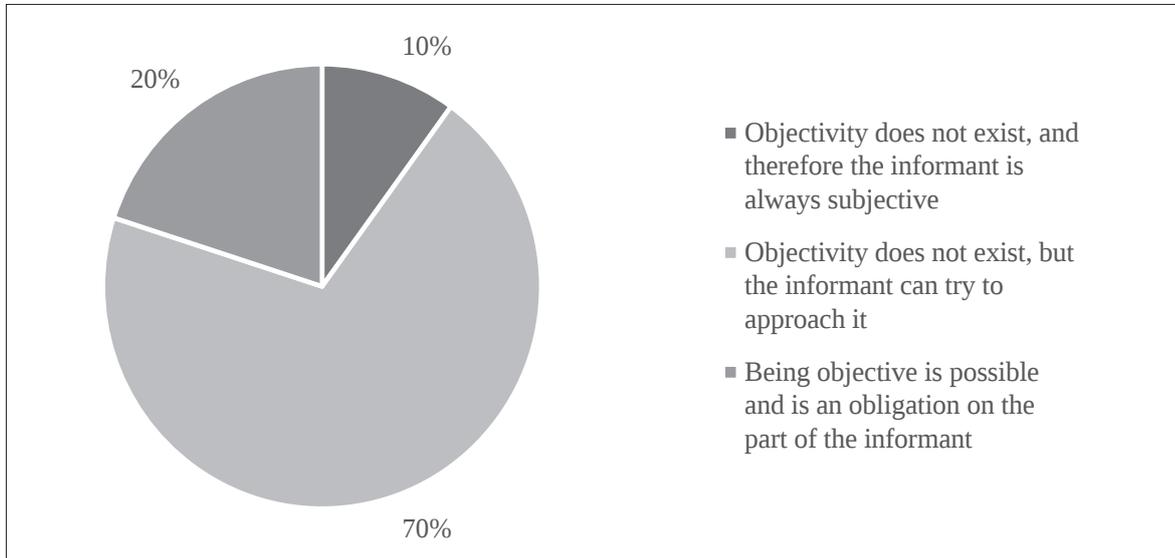


Source: Own elaboration

The ethical specific values to the professional practice in the journalistic field in Mexico comes from five main principles: adherence to veracity; quest for independence; assumption of responsibility; commitment to professional integrity; and the interest to serve the community (MARTÍNEZ, 2016). In Habermas’s theory of communicative action (1987), three concepts compatible with the previous ones can be located: pretension of validity, rationality and consensus without coercion. This section retakes the evaluations that the citizen journalists show about their performance and ethical behavior.

Regarding the principle of objectivity, 20% consider that obtaining it is possible and an obligation of the journalist. 70% think that in Mexico objectivity does not exist but the journalist can approach it. The remaining 10% believe that it does not exist and that the journalist’s subjective criterion is always imposed (Graph 4).

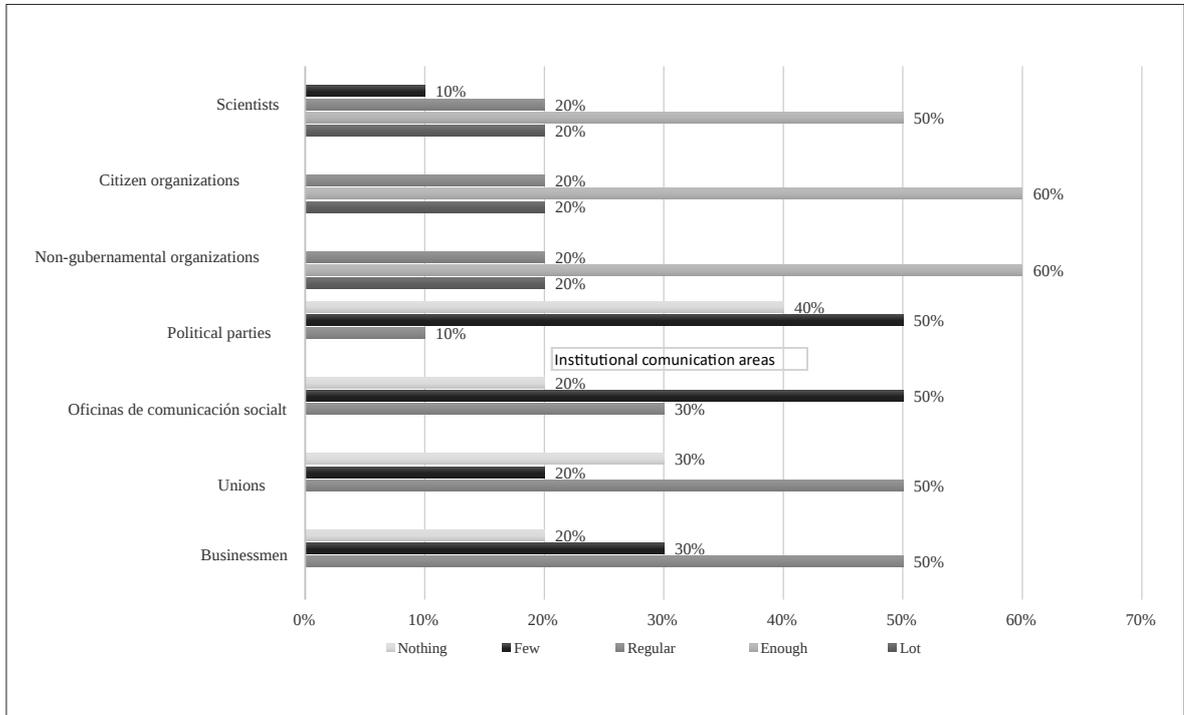
Graph 4 – Objectivity of citizen journalist in Mexico



Source: Own elaboration

When reliability of information sources is analyzed, respondents answered using the Likert scale in 5 sections, where the lowest confidence level is “Nothing”. In the results, sources that obtained this last mention are political parties, employers, labor unions and institutional *communication departments*. The highest negative percentage in this category was obtained by political parties (40%). This fact should not be missed in the light of the foregoing: on the one hand, considering constant discredit and historical character of the party system in Mexico. On the other, and more immediately, three years after the current federal public administration headed by President Enrique Peña Nieto, 31 journalists have been killed. We pointed out that this situation is even more worrying when 53% of the attacks against the press in 2016 were committed by public officials of different levels of government. In the second lowest grade which refers to low reliability, these again reach the largest statistic with 50% of the answers. Finally, in the third seat, the one of regular reliability, obtains 10%. Institutional *communication departments* (government offices) share the same scales, although with a different percentage distribution: 20%, 50% and 40%, for the options “Nothing”, “Few” and “Regular”, respectively (Chart 5). Outside the boxes are “Enough” and “Lot”, since none of these sources appears with that degree of confidence in the survey.

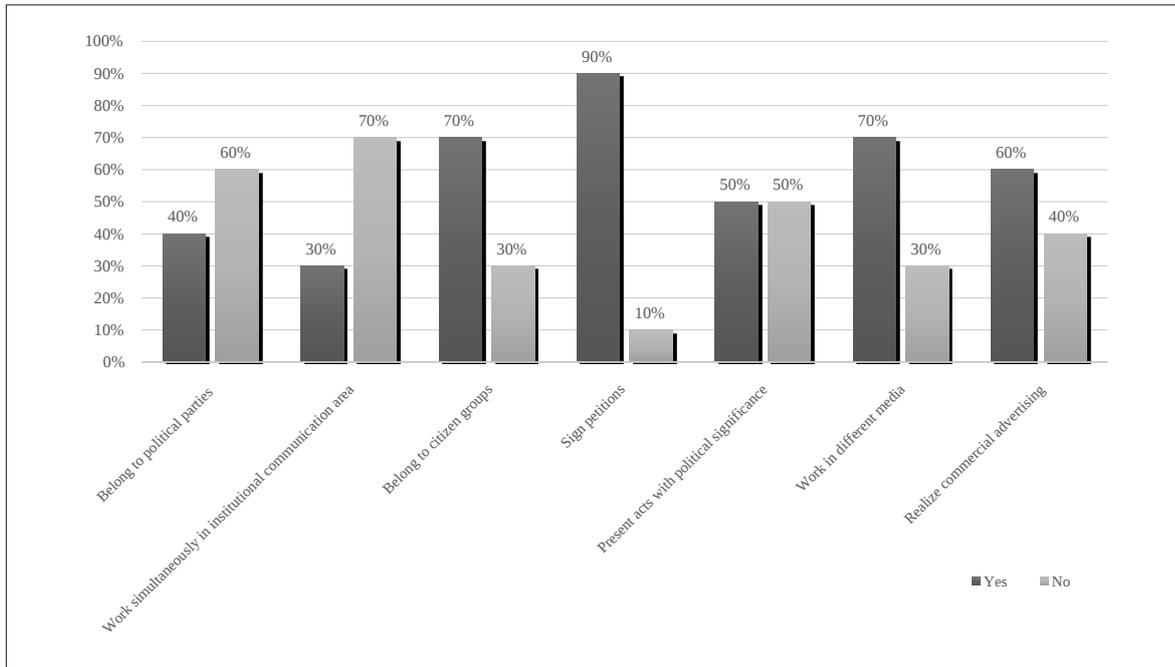
Graph 5 – Reliability of information sources. Mexico



Source: Own elaboration

In replies to ethical dilemmas related to combining professional practice with political activities, the poll shows disapproval on belonging to political parties (60%), and working simultaneously in institutional communication departments (70%). On the opposite, it is approved to belong to citizen groups (70%), as sign public letters and manifestos (90%). With an opinion divided to 50%, appears to present acts with political significance. In the economic area, there is a positive response to work in different media (70%), and to carry commercial advertising (60%) (this last point remains the dilemma to be solved regarding the economic model, not just for citizen journalism but also for the traditional journalism company) (Graph 6).

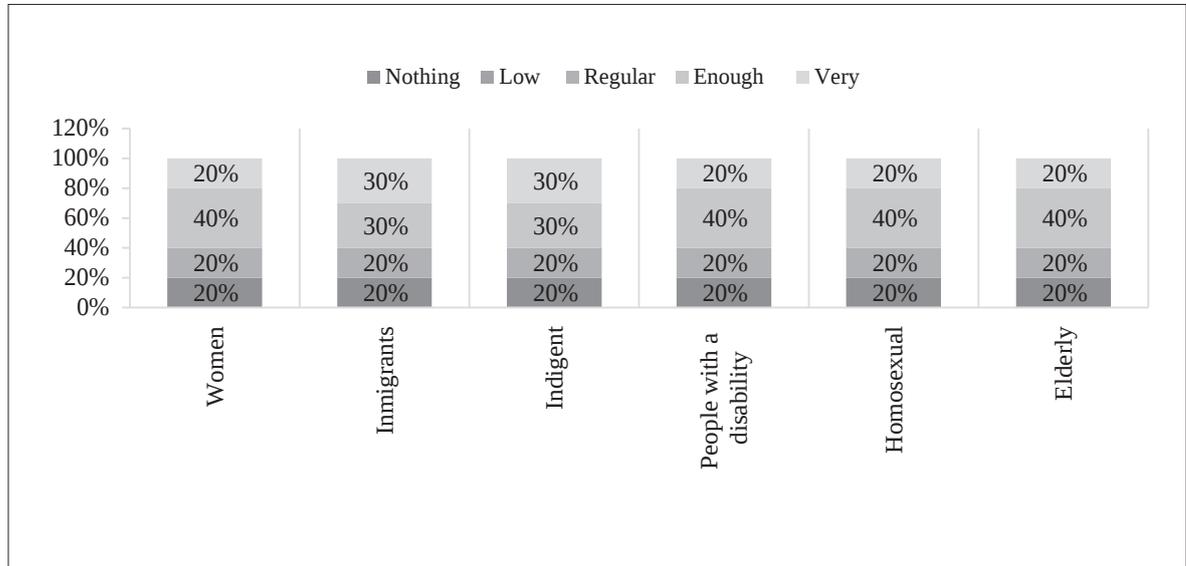
Graph 6 – Compatibility of journalistic work



Source: Own elaboration

In our opinion, an important indicator that reflects the trend of citizen journalist to be involved in issues of public interest is the treatment imprinted on their coverage. While the classic model of journalism establishes impartiality as a professional guide, the poll results show their greater empathy with vulnerable sectors. In relation to the groups of women, immigrants, indigents, people with disabilities, homosexuals and the elderly, according to what was annotated by the subjects of study, the highest percentage agrees to give special coverage to them, with a total percentage of 60%, combined result of “Important enough” and “Very important” scales (Graph 7).

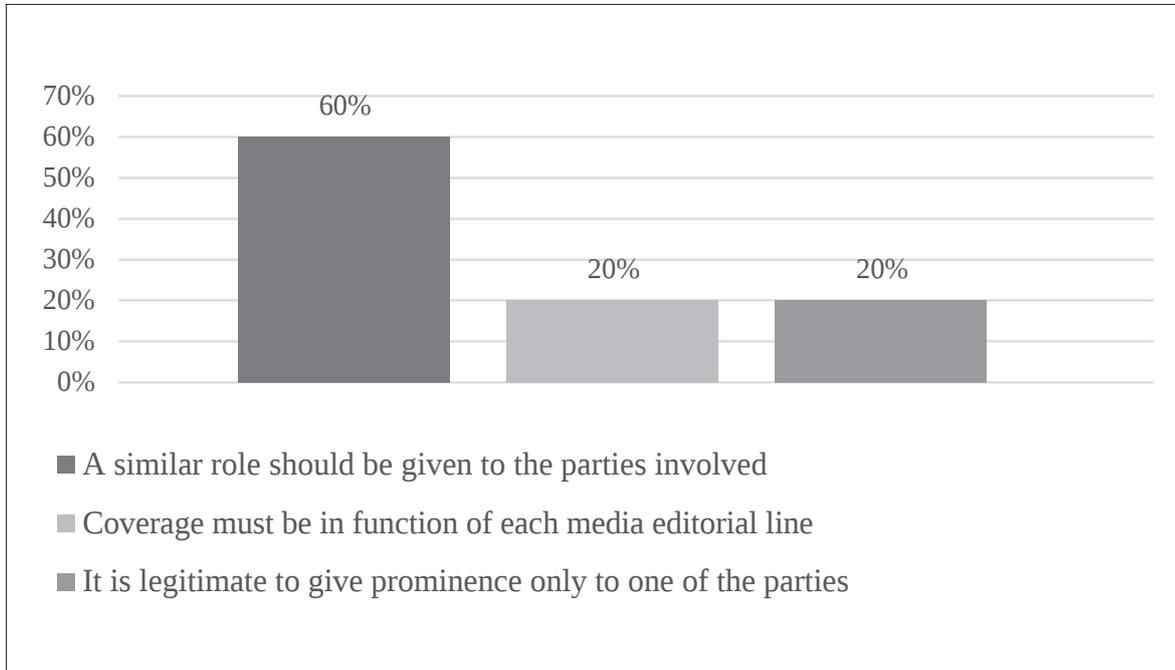
Graph 7 – Special treatment of social groups



Source: Own elaboration

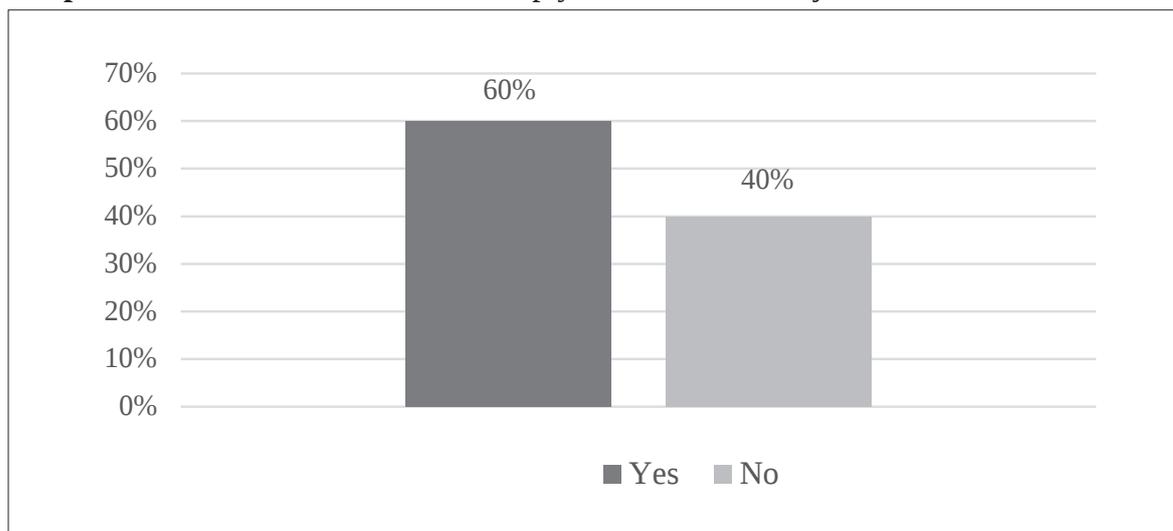
Separately, 20% of the sample is in favor of giving the maximum special treatment to these sectors and 40% consider it important to do so. The remaining 40% is divided in half between maintaining the absolute impartiality code and the preference for regular treatment. When responding to the principle of responsibility when providing balanced information between two or more parties in conflict, 60% consider that the same prominence should be offered to those involved, while the remaining 40% is divided equally for granting coverage according to the editorial line of the medium and to favor only one of the parties involved (Graph 8).

Graph 8 – When reporting a conflict between two or more



Source: Own elaboration

On the other hand, when citizen journalists are questioned about the usefulness of journalistic codes of ethics, their response did not lead to a dominant tendency, since the participants had different opinions (Graph 8). However, on a scale where ten is optimal utility and one, no utility, the results define a trend between the null and low utility of ethical codes (1 to 4 of the scale), being 60% of the shares. Finally, 60% agree that there should be coercive instruments to enforce codes of ethics (Graph 9).

Graph 9 – Coercive instruments to comply with the codes of journalistic ethics

Source: Own elaboration

As we pointed out before, the profile of citizen journalist in Sonora is made up of the duality of the subject when entering into activities of production and dissemination of information, and then in his role as a civilian. In addition to the combination of amateur-professional profiles within the working groups themselves, this statistical approach allows us to locate that the basic ethical principles appear as an approximation that the subject had with the professional field, although in another moment their perceptions arises as citizens not subordinated to a structure that frames their performances or that prevents them from expressing their own judgments of value.

Discussion and conclusions

Among the peculiarities that an important part of the collective that integrates the field of citizen journalism in Sonora, Mexico, is the characteristic that it is in an incipient phase of hybridization, since the practice within the convergent structure in the journalistic field counts with a strong productive tendency towards the use of different intelligent mobile devices in complete harmony with a work dynamic based on the multifunctional interactive digital communication scheme, that is to say, in hypertextuality, interactivity and multimedia as predominant needs in its activity within the Web. Indeed, in the history of the press and journalistic practice in the Sonora region, the topic of journalistic ethics and the study of the mechanisms of regulation and professional self-regulation in general has been little discussed (LEÓN DUARTE et al, 2017). Even less from a research perspective that considers ethics and journalistic practice as a complex terrain and that

starts from the need to integrate information from convergent and specialized disciplinary nuclei from a perspective not only integrative but that also seeks to go beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice, in this case, beyond the journalistic field itself. By implementing an integrated model of research based on an interdisciplinary perspective, what we proposed in this article was to carry out a series of steps and research strategies that will guide us in our effort to understand in greater depth and explanation the many theoretical and empirical studies that involve the study of journalistic ethics in a region such as Sonora, in northwestern Mexico. This complex problem of multifaceted, multidimensional character and vertiginous changes in the public sphere as it is the so-called “crisis” of journalism in general and the journalistic “ethical crisis” in particular. Therefore, journalistic ethics is addressed as a key and common ground to integrate the contributions of theoretical disciplines from sociology, journalism and communication. In previous pages we have shown the results that aimed to identify perceptions of journalistic practices and strategies, as well as their relationship with ethics. They have clarified what are the signs of positions and dispositions that participants have in that social space and facing a complex problem that questions not only the confidence and credibility of a professional activity but its independence, impartiality and, above all, the professional quality of the journalist. Consequently, it has also been possible to verify the ways in which power or capitals are distributed, and the unreliability that the citizen journalist has of the different spheres of government, of the parties and politicians in turn, as well as the impact and relation to the context of which they are part and have to deal with. Thus, we have seen how the current state and functioning of the field of citizen journalism is explained. It is possible to affirm, for example, that an important part of the collective of professionals that integrate the journalistic field of the region of Sonora affirms that the objectivity does not exist and that its place is occupied by subjectivity, or that it is possible to approach it. The proclivity of the citizen journalist to be involved in subjects of public interest is forceful in the daily coverage of citizen journalism. The evidence shows a greater empathy with the most vulnerable social sectors. It is evident that in the journalistic field in Sonora there are lights and shadows, and still enough criteria that should be studied to complete the panorama. However, the evidence confirms the need of the sector for a more proactive work with the new multimedia narratives due to the disposition that social networks and new virtual platforms bring. In addition, in the context of content convergence, the respondents emphasized the need to implement new multimedia narratives. They did not perceive it as an exclusively technical matter. On the contrary, they were quite critical of the precariousness of content in the network society and the proliferation of preconceived ideas. One of the most relevant and little-studied findings within the journalistic field in Sonora was related to a new journalism that is increasingly participatory as a result of citizenship: a new way of collecting content. At the same time, resistance was revealed by the confrontation that

can arise from the emergence of new societal groups and the possible entry into the digital or convergent space to supply or share functions that historically have been carried out by the traditional journalist. Finally, we consider that it would be very useful to include, as part of future studies in this subject, the analysis of the role of journalism education processes in bachelor and postgraduate studies in Mexico, mainly in relation to the ethical dimension that the professional of the information require. With this expansion in empirical terms, as well as the inclusion of more refined discourse analysis techniques and a greater appropriation of the concepts of the social field theory used in this article, it is aspired to emit more powerful criticisms and positions in the field of public information that transcends the mere provision of facts, demonstrating responsibility, independence, credibility, trust and quality in the way of informing, in full right to serve truthful and authentic information for the honest adherence to the different realities that are lived day by day in Mexico.

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