

Negotiating Journalism: The (In)congruences of Role Expectations and Evaluation of Media Performance Between Audiences and News Professionals in Chile

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Based on an online survey with 330 Chilean journalists and 4,615 media users, this study examines the discrepancies between the expectations of Chilean audiences and news professionals regarding journalistic roles and their evaluation of media performance. The findings reveal that audiences place greater importance on the disseminator and public service-oriented roles, while journalists prioritize roles aimed at influencing the public. Regarding media performance, audiences believe that journalism favors industry-oriented roles over those they prioritize. In contrast, journalists believe that the media mostly perform roles aligned with the audience's expectations. Our results also show that although the watchdog and disseminator roles are strong predictors of quality journalism for both groups, the civic role only impacts quality journalism in the case of news professionals. Instead, audiences associate good journalism with practices that address their everyday problems, such as the ones represented by the service role.

Keywords: journalists, audiences, journalistic roles, perception of media performance, role expectations

In recent years, trust in the news has significantly declined, leading to shifts in audience news consumption and avoidance patterns (Newman, Fletcher, Eddy, Robertson, & Nielsen, 2023). One possible explanation for this trend is the disconnect between audience expectations of journalism and the actual practices of journalists (Abdenour, McIntyre, & Dahmen, 2021; Fawzi & Mothes, 2020; Willnat, Weaver, & Wilhoit, 2017). Given the significance of mutual expectations between journalists and audiences (Scholl & Weischenberg, 2013), along with the substantial influence audiences may wield over journalistic practices, it is crucial to understand to what extent these incongruencies are problematic for the audience-journalists relationship and what are the main discrepancies between both groups (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Walter, 2011; Gil de Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013; Tsfati, Meyers, & Peri, 2006).

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In the case of journalists, working in a media environment involves interacting with colleagues, sources, and other reference groups, all of which can affect the effectiveness of the normative control exerted by news organizations (Mellado et al., 2020). Audience members also have different roles in society and may have multiple preferences regarding what they want and need to receive (Livingstone, 2005). At times, they may seek political information from a civic and watchdog journalism perspective, but at other times, they may seek entertainment, and at others, they may seek to solve their everyday problems as individuals (Gil de Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013; Meijer, 2001). In addition, audiences are much more heterogeneous than professional journalists, who tend to have a much more uniform perception of what constitutes their practice (Tsfati et al., 2006).

In this regard, it is conceivable that the changes brought about by the digital world, transformations in the workplace, and historical events influencing how journalists approach their roles (Mellado, 2020; Peters & Broersma, 2013) also impact audience expectations and evaluations of journalism. Consequently, these factors could affect the relationship between audiences and journalists across multiple dimensions (Loosen, Reimer, & Hölig, 2020; Singer et al., 2011).

Over the past few decades, two major research areas related to audiences have been developed in journalism studies. The first has analyzed what audiences expect from journalism (e.g., Fawzi & Mothes, 2020; Tandoc & Duffy, 2016), as well as potential discrepancies between what journalists believe to be important and what audiences say they prefer (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013; Loosen et al., 2020; Riedl & Eberl, 2022; Vos, Eichholz, & Karaliova, 2019). A second research area aims to compare journalists' evaluations regarding the implementation of various forms of journalism to those of audiences (e.g., Beaudoin & Thorson, 2002; Tsfati et al., 2006; Willnat, Weaver, & Wilhoit, 2019).

Although the number of studies on the relationship between journalists and their audiences has been comparatively small, such work has increased in recent years. The results of previous research generally reveal significant discrepancies in the perception and evaluation of audiences and news professionals in the relevance or implementation of different journalistic roles. For example, studies conducted in the United States and Israel that compare the expectations of the two groups identified significant differences in the importance that audiences and journalists place on the various functions of journalism (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013; Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005; Tsfati et al., 2006; Vos et al., 2019; Willnat et al., 2019). Meanwhile, studies conducted in Europe have found—though always with discrepancies—more agreement between audiences and news professionals' expectations of the roles of journalism (Heise, Loosen, Reimer, & Schmidt, 2014; Loosen et al., 2020; Riedl & Eberl, 2022).

Regarding research comparing both groups' evaluation of the practice of journalism, the studies generally show that journalists are more positive than audiences and that the greater the discrepancy between the two, the lower audience trust in the media (Tsfati et al., 2006). Furthermore, it has been determined that factors such as education, age, gender, and political leaning also influence audiences' perceptions of journalism and media performance (e.g., Fawzi & Mothes, 2020; Heider et al., 2005; Loosen et al., 2020; Riedl & Eberl, 2022; Vos et al., 2019; Willnat et al., 2019).

Despite the important contributions made by earlier research, there is a lack of conclusive empirical evidence regarding the magnitude and the scope of the gap between the two groups regarding specific journalistic roles studied by the literature because most of the studies on role expectation and evaluation of media performance have only focused on normatively accepted roles. Furthermore, there have been discrepancies in the definitions and frameworks used across studies to conceptualize specific functions and roles of journalism.

Finally, most of the studies have been conducted in developed countries, and little is known about the extent to which the relationship between journalism and audiences found in Western countries applies to other regions such as Latin America, and more specifically, Chile.

Chile represents a compelling case study because of its highly concentrated and commercial media landscape, dominated by large economic conglomerates and a strong focus on privatization (Cornejo & González, 2022). In the print media sector, *El Mercurio* S.A.P. and Copesa control the majority of newspapers. Although radio offers greater brand diversity, major players include Iberoamericana Radio Chile (Prisa), Grupo Copesa, RDF Media, and Megamedia. Broadcast television is dominated by four major conglomerates—Grupo Luksic, Grupo Bethia, Warner Media—and Televisión Nacional de Chile (TVN), the sole public-oriented channel despite its reliance on advertising revenue. In cable television, CNN Chile stands out as the first CNN branch in South America, currently operating under a license from Warner Bros. Discovery. The digital landscape is more varied, featuring online portals of traditional media and alternative initiatives, such as *El Mostrador*, *CIPER* Chile, *El Dínamo*, and *El Desconcierto*, alongside fact-checking projects that emerged following social unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, social media platforms—particularly Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp—have become key channels for news consumption in Chile (Cornejo & González, 2022; Fernández & Núñez-Musa, 2023; Guerra, 2019; Mellado & Cruz, 2024).

Moreover, the media in Chile is closely tied to major corporations and adheres to specific political ideologies, which reduces diversity and pluralism (Cornejo & González, 2022; Gronemeyer & Porath, 2015).

Studies have highlighted significant political polarization within the Chilean population. While there has been a noticeable rise in extreme right- and left-leaning ideologies, there has also been an increase in anti-political sentiment and growing criticism of traditional political parties (Cerdeña, 2022; Luna, 2024). This polarization has been particularly evident during recent social events, such as the social uprising and the constitutional referendum (Campos-Parra & Navia, 2024), where the Chilean media system faced widespread criticism from the public as many perceived it as biased and lacking in providing fact-based news coverage (Nalvarte, 2020).

In the context of Chile's highly centralized media system and significant political polarization, audiences exhibit low levels of trust and engage in selective exposure driven by political interests (Melki et al., 2023; Mellado & Cruz, 2024; Newman, Fletcher, Eddy, Robertson, & Nielsen, 2024). Nevertheless, little is known about how audiences and journalists perceive and evaluate journalism within this concentrated and polarized environment.

Against this backdrop, the main goal of this study is to investigate the in(congruences) that exist between Chilean audience expectations and evaluations of the roles of journalism, the expectations, and evaluations of Chilean journalists about their work, while also examining the journalistic roles that both audiences and journalists associate with quality journalism.

Journalism Expectations and Evaluation of Media Performance

Studies on professional roles have shifted from viewing roles as static to seeing them as dynamic and negotiated within social contexts (Biddle, 1986; Livingstone, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Mellado, 2015, 2020; Vos, 2017). Role theory suggests that roles are situational (Lynch, 2007) and evolve based on historical and contextual factors (Vos, 2017). Thus, it makes sense to think that as journalists, audiences may have a plurality of preferences that are not mutually exclusive.

Overall, most previous studies tend to identify more differences than agreements in terms of what journalists and audiences expect from journalism, finding a significant gaps between both (e.g., Abdenour et al., 2021; Loosen et al., 2020; Riedl & Eberl, 2022; Tsfati et al., 2006; Vos et al., 2019; Willnat et al., 2017). This previous research indicates that differences in expectations and evaluations of journalism vary significantly across different contexts.

Regarding the gap between journalists' and audiences' expectations, there is no consensus among studies on which roles are more valued by each group or generate the greatest discrepancies among them. From the perspective of the journalists, Heise et al. (2014) and Riedl and Eberl (2022) find that journalists place more value on reaching a broad audience compared with the value audiences themselves place on this role. Conversely, Willnat et al. (2019) identify that journalists consider analyzing complex problems to be of greater importance than audiences do. Abdenour et al. (2021) highlight that journalists prioritize investigating government claims more than audiences, while Gil de Zúñiga and Hinsley (2013) find that the emphasis on objectivity is the journalistic function where journalists' and audiences' values diverge the most.

About the functions that are more valued by audiences than by journalists, Heise et al. (2014), Loosen et al. (2020), and Riedl and Eberl (2022) find that audiences place greater importance on the civic role of journalism compared with journalists. Riedl and Eberl (2022) and Vos et al. (2019) report that audiences favor functions associated with loyal journalism more than journalists do. Tsfati et al. (2006), meanwhile, identify that the journalistic role of maintaining neutrality is valued more by audiences than by journalists.

Although previous studies show that journalists and audiences exhibit differences in their expectations of journalistic functions, they also reveal notable nuances. For instance, studies conducted in countries with robust public media systems, such as Germany and Austria, show a stronger alignment between journalists' and audiences' expectations regarding journalistic functions (Heise et al., 2014; Loosen et al., 2020, Riedl & Eberl, 2022). Additionally, audiences in Germany, the United Kingdom, and France tend to evaluate public media services more favorably compared with other media offerings (Sehl, 2020). Conversely, research in countries with less robust public media, such as the United States and Israel, tends

to reveal greater discrepancies between journalists and audiences (Gil de Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013; Tsfatı et al., 2006; Vos et al., 2019).

The studies mentioned so far only focus on the expectations of both audiences and journalists. However, some endeavors have also compared evaluations of journalistic performance by both groups. Gil de Zúñiga and Hinsley (2013) found that while audiences have higher expectations than journalists, journalists tend to rate their professional performance more positively than do audiences. In contrast, Lee, McGuinness, Park, Fulton, and Lukamto (2024) and Tsfatı et al. (2006) found that the general evaluation of media performance is more favorable from the audience's perspective than from that of journalists.

Given the lack of agreement on the (in)congruencies between journalistic expectations and evaluations by journalists and audiences regarding specific roles, we pose the following questions:

- RQ1: Which (in)congruences exist between the importance that audiences place on various journalistic roles and what journalists themselves perceive to be the most important tasks of the profession in Chile?*
- RQ2: Which (in)congruences exist between audiences' and journalists' evaluations of journalistic performance in Chile?*
- RQ3: Which journalistic roles have the smallest gap between the expectations and performance evaluations among journalists and audiences in Chile?*

Professional Roles and Journalistic Quality

Quality in journalism is defined as the extent to which a journalistic product meets the criteria expected by its audience and professional standards (Arnold, 2008; Degen, Olgemöller, & Zabel, 2024). Building on this framework, Arnold (2008) identifies three key perspectives that encapsulate these expectations: the functional perspective, the democratic-normative perspective, and the market-oriented audience perspective.

The functional-systemic approach posits that journalism should offer a diverse array of relevant and accessible topics, ensure the credibility of information, and facilitate effective societal self-observation. The normative-democratic perspective underscores that journalism must uphold democratic values by adhering to ethical standards that promote open and inclusive public debate. Finally, the market-oriented audience perspective emphasizes the importance of meeting audience needs and competing effectively in the market, ensuring that news is both accessible and pertinent to the public (Arnold, 2008).

Research investigating news quality assessments among audiences and journalists often conceptualizes news quality through normative perspectives of what constitutes "good" journalism (e.g., Fawzi & Mothes, 2020; Gil de Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013; Tsfatı et al., 2006).

Journalistic quality is often linked to roles that emphasize public service, such as disseminator, watchdog, and civic journalism, whereas market-driven and partisan journalism associated with public-

influence and consumer-oriented roles such as interventionism, infotainment, loyalism, and service are considered less valuable (e.g., Beam, Brownlee, Weaver, & Di Cicco, 2009; Cohen, 2002; Jenkins & Nielsen, 2020; Meijer, 2001; Mothes et al., 2024). This distinction arises because consumer-oriented and influence-driven journalism frequently deviates from established normative standards, resulting in varied assessments of their quality (e.g., Meijer, 2001).

However, most studies are limited to analyzing the expectations that audiences and journalists have of specific roles in journalism while it remains unclear to what extent the perception of performance of specific journalistic roles influences the overall assessment of the journalistic profession. An exception to this is the work by Tsfaty et al. (2006), which analyzes the relationship between the evaluation of specific journalistic practices and the general evaluation of media performance, although not focusing on journalistic roles as studied by the literature.

We then ask:

RQ4: Which journalistic roles—evaluated by news professionals and audiences as more or less performed by the media—significantly influence their overall assessment of journalism?

Methodology

To address our research questions, we compared the results from two online surveys conducted in September and October of 2023 in Chile: a survey with 330 media journalists and a survey with 4,615 members of the public.

The data for both the audience's and journalists' samples were collected by the Chilean market research company "Feedback." The sampling strategy employed by Feedback considers the regions, gender, and age of potential participants based on the characteristics of the Chilean population. Based on the monitoring of the responses received and according to the distribution of sociodemographic variables, subsequent targeted follow-ups were carried out in those segments with low response rates to ensure balanced samples.

The audience sample consisted of individuals living in the three most populated regions of the country. In terms of gender, 55.3% were self-described as male and 44.7% as female. Regarding age, 49% were over 50 years old ($M = 45.30$; $SD = 5.48$), while regarding level of formal education, 60% indicated having at least a bachelor's degree. The resulting journalists' sample included 174 men (52.9%) and 156 women (47.1%) with an average age of 49.2 ($SD = 11.36$). About 45% of the sample corresponds to reporters, 47% to editors, 4% to producers, and 4% to anchors or TV presenters.

Both groups of participants completed a questionnaire including the same list of professional practices that journalists and journalistic media can apply when reporting on an event, based on standardized operationalizations of the watchdog, civic, interventionist, loyal-facilitator, infotainment, and service roles in journalism used by previous studies (Mellado et al., 2020; Willnat et al., 2019).

Journalists and members of the audience were first asked, on a 7-point scale (where 1 is “not at all important” and 7 is “extremely important”), to evaluate the personal importance they assign to each journalistic practice (role expectations) based on a list of journalistic functions. Specifically, they responded to the question: “How much importance do you ascribe to each of these journalistic practices?”

To estimate their evaluation of media performance, they were asked to respond to the extent to which they believe the same list of journalistic functions was put into practice by the media. For this, participants used a 7-point scale where 1 is “never” and 7 is “always.” Specifically, they answered the question: “How often do you think Chilean journalists perform these professional practices in the media?”

Additionally, journalists and audiences were asked, on a 7-point scale (where 1 is “very poor” and 7 is “excellent”), to evaluate the overall performance of journalism and the media in Chile.

The questionnaire further included measures on both groups of participants’ sociodemographic, political leaning, and media trust. Additionally, for the group of audiences, the questionnaire included measures on topic interests, media use, and their perceived media literacy.

Findings

The (In)congruencies on Role Expectations Between News Professionals and Audiences

According to the results, both the journalists and the audience consider the disseminator role and public service-oriented roles such as watchdog and civic the most important ones from the profession. Conversely, both groups tend to agree that the least important roles are those related to consumer and public-influence orientation, such as infotainment and loyal journalism.

Specifically, the most valuable journalistic functions for both audiences and journalists are “to uncover illegal/irregular behavior of powerful individuals or groups in society” (M journalists: 6.21; SD journalists: 1.23; M audiences: 6.28; SD audiences: 1.25); “try to report as impartially as possible” (M journalists: 6.15; SD journalists: 1.34; M audiences: 6.44; SD audiences: 1.17); “to cover information on judicial processes against individuals or groups of power” (M journalists: 6.16; SD journalists: 1.15; M audiences: 5.94; SD audiences: 1.36); and “to include the vision/reaction of regular or organized citizens on how they perceive or are affected by political decisions” (M journalists: 5.39; SD journalists: 1.84; M audiences: 5.59; SD audiences: 1.59). In contrast, among the least expected functions for both journalists and audiences are “to include information on the private lives of people” (M journalists: 3.47; SD journalists: 1.97; M audiences: 2.63; SD audiences: 1.88); “to use humor, exaggeration or sarcasm to provide information in an entertaining way” (M journalists: 2.56; SD journalists: 1.67; M audiences: 2.95; SD audiences: 1.86); and “to present a positive image of the elite” (M journalists: 3.63; SD journalists: 2.18; M audiences: 3.10; SD audiences: 1.92).

Nevertheless, the two groups differ significantly in the extent to which they value the different roles of journalism. Based on that, some professional roles are more appreciated by journalists than by audiences and vice versa (see Figure 1).

In fact, only in two of the 21 survey items, the difference between journalists and the audience was not statistically significant. For the remaining statements, the differences on the extent to which both groups value different journalistic functions were highly significant ($p < .001$; see Appendix 1).

While a majority of journalists consider the interpretive function a very important part of their jobs (M journalists: 4.61; SD journalists: 2.01; M audiences: 4.14; SD audiences: 2.00), the audience tends to value the disseminator role, such as portraying facts neutrally, significantly more (M journalists: 4.95; SD journalists: 2.04; M audiences: 5.91; SD audiences: 1.58).

Another function more strongly supported by audiences than by journalists—and, therefore, a potential area for conflict when journalism tries to meet audience expectations—is to educate the citizens on their duties and rights, being actually the function with the largest discrepancy between both groups (M journalists: 5.13; SD journalists: 2.06; M audiences: 6.37; SD audiences: 1.19). While the public prefers that the media educate them on their duties and rights, the journalists believe that it is more relevant to give citizens voice in the news (M journalists: 5.39; SD journalists: 1.84) or provide consumer information that can be used by people, or that they can take advantage of (M journalists: 5.65; SD journalists: 1.52).

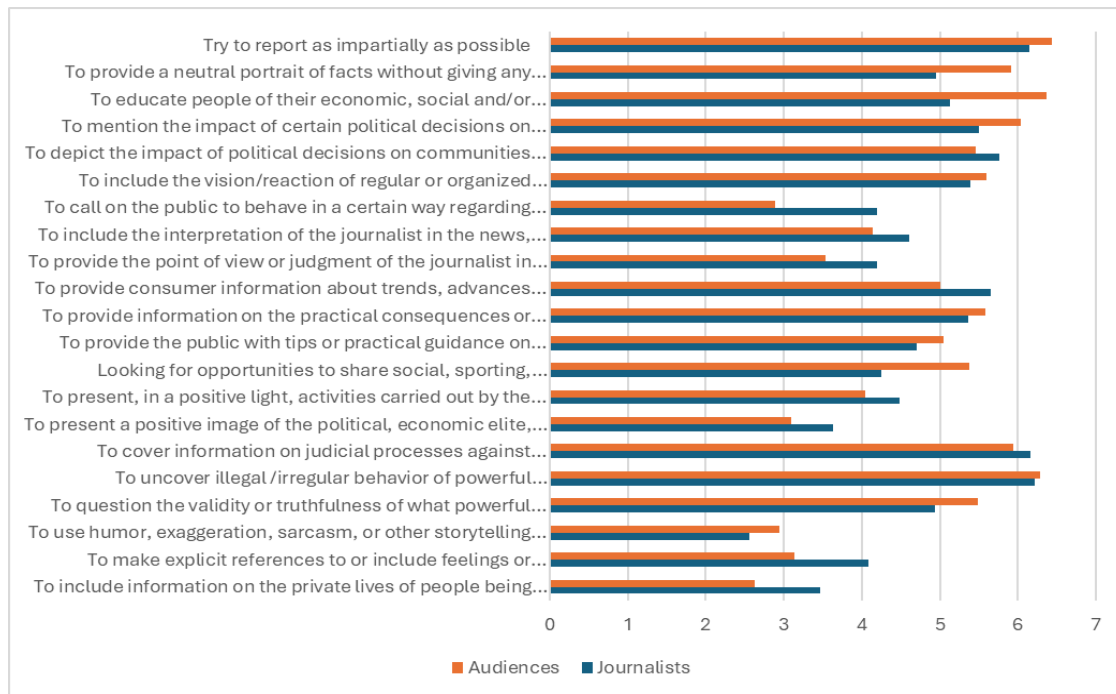


Figure 1. Journalistic functions expected by audiences and journalists.

While the public is quite skeptical of journalistic role in providing a positive image of those in power (M audiences: 3.10; SD audiences: 1.92), it considers media support of the country's development as very important (M audiences: 5.37; SD audiences: 1.57).

Looking at the specific role dimensions that comprise these journalistic functions, we found that audiences tend to place more importance than journalists on functions associated with the watchdog (M journalists: 5.76; SD journalists: 1.07; M audiences: 5.90; SD audiences: 1.15), the civic (M journalists: 5.42; SD journalists: 1.14; M audiences: 5.80; SD audiences: 1.13) and specially the disseminator role (M journalists: 5.55; SD journalists: 1.35; M audiences: 6.17; SD audiences: 1.2) of journalism, even if both groups rate them as the most important. Meanwhile, journalists consider more relevant than the audience functions associated with roles that intent to influence the public, such as the interventionist (M journalists: 4.32; SD journalists: 1.63; M audiences: 3.52; SD audiences: 1.53) and the infotainment role (M journalists: 3.37; SD journalists: 1.22; M audiences: 2.90; SD audiences: 1.30), even if both rate them as less important overall (see Table 1).

These significant differences seem to point at the varying perceptions of ideal-type of journalism held by journalists and audiences in Chile. When examining the size of the discrepancies between the expectations of journalists and audiences in journalism, the findings show the largest gap in the interventionist role, with journalists giving significantly more importance to the role, comparatively. Meanwhile, the disseminator role shows the second-largest gap, with audiences giving more importance to this role, despite being the most valued overall.

Although significant, the infotainment and civic roles present comparatively smaller gaps. Conversely, the loyal (M journalists: 4.11; SD journalists: 1.27; M audiences: 4.10; SD audiences: 1.32), as well as the service role (M journalists: 5.24; SD journalists: .98; M audiences: 5.21; SD audiences: 1.24) show no significant gaps between the expectations of journalists and audiences (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Gaps Between Journalists and Audiences' Expectations.

| | Journalists | Audiences | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-------|
| | Mean | Mean | Mean differences | p |
| Diseminator_expectations | 5.55 (1.35) | 6.17 (1.20) | -.62302 | <.001 |
| Interventionism_expectations | 4.32 (1.63) | 3.52 (1.53) | .80470 | <.001 |
| Infotainment_expectation | 3.37 (1.22) | 2.90 (1.30) | .46872 | <.001 |
| Service_expectations | 5.24 (.98) | 5.21 (1.24) | .02668 | .321 |
| Civic_expectations | 5.42 (1.14) | 5.80 (1.13) | -.38110 | <.001 |
| Watchdog_expectation | 5.76 (1.07) | 5.90 (1.15) | -.13640 | .019 |
| Loyal_expectation | 4.11 (1.27) | 4.10 (1.32) | -.04852 | .260 |

The (In)congruencies in Media Performance Evaluations by News Professionals and Audiences

When analyzing the potential (in)congruencies between what the audience and news professionals think are the most common practices of journalism and the media in Chile, we found that journalists in general tend to perceive that the media perform all its functions more than what the audience perceive to be the case. Overall, journalists evaluate the fulfillment of public service-oriented roles and the disseminator better than the audiences, and these roles are most highly appreciated by both groups.

Overall, journalists consider that the media perform the watchdog (Mjournalists: 4.56; SD journalists: 1.30; M audiences: 4.19; SD audiences: 1.61), civic (M journalists: 4.40; SD journalists: 1.25; M audiences: 3.92; SD audiences: 1.58), and disseminator roles (M journalists: 4.45; SD journalists: 1.56; M audiences: 3.63; SD audiences: 1.90) more than interventionism (M journalists: 4.36; SD journalists: 1.28; M audiences: 4.35; SD audiences: 1.43) and especially infotainment (M journalists: 4.20; SD journalists: 1.14; M audiences: 4.30; SD audiences: 1.39). The audience, instead, has the opposite perception (see Table 2).

Specifically, "trying to report as impartially as possible" (M journalists: 4.44; SD journalists: 1.90; M audiences: 3.57; SD audiences: 2.09), "to cover information on judicial processes against individuals or groups in power" (M journalists: 4.74; SD journalists: 1.67; M audiences: 4.13; SD audiences: 1.86), and "to depict the impact of political decisions on communities defined by specific social characteristics" (M journalists: 4.62; SD journalists: 1.62; M audiences: 4.00; SD audiences: 1.83), have the biggest discrepancies when evaluated as higher in terms of performance by journalists than by audiences (see Appendix 2).

Still, journalists as well as audiences, believe that the media perform public-service roles (watchdog and civic roles), the disseminator role, and the service role less than expected, and that perform public-influence and consumer-oriented roles (interventionist, infotainment, loyal) more than expected.

Although journalists and audiences disagree on the extent to which they perceive several journalistic functions manifested in media performance, some of those differences, especially related to the service, loyalty, and infotainment roles, are not significant (see Appendix 2).

Speaking the internal discrepancies of both groups between expectations and media performance evaluations, the data reveal that the gaps are larger within audiences than within journalists (see Appendices 3 and 4).

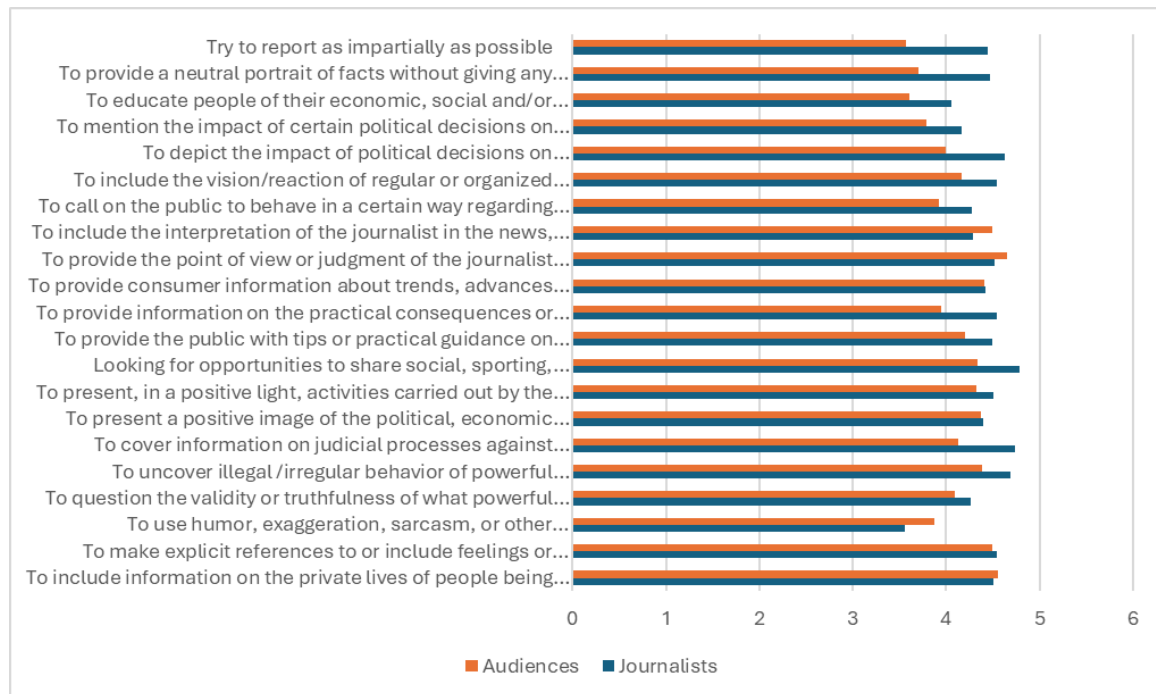


Figure 2. Evaluation of media performance by audiences and journalists.

In terms of the size, the disseminator role shows the largest gap, followed by the civic and the watchdog role. Although significant, the loyal and service roles show smaller gaps in media performance evaluations between journalists and audiences (Figure 2). Moreover, there are no significant gaps in media performance evaluations for the interventionist and infotainment roles. This indicates that both journalists and audiences perceive the media as performing these roles—the two least expected roles by both groups—similarly.

Table 2. The Gaps Between Journalists and Audiences' Media Performance Evaluation.

| | Journalists | Audiences | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-------|
| | Mean | Mean | Mean differences | p |
| Diseminator_evaluation | 4.45 (1.56) | 3.63 (1.9) | .81468 | <.001 |
| Interventionism_evaluation | 4.36 (1.28) | 4.35 (1.43) | .00900 | .452 |
| Infotainment_evaluation | 4.2 (1.14) | 4.3 (1.39) | -.10076 | .089 |
| Service_evaluation | 4.48 (1.09) | 4.18 (1.33) | .29576 | <.001 |
| Civic_evaluation | 4.4 (1.25) | 3.92 (1.58) | .47938 | <.001 |
| Watchdog_evaluation | 4.56 (1.30) | 4.19 (1.61) | .36458 | <.001 |
| Loyal_evaluation | 4.55 (1.12) | 4.34 (1.31) | .21262 | <.001 |

Journalistic Roles Influencing Quality Evaluations of Journalism

The evaluation of quality journalism in Chile reveals significant differences between the perceptions of journalists and audiences. Specifically, the data reveal that journalists evaluate Chilean journalism significantly better than media users (M journalists: 3.53; M audiences: 3.02). Therefore, it is essential to explore which journalistic roles that both journalists and audiences associate with good journalism.

To achieve this goal, we ran regression models, with the general assessment of journalism as the dependent variable, and the performance valuation of each journalistic role as covariates. This allowed us to determine the strength of the contribution of each journalistic role to their general judgments, controlling for each other.

Table 3 presents the results. The standardized beta coefficients reported in the models represent the weights assigned by respondents to each specific role when evaluating the overall performance of Chilean journalism.

At the last column of the table, the t-test checks the hypothesis that the difference between the coefficients in the models for journalists and the audience are statistically significant. As shown in Table 3, the differences were significant for all roles except for infotainment. This means that journalists and audiences assign different weights to different roles and performance evaluation when making a general assessment of the profession.

In the journalists' sample, the best predictors of good journalism were public service orientation roles, specifically, the watchdog role ($\beta = .209$) followed by the disseminator ($\beta = .109$) and the civic role ($\beta = .100$). The performance of the loyal-facilitator role was instead negatively associated with their general

positive assessment of Chilean journalism ($\beta = -.073$). Meanwhile, the extent to which journalists perceive that the media perform the interventionist, service, and infotainment roles did not significantly predict their media evaluation.

For the audience, the strongest predictor of their assessments of Chilean journalism was also the watchdog ($\beta = .130$) and disseminator role ($\beta = .217$) but the weight they give to both differs. Indeed, for audience members, the performance of the disseminator role is a stronger positive predictor of quality Chilean journalism than the watchdog role. Unlike with the journalists' group, the civic role did not show for media users any significant association with their assessments of Chilean journalism, while the service role turned out to be a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .056$).

Similar to journalists, the extent to which audience members perceive Chilean journalism performs the interventionist, loyal-facilitator, and infotainment roles don't predict their overall evaluation of the media.

Table 3. OLS Regression Models Predicting General Evaluations of Chilean Media Performance.

| | Journalists | Audience members | T-test |
|---|-------------|------------------|---------|
| Roles | | | |
| Disseminator | .107** | .217*** | 8.99*** |
| Interventionism | .050 | .030 | 2.85** |
| Loyal-facilitator | -.073* | .020 | 3.26** |
| Watchdog | .209*** | .130*** | 4.81*** |
| Service | .043 | .056* | 3.92** |
| Infotainment | .163 | .021 | -1.53 |
| Civic | .100*** | .016 | 5.04*** |
| R squared | .33 | .14 | |
| N | 330 | 4,612 | |
| General evaluation of Chilean media performance | 3.53 | 3.02 | |

Another important finding concerns the variance explained by the models. For journalists, the survey items assessing media performance in specific roles accounted for 33% of the variance in their overall evaluation of the profession. In contrast, these items only accounted for 14% of the variance in the audience's evaluations. This disparity is consistent with Tsfaty et al. (2006) findings, suggesting the presence of additional factors influencing the audience's general assessment of journalism that were not captured by the current analyses.

Discussion

This study explored the (in)congruences between Chilean audience expectations and evaluations of journalistic roles and the self-perceptions of journalists regarding their professional role conceptions and perceived enactments. The findings revealed both alignments and significant gaps between the two groups, shedding light on areas where journalism as ideal and practice may diverge from public expectations and evaluations.

The results showed that both Chilean audiences and journalists overall agree on the most important roles that journalism should play in society. Both groups highly value the disseminator role and public service-oriented roles, such as the watchdog and civic roles. This indicates a shared understanding of the importance of journalism in promoting neutrality and holding power to account as embodying the ideal form of journalism.

Despite the general preference for disseminator and public service-oriented journalism, the study reveals that audiences have a stronger preference for these roles compared with journalists. This discrepancy suggests that audiences expect a more demanding and rigorous form of journalism in their daily lives, while they give significantly less relevance to journalistic roles that prioritize the interests of the industry.

The results also highlight gaps between audiences' and news professionals' expectations and evaluations of media performance of specific journalistic roles. For instance, journalists tend to place greater importance on the interpretive functions of the profession, whereas audiences emphasize impartiality and the need for journalism to educate citizens about their duties and rights. While both groups recognize the core functions of journalism, audiences may be more focused on receiving neutral, fact-based information that empowers them as citizens, whereas journalists are more inclined toward providing context and analysis.

Another noteworthy finding is that journalists place significantly greater importance on the infotainment role than audiences do. This may partly be explained by the market-oriented strategies that media outlets have increasingly adopted in recent years, aiming to attract audiences through entertainment and sensationalism (Gade, 2004; Hanusch & Tandoc, 2019). Another plausible explanation is that the infotainment role is often criticized for its low journalistic quality, which could influence the audience's attitudes when asked about this role. However, this does not necessarily reflect a low consumption or preference for infotainment journalism among either group (Baum, 2002; Saad & Hamza, 2021; Schrøder, 2019).

Indeed, findings reveal that a potential conflict arises from the fact that audiences have higher expectations regarding normative roles (disseminator, civic, and watchdog); however, they believe that the media prioritizes industry-oriented roles over what they expect. In contrast, journalists perceive this situation differently. They are more likely than audiences to believe that the media primarily practice public service-oriented roles.

These contradictory evaluations of media practices between journalists and audiences present a challenge to audience satisfaction with Chilean journalism and may even contribute to dissatisfaction among the journalists themselves.

Journalists' expectations fall short in specific areas. Although the loyal role is one of the least expected by this group, media professionals perceive it as being performed more often than roles they consider more important, such as that of the disseminator and civic roles. Similarly, it is noteworthy that the infotainment role, though the least expected by both audiences and journalists, is considered to be

widely practiced by the media. In fact, the results show that both journalists and audiences agree that the media predominantly fulfills roles like service, infotainment, and loyal journalism, which are driven more by industry needs than by audience demands.

The largest gaps between audiences and journalists were found in the evaluation of the disseminator role, which is highly valued by audiences but perceived as underperformed by the media. This gap may contribute to the ongoing decline in trust in media, as audiences perceive a disconnect between their expectations and what they say they experience in media content. The fact that journalists rate the performance of watchdog, civic, and disseminator roles significantly higher than the audience suggests a potential overestimation of their effectiveness in delivering what the public seeks.

Interestingly, the study reveals that roles associated with loyalism and service show the smallest gaps between expectations and evaluations among both groups. This indicates that journalists and audiences have a relatively aligned view on the performance of these roles, partly because they are not the most valued, and the levels of expectations are lower. Overall, audiences exhibit greater internal discrepancies than journalists do in their expectations and their evaluations of media performance, indicating a wider gap between what they expect and what they perceive the media to accomplish.

Our findings align with those of Gil de Zúñiga and Hinsley (2013) in the United States, who observed that journalists tend to evaluate their performance more positively than external observers. However, our results contrast with those of Tsati et al. (2006), as cited in Israel and Lee et al. (2024) in Australia, who found that audiences generally perceive media performance more favorably than journalists themselves. The reason why journalists evaluate Chilean journalism significantly better than media users may be related to different aspects, such as different expectations regarding the quality and objectivity of news reporting and trust in the media. In recent years, trust in Chilean media has significantly declined, further affecting audience consumption patterns, with a clear trend toward decreasing consumption of traditional media such as print, television, and radio, and a significant increase in alternative online media and social networks (Mellado & Cruz, 2024; Newman et al., 2024). However, this phenomenon is not exclusive to the Chilean context. In the Latin American context, a downward trend in trust in the media has also been observed, alongside a shift in consumption patterns characterized by a decrease in the consumption of traditional media and an increase in the consumption of news through online media and social networks (Mont'Alverne, Ross Arguedas, Toff, & Badrinathan, 2021).

Additionally, the study found that quality journalism is linked to specific roles. The watchdog role is the strongest predictor of quality journalism for audiences and journalists. Both groups consider the watchdog and the disseminator role as key predictors of quality journalism. However, audiences place more weight on the disseminator's role, whereas journalists emphasize the watchdog role. This difference highlights the audience's preference for accessible, factual information as a foundation for their evaluation of media quality, while journalists may prioritize their role in investigating and exposing societal issues.

The results also show that although journalists have higher expectations than audiences regarding the interventionist and infotainment roles, these roles are not predictors of good journalism by any of the

two. This may be because of the frequent practice of interventionist and infotainment journalism by Chilean media, leading both journalists and audiences to normalize this type of content.

In relation to journalistic roles focused on the audience, the results reveal a divided effect: While journalists see the civic role as a positive predictor of quality Chilean journalism, audiences associate good journalism with the service role. This suggests that despite the high expectations that audiences hold for the civic role—particularly for its educational function in informing citizens about their rights and duties—the key value is placed on the kind of journalism that provides practical information for their daily lives, such as tips and advice. Journalists, on the other hand, remain more aligned with the normative ideals of journalism.

While this study provides valuable insights into the congruences and incongruences between audience and journalists' perceptions in Chile, it is important to recognize its limitations. First, the focus on Chile restricts the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future research should explore these dynamics in different cultural and political environments. Additionally, in-depth studies that consider the hyperfragmentation of audiences could greatly enhance our understanding of the relationship between audiences and journalists. Second, the reliance on self-reported data from both journalists and audiences may introduce bias. Future studies could benefit from incorporating observational or experimental methodologies to triangulate these findings, thereby determining whether audiences are indeed prioritizing paying, consuming, watching, and reading news as they claim. Third, given that distrust in the media is an increasing trend both in Chile and in Latin America, future research should investigate the relationship between distrust in the media and the discrepancies between the expectations and evaluations of journalism among journalists and audiences.

Despite these limitations, these findings contribute to the burgeoning literature on role performance and the gap between journalistic ideals and professional practice by broadening the analysis to the relationship between audiences and news professionals. Our study demonstrates that, much like the disconnect between journalistic ideals and media performance, the expectations and evaluations of journalistic roles by journalists and audiences frequently diverge—highlighting that these discrepancies are not only internal to the profession but also extend to the media-audience relationship.

While our findings underscore that normative roles remain central to both audience and journalist perceptions, the ways these roles materialize in practice expose tensions between professional autonomy, market pressures, and audience needs. This dynamic highlights the intricate interplay between expectations, evaluations, and perceptions of journalistic quality. At the heart of this complexity is the recognition that journalistic expectations do not necessarily translate into what is ultimately perceived as high-quality journalism, especially by the audience. Expectations and evaluations of journalistic quality can be misaligned or even contradictory, reinforcing the idea that studies on journalistic roles should move beyond normative ideals to examine how these ideals are negotiated in practice and how they shape—or fail to shape—audience perceptions, attitudes, and decisions.

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Appendix 1. Expectations of Journalistic Functions by Journalists and Audiences.

| Journalistic functions | Journalists | Audiences | | |
|--|-----------------|----------------|------------------|-------|
| | Mean | Mean | mean differences | p |
| To include information on the private lives of people being covered in the news | 3.47 (1.977) | 2.63 (1.88) | .841 | <.001 |
| To make explicit references to or include feelings or emotions in the news | 4.09 (2.08) | 3.14 (1.82) | .948 | <.001 |
| To use humor, exaggeration, sarcasm, or other storytelling devices to provide information in an entertaining way | 2.56 (1.67) | 2.95 (1.86) | -.383 | <.001 |
| To question the validity or truthfulness of what powerful individuals or groups in society | 4.93 (2.04) | 5.48 (1.85) | -.555 | <.001 |
| To uncover illegal/irregular behavior of powerful individuals or groups in society | 6.21 (1.23) | 6.28 (1.25) | -.076 | .291 |
| To cover information on judicial processes against individuals or groups of power | 6.16 (1.15) | 5.94 (1.36) | .221 | <.001 |
| To present a positive image of the political, economic elite, or cultural elite | 3.63 (2.18) | 3.10 (1.92) | .528 | <.001 |
| To present, in a positive light, activities carried out by the individuals or groups of power | 4.48 (1.98) | 4.04 (1.92) | .438 | <.001 |
| Looking for opportunities to share social, sporting, political, or economic achievements of your country in comparison to other countries | 4.25 (1.90) | 5.37 (1.57) | -1,112 | <.001 |
| To provide the public with tips or practical guidance on how to deal with everyday life problems | 4.70 (1.90) | 5.05 (1.73) | -.347 | <.001 |
| To provide information on the practical consequences or meanings that particular events or actions have for people's everyday personal lives | 5.36 (1.76) | 5.58 (1.46) | -.213 | .033 |
| To provide consumer information about trends, advances, and new products or services that can be used by people, or that they can take advantage of | 5.65 (1.52) | 5.01 (1.76) | .640 | <.001 |
| To provide the point of view or judgment of the journalist in the news | 4.19 (2.16) | 3.54 (2.05) | .648 | <.001 |
| To include the interpretation of the journalist in the news, explaining the causes, meanings, and/or possible consequences of certain events/actions | 4.61 (2.01) | 4.14 (2.00) | .468 | <.001 |
| To call on the public to behave in a certain way regarding an event or issue | 4.19 (2.19) | 2.89 (1.93) | 1,298 | <.001 |
| To include the vision/reaction of regular or organized citizens on how they perceive or are affected by political decisions | 5.39 (1.84) | 5.59 (1.59) | -.192 | .066 |
| To depict the impact of political decisions on communities that are defined by specific social characteristics | 5.76 (1.49) | 5.46 (1.75) | .296 | <.001 |

| | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|--------|-------|
| To mention the impact of certain political decisions on local geographical locations or settings | 5.50 (1.96) | 6.04 (1.27) | -.542 | <.001 |
| To educate people of their economic, social, and/or political duties and rights as citizens | 5.13 (2.06) | 6.37 (1.19) | -1,247 | <.001 |
| To provide a neutral portrait of facts without giving any personal judgment on it, by the part of the journalist | 4.95 (2.04) | 5.91 (1.58) | -.955 | <.001 |
| Try to report as impartially as possible | 6.15 (1.34) | 6.44 (1.17) | -.291 | <.001 |

Appendix 2. Evaluation of Journalistic Functions by Journalists and Audiences.

| Journalistic functions | Journalists | Audiences | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|------------------|-------|
| | Mean | Mean | mean differences | p |
| To include information on the private lives of people being covered in the news | 4.51 (1.73) | 4.55 (1.95) | -.041 | 0.309 |
| To make explicit references to or include feelings or emotions in the news | 4.54 (1.83) | 4.49 (1.89) | .047 | .256 |
| To use humor, exaggeration, sarcasm, or other storytelling devices to provide information in an entertaining way | 3.56 (1.70) | 3.87 (1.78) | -.308 | .002 |
| To question the validity or truthfulness of what powerful individuals or groups in society | 4.26 (1.76) | 4.09 (1.99) | .171 | .094 |
| To uncover illegal/irregular behavior of powerful individuals or groups in society | 4.69 (1.63) | 4.38 (1.89) | .313 | <.001 |
| To cover information on judicial processes against individuals or groups of power | 4.74 (1.67) | 4.13 (1.86) | .610 | <.001 |
| To present a positive image of the political, economic elite, or cultural elite | 4.39 (1.82) | 4.37 (1.95) | .020 | .546 |
| To present, in a positive light, activities carried out by the individuals or groups of power | 4.50 (1.62) | 4.32 (1.86) | .173 | .066 |
| Looking for opportunities to share social, sporting, political, or economic achievements of your country in comparison to other countries | 4.78 (1.63) | 4.33 (1.74) | .445 | <.001 |
| To provide the public with tips or practical guidance on how to deal with everyday life problems | 4.49 (1.69) | 4.20 (1.72) | .286 | .003 |
| To provide information on the practical consequences or meanings that particular events or actions have for people's everyday personal lives | 4.54 (1.67) | 3.94 (1.71) | .599 | <.001 |
| To provide consumer information about trends, advances, and new products or services that can be used by people, or that they can take advantage on | 4.42 (1.72) | 4.41 (1.68) | .002 | .581 |
| To provide the point of view or judgment of the journalist in the news | 4.52 (1.83) | 4.65 (1.91) | -.129 | .220 |
| To include the interpretation of the journalist in the news, explaining the causes, meanings, and/or possible consequences of certain events/actions | 4.29 (1.67) | 4.49 (1.78) | -.200 | .038 |
| To call on the public to behave in a certain way regarding an event or issue | 4.27 (1.74) | 3.92 (1.87) | .356 | <.001 |
| To include the vision/reaction of regular or organized citizens on how they perceive or are affected by political decisions | 4.54 (1.75) | 4.17 (1.86) | .373 | <.001 |
| To depict the impact of political decisions on communities that are defined by specific social characteristics | 4.62 (1.62) | 4.00 (1.83) | .612 | <.001 |

| | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|-------|-------|
| To mention the impact of certain political decisions on local geographical locations or settings | 4.17 (1.82) | 3.79 (1.83) | .379 | <.001 |
| To educate people of their economic, social and/or political duties and rights as citizens | 4.05 (1.82) | 3.60 (2.02) | .453 | <.001 |
| To provide a neutral portrait of facts without giving any personal judgment on it, by the part of the journalist | 4.47 (1.83) | 3.70 (2.04) | 0.762 | <.001 |
| Try to report as impartially as possible | 4.44 (1.90) | 3.57 (2.09) | .867 | <.001 |

Appendix 3. Expectation-Evaluation Discrepancy on Journalistic Roles by Audiences.

| Audiences | Expectation | Evaluation | Expectation-evaluation discrepancy |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Disseminator | 6.17 | 3.63 | 2.53 |
| Interventionism | 3.52 | 4.35 | -0.83 |
| Infotainment | 2.9 | 4.3 | -1.39 |
| Service | 5.21 | 4.18 | 1.02 |
| Civic | 5.8 | 3.92 | 1.88 |
| Watchdog | 5.9 | 4.19 | 1.7 |
| Loyal | 4.1 | 4.34 | -0.23 |
| Test statistics | F = 6127.075; p < .001; n2 = .32 | F = 187.323; p < .001; n2 = .024 | F = 3101.297; p < .001; n2 = .161 |

Appendix 4. Expectation-Evaluation Discrepancy on Journalistic Roles by Journalists.

| Journalists | Expectation | Evaluation | Expectation-evaluation discrepancy |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Diseminator | 5.55 | 4.45 | 1.1 |
| Interventionism | 4.32 | 4.36 | -0.03 |
| Infotainment | 3.37 | 4.2 | -0.83 |
| Service | 5.24 | 4.48 | 0.75 |
| Civic | 5.42 | 4.4 | 1.02 |
| Watchdog | 5.76 | 4.56 | 1.2 |
| Loyal | 4.11 | 4.55 | -0.43 |
| Test statistics | F = 181.984; p < .001; n2 = .126 | F = 4.084; p < .001; n2 = .010 | F = 94.248; p < .001; n2 = .049 |