

## **Assessing the Co-Occurrence of Professional Roles in the News: A Comparative Study in Six Advanced Democracies**

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Based on a content analysis of 22 newspapers from the United States, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, and Greece ( $N = 10,512$ ), this study addresses the overlapping nature

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of professional role performance in the news. The authors analyze the interaction and co-occurrence of the interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, civic, and infotainment roles. The results show three main types of role co-occurrence—interventionist-watchdog, watchdog-civic, and interventionist-infotainment—from which intermediate roles emerge. The findings also shed light on the influence of organizational structures, journalistic routines, and local contexts on the interaction of different roles in professional practice.

*Keywords: Role performance, professional roles, journalistic cultures, news, media practices, newspapers, intermediate roles*

Research on journalistic roles has traditionally focused on identifying which professional roles dominate in journalistic cultures across the world. Scholars also have examined the impact of individual, professional, organizational, and systemic factors on journalists' ideals and performance (Donsbach, 2012; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Mellado, Hellmueller, & Donsbach, 2017; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). However, significantly less attention has been paid to the study of how different professional roles interact with each other and the types of relationships that emerge from their co-occurrences.

This approach starts from the argument that when a systematic co-occurrence of roles exists, their nature as individual roles is impacted; this may lead to the emergence of intermediate roles, going beyond the mere joint presence of different roles' characteristics in a news story (Mellado, 2020).

Pioneering research in this field has paved the way for such a rationale (e.g., Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1972). Nevertheless, these authors overlooked the importance of some of their findings, which showed that, far from being exclusive, professional roles actually overlap. Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) noted that less than 20% of the journalists in the study conducted by Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman (1976) stuck to the two proposed roles. They described that finding as the "pluralism of the journalistic mindset" (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996, pp. 134-135). Subsequent studies on North American journalists by Weaver, Wilhoit, and Bergen (1991), Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), and Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, and Wilhoit (2007) support this idea.

Based on these findings, some authors have theorized about the overlapping nature of professional role performance (e.g., Mellado, 2020; Mellado, Hellmueller, & Donsbach, 2017; Vos, 2017). These studies have opened the door to a more systematic approach to role co-occurrence in news content, which might answer questions such as which patterns of role co-occurrence are more common, which new intermediate roles emerge from different role co-occurrences, which circumstances activate potential role combinations, or how they can be useful for better understanding journalistic cultures.

Whereas these studies have analyzed the reality of specific national contexts or various types of countries with different geographic locations, political regimes, and societal contexts (Hallin & Mellado, 2018; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020; Mellado, Hellmueller, et al., 2017), in this study, we analyze role co-occurrence in Western countries that share more similarities in regard to their political systems and general cultural context. These countries also present differences in terms of their media systems and journalistic

cultures, which can influence both the activation of the co-occurrence of roles and the greater or lesser presence of intermediate roles.

While all are considered to have well-established democracies with similar levels of press freedom (Freedom House, 2021), they have been theorized as part of different media systems, with different media market structures, levels of professional autonomy, and degrees of political parallelism (Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, & Castro, 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The United States and Ireland form part of the liberal model, Germany and Switzerland belong to the democratic corporatist model, and Spain and Greece are associated with the polarized pluralist model. Furthermore, during the years analyzed, developments have taken place in all six countries (increasing political polarization in the United States; economic crises, particularly in Ireland, Spain, and Greece; and social conflicts, also more prominent in Spain and Greece because of social cuts and unemployment) that could influence the activation of different combinations of roles, given the contextual nature of role performance (Mellado, Hellmueller, & Donsbach, 2017).

Against this backdrop, and based on a content analysis of print news published in the most important mainstream newspapers in the United States, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, and Greece ( $N = 10,512$ ), this article analyzes the relationships and interactions that emerge in the performance of the interventionist, watchdog, loyal, infotainment, service, and civic roles across countries and which factors best explain the co-occurrence of different role performances within a single news story.

### **Journalistic Roles: From Ideal Typologies to Intermediate Roles**

Classic analyses of professional roles focused on identifying analytical typologies inherent to the processes of occupational differentiation. However, in their first classification of the adversarial, disseminator, and interpreter roles, Weaver and associates (1991) found a "great deal of overlap among these roles" (p. 190). This trend was also identified in their subsequent work on role conceptions (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996; Wilhoit, Weaver, & Willnat, 2017).

In terms of role performance, current research on journalistic roles has also revealed the presence of role blending (Mellado et al., 2020). In China, Wang, Sparks, Lü, and Huang (2017) discovered that the interventionist dimension of the journalistic voice was closely linked to the performance of the loyal-facilitator role, the infotainment role, and, to some extent, the service role. Hallin and Mellado's (2018) analysis of print and television news also showed that the infotainment role correlated to the civic and watchdog roles in both types of media platforms, supporting the idea of the multiple and non-mutually exclusive performance of journalistic roles in the news. Márquez-Ramírez and colleagues (2020) found a significant co-occurrence of the disseminator/interventionist role and the watchdog role in news content from 18 countries.

As an interconnected discourse, research on media and journalism has given great importance to the concept of hybridization as an analytical tool to explain the blending of different features that affect communication processes. These include media systems, genres, formats, professional cultures, and audience behaviors. From a media systems perspective, Chadwick (2013) states that a hybridization approach "foregrounds complexity, interdependence, and transition. It draws attention to boundaries, to flux, to in-

betweenness, and it concerns how practices intermesh and coevolve" (p. 4). Baym (2017) defines hybridization as a de-differentiation process in which old static taxonomies are replaced by "unstable mixtures" (p. 12).

In this sense, Mellado, Hellmueller, and colleagues (2017) found evidence of the fluid and dynamic nature of the performance of journalistic roles in different political regimes. These scholars show that national journalism cultures are not necessarily grouped together by geographic or political proximity, or by belonging to ideal media systems. For example, regarding roles within the power relations domain, one study found that the presence of the watchdog role is similar in transitional democracies such as Hungary, Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, and in the United States and Germany. The study also showed that although Greece and the United States belong to different media systems, they scored the highest in the civic role. In their study of media performance and political information, Umbricht and Esser (2014) also refer to a "hybrid style of political coverage" (p. 215) in which objective reporting and opinion are combined.

This study moves from a general catch-all definition of hybridization that is useful for categorizing phenomena that don't show clear patterns to an understanding of role performance hybridization as the result of the simultaneous occurrence of more than one role in a single news story. Such co-occurrence can lead to intermediate roles (Mellado, 2020), reflecting specific combinations and traits of journalistic cultures.

We view professional roles as independent practices that can be combined in various ways and argue that "the actual manifestation of journalistic roles is more difficult to fit into existing ideal typologies, since they are constantly changing, being mediated not only by social, organizational, and individual factors, but also by the local context of the news" (Mellado, 2019, p. 9).

### **Journalistic Roles and Role Performance**

This study draws on the operationalization of six journalistic roles in the news: the interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, civic, and infotainment roles (Mellado, 2015). These roles can be analyzed from three different perspectives: the presence of the journalistic voice in the news, the relationship between journalism and power, and the way journalism approaches the audience. While similar approaches have suggested that these areas be used to study journalistic roles as three different dimensions (Hanitzsch, 2007), Mellado has proposed and then empirically corroborated (Mellado et al., 2020) that, instead of dimensions, there exist three interrelated domains consisting of six independent roles that may co-occur and overlap, and they are not poles on a continuum.

Subsequent studies of professional roles have shown that, given the transversal nature of the interventionist role in journalistic practice, we might expect it to correlate with the other journalistic roles, becoming a sort of meta-role that activates other journalistic functions and generates changes in the other roles (Mellado, 2020), giving each of them a specific meaning. For instance, it is not the same for a news organization to exercise the surveillance function from a neutral position as it is for the organization to do so from a partisan one. Two new intermediate roles thus emerge from the combination of the watchdog and interventionist roles: the detached watchdog and the adversarial watchdog (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020).

Similarly, when the loyal role is allied with interventionism, a more propagandist role performance will emerge. When the interventionist role interacts with the civic role, it acquires an advocacy tone regarding citizen demands and activities. In the case of the service role, the presence of elements of interventionism will make it closer to a promotional role. Meanwhile, if the infotainment role is combined with a stronger presence of the journalistic voice, it may evolve into narrative journalism.

Role co-occurrence can also exist among professional functions from different domains (Mellado, 2020). Regarding the power relations domain, the watchdog and loyal-facilitator roles do not have to be antagonistic, and their co-occurrence could be activated by the news topic or by a specific political and social context. For example, in media systems characterized by political parallelism, the watchdog orientation could positively correlate with the supportive orientation of elites if a news story criticizes or denounces the bad actions of some actors while supporting other political elites.

Different role co-occurrences might emerge within the audience approach domain. The first is the co-occurrence of the civic and infotainment roles, mixing elements of public life and entertainment features. The second involves the civic and service roles. In this case, the news addresses issues that are important to audience members and offers guidance and advice for everyday life. A third co-occurrence can involve the service and the infotainment roles, when the media offer tips and guidance on how to manage everyday life or consumer advice, but with elements of personalization, sensationalism, emotions, or morbidity.

Finally, it is also possible to address specific combinations of the roles between the power relations and audience approach domains. The first involves the watchdog and civic roles, producing news performance that evokes an audience critical of those in power. A second combination could occur between the infotainment and watchdog roles, with news stories including the joint presence of surveillance and scandalization, or descriptions of the private lives of those in power.

Theoretically, all roles can be combined simultaneously, with a news story including elements of each of them.

To grasp the complexity of journalistic cultures in different contexts, it is important to identify and explain when and how these intermediate roles are activated. Moreover, identifying the practical co-occurrence of each of these combinations allows us to better understand the specificities of journalistic role performance and to empirically unravel the layers of hybridization that exist across and within journalistic cultures in Western democracies.

The main hypothesis of this study is that the co-occurrence and overlapping of roles in the news published by the Western media will be activated or inhibited depending on the specific social or political characteristics of each national context. Given that most of the evidence produced thus far is related to the hybridization of journalistic styles (e.g., Esser & Umbricht, 2014) or to the hybridization of journalistic cultures as a general phenomenon (Mellado, Hellmueller, et al., 2017), we also pose the following research question:

*RQ1: What specific hybridization patterns emerge from the co-occurrence of the interventionist, watchdog, loyal, service, civic, and infotainment roles in national news stories published in six Western democracies?*

### **Modeling Role Hybridization in News Content**

Another aim of this study is to understand which factors explain the co-occurrence of roles in the news. Previous studies have identified different factors that affect role performance, which could also influence the combination of roles in the news.

News beats have proved to have significant predictive power regarding role performance. The watchdog role tends to be associated with news on politics, police and crime, and the courts, whereas the loyal role is more closely related to economy and business news. And the civic role tends to be linked to coverage of demonstrations and protests, social issues, education, and human rights (Humanes & Roses, 2018; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020).

Role performance research has also brought to light the link between the media audience orientation (popular vs. elite) and the presence of specific journalistic roles (Hallin & Mellado, 2018; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020; Stępińska, Jurga-Wosik, Adamczewska, Selcer, & Narożna, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). These studies have suggested that the service and infotainment roles have a greater presence in the popular media.

Several studies have shown that reporting methods are related to professional roles at the conceptual (e.g., Skovsgaard, Albæk, Bro, & de Vreese, 2013) and performative levels (Mellado, Hellmueller, & Donsbach, 2017). In their study on Spanish journalism, Humanes and Roses (2018) found that the variation in the interventionist and watchdog roles was largely explained by the use of argumentation. In a cross-national study on the watchdog role (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020), the balance of sources and argumentation proved to be an important predictor.

Regarding news sourcing, Donsbach (2012) notes that "the way journalists understand their role will influence considerably the way they interact with news sources" (p. 1). Kurpius (2002) found that on TV news, civic journalism favored a diversity of sources and promoted a greater presence of minorities as sources. And Hellmueller and Mellado (2016) found that while the watchdog role in U.S. newspapers is related to political sources, such sources are linked to the interventionist and infotainment roles in Chilean newspapers. Based on previous research, we thus pose our second research question:

*RQ2: Do content-based and organizational-level variables have a significant influence on the role performance hybridization that emerges across the media of six advanced democracies?*

### **Method**

This article is based on data from the United States and five western European countries. We used the media system classification developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) to select our sample, including the

United States and Ireland for the liberal model, Germany and Switzerland for the democratic corporatist model, and Spain and Greece for the polarized pluralist model.

We conducted a content analysis of news items published in the 22 most popular newspapers of each country; these were selected because of their ability to set the agenda, allocate more resources to cover a wider range of news, and provide more diverse coverage of different issues (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013).

The selection of newspapers was based on audience size, scope, coverage, ownership, and political orientation, among other characteristics, in the way that best represented the diversity and shape of each country's national media system (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Country Distribution by Newspaper, Story Type, Political Leaning, and Total Number of News Items.**

Country	Story Type (%)				N	Media Outlet	Political Leaning
	Brief	Article	Chronicle/ Feature	Reportage			
U.S.	20.1	63.1	11.6	5.2	1,421	<i>USA Today,</i>	Center
						<i>Washington Post</i>	Close to left
						<i>NY Times</i>	Close to left
						<i>LA Times</i>	Center
Ireland	1.4	91.2	3.4	4	792	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	Close to right
						<i>Irish Independent,</i>	Close to right
						<i>Daily Star</i>	Center
Germany	47.6	51.5		.9	1,169	<i>Frankfurter</i>	Close to right
						<i>Allgemeine Zeitung</i>	
						<i>Süddeutsche</i>	Close to left
						<i>Zeitung</i>	
Switzerland	51.6	44	2.1	2.3	2,820	<i>BILD-Zeitung</i>	Close to right
						<i>Neue Zürcher</i>	Center
						<i>Zeitung</i>	
						<i>Blick</i>	Center
						<i>Le Temps</i>	Center
						<i>Le Matin</i>	Center
Spain	12.7	82.5	1.5	3.2	2,278	<i>Corriere del Ticino</i>	Center
						<i>ABC</i>	Close to right
						<i>El País</i>	Close to left
						<i>El Mundo</i>	Close to right
Greece	60.5	18.1	5	16.5	2,032	<i>La Razón</i>	Close to right
						<i>Kathimerini</i>	Close to right
						<i>Nea</i>	Center
<i>Eleytheros Typos</i>	Close to right						
<i>Total</i>	36.4	54.3	3.7	5.6	10,512	22	

### **Measurements**

We used the operationalization of the performance of the interventionist, disseminator, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic roles in news content developed by Mellado (2015). Each journalistic role was examined through the explicit presence/absence of specific indicators in the news.

The interventionist role was measured using five indicators: *opinion, interpretation, call to action, adjectives, and use of the first person*. Ten indicators were used to measure the presence of the watchdog role: *information on judicial/administrative processes, questioning by the journalist, questioning by others, criticism by the journalist, criticism by others, uncovering by the journalist, uncovering by others, reporting of external investigation, conflict, and investigative reporting*. Finally, nine indicators were used to measure the performance of the loyal-facilitator role: *defense/support activities, defense/support policies, positive image of the political elite, positive image of the economic elite, emphasis on progress/success, comparison to other countries, emphasis on national triumphs, promotion of the country's image, and patriotism*.

Within the audience approach domain, four indicators were used to measure the presence of the service role: *impact on everyday life, tips and advice [grievances], tips and advice [individual risks], and information and consumer advice*. Six indicators were used to measure the performance of the infotainment role: *personalization, private life, sensationalism, scandal, emotions, and morbidity*. Finally, nine indicators were used to measure the performance of the civic role: *citizen reactions, citizen demand, credibility of citizens, education on duties and rights, contextual background information, local impact, citizen questions, information on citizen activities, and support of citizen movements*.

Local teams in each country were trained on the application of a codebook that was translated and back-translated from English into the various local languages.

We followed a three-step strategy to test for intercoder reliability between and within countries: a pretest among local researchers across countries, a pretest among coders within each country, and an intra-country posttest between coders. Based on Krippendorff's formula ( $Ka$ ), final global intercoder reliability was .76 (see Table 3).

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for each domain.<sup>2</sup> Following the CFA results, the items were combined by dimension (range: 0–1), which resulted in a final score for each role for each news item. A higher score expressed a higher level of performance of each journalistic role. For descriptive purposes, we calculated the raw scores (the sum of the points divided by the total number of items in each role). We used factor scores to run both correlations between roles and the linear regressions.

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2 The *interventionist* role showed a very good fit with the data:  $\chi^2 = 355.630$ ,  $p < .001$ ; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .031 (confidence interval [CI] 90% [.026, .035]); comparative fit index (CFI) = .982; and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .976. The *watchdog* and the *loyal-facilitator* roles showed a good fit with the data:  $\chi^2 = 3242.731$ ,  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .034 (90% CI [.030, .037]); CFI = .8966; TLI = .910. The *service, infotainment, and civic* roles also showed a good fit with the data:  $\chi^2 = 2145.465$ ,  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .021 (90% CI [.016, .024]); CFI = .964; TLI = .969.



We also measured different variables at the news story and organizational levels as potential predictors of role hybridization.

At the news story level, we first measured news topic (politics, the courts, social affairs, police and crime, economy and business, and miscellaneous) and source type (state/political parties, economy and business, civil society, ordinary people, media and experts). We also measured different reporting methods through four indicators coded on a presence/absence basis. Balance was measured through the presence of different sources or points of view. Verifiable evidence measured the presence of information that can be verified by a third party and does not correspond to the opinion of the journalist. We also coded for whether or not the journalists used both the conditional tense (i.e., It would be), and argumentation, which was operationalized as the use of reasoning or logic to prove or support a point or to persuade the reader to accept what a journalist affirms or denies.

We included two variables at the organizational level: media audience orientation (popular vs. elite) and media political orientation (right-center-left).

To answer our first research question (RQ1), we applied zero-order and partial correlations to test the existence of associations between the roles. We also used analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests to compare differences in the presence of role hybridizations, and paired *t* tests to evaluate the mean difference between professional role performances. Finally, different regression analyses were run for each country to address RQ2.

## **Results**

### ***Mapping Role Co-Occurrence in News Content***

According to our conceptual framework, different potential combinations of roles might be found across and within role dimensions and domains. In regard to the potential co-occurrence of roles, our findings reveal three main correlations: the interventionist and watchdog roles, the watchdog and civic roles, and the interventionist and infotainment roles (see Table 2). The rest of the associations, though significant, were very weak. Partial correlations showed the same patterns controlling for country, audience orientation, political leaning, reporting methods, and news topic.

**Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations Between Six Journalistic Roles.**

	Interventionist	Watchdog	Loyal-Facilitator	Service	Infotainment	Civic
Interventionist	-	<b>.333**</b>	.164**	.080**	<b>.203**</b>	.178**
Watchdog		-	.057**	.019	.091**	<b>.228**</b>
Loyal-Facilitator			-	.038**	.043**	.070**
Service				-	-.006	.131**
Infotainment					-	.164**
Civic						-

\*\*  $p < .01$ . In bold, the three strongest correlations are marked, which correspond to the most important co-occurrence of roles.

The two combinations with the highest presence in the overall sample and each country sample are those that include the interventionist dimension (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Differences in Role Performance and Role Co-Occurrences Across Countries (Mean and Standard Deviation).**

Role hybridizations	U.S.	Greece	Spain	Switzerland	Germany	Ireland
Interventionist-Watchdog	.20 (.12)	.18 (.16)	.15 (.17)	.12 (.12)	.15 (.12)	.07 (.11)
Watchdog-Civic	.10 (.10)	.11 (.12)	.08 (.10)	.02 (.04)	.07 (.09)	.04 (.08)
Interventionist-Infotainment	.20 (.13)	.15 (.14)	.10 (.12)	.12 (.13)	.15 (.14)	.06 (.11)
Roles						
Interventionism ( $Ka = .79$ )	.32 (.19)	.24 (.25)	.19 (.23)	.21 (.22)	.22 (.17)	.09 (.17)
Watchdog ( $Ka = .75$ )	.09 (.11)	.12 (.14)	.12 (.14)	.02 (.05)	.08 (.12)	.05 (.11)
Loyal-Facilitator ( $Ka = .72$ )	.01 (.04)	.05 (.10)	.02 (.08)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.04)	.02 (.09)
Service ( $Ka = .76$ )	.02 (.07)	.04 (.13)	.03 (.11)	.02 (.07)	.03 (.09)	.03 (.13)
Infotainment ( $Ka = .74$ )	.07 (.13)	.06 (.10)	.02 (.07)	.04 (.10)	.08 (.15)	.03 (.11)
Civic ( $Ka = .78$ )	.12 (.15)	.11 (.17)	.04 (.12)	.01 (.05)	.05 (.10)	.03 (.10)

The strongest correlation in the overall sample was found between the interventionist and watchdog roles ( $r = .333$ ). This combination was strongest in Spain ( $r = .521$ ), Greece ( $r = .386$ ), Germany ( $r = .283$ ), and the United States ( $r = .217$ ). The correlation coefficient in Ireland was moderate ( $r = .260$ ). Finally, in Switzerland, the correlation between the two roles was rather weak, though significant ( $r = .140$ ).

Using paired  $t$  tests ( $t = 65,159$ ,  $p < .001$ ), we found that the interventionist role was observed more frequently than the watchdog role in both the overall sample and each country sample, as shown in Table 3.

Significant differences in the co-occurrence of the interventionist and watchdog roles were found across countries ( $F = 153,320$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .06$ ). We also found significant differences when we considered variables such as news type ( $F = 389,563$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .10$ ), news topic ( $F = 17,406$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .02$ ), news source ( $F = 42,398$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .03$ ), media audience orientation ( $F = 30,357$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .003$ ), and media political leaning ( $F = 60,541$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$ ).

The second combination was found between the watchdog and civic roles ( $r = .228$ ), which occurred in all countries except Ireland and Switzerland. This role performance hybridization stands out in the United States ( $r = .241$ ) and Greece ( $r = .223$ ), and to a significant lesser extent in Spain ( $r = .164$ ) and Germany ( $r = .158$ ).

The watchdog role ranked above the civic role in the overall sample ( $t = 17,133$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The only country in which mean differences between the two roles were not found ( $t = 1,400$ ,  $p < .162$ ) was Greece. In the United States, by contrast, the presence of the civic role was higher than the watchdog role ( $t = -5,862$ ,  $p < .001$ ). While all the countries analyzed tend to score low in this role hybridization (see Table 3), ANOVA testing revealed significant differences ( $F = 330,677$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .13$ ). Other factors that significantly influenced this role combination were news type ( $F = 196,548$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .05$ ), news topic ( $F = 63,912$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .09$ ), news sources ( $F = 119,449$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .08$ ), media audience orientation ( $F = 106,438$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$ ), and media political leaning ( $F = 177,596$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .03$ ).

The interventionist and infotainment roles formed a third important combination ( $r = .203$ ), with particular incidence in Germany ( $r = .443$ ) and, to a lesser extent, Switzerland ( $r = .241$ ). We identified this type of hybridization in the United States ( $r = .200$ ) and Ireland ( $r = .165$ ) as well, although the correlation coefficients were weaker.

The interventionist dimension has a much higher presence than the infotainment role overall ( $t = 126,333$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with the exception of Ireland, where the mean difference between the two roles, although significant, was very low.

Significant differences were found in the presence of this third hybridization across countries ( $F = 159,636$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .07$ ). We also identified a significant influence of this role hybridization by news type ( $F = 346,658$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .09$ ), news topic ( $F = 20,320$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .03$ ), news sources ( $F = 33,746$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .02$ ), media audience orientation ( $F = 8,646$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .001$ ), and media political orientation ( $F = 47,630$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .009$ ).

### ***Explaining Role Co-Occurrence in the News***

We ran regression models to explain the variance of the three main role hybridizations in news content (RQ2). Given that the three role hybridization models were not found in all the countries in the sample, we performed linear regressions for individual countries. All the models are statistically significant (see Tables 4, 5, and 6).

The interventionist-watchdog model showed that variables related to reporting methods had the highest explanatory power for all the countries, particularly argumentation and use of the conditional tense (see Table 4). The rest of the predictors acquired different predictive power when explaining the co-occurrence of these two roles in each country.

**Table 4. Predictors of Interventionist-Watchdog Role Co-Occurrence.**

Predictors	U.S.	Greece	Spain	Switzerland	Germany	Ireland
News topic						
Politics	.170***			-.118***		.121***
The courts	.051*				.068**	
Social affairs			-.076***	-.113		
Police and crime				-.090		
Economy and business			-.098***	-.160***		.073*
Media audience orientation				-.111***		
Media political orientation	-.224***	-.042*				
Reporting methods						
Balance			.098***	.209***		.082*
Verifiable evidence	.080***		-.087***	-.044**	.096***	.095**
Use of the conditional tense	.224***	.133***	.099***	.147***	.173***	
Argumentation	.183***	.590***	.484***	.313***		.449***
News sources						
State/political parties	.091***	.048*			.138***	
Economy and business	.056*					
Civil society	.122***	.063***	.047*	.069**	.099***	
Ordinary people	.134***	.080***	.064***	.044*	.080***	
Media	.055*		.042*		.155***	.087**
Experts	.054*	.078***				
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	28	47.5	33.6	32	16.9	28.4

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

In the United States, the hybridization of these roles was higher with the use of the conditional tense (.224), argumentation (.183), in left-wing newspapers (-.224), in political news (.170), and in news in which civil society (.122) and citizens (.134) appear as news sources. In Greece, argumentation (.590) and the use of the conditional tense (.133) were the variables that best explained the co-occurrence of these two roles in news stories in their national press. In Spain, we found that the use of argumentation was the most important predictor of interventionist-watchdog role hybridization (.484). In Switzerland, besides argumentation (.313), the presence of balance (.209) and the popular press (-.111) activated the link between the two roles. In Germany, this hybridization was associated with the use of the conditional tense (.173) and the presence of state political sources (.138) and media sources (.155). Finally, in Ireland, the connection between the two roles was more apparent in news that included argumentation by the journalist (.449) and political news (.121).

According to our data, the hybridization of the watchdog and civic roles was mostly explained by the use of civil society and citizens as news sources in the four countries where this association was found (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Predictors of Watchdog-Civic Role Co-Occurrence.**

Predictors	U.S.	Greece	Spain	Germany
News topic				
Politics				
The courts		.101***	.086***	
Social affairs		.137***	.147***	
Police and crime			.195***	
Economy and business				-.094**
Media audience orientation				.064*
Media political orientation	-.246***			-.091**
Reporting methods				
Balance	.112***		.124***	.098**
Verifiable evidence	.182***		-.039*	-.100***
Use of the conditional tense		.090***	.055**	.092***
Argumentation	.058**	.319***	.239***	
News sources				
State/political parties	.104***	.064**		.085*
Economy and business				.087**
Civil society	.148***	.289***	.303***	.155***
Ordinary people	.478***	.267***	.201***	.167***
Media				
Experts			.048***	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	45.8	38.7	31	16.6

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

However, national differences existed for this model as well. In the United States, besides those news sources, the co-occurrence of the watchdog and civic roles was highest in left-wing newspapers (-.246) and news stories that included verifiable evidence (.182) and a diversity of points of view (.112). In Greece, argumentation was the individual predictor with the highest predictive power (.319), followed by civil society (.289) and citizens (.267) as news sources. The presence of both roles was also higher in news on social affairs (.137) and the courts (.101). In Spain, argumentation (.239) was as important as it was in Greece, and the presence of both roles was more prevalent in news on police and crime (.195) and social affairs (.147). In Spanish newspapers, diversity of points of view (.124) was related to this hybridization. In Germany, by contrast, only the use of civil society sources (.155) and citizen sources (.167) explained the co-occurrence of the two roles.

For the third main role hybridization (interventionist-infotainment), the predictive power of the presence of citizens as a news source was a common element in the United States, Switzerland, Germany,

and Ireland, followed by reporting methods, albeit with a different interpretation depending on the country (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Predictors of Interventionist-Infotainment Role Co-Occurrence.**

Predictors	U.S.	Switzerland	Germany	Ireland
News topic				
Politics	.110***			
The courts				
Police and crime			.062*	
Social affairs				-.127***
Courts				-.181***
Economy and business		-.045*		
Media audience orientation	.073**	-.127***	-.127***	
Media political orientation	-.095***		-.146***	.097**
Reporting methods				
Balance		.201***		.101***
Verifiable evidence		-.057***	.122***	.112***
Use of the conditional tense	.213***	.133***	.144***	
Argumentation	.150***	.312***	-.138***	.359***
News sources				
State/political parties			.099***	-.119***
Economy and business			.092***	
Civil society				-.074*
Ordinary people	.299***	.156***	.240***	.102***
Media			.089***	
Experts		.042**		
Adjusted $R^2$	20.6	31.9	18.3	21.6

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

Besides those two factors, the co-occurrence of these roles in the United States was associated with the presence of political news (.110). In Swiss newspapers, this hybridization was linked to a diversity of perspectives (.201) and popular newspapers (-.127). In Germany, in contrast to the rest of the countries, this role hybridization was negatively associated with the use of argumentation (-.138). In addition, this combination of roles was stronger in popular newspapers (-.127) and left-wing media (-.146). In Ireland, argumentation had the highest predictive power (.359), followed by the presence of verified evidence (.112) and citizen sources (.102).

### Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this article was to examine the way in which the performance of journalistic roles overlapped in practice through an analysis of the co-occurrence of the interventionist, watchdog, loyal-

facilitator, service, civic, and infotainment roles in national news stories from 22 newspapers in six Western democracies.

Overall, the data support our main hypothesis, showing that journalistic role performance is shaped by specific types of combinations of roles across and within countries.

First, the data showed a significant correlation between the interventionist role and all other journalistic roles. This connection to the rest of the roles was always positive in our analysis, which suggests that there is a tendency to use a more opinionated and interpretative reporting style in Western countries overall (Esser & Umbricht, 2014).

Based on the strength of the relationship ( $r \geq .200$ ), the analysis showed the presence of three intermediate roles in the news: an adversarial watchdog role (the result of the co-occurrence of the interventionist and watchdog roles), a civic advocate role (the result of the co-occurrence of the watchdog and civic roles), and the entertainer-performer role (the result of the co-occurrence of the interventionist and infotainment roles). The watchdog role forms part of the two strongest associations, which might reflect the core nature of this function in Western journalistic cultures.

In addition, specific combinations of roles were found to have correlation coefficients above .200. This was the case of the interventionist and civic roles in Greece ( $r = .214$ ;  $M = .22$ ,  $SD = .13$ ) and the United States ( $r = .207$ ;  $M = .18$ ,  $SD = .17$ ); between the interventionist and loyal-facilitator roles in Greece ( $r = .292$ ;  $M = .15$ ,  $SD = .15$ ), Germany ( $r = .217$ ;  $M = .11$ ,  $SD = .09$ ) and Switzerland ( $r = .211$ ;  $M = .11$ ,  $SD = .112$ ); and between the infotainment and civic roles in the United States ( $r = .365$ ;  $M = .09$ ,  $SD = .12$ ).

The adversarial-watchdog intermediate role was the strongest and was present in all the countries analyzed, which suggests that there is a shared pattern of interventionist-watchdog journalism in Western models. This relationship was by far the strongest in Spain, followed by Greece, suggesting that the watchdog function tends to be more adversarial in countries with a commentary-oriented tradition and a high degree of political parallelism. Higher levels of social and political unrest in those countries might also have reinforced this tendency during the period analyzed.

The presence of the hybridization of both roles was also higher in the United States, which had the highest presence of the interventionist role. This result supports the hypothesis that the U.S. media is moving away from the objectivity paradigm (Nechushtai, 2018) and that the polarization of U.S. society and the media has increased (Pew Research Center, 2014), giving rise to a more partisan press.

In Ireland, by contrast, the co-occurrence of the two roles emerged only rarely, which speaks to the strength of the values of balance and nonpartisan journalism in Irish journalistic culture (Corcoran, 2004; O'Malley, Brandenburg, Flynn, McMenamin, & Rafter, 2014). Job insecurity following the financial crisis and the introduction of the Defamation Act in 2016 could also have a chilling effect on watchdog journalism (Hayes & Silke, 2019).

The second combination (civic-advocate role) had the strongest presence across countries, supporting the idea that practicing both roles contributes to democratic citizenship (Hallin & Mellado, 2018).

The correlation between the civic and watchdog roles also calls into question the idea that they correspond to distinct journalistic models (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2008). In the Western countries analyzed, the hybridization of the watchdog and civic roles was less generalized than the co-occurrence of the watchdog and interventionist roles, which appeared in only four countries (United States, Germany, Greece, and Spain) and had relatively low scores compared with the other two role performance hybridizations (see Table 2). The co-occurrence of the watchdog and civic roles in the U.S. press demonstrates the central role that both have played in that journalistic culture (e.g., Norris, 2014; Weaver et al., 2007). In the cases of Greece and Spain, it might also suggest that these roles are triggered by social unrest (such as the most recent financial crisis), though in Spain, the presence of the watchdog role is stronger than that of the civic role.

The third and final model of role co-occurrence—the entertainer intermediate role—was strongest in four countries that have a popular press in their print media systems (United States, Germany, Switzerland, and Ireland). However, this combination was not limited to the popular press. In the cases of the United States, Germany, and Switzerland, the relationship between the infotainment and interventionist roles was quite similar in elite and popular newspapers, whereas in Ireland, that association was only found in elite newspapers. Given that the infotainment role was not combined with any of the other roles in the sample, this combination would be explained by the meta-role function that the interventionist role fulfills in relation to the infotainment role, which evokes an expressive journalism that affects all news topics (Humanes & Roses, 2020; Mellado, 2020).

Another important finding from our study is connected to similarities and differences in the presence of the three main role hybridizations across the countries analyzed. Overall, post hoc tests showed more differences than similarities. Only Spain and Germany had similar levels of co-occurrence between the interventionist and watchdog, and the watchdog and civic, while Greece and the United States shared a link between the watchdog and civic roles. These data are consistent with the results obtained in previous studies on role performance applied to different sociopolitical contexts (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020; Mellado, Hellmueller, et al., 2017), which suggest that the differences and similarities in the performance of different roles in the news across countries did not perfectly match existing media system typologies (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) or empirical models (Brüggemann et al., 2014). Rather, we found that the study of role performance in the news must consider the national context.

Our second research question (RQ2) addressed the predictors that best explain different role performance hybridizations and whether their influence manifested differently in various national and journalistic contexts.

Two cross-cutting significant predictors—reporting methods and news sources—were found for the three hybridizations under analysis and had the greatest explanatory power in every country. The data corroborated the tendency related to the relationship between role performance and reporting methods



found in previous studies (Humanes & Roses, 2018; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020). In this study, we also found that the nature of that relationship varied when we dug deeper into this topic.

First, in the two co-occurrences that include the interventionist dimension, analytical reporting methods (argumentation and use of the conditional tense) had the greatest explanatory power. In some countries, however, we found a combination of analytical and objective methods. This tendency was clearer in the entertainer intermediate role in Germany, Switzerland, and Ireland, where diversity of points of view, verifiable evidence, argumentation, and use of the conditional tense turned out to be significant predictors. That tendency was also found in Spain and Ireland, albeit to a lesser extent.

Second, for the civic advocate intermediate role, different significant relationships with reporting methods were found in each of the countries analyzed. In the United States, for example, the co-occurrence of these roles was associated with objectivity strategies, whereas Greek newspapers opted for analytical reporting methods. In Spain, argumentation was combined with diversification of sources. Finally, these predictors were not relevant in Germany.

The results of the regression analyses allowed us to conclude that the selection of news sources is a relevant factor in the joint performance of different intermediate roles. The presence of civil society—and of citizens in particular—should be noted as a cross-cutting trend affecting the civic advocate and entertainer intermediate roles. When the infotainment and interventionist roles are activated together, ordinary people become a dominant news source. As such, this may suggest a potential shift away from official sources and toward more citizen-oriented journalism that seeks to engage and entertain (Kurpius, 2002). Nevertheless, this may also be related to an increase in commercialization and media market competition (Hopmann & Shehata, 2011) and to the use of citizen sources “to increase story attractiveness, concreteness, and vividness and to add a feeling of authenticity” (Kleemans, Schaap, & Hermans, 2017, p. 467).

Finally, for the civic-advocate intermediate role, the use of citizens as a source varied significantly across the four countries. The presence of citizens dominated in the United States, whereas the joint performance of the roles was linked to the use of civil society sources in Greek and Spanish newspapers. One possible explanation for such differences may be the level of commercialization of media systems: In the United States, a greater commercialization of the media may lead to the use of what are called “common people narratives” (Umbricht & Esser, 2016, p. 100). Meanwhile, civil society organizations such as unions enjoy greater credibility as sources in media systems in countries like Greece or Spain, where traditional newspapers are less market oriented and focus on official sources that represent parties or social organizations (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The explanatory power of news topic, type of media outlet, and political leaning varied based on specific national contexts. For example, the presence of the three role hybridizations was higher in political news and left-wing newspapers in the United States. We note that several major events were at the heart of political life in the United States in a climate of growing Democrat and Republican polarization during the period analyzed, which included the 2012 presidential election, the introduction of Obamacare, and the 2013 government shutdown. Political news also activated the hybridization of the interventionist and watchdog

roles in Ireland (although to a much lesser extent), thus showing a tendency similar to that of the United States.

In Spain and Greece—the two countries that experienced the greatest social unrest during the period analyzed because of the financial crisis—the hybridization of the watchdog and civic roles was activated to a greater extent in news stories on social affairs, the courts, and police and crime. These results may be driven by protests against austerity policies, high unemployment rates, and, in the Spanish case, publicity surrounding corruption cases involving the governing party and the monarchy. It was odd to find that the newspapers analyzed did not activate the watchdog and civic roles in news on politics and the economy in either country.

In Germany and Switzerland, news topic was not a relevant factor for any of the three hybridizations, which may be related to the countries' social and political situations being quite stable at that time. For example, Germany held elections in 2013, but the political climate was not as polarized as it was in the United States, as evidenced by the formation of a coalition government by conservatives and social democrats. Instead, media audience orientation activated the hybridization of the interventionist and infotainment roles in both countries. Specifically, the popular press took that approach, and we identified a link between the interventionist and watchdog roles in the Swiss case.

In summary, our study provides evidence to support the overlapping nature of role performance, allowing us to move theoretically from the concept of plurality of roles to the co-occurrence and hybridization of roles. Overall, a more active watchdog journalism seems to be emerging along with the appearance of an intermediate role created by combining the watchdog and civic roles, which would make it easier for citizens to scrutinize those in power. Second, we have concluded that these intermediate roles are present in countries that share some similar characteristics with Western democracies and are shaped by social context, organizational structures, journalistic routines, and local context.

Although this study provides compelling evidence regarding the overlapping nature of professional roles, future studies should address the limitations we faced. First, they should include other media platforms such as television, radio, online media, and social media, providing a more complete picture of how the co-occurrence and hybridization of roles manifest in different types of media outlets. Second, future research should expand the analysis to include other Western democracies such as Great Britain, France, Italy, or Nordic countries. Finally, given that our findings elucidate the importance of understanding the political and economic context when analyzing role hybridization in comparative perspective, it will be crucial to conduct longitudinal studies.

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