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Do digital platforms really make a difference in content? Mapping journalistic role performance in Chilean print and online news

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Abstract

Previous research has largely explored the differences and similarities between print and digital media in terms of news cycles and specific content characteristics. However, fewer studies have addressed the extent to which the media platform accounts for differences in the performance of key journalistic roles. Based on a content analysis of 1519 stories from Chilean print and online news outlets, this study found that, while media affordances did have an influence on the way journalists performed their work, thematic beat and media audience orientation were more crucial to explaining differences in the presence of different roles across print and digital media. The findings support a position that is midway between the *generalist* and *particularistic* approaches regarding

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the influence of the media platform on role performance, thereby underscoring the multilayered nature of journalistic practice.

Keywords

Digital media, generalist approach, journalism, journalistic role performance, media affordances, media platform, online news, particularistic approach

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, journalists have produced news on both traditional and digital media platforms. The use of the latter has grown rapidly during that time, and news professionals have adopted digital media as a valid tool for content production (Walther et al., 2005). Digital technologies have shaken up traditional media and have caused them to undergo considerable change. Given that audiences and revenues are now more fragmented than ever, the search for market niches faces escalating competition (Benson et al., 2012). In addition, time constraints and changes in news cycles within newsrooms have affected journalistic practices in both print and digital media (Boczkowski, 2010; Boczkowski and de Santos, 2007). News professionals are expected to produce more content in an environment of immediacy, where news cycles are described in continuous and unstoppable terms (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger, 2015: 1048).

These transformations have opened the discussion about their level of influence on professional roles and norms in newsrooms across the globe, and how journalists adapt to the new demands of audiences in print and digital media (Cassidy, 2005; Quandt et al., 2006; Singer, 2008; Weaver et al., 2007).

The existence or non-existence of significant differences across media platforms has been a theoretical dispute between the *particularistic* and the *generalist* camps (Reich, 2016). Both perspectives vary in how much importance they give to the media platform in explaining journalistic values and practices. While these opposing views have largely explored differences across different types of media from the perspective of news production and, to some extent, of professional role conception studies, less has been said about how differences across media platforms have an impact on journalistic role performance.

Over the past decade, studies have systematically started to assess the way in which journalistic roles manifest themselves in news across the globe (Hallin and Mellado, 2018; Humanes and Roses, 2018; Mellado et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Stępińska et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Nevertheless, one of their weaknesses is that they have mostly focused on analyzing content from a single medium,[1] particularly the print press, despite the important theoretical discussion about whether journalistic cultures and practices vary across media platforms (Hallin and Mellado, 2018).

In this respect, it is worth looking at elements relating to media affordances (Hutchby, 2001) that may have an impact on the final output that the public receives from different media platforms (Mellado and Vos, 2017; Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger, 2015).

At the same time, and considering that role performance is understood as the collective outcome of concrete news decisions and reporting styles that result from complex

and constantly changing negotiations among different reference groups (Mellado, 2015), it is also relevant to consider whether organizational and story-level variables, such as the type of audience to which the media is targeted or the main thematic beat, play a role in the manifestation of key journalistic roles in news, besides the media platform alone.

Specifically, this study tests if there are significant differences in the performance of different professional roles in print and online news, and, if so, whether the differences in role performance are better explained by the media platform or by alternative macro or micro level variables, such as media audience orientation, which cuts across media platforms, or the thematic beat of a news story, which is embedded within each media outlet.

In a context in which convergence and technological development are increasingly prevalent, a comparative study of this kind contributes conceptually to outlining whether – and to what extent – the affordances of specific media platforms are crucial to understanding journalistic role performance, or whether other elements involved in the news production cycle have more power to explain the presence of different professional roles in news.

Professional roles in a contested media ecosystem

While many efforts have been directed toward understanding the rules and norms governing journalism across media platforms, a relatively recent, fruitful, and growing area of research examines how such platforms influence the performance of different journalistic roles in the competitive ecosystem of today's media, especially when considering the inevitable gap between professional ideals and practice in journalism (Mellado and van Dalen, 2017). Journalistic role performance has been understood as 'the collective outcome of concrete newsroom decisions and the style of journalistic reporting, considering different constraints that influence and enable journalism as a professional practice' (Mellado et al. 2017a: 5).

Several key studies have analyzed journalistic role performance from at least three fundamental domains that cover distinct but not mutually exclusive roles of journalism in society: the presence of the journalist's voice in news content; the relationship between journalism and those in power; and how journalism approaches the audience. The first deals with the active–passive stance of journalists in their reporting, by measuring the presence of their voices in the narratives they create. The second domain addresses the position of journalists in relation to those in power, yielding two independent professional roles: the loyal-facilitator and the watchdog roles. The third domain refers to how journalism addresses the audience through three independent professional roles. While approaching the audience as citizens is related to the civic role, approaching the audience as clients and spectators is related to the service and infotainment roles, respectively.

Mellado (2015) has identified how professional roles manifest themselves in news content, operationalizing six professional roles within the three previously mentioned domains. They are the interventionist, disseminator, service, infotainment, civic, loyal-facilitator, and watchdog roles. Each of these roles comprises specific indicators that have been tested and validated by different national, regional, and cross-national studies

(e.g. Hallin and Mellado, 2018; Humanes and Roses, 2018; Mellado et al., 2017b, 2017c; Stępińska et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017, among others).

Nevertheless, an important limitation of existing research on role performance in journalism is that it has largely focused on the analysis of the print press, despite the important theoretical discussion about whether journalistic practices vary across media platforms. This study explores the variation in print and online news, and analyzes how different structural, organizational, and story-level aspects may lead to different outcomes on print and digital media platforms.

Existing literature shows two overall perspectives regarding the potential differences across media platforms: the *generalist* and the *particularistic* approaches. Although the assumptions of both the perspectives arose from traditional media analysis, the emergence and consolidation of digital journalism has widened the divide between these two opposing conceptual views (Reich, 2011: 287).

The *generalist* camp suggests that both traditional and digital media share a set of features that relate to the broader media system in which they are embedded (Benson et al., 2012). According to this perspective, economic and technological changes have forced all types of media to face similar challenges, prompting technological convergence, which would tend to homogenize content across platforms (Boczkowski and Ferris, 2005).

Meanwhile, the *particularistic* perspective stresses that digital changes have transformed media production and practices (Deuze, 2003; Singer, 2008). Domingo et al. (2008), for example, highlight the fact that digitalization has equipped journalists with tools and devices that enable new ways to access information, such as crowdsourcing, 'wobbing' (a Dutch journalism slang term that means getting hold of documents through Freedom of Information legislation), or open data. In addition, they have at their disposal new ways of creating content (e.g. data visualization and storytelling for mobile devices and social media). There are also new ways of practicing journalism (such as data journalism), and new ways of relating to audiences (e.g. web analytics and social media interaction) that may have an impact on news work.

These distinctions approximate to what have been called the 'affordances' of different media platforms (Hutchby, 2001); that is, the physical and structural possibilities of media technologies, which may shape the conditions and potentiality of their uses. Print and online news outlets differ, for example, in the availability of formats they use to display information and to communicate with the audience, and in their production logics. Unlike print media, digital media have affordances associated with immediacy, speed, and interactivity, among others (Boczkowski, 2010). They are all elements that have the potential to influence how journalism is performed, and therefore, what kind of content reaches the public (Mellado, 2015).

The affordances of media platforms vary, and so too do their organizational settings within specific sociopolitical contexts. In Chile, for example, they significantly differ in terms of media ownership and political orientation. When it comes to the press, independent and regional newspapers have almost disappeared, while the two main newspaper conglomerates (*El Mercurio* and *Copesa*) have grown to form a strong duopoly, both of which are on the right-wing end of the political spectrum. Both groups control the only four nationally distributed newspapers and almost 90 percent of regional newspapers,

and they have close ties with the economic sector, since the newspapers' owners also own several of the country's large companies in sectors such as banking, retail, and so on.

Within the country's digital landscape, however, there is a greater variety of outlets (owned by companies and individuals unrelated to other types of business), where the circulation of online newspapers like *El Mostrador* (La Plaza S.A) or *El Dínamo* (Ediciones Giro País) has reached a very high level.

Thus, depending on which of the above elements are taken into account, the predominance of specific roles in print and online news could be expected.

First, when compared to online outlets, print outlets are limited in terms of immediacy yet have more time to invest in a news story. We would therefore expect print media to be more active in the civic and service roles, for example, than digital media. We would also expect the presence of the journalistic voice in news to be higher. Also, considering the multimedia tools of digital media, we might expect a greater infotainment orientation in online news coverage.

Moreover, if the Internet enables the public to have a closer, more interactive relationship with digital media, then it could be posited that they perform the civic role of journalism to a greater extent.

Regarding organizational factors, online journalism might play a greater watchdog role since it is more independent in terms of ownership, while the presence of the loyal-facilitator role in print media may be higher due to the high degree of parallelism between the media and economic powers in Chile. At the same time, digital media play greater service and infotainment roles since they have fewer resources and need to sell and make a profit.

Evidence from studies that look at specific differences in content by comparing print and online news show conflicting and, in some cases, contradictory results in terms of differences and similarities between these two types of media platform. Benson et al. (2012) aimed to identify changes in content and the structure of the news discourse when moving from the print to the digital version. They found that digital media had softer content and were more sensationalist than their print counterparts. Hoffman (2006) and Gerhards and Schäfer (2010) concluded that there were content similarities on both platforms, but that substantial differences emerged with regard to tone, depth, and geographical focus. Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2015) analyzed top news stories in the Israeli media and found that a future-time orientation was more prevalent in print media, whereas online news tended to play the role of informing the public of recent-past events.

Reich (2011) compared Israeli journalistic production practices across print, radio, and digital media, and found more similarities than differences in their work routines, at least during the early stages of news reporting. However, in a subsequent study (Reich, 2016), he found results in the opposite direction, where differences prevailed. Also, comparing print and online news, Engebretsen (2006) in Scandinavia, and Cohen (2002) in the United States, did not find an increase in the interactivity of digital media, or a significant increase in the inclusion of non-journalistic voices in their stories. Meanwhile, the study by Boczkowski and de Santos (2007) of Argentina's print and online newspapers found increasing content homogeneity across print and digital media.

Media audience orientation and the performance of journalistic roles

Unlike the media affordances explanation, several studies have found that other factors have a strong impact on journalistic practice. One of these factors is the audience orientation of the media, referring to the traditional debate between journalism as a public service or as a market-oriented endeavor (Eide and Knight, 1999; Weaver et al., 2007), as well as to the kind of audience that media outlets and advertisers target. This distinction is relevant for two reasons. First, it has been associated with particular types of journalistic outcomes (Skovsgaard, 2014). Traditionally, elite media are assumed to be more inclined toward both hard news and watchdog and civic journalism, while popular media are linked to soft news and the infotainment and service roles.

Second, it has been related to homogeneity across media due to competition. Esser (1999) stated that the quest for revenue when competition is high can prompt elite and popular media to try to reach the same audience segments, distorting traditional boundaries between what is considered 'high' or 'low' quality content. In Chile, Mellado and Lagos (2014) found that elite and popular newspapers did not compete against each other, but rather against similar outlets in the same audience segment. This is because print news companies produce both elite and popular newspapers, assuring revenue without the need to tabloidize the so-called quality press.

In this regard, although there is insufficient empirical evidence to support these expectations, conventional wisdom would suggest that the presence of more commercially oriented journalistic roles, such as the interventionist, infotainment, service, and loyal-facilitator roles, should be higher in the popular media, whereas the presence of the civic and watchdog roles should be higher in the elite media, regardless of the platform.

Thematic beats and the performance of journalistic roles

Another potential explanation for the differences in the performance of different roles in news is the thematic beat of a story, which is embedded within each media outlet.

The system of thematic beats establishes coverage areas such as politics, economics, sports, and so on, in which journalists focus on specific sectors of society to inform the public (McCluskey, 2008). Most academic literature classifies thematic beats as a key factor in the creation of news (Marchetti, 2005), making journalistic reporting rich in nuances depending on the subject being addressed. In this respect, the analysis of news beats can diagnose the complexity of both news content and the values and attitudes of the journalists assigned to those beats (Reich, 2012). Studies that have analyzed reporting practices across news beats have illustrated the importance of this variable in professional practice.

Skovsgaard and van Dalen (2013) argued that journalists covering different topics could place emphasis on different journalistic and media goals, such as profit, audience size, or prestige, and, therefore, could be more affected by internal and external pressures when implementing different journalistic roles. Moreover, they concluded that if news topics were not equally affected, the presence of some professional roles could be higher than others, depending on the thematic beat (Skovsgaard and van Dalen, 2013).

Thus, previous research has found that the functions of journalism are diverse and that thematic beats may fulfill different roles. Mellado and Lagos (2014), for example, found a direct relationship between both aspects in the case of the print press in Chile. However, little is known about the relationship on other platforms. Consequently, and given their high degree of importance to journalistic work, it is necessary to analyze whether thematic beats lead to differences in professional roles across platforms.

Research questions

Despite the contributions made by international studies, the differences in the performance of specific journalistic roles in news content across print and digital media are still unknown. There is no systematic evidence to allow inferences to be made or formal hypotheses to be posed about the prevalence of some roles over others on the two types of media platform, or how the media affordances, as well as different organizational and story-level factors, may have an impact on role performance in different types of media. Consequently, we pose the following research questions:

> RQ1: *Are there significant differences in the presence of the interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, civic, service, and infotainment journalistic roles in print and online news?*

> RQ2: *Are differences in the presence of journalistic roles in news across print and digital media significant when controlling for both media audience orientation and thematic beat?*

> RQ3: *Is there a significant interaction effect between media platform and media audience orientation, and between media platform and thematic beat on the presence of different journalistic roles in the analyzed news?*

> RQ4: *Which factors – media platform, media audience orientation or thematic beat – better explain the differences in the presence of journalistic roles across print and online news?*

Methods

Sampling

We conducted a content analysis of print and online news stories published in the most important written media of Chile. The criteria for selecting each media outlet were audience size and reach, audience orientation, ownership, and level of influence in agenda setting. The chosen print media outlets were *Las Últimas Noticias* (N = 451) and *La Tercera* (N = 690), representing the popular and elite press, respectively, both delivering general interest news with national circulation. Within online news, two of the digital media outlets with the largest audience – *El Mostrador* (N = 207) and *El Dínamo* (N = 171) – were content analyzed. To be considered, both met the criterion of being native digital outlets rather than the digital version of a traditional print medium.

We selected the sample based on common technical aspects to make the overall sample comparable: the same time frame, the same days under analysis, and the same unit of analysis. For each media outlet, the sampled units were the selected issues/homepages, and the unit of analysis was the news item.

A media outlet of each kind was selected since previous studies have shown that media with a similar audience orientation tend to be homogeneous in terms of their content due to competition (Esser, 1999; Mellado and Lagos, 2014).

The time frame for the content analysis was the full year of 2015. By using the constructed week method, a stratified-systematic sample was selected for each media outlet. Thus, a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and a Sunday of each semester of the year were randomly selected. For each of the selected issues/homepages from both the print and digital media outlets, all news on politics, economics and business, police and crime, courts, defense, health, education, public works, housing, transport, energy and environment, accidents and disasters, religion and faiths, human rights, marches and protests, science and technology, and sports, culture and entertainment were content analyzed. The editorial and opinion columns, weather, horoscopes, puzzles, supplements, and social pages were not included in the corpus of analysis. For the print media, the regular sections of the newspaper (which appear every day) were analyzed. For the digital media, the home pages of the selected days were sampled at 1:00 p.m., so all news included in the homepage of the outlets at that time were analyzed.

To prevent the length of news items from skewing the presence of roles in the analyzed stories, short news items were excluded from the sample of both print and digital media outlets.[2]

In total, our sample consisted of 1141 news items from the print press and 378 news items from online news outlets. The imbalance between the numbers is explained by the fact that in the Chilean case, digital media cover fewer news articles per day and retain popular news items published on previous days. For the purposes of comparing similar events on the two types of media platforms, such news items (whose date of publication was different from that of the day of the sample) were not included in the corpus of analysis.

Measurements

We relied upon the instrumentalization proposed and validated by Mellado et al. (2017b), Mellado and van Dalen (2017), Mellado and Vos (2017), and Mellado (2015), adapting the operationalization of the indicators designed initially for the print media format to the digital media format, considering the audio/audiovisual resources that such news may include.

The six journalistic roles were examined through the explicit presence of specific indicators in news content (see Table 1).

All indicators were coded on a presence (1) or absence (0) basis. For each professional role, multi-item scales were generated after performing confirmatory factorial analysis within each domain,[3] thus resulting in a final score for each role in each news item (range 0–1). A higher score expressed a higher performance of the journalistic role, and vice versa. For descriptive purposes, we calculated the raw scores (sum of points

Table 1. Indicators for the interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic roles.

Interventionist	Opinion (Kα = .76)
	Interpretation (Kα = .72)
	Proposal/demands (Kα = .71)
	Adjectives (Kα = .81)
	First person (Kα = .79)
Watchdog	Reporting on trials and hearings (Kα = .78)
	Questioning on the part of the journalist (Kα = .73)
	Questioning on the part of others (Kα = .72)
	Criticism on the part of journalist (Kα = .71)
	Criticism on the part of others (Kα = .73)
	Charges of wrongdoing expressed by the journalist (Kα = .72)
	Charges of wrongdoing expressed by others (Kα = .71)
	Reporting of external investigations (Kα = .77)
	Reporting of conflict (Kα .77)
	Investigative reporting (Kα = .80)
Loyal-facilitator	Defense/support activities (Kα = .74)
	Defense/support policies (Kα = .75)
	Positive image of the political elite (Kα = .78)
	Positive image of the economic elite (Kα = .77)
	Positive image of civic society (Kα = .76)
	Positive image of the cultural elite (Kα = .75)
	Progress/success (Kα = .75)
	Comparison to the rest of the world (Kα = .71)
	National triumphs (Kα = .73)
	Promotion of the country's image (Kα = .77)
	Patriotism (Kα = .71)
Service	Impact on everyday life (Kα = .80)
	Tips and advice (grievances) (Kα = .72)
	Tips and advice (individual risks) (Kα = .71)
	Consumer information (Kα = .75)
	Consumer advice (Kα = .72)
Infotainment	Personalization (Kα = .74)
	Private life (Kα = .75)
	Sensationalism (Kα = .78)
	Scandal (Kα = .70)
	Emotions (Kα = .74)
	Morbidity (Kα = .72)
Civic	Including citizen perspectives (Kα = .80)
	Reporting citizen demands (Kα = .75)
	Supporting credibility of citizens (Kα = .75)
	Education on duties and rights (Kα = .74)
	Providing background and context (Kα = .74)
	Information on citizen activities (Kα = .76)
	Citizen questions (Kα = .74)
	Support of citizen movements (Kα = .77)
	Reporting on local impact (Kα = .73)

Kα: Krippendorff's alpha.

divided by the total items in each role). To test for differences in the presence of the six roles, we used factor scores. The independent variables measured by this study were media platform (print and digital), media audience orientation (popular and elite), and the main thematic beat (listed in the sampling subsection above).

The sample edition and items search process, as well as the coding of each news item were carried out by six coders trained by the researchers. We conducted several pretests among coders to ensure a common understanding of the codebook. Final intercoder reliability tests were calculated from a posttest among coders based on a randomly selected subset of 152 news items (10% of the final sample). Considering the average of all indicators, the overall Krippendorff's alpha (Kα) was .75. The variation of intercoder reliability per indicator within each role ranged from .70 to .81. The intercoder reliability for each role is shown in Table 1.

Data analysis

To answer RQ1, we reported the mean and standard deviation, and we conducted an independent sample t-test for each role. To answer RQ2 and RQ4, we performed multiple linear regressions for each of the six roles analyzed. The dependent variables were the six journalistic roles, and the independent variables were media platform (digital vs print), media audience orientation (elite vs popular) and the thematic beats. To answer RQ3, we used the general linear model (univariate) with each role as the dependent variable, and media platform, main thematic beat, and media audience orientation as independent variables (fixed factors).

Results

Differences in the performance of roles in print and online news

Overall, and supporting previous Chilean studies on the print press (Mellado and Lagos, 2014), the results suggested that journalists in both print and digital media performed the disseminator more than the interventionist role (M = .271, SD = .22). Within the power relations domain, the presence of the watchdog role (M = .065; SD = .11) was higher on both media platforms than the loyal-facilitator role (M = .023; SD = .06), which was, in fact, the least performed role of all analyzed roles in news. Finally, within the audience approach domain, the most performed role in both print and online news was the infotainment role (M = .160; SD = .17), followed by the service (M = .071; SD = .16) and civic roles (M = .070; SD = .12).

Nevertheless, significant differences emerged when comparing the intensity of the presence of these six roles in print and online news (RQ1; $t_{interventionist}$ = 2.137, p = .033; $t_{watchdog}$ = −3.996, p = .000; $t_{loyal-facilitator}$ = 3.401, p = .001; t_{civic} = 2.120, p = .033; $t_{infotainment}$ = 5.824, p = .000; $t_{service}$ = 4.588, p = .000).

The presence of the interventionist, loyal-facilitator, civic, and infotainment roles was higher in print media, while the presence of the disseminator and watchdog roles was higher in online news. However, the effect sizes of these differences were quite small. The differences between print and online news were greater in the performance of the

infotainment ($M_{digital}$=.12, SD=.14; M_{print}=.17, SD=.18; η^2=.017), the watchdog ($M_{digital}$=.09, SD=.12; M_{print}=.06, SD=.10; η^2=.013) and the service roles ($M_{digital}$=.04, SD=.12; M_{print}=.08, SD=.17; η^2=.010), than in the loyal-facilitator ($M_{digital}$= .02, SD=.05; M_{print}=.03, SD=.06; η^2=.006), civic ($M_{digital}$=.05, SD=.11; M_{print}=.07, SD=.11; η^2=.003) and the interventionist roles ($M_{digital}$=.25, SD=.22; M_{print}=.28, SD=.21; η^2=.003) (see Figure 1).

The influence of media audience orientation and thematic beat on journalistic performance

RQ2 asked if differences in the presence of journalistic roles in news across print and digital media were significant when controlling for both media audience orientation and thematic beat. Table 2 shows that the media platform had a significant effect on the performance of five out of the six roles analyzed, even when media audience orientation and thematic beat were taken into consideration. The interventionist role was the only one for which the media platform was not statistically significant when controlling for these two variables. Considering media audience orientation alone, the effect of the media platform on the presence of this role was indeed significant. Nevertheless, when also controlling for thematic beat, the mean differences between digital and print disappear.

Regarding a possible interaction effect between media platform and media audience orientation, and between media platform and thematic beat on the presence of the roles analyzed by this study (RQ3), our results showed that, for the watchdog (F=5.078, p⩽.024; η^2=.003), service (F=9.401, p⩽.002; η^2=.006), and the infotainment roles (F=18.075, p⩽.002; η^2=.012), the interaction effect between media platform and media audience orientation was statistically significant, even though the effect size was small. For the watchdog role, there were fewer differences across print and online news outlets within the elite media than within the popular media. The presence of the service role in the elite media was similar across print and digital outlets, while in the popular media the differences across both platforms were significantly higher. The same pattern was observed for the infotainment role.

In contrast, for the interventionist, loyal-facilitator, and civic roles, the interaction effect between these two variables was not significant.

The data also showed that the effect of interaction between media platform and thematic beat on the presence of different journalistic roles was statistically significant for the interventionist (F=2.476, p⩽.011; η^2=.013), watchdog (F=2.489, p⩽.011; η^2=.013), service (F=2.782, p⩽.005; η^2=.015), and infotainment roles (F=3.099, p⩽.002; η^2=.016), even though the explained variance did not exceed 1.6 percent for any of the roles. In contrast, the effect of interaction between the two variables was not statistically significant in the case of the loyal-facilitator and civic roles. Regarding the presence of the interventionist role, there were significant differences in print and online news on courts, and economics and business. For the watchdog role, the differences were significantly greater across print and digital media for news on police and crime, on courts, and on economics and business. Finally, in the case of the service role, the differences across print and digital platforms were greater for news on economics and social affairs.

Table 2. Linear regression coefficients for professional roles in news (standardized regression coefficients).

Predictors	Interventionist	Watchdog	Loyal-facilitator	Service	Infotainment	Civic
Block 1 − Media platform						
Digital (print)		.071**	−.052*	−.086***	−.116***	−.063*
Incremental Adjusted R^2	0.2%	1.2%	0.5%	0.9%	1.7%	0.2%
Block 2 − Audience orientation						
Popular (elite)	.058*	−.073**		.108***	.235***	−.089***
Incremental Adjusted R^2	0.6%	1.5%	0%	2.2%	6.7%	0.9%
Block 3 − Thematic beat						
Politics	−.165***	.235***				
Police and crime	−.124***	.244***			.047*	
Court	−.068*	.218***				
Economics/business			.065*	.186***		−.078**
Social affairs			.057*	.174***		
Accidents/natural disasters	−.085**	−.060*				.074**
Sports	.133***		.157***		.250***	−.139***
Culture			.236***	.229***	.293***	−.195***
Miscellaneous			.076*	.239***	.064**	−.078**
Incremental adjusted R^2	7.0%	13.4%	4.8%	10.1%	10.5%	7.9%
Total adjusted R^2	7.8%	16.1%	5.3%	13.2%	18.9%	9.0%
N	1518	1518	1518	1518	1518	1518

*$p<.05$.
**$p<.01$.
***$p<.001$, for two-tailed.

Finally, the differences in the performance of the infotainment role across print and digital media were greater for news on accidents and natural disasters, and entertainment.

Modeling the differences in journalistic performance in print and online news

RQ4 asked which factors – media platform, media audience orientation or thematic beat – better explained the differences in the presence of journalistic roles in print and online news. The results showed that all of the models were statistically significant and that thematic beat was the best predictor of the presence of the six roles analyzed by this study.

The first column in Table 2 shows the model for the interventionist role, explaining 7.8 percent of variance. The results revealed that thematic beat was indeed highly significant as a predictor of that role. Specifically, there tended to be a higher presence of the interventionist role in news on sports (.133) and a lower presence in news on politics, (−.165), crime and police (−.124), natural disasters (−.085), and courts (−.068). The data also showed that the presence of the interventionist model was highest in the popular press.

The regression model for the watchdog role explained 16.1 percent of variance. The data revealed that there tended to be a higher presence of the watchdog role in news on politics (.235), crime and police (.244) and courts (.218), and a lower presence in news on natural disasters (−.060). Although the explanatory power of both variables was lower, media platform (.071) and media audience orientation (−.073) were nevertheless significant predictors for the model, where there tended to be a higher presence of the watchdog role in both digital and elite-oriented news.

The model for the loyal-facilitator role explained 5.3 percent of total variance, and it showed that the most important thematic beat predictors of its presence were entertainment (.236) and sports (.157), followed by miscellaneous (.076), economics and business (.065), and social affairs news (.057). Media platform was also a significant predictor of the loyal-facilitator role (−.052), with a higher presence of that role in the print press. Media audience orientation, meanwhile, was not a significant predictor.

The model for the service role explained 13.2 percent of variance. Miscellaneous (.239), entertainment (.229), economics and business (.186), and social affairs news (.174) were the thematic beats that had the highest explanatory power in the performance of that role. Both media platform and media audience orientation also showed significant coefficients, although the explanatory power of both was lower.

For the infotainment role, the regression model explained the highest variance among the roles analyzed (18.9%). The differences in its presence were better explained by entertainment (.293) and sports (.250) thematic beats. Media audience orientation was also a significant predictor, with a higher presence of the infotainment role in popular media (.235). Regarding media platform, the presence of that role in the print press was also higher.

Finally, the regression model for the civic role explained 9 percent of total variance. Entertainment (−.195) and sports (−.139) thematic beats were the most important predictors for explaining the presence of this role in the news, followed by economics and

business (−.078) and miscellaneous news (−.078). According to the data, the presence of the civic role tended to be lower in those thematic beats. Media platform and media audience orientation were also significant predictors of the presence of this role, with a higher presence of this role in print (−.063) and elite media (−.089) than in their counterparts.

Discussion

Based on a content analysis of 1519 news items, this study empirically examined the extent to which the affordances of print and digital platforms significantly matter to the performance of professional roles in news, or if other organizational or story-level aspects have a greater influence on the presence of different journalistic roles in news regardless of the platform.

First, and consistent with previous international studies (e.g. Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger, 2015), our results suggested that Chilean online news media tended to be more passive, adopting more classical roles than print media. The results showed that while print news was associated with a higher presence of the loyal-facilitator, civic, service, and infotainment roles, online news was associated with a higher presence of the disseminator and watchdog roles.

The results gave partial support to the expectations of differences arising from different media affordances. On one hand, the data showed a higher presence of the interventionist, civic, and service roles when the print news cycle was least tied to immediacy. On the other, the data showed that Chilean digital media did not take advantage of technological tools such as interactivity to perform the civic role, for example, or of multimedia tools to perform the infotainment role of journalism.

The latter result contradicted the findings of Benson et al. (2012), who had found a greater association between digital media and sensationalist content. Another possible and complementary explanation for this relationship might be that, with declining rates of newspaper readership and a shift in advertising spending toward digital media outlets, print media feel compelled to capture more readers. In this respect, the service role could also be seen as an effective way of attracting a bigger audience, which would explain its higher presence in print than in online news.

The expectations based on different media affordances were not supported for roles linked to the relationship between journalism and those in power. The results showed a higher presence of the watchdog role in digital media, whereas the loyal-facilitator role was predominantly performed by print media, albeit at a low level. As we posited in our conceptual framework, one plausible explanation for this result could be the difference in ownership of the respective type of media platform. For example, the Chilean political context during the sampled year was characterized by unparalleled political scandals (Penta, SQM, and Corpesca), where the biggest print media outlets – which had a marked concentration of ownership, as well as strong economic and ideological ties with those cases – tried to avoid critical coverage. In this sense, digital media might have had more freedom than legacy newspapers to cover these scandals and to scrutinize the authorities more closely, mainly because of their greater independence in terms of ownership (Jenkins, 2006).

On the other hand, the fact that the native digital platforms analyzed did not belong to those big conglomerates might have made them economically less powerful. The consequences of that are, first, that they had fewer resources to hire staff to gather news and therefore relied more heavily on newswires. This might have led them to fulfil a function of informing on recent-past events rather than a more active function linked to journalistic roles where major analysis would have been required.

Furthermore, our results indicated that the differences between print and digital journalism could not be explained exclusively by the media platform, thereby implying that changes in news production logics might be associated with content homogeneity across both types of media platform. In this regard, our data suggested that differences in news content were a complex phenomenon that could not be ascribed to affordances and/or technological characteristics alone, but to the nature of news production, where news-gathering routines and organizational factors play an important role.

According to the results, thematic beat was the most relevant variable in explaining why we tend to read certain news in certain ways in both print and digital media. After thematic beat, media audience orientation emerged as the second most influential factor on the presence of journalistic roles in news, while the media platform, although significant, was less important than the other two. This might be because news work, beat routines, and the narratives and styles associated with them have been learned on the job for decades, as journalists share certain practices with regard to the coverage of specific beats – politics, sports, culture, and so on. For example, the interaction effects found by this study showed that while the watchdog role was positively associated with beats such as politics, the loyal-facilitator role – with its emphasis on national triumphs – had a strong link to beats usually associated with soft news such as sports.

Regarding the audience approach domain, we also found interesting differences. The service role had a positive relationship with thematic beats associated with both hard news and soft news, whereas the infotainment and civic roles were strongly linked to sports and culture beats, usually associated with soft news. Finally, the interventionist role showed a negative relationship with thematic beats usually associated with hard news, and a positive relationship with sports news. This finding may imply that journalists inhibit their active presence in the news when evaluating matters of high public importance, yet participate more actively in thematic beats that are more related to soft news.

The relevance of thematic beat to the performance of professional roles is consistent with a previous study by Reich (2012), who found that despite the tendency of digital media to merge traditional divisions in newsrooms and of having journalists capable of working across all beats, thematic beat continued to play a key role in the way journalists did their work.

These findings in Chile might indicate that online news outlets have absorbed structural and organizational logics of traditional media, just like other research measuring role conceptions among journalists or the influence of news production logics in journalistic practice in other countries has found (Boczkowski, 2010; Singer, 2005). Therefore, in a contested environment where economic and market pressures and technological transformations are considerable, the internal structural organization of the media continues to exert a powerful influence over their professional practices (Marchetti, 2005;

Skovsgaard and van Dalen, 2013). Journalists seem to learn how to be political or sports journalists first, rather than learning to be digital journalists, at least in Chile, where the acquisition of digital skills is typically an improvised or pragmatic endeavor rather than a major/minor degree. All this suggests the need to compare news beat routines through ethnographic work in relation to role performance in future research.

We found more nuanced results when measuring interaction effects between media platform and media audience orientation. Regardless of the platform, Chilean elite media displayed no differences across platforms with regard to role performance. In a competitive market where both print and digital media strive to target the same types of audience, it could be the case that they are more tempted to publish content that is more likely to maximize their revenue.
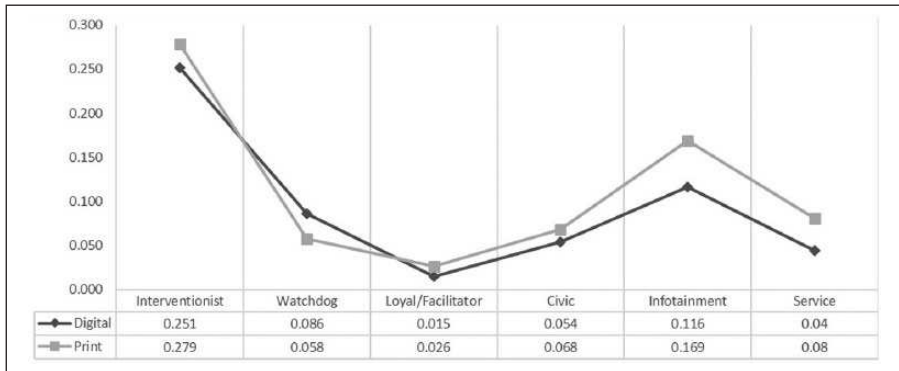
Although previous studies have shown that levels of media competition can indeed explain homogenization (Esser, 1999) – as in the instance of the elite newspapers in Chile – the popular media in Chile seem to follow a different pattern, with significant differences in role performance. While we found a higher presence of the watchdog role in popular digital media, there was a higher presence of the service and infotainment roles in print newspapers. Since the two sampled popular media outlets target audiences that are more segmented (*Las Últimas Noticias* has a predominantly showbiz news orientation, whereas *El Dínamo* has a predominantly current affairs one), with different news interests, this key element might explain a more heterogeneous journalistic performance.

The findings support a position that is midway between the *generalist* and *particularistic* approaches regarding the influence of media platform on journalistic practices (Reich, 2011, 2016). Our evidence suggests that although print and digital media have different affordances that do have an influence on the roles that journalists perform in their work, thematic beat and media audience orientation are more crucial to defining the performance of roles in news. Moreover, the data revealed that, in hierarchical terms, the presence of the six professional roles was similar on both types of media platform, suggesting some degree of common ground in the journalistic culture across them. Hence, asserting that the type of platform determines journalistic content overlooks the multilayered nature of journalistic practice.

This study significantly expands the literature on journalism and media production by analyzing the impact that the media platform has on the performance of roles in news. However, it also presents several limitations. First, this study compares two print media to two independent digital media with no print version. Although the intention was indeed to compare independent native media outlets, this selection made it impossible to establish whether editorial aspects of the media outlet played a role in the differences found here. For this reason, future research should also examine whether the differences remain when comparing both types of media platform for a single medium. At the same time, future in-depth longitudinal studies are needed to explain a possible adaptation logic that reflects the high levels of homogeneity found across print and digital media.

Similarly, studies should control for other story-level variables that we did not consider in this study. For example, even though short news items were excluded from the analysis of both the print and online newspapers, the length of the news articles included in the sample from both types of media should be acknowledged as a possible limitation, or at least as an alternative explanation for the differences found.

	Interventionist	Watchdog	Loyal/Facilitator	Civic	Infotainment	Service
Digital	0.251	0.086	0.015	0.054	0.116	0.04
Print	0.279	0.058	0.026	0.068	0.169	0.08

Figure 1. Presence of journalistic professional roles in print and online news.

Furthermore, it is also important to compare how professional roles are performed in other types of media outlets with different technological characteristics, such as radio, television, or social media. Finally, the geographical limitations of this study – one country – render it expedient to explore the extent to which our findings hold true when comparisons are made between countries with different economic, political, and cultural systems.

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Notes

1. Some national and international studies have also analyzed specific aspects of journalistic performance in television, online, and social networks separately, while a smaller number have compared more than one media platform simultaneously, but they have not directly addressed the comparison of different professional roles in news (Reich, 2011; Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006).
2. Subsequent analyses that included short news items found that the only difference – compared to the results shown here – was in the interventionist role, where no significant differences were found.
3. Prior to our main analyses, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) per domain using Mplus 7.0. Within the journalistic voice domain, the interventionist role showed a very satisfactory fit with the data ($\chi^2 = 6256.3$, $p < .001$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .018 (90% confidence interval (CI) = .010, .025), comparative fit index (CFI) = .997, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = .996, weighted root mean square residual (WRMR) = 1.032). Within the power relations domain, the watchdog and the loyal-facilitator roles showed a good fit with the data ($\chi^2 = 1620.3$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .031 (90% CI = .030, .034), CFI = .957, TLI = .952, WRMR = 1.102). Finally, within the audience approach domain, the model composed of the service, infotainment, and civic roles showed a satisfactory fit with the data: $\chi^2 = 1023.2$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .025 (90% CI = .023, .028), CFI = .977, TLI = .971, WRMR = .984. We identified each solution as providing a better account of the data than other competing solutions.

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