

Strategic Avoidance and Strategic Use: A Look into Spanish Online Journalists' Attitudes Toward Emotions in Reporting

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By taking an exploratory tack and drawing on interviews with journalists from five Spanish online news media, this article investigates journalists' attitudes toward emotions in reporting. The article shows that journalists in the sample hold two opposing types of attitudes toward emotion: strategic avoidance and strategic use. It examines the extent to which such attitudes shape their views of the place and role of emotions in journalism, their judgments on the news value of emotions, their perceptions of the relationships between emotions and objectivity, their decisions on whether emotions enter (or not) the news production process, and how emotions are represented in their stories. The article contributes to current research on the value of emotionality in journalism by focusing on online journalists and complementing recent studies on journalists' perception and use of emotions in other media outlets, for instance, newspapers and television.

Keywords: emotions, online news, attitudes, objectivity, strategic avoidance, strategic use

Within the field of journalism practice and theory, reason and emotion have for a long time been two opposing categories, with reason guiding journalists in the pursuit of detached objectivity and emotion allegedly leading journalists astray and driving bad professional practices (Ward, 2005). However, current research on news production has showed that one can no longer make such dual, untenable assumptions. Indeed, as several scholars have recently suggested, emotions do enter the news production (and reception) at different points, and evidence of this can be found, for instance, in stereotypical portrayals of emotions in newspaper photos (Rodgers, Kenix, & Thorson, 2007); (re)presentations of emotions in news agency reports (Stenvall, 2014); emotional language in newspaper stories (Ungerer, 1997); emotionality as a strategic ritual in Pulitzer Prize-winning articles (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013); television journalists' notions of emotionality (Pantti, 2010); emotions and visual agenda setting in cases of terrorism (Fahmy, Cho, Wanta, & Song, 2006); and the framing effects of emotion on opinions about immigration (Lecheler, Bos, & Vliegenthart, 2015), to name a few.

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Date submitted: 2016-12-20

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Taken together, these findings are relevant for at least three reasons: First, they make it evident that emotions have not been ostracized from journalism practice and are certainly pertinent to understand key terms such as news values, gatekeeping, agenda setting, and framing, as well as the effects of emotional news on audiences. Second, these studies also suggest that the received notion of objectivity needs to be recalibrated to rethink the framing, narrative, and engaging potential of emotions for journalistic practices. Third, emotions enter the news production process and are conveyed to the audiences in multiple formats and through different outlets.

Among those outlets and formats are the ones provided by online news media. Although they share the visual-textual features of newspapers and the audiovisual characteristics of television broadcast news, online news media provide specific ways of packaging, distributing, delivering, receiving, and sharing the news afforded by digital technologies (Buhl, Günther, & Quandt, 2016; Karlsson & Strömbäck, 2010; Widholm, 2016). This has contributed to the development of a multimodal grammar of news production and reception (Knox, 2007), which has significant consequences for how emotions are represented and conveyed in online news. In the perspective taken here, emotions are regarded as socio-discursive phenomena reflecting people's engagement with issues that matter to them (i.e., concerns), and the multimodal format refers to the representation of emotions and articulations of these representations into a grammar involving different semiotic systems and their materialities (e.g., text, audio, still image, moving image). To illustrate this, let us briefly examine a couple of examples of how emotions are represented in two Spanish online news media.

The short piece "King Juan Carlos Says He Feels 'A Great Sorrow'" ("Don Juan Carlos dice sentir «una gran pena»,” EFE news agency, 2014) addresses the king's reaction to the death of Adolfo Suárez, a key political figure in the transition from the dictatorial regime to modern democracy in Spain. The emotional tone of the story is explicitly anchored in the headline through the emotional words "feels" and "great sorrow"—the latter being enclosed in quotation marks. A close-up picture of the king displaying a sad face while holding Suárez's son in his arms during the ceremony captures the "flavor" of the event and opens the narrative space. Members of the government and Suarez's family also appear in the background of the picture displaying solemn faces. The picture occupies almost half of the space on the page. The text goes on to describe some emotional moments during the ceremony and highlights the exact timing of the members of the royal family coming to pay homage to Suárez's relatives. No hyperlinks are provided. The story contains details such as how many kisses each member of the royal family gave to Suárez's sons and daughters, and the slight bows the queen and Princess Elena made to the coffin while crossing themselves. Through direct correspondence between picture and text, in which the latter strengthens the emotional connotations awakened by the former, the whole piece conveys in an aestheticized way the emotional regime (Reddy, 2001; Rosas, 2015) set up by the royal family: sadness, solidarity, empathy, and unity as a national family mourning the loss of a beloved son. The narrative is so constructed that the death of a key national political figure works as a canvas to place the royal family's public display of empathic feelings in the limelight.

The piece "All the Videos of the Most Massive Migrant Crossing to Melilla" ("Todos los vídeos de la entrada de inmigrantes más masiva a Melilla,” El Mundo, 2014) is composed of four video clips with short captions that capture specific moments when some 500 migrants crossed the Morocco–Spain border. The

video clips are presented in chronological order, starting with footage from security cameras of the local government of Melilla showing a crowd of sub-Saharan migrants walking down the Moroccan hills along the border, looking for a spot in the fence with no barbed wire. The second video shows the desperate race of hundreds of migrants who managed to circumvent the border control and head shouting into Spanish territory. The third video shows the migrants running along the streets of Melilla, singing, looking at the camera, and showing joy for having set foot in Spain. The final video clip shows the arrival of the migrants to the temporary stay center of Melilla (CETI) where the police and staff of the Red Cross give them bottles of water. Explaining what is depicted in the video clip, the caption says that some of the “undocumented migrants” (*sin papeles*) have arrived totally exhausted, others jumped for joy, while still others talked with family and friends on their mobile phones to tell them the good news. The series of videos represents a snapshot of a painful journey that for some has lasted a long time—as can be inferred from the words of two migrants who look directly at the camera and say in French, “Now it’s over . . . three years! Three years!” (*Maintenant c’est fini . . . trois ans! Trois ans!*). The emotional tone of this piece—a mix of fear, determination, and joy—is mostly supported by the chronological articulation of the dramatic scenes depicted in the videos. In this case, the sequential moving image carries the greater narrative authority in the piece, and captions play a minor role in restating what can be seen and felt directly from the clips.

These examples raise several questions. How do journalists ponder the words, audiovisual material, and emotional tone of their stories? What are their motivations to highlight some emotional reactions but not others? How do they conceive of the articulation of emotional meanings between text and other audiovisual material? And, more generally, what role do they assign to emotionality (e.g., emotional words, moving pictures, dramatic tension) in their reporting? Investigating this is important because journalistic representations of emotions have the power to recruit audiences’ cognitive and affective systems in a swift networked way, waving together emotional meanings coming from auditory and visual inputs, and linking emotions to inferences, beliefs, and interpretations of specific aspects of social reality. Finally, given the multimedia packaging and easy shareability of online media, are there significant differences between how online journalists perceive and implement the news value of emotions compared with, say, print and television journalists?

The aim of this article is to provide answers to these questions by situating them in the context of Spanish online news media. To achieve this, the article takes an exploratory tack and draws on interviews with journalists from five Spanish online news media to examine journalists’ attitudes toward emotions and the extent to which such attitudes shape their views of the place and role of emotions in journalism, their judgments on the news value of emotions, their perceptions of the relationships between emotions and objectivity, their decisions on whether emotions enter (or not) the news production process, and how emotions are represented in their stories. The article begins by theoretically addressing the relationships between emotions, journalism, and the idea of objectivity. The second section describes the context and methods used in this investigation. The third section presents results from interviews with online journalists. The final section provides some concluding remarks and directions for future research.

Objectivity, Emotions, and Journalism

Usually described as the “core value” and the “defining norm” of the journalistic profession, objectivity has historically pervaded news production as a guide for journalists to filter, gather, and communicate the news (Schudson, 2003). As an ideal imported from the field of science and marked by a rationalistic background that can be traced back to the Enlightenment period (Ward, 2005), objectivity in journalism posits that there is a reality out there that can be reported on as “facts” free from bias and prejudice. This presupposes that journalists, as individuals trained to face that reality rationally and communicate it impartially, can provide true descriptions and explanations of those events, put them into perspective, and determine relationships with past and future happenings. However, this ideal of objectivity has been strongly criticized from different fronts, for instance, because as humans, journalists fail to meet its requirements given that they cannot be completely free from bias; because the positivistic idea that reality can be described as it is without subjective interpretation is impossible; and because objectivity leads journalists to detachment from any value judgment, including those that would foster the society they are meant to serve (Skovsgaard, Albæk, Bro, & de Vreese, 2013). Yet, despite such strong criticism, objectivity still is a widely shared professional norm among journalists, although there appears to be significant variation in how journalists perceive and adapt to the norm (Donsbach & Klett, 1993).

Furthermore, the pursuit of objectivity is one of the main reasons that journalism practitioners and scholars have been mistrustful of emotions. As a highly rationalistic norm, objectivity has prevailed as an affect-sanitized ideal in which emotions figure as troublemakers that undermine the use of reason intrinsic to professional journalism. Nevertheless, and despite this prevalence of objectivity in journalistic practices, attentive observation indicates that emotions are everywhere in the news. Yet, as Peters (2011) has aptly noted, it is not the case that the news has recently become emotional; it has always been. What we have seen in recent years is that “the diversity of emotional styles, the acceptability of journalistic involvement, and attempts to involve the audiences have become more explicit” (Peters, 2011, p. 297). Peters’ observation is worth highlighting here because, as far as news production is concerned, emotions have never been in disciplinary exile, but they have often been treated as residual categories typifying tabloid, low-quality, entertainment, sensationalistic, or even “female” journalism (Aldridge, 2001; Franklin, 1997; Sparks, 1998; Van Zoonen, 1998). Moreover, as Peters argued, such a treatment stems from “undertheorized,” “commonsensical,” and “fairly rudimentary” conceptions of emotions that perpetuate the opposing relationship between reason and emotion and establish an implicit hierarchy giving priority to the former at the expense of the latter. To overcome this, Peters suggested adopting a sociological perspective and—following Barbalet (2002)—considering emotions in terms of the “experience of involvement” to explain how journalists draw on the narrative and engaging potential of emotions to connect with audiences. This move is important because producing an experience of involvement—that is, providing audiences with engaging stories and opportunities to care for something happening in public life, to make it a social, political, or cultural concern—does not mean completely ruling out objectivity norms. Indeed, what it suggests is that the traditional ideal of objectivity, what Ward (2005) termed “formulaic objectivity” (a rhetorical strategy aimed at protecting journalism from critique, with its essential components such as fairness, factuality, independence, noninterpretation, neutrality, and detachment; see also Peters, 2011, p. 301), can be reshaped and understood in flexible ways so that it coexists with an experience of emotional involvement that is crafted by journalists for audiences.

In a similar vein, attempts to craft the experience of involvement for audiences can be traced in Wahl-Jorgensen's (2013) analyses of the strategic ritual of emotionality in Pulitzer Prize-winner pieces of journalism. As Wahl-Jorgensen has noted, award-winning journalists engage in systematic, ritualistic ways of infusing their reporting with emotion to draw audiences' attention to issues of social and political import, ways that complement their objectivity-oriented practices. In this sense, the strategic ritual of objectivity (Tuchman, 1972) and the strategic ritual of emotionality coexist based on two epistemologies that do not a fortiori exclude each other. A point worth noting here is that the systematic structure of the strategic ritual of emotionality provides grounds for considering that emotions can also be strategically avoided by journalists, for instance, by avoiding emotive language, shocking images, or dramatic tone in journalistic pieces. Nothing prevents this strategic avoidance from being subject to "institutionalized and systematic practices" (e.g., journalists eschewing emotions for personal, newsroom routine, and institutional reasons), and, as such, those practices may also be part of the strategic ritual of objectivity.

Moving on to the processes that underpin the manufacturing of affective news, Pantti (2010) has provided interesting insights into how commercial and public television journalists in Finland and the Netherlands perceive the value of emotionality in the news. Pantti found that, despite there being traditional views of journalism based on the reason/emotion dichotomy in all newsrooms in her study, journalists do grant emotions a significant role in facilitating the intelligibility of news stories and in shaping the way in which the viewers watch the news (see p. 176). Moreover, for these journalists, using emotions did not represent a challenge to the rationales of factuality and objectivity, which suggests that they adapt the objectivity norm so that emotions can be drawn on to reveal aspects of reality (what Pantti called the "reality argument"), to capitalize on the visibility of television as an emotion medium (the "medium argument"), and to enhance the social and political knowledge of the audience (the "functionality argument").

Finally, and in line with the experience of involvement, the strategic ritual of emotionality, and the value of emotionality, Beckett and Deuze (2016) have posited emotion as an "animating principle" in the contemporary dynamics of news production and reception. By singling out economic, technological, and behavioral ways to "use emotion well" in journalistic practices, these authors highlight how emotion allows for "connection" between journalists and their audiences, a point that is crucial to the survival of news organizations in the highly competitive market of information. According to Beckett and Deuze, emotion is directly linked to strategic ways of catching news consumers' attention (and improving Web traffic and revenue), to capitalizing on affordances of digital technologies to facilitate communication and community building with and among audiences, and to audiences' behavioral patterns of news consumption and sharing in which emotions work as powerful motivators for engaging with the news. When asking "how best an aspiration to objectivity might be fostered" in the contemporary news environment, Beckett and Deuze suggest, "It will be about linking news to emotion: connecting with communities, creating constructive journalism that deploys positive psychology, and linking up with the culture of sharing on social networks" (p. 4).

Involvement, connection, communication, knowledge enhancement, sharing, and community building are thus some of the benefits that can be expected from journalism when its practitioners engage with emotions in their professional practices. At the same time, it is apparent that the long-standing affect-sanitized conception of objectivity that has pervaded much journalism practice and research needs

to be recalibrated, given that, as we have seen, journalism as a professional practice is not immune to affect, but it is highly sensitive to reductionist concepts of emotion that see the latter as the bare manifestation of irrationality and low-quality practice.

Context and Methods

Context

Hallin and Mancini (2004) have argued that the Spanish media system fits into what they have termed the “Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model”—which, besides Spain, also includes countries such as Italy, Portugal, Greece, and, to a lesser extent, France. According to the authors, the fact that “liberal institutions, including both capitalist industrialism and political democracy, developed later” (p. 89) than in other regions of Europe and the United States gave rise to distinct patterns of relationship between the media and political actors in which the former were seen by the latter “as a means of ideological expression and political mobilization” (p. 90). Those actors usually encompass the state, political parties, the church, and wealthy private patrons, all of which have the power to intervene in the media agenda, to set strong partisan editorial preferences, and therefore to bring about a polarized pluralist media system. In such a model, the link between news organizations and ideology is complex because of the intertwining of media owners’ affiliations with political parties, journalists’ political views, and ideologically fragmented readership.

Although the drifts of globalization, commercialization, and secularization have been strongly at work in this part of Europe since the 1970s, recent research has confirmed the prevalence of this model in Spain by showing that the contemporary Spanish media system is highly partisan, with newspapers (and media organizations) “reaching self-selected partisan audiences and espousing explicitly partisan editorial preferences” (Baumgartner & Chaqués Bonafont, 2015, p. 268; see also Chaqués Bonafont, Palau & Baumgartner, 2015). In addition, in a recent digital news report, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has found that “over half of news media users in Spain do not think the media are independent from undue political and commercial influence” (Reuters Institute, 2016, pp. 42–43). This report also noted that news consumers considered that “ideological bias, partiality, and loaded language are the key drivers of mistrust” (p. 43) in the media. It is thus within this polarized context that we must situate the online media selected for this study: *elpais.com*, *elmundo.es*, *abc.es*, *elconfidencial.com* and *expansion.com*.

- *elpais.com* is the online version of the national daily newspaper *El País*, based in Madrid and founded in 1976 by the media conglomerate Prisa, whose administrators cultivated political affiliations with the socialist party for at least two decades. It is considered center-left and generalist and is ranked Number 1 in print and online at the national level, although its current editor-in-chief has recently announced that “it will become an essentially digital newspaper” (Reuters Institute, 2016, p. 42).
- *elmundo.es* is the online version of the national daily newspaper *El Mundo*, based in Madrid, founded in 1989 and owned by the Spanish publishing group Unidad Editorial

S.A. It is considered center-right liberal generalist and has prioritized its task as being a watchdog of Spanish politics. It is ranked number two in print and online at the national level (Reuters Institute, 2016, p. 42).

- *abc.es* is the online version of the national daily newspaper *ABC*, based in Madrid, founded in 1903 and owned by the multimedia communications group Vocento S.A. It is considered right-wing, nationalist, and monarchist and also specializes in covering Spanish culture and arts.
- *elconfidencial.com* is a digital-born generalist newspaper founded in 2001. Ten years after its launch, it became one of the points of reference for the Spanish digital media (Salaverría, 2016). It is based in Madrid and considered liberal, with special emphasis on economic, financial, and political news.
- *expansion.com* is the online version of the newspaper *Expansión*, founded in 1986 and owned by the media company Recoletos. It is published by the group Unidad Editorial S.A., the same publishing venue of *El Mundo*. It is considered center-right and a leader in economic and business news in Spain.

Methods

Following Gray's (2004) observation that if the research is exploratory and involves "the examination of feelings and attitudes, then interviews may be the best approach" (p. 214), the interviewing method was chosen to empirically investigate online journalists' attitudes toward emotions in their reporting practices. To recruit participants, a convenience sample (i.e., major distribution media, all based in Madrid), including the aforementioned online media, was identified and selected.

A two-month period of observation (January–February 2014) was scheduled to identify and gather journalistic pieces addressing topics of society, culture, politics, and economics. Two kinds of journalistic pieces were selected: (1) stories using emotive language, for instance, through naming and nominalizations (e.g., "fear," "anger," "indignation"; Stenvall, 2008), as well as stories framed in an emotional style through dramatic tension and emotional anchoring (Höijer, 2010), and (2) stories addressing either the same topics or different ones without using emotive language or emotional style. Pieces consisting of only text or of text, audio, pictures, and video were collected. A cluster of 62 journalistic pieces meeting these requirements was gathered. Based on this collection, a randomized sample of 30 journalists (16 male, 14 female) who authored those pieces was selected and contacted. Eighteen journalists responded positively to the request for interview; however, three were dropped after they canceled the interview appointment because of overlapping professional commitments.

Accordingly, final data for this part of the study were gathered from semistructured interviews with 15 journalists (eight male, seven female; aged 29–51 years; 8–30 years of experience; nine used emotions in their articles, six did not). Interviews were scheduled in two waves: The first took place in June 2014, and the second in November 2014. All journalists completed an informed consent form and

were granted anonymity and confidentiality. Twelve interviews were conducted in the five media's premises and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The remaining three interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were conducted online via Skype. Face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded, and online interviews were video recorded using Call Recorder software. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), progressing in three steps from identifying themes and subthemes in the interviews, to validating the thematic map against the data, and to (re)constructing interviewees' perceptions of and attitudes toward emotions in their professional practices.

The main thematic categories explored in the interviews were journalists' perceptions of the place and role of emotions in reporting activities, the personal and institutional factors that shape their attitudes toward and use of emotions in news stories, and how emotions are represented in their stories.

Journalists' Attitudes Toward Emotions in Reporting

This section examines journalists' attitudes toward emotions, how these attitudes reflect their allegiance to different conceptions of objectivity, what the locus of emotions in their reporting practices is, and the impact of those attitudes on how their stories are produced and delivered.

Strategic Avoidance and Strategic Use

To begin with, it should be noted that the journalists interviewed in this study were fully aware of the presence of emotions in their professional practices and felt at ease talking about the interviewing topic. This awareness was manifest, for instance, in their spontaneous characterizations of emotions as an essential part of many social, political, cultural, and economic issues and in their reflections on the social responsibility implied in their work as journalists. Nevertheless, this general awareness does not mean they all hold the same attitudes toward emotions. Indeed, when asked about their views on the role of emotions in their reporting practices, two general types of attitudes came out in the interviews: namely, strategic avoidance and strategic use. Furthermore, the latter appeared to be divided into two subtypes, which we may call pragmatic and epistemic use.

Those who adopted an avoidance strategy considered emotions as potential reporting material that must be carefully handled, and preferably sidestepped. They used explicit metaphorical expressions such as "flammable materials," "playing with fire," or "risk of drowning" both to describe what they saw as the potentially hazardous consequences of using emotions in reporting and to illustrate why they were wary of them. Furthermore, they noted that, although they covered several events that had strong emotional content (e.g., accidents, demonstrations, terrorist attacks, political and financial crises), they always strove to keep that content to a minimum in their stories and, whenever possible, to sidestep it. This strategic avoidance of emotions was illustrated by one participant's precautionary comment, "Emotions always play an important role in my work. This is like asking about the role of the sea in a fisherman's life. That is, you move on its surface, but you'd better avoid swimming in it" (male, age 45, *elpais.com*). It was evident from the interviews with these journalists that they systematically avoided using emotions, something that was performed in a rather ritualistic way: Whenever a potential reporting

topic had emotional content, they strove to sidestep it and frame the story dispassionately. As Bruce and Yearley (2006) noted, the doing of a ritual "conveys more than the content of what is done" (p. 263).

Those who used emotions strategically can be divided into two subgroups. First, a small subset of journalists (three of 15) appeared to take a pragmatic, Web-traffic-oriented approach to emotions. Although they did not use emotions in every piece they produced, they had, on occasion, infused a controlled dose of emotionality into their stories to cast their net wide and improve the traffic to their websites. For instance, while speaking about a story he wrote using Pablo Iglesias's (secretary general of the political party Podemos) invective declarations about "the guard dogs of the extreme right," (male, age 30, *elconfidencial.com*), one journalist commented,

The lead is shocking, it's like teasing, baiting the readers a bit. But I put it because I knew we were going to have lots of visitors and in fact we got 400 comments, which is four times more than usual in this newspaper. So, yes, in some cases emotions influence how you select the topics you want to cover and how you write your stories. (male, age 30, *elconfidencial.com*)

It transpired in the interviews that these journalists used emotions strategically as powerful tools to catch the audience's attention, and, in their view, using emotions this way did not harm the quality of the news; on the contrary, "using them in small doses can make some stories more appealing to the readers" (female, age 38, *elpais.com*), which is, as another journalist put it, "what we all go after, whether or not we acknowledge it publicly" (male, age 35, *elmundo.es*).

Second, still other interviewees held a more engaging attitude toward emotions and drew on them for social- and knowledge-oriented purposes. But differences appear between those who used emotions explicitly in their stories and those who did not. The latter did grant emotions a place among the web of social and economic concerns implied in the topics they covered, but emotion names or emotional style never made it through the selection gates leading to publishing. Illustrating this point, one journalist commented,

It's not always possible, but sometimes we try to tell people, for instance, what precautions they should take when investing their money or how taxes can affect their lives, that is, we're thinking about people, and as far as we do so, we're thinking about emotions. (male, age 38, *elconfidencial.com*)

It is interesting to note here that a sort of empathy with the audience appears to lie at the root of their considerations before they craft their stories; however, the absence of emotive terms or emotional style suggests they perform a mode of "perspective taking" (Batson, 2009) that is mostly cognitive and reflexive, conscious and measured, imagining their target audience and projecting what the audience should or need to know.

Those who used emotions explicitly agreed that emotions are powerful attention-grabbing mechanisms to get their stories across to the public but qualified this view by considering emotions as

legitimate means to communicate their stories in socially relevant ways. They stressed their use of emotions along with “facts” and contextual information, which, in their view, allowed them to produce engaging stories that were not necessarily low quality or sensationalistic. One journalist illustrated this when talking about her covering of the civil unrest in the Gamonal neighborhood in Burgos in 2014, where the City Hall wanted to spend almost €9 million to build a boulevard: “Demonstrations and collective indignation were powerful civic responses to that situation and, as such, they allowed me to better understand and communicate how an administrative decision was about to profoundly affect an entire neighborhood’s life” (female, age 41, *elpais.com*). These journalists used emotions strategically as narrative and epistemic resources that allowed them not only to highlight the social, political, or economic import of the stories but also to situate and make complex topics intelligible to the audience, topics that would otherwise be dry and highly technical. But using emotions this way, they were quick to remark, must be done in a “responsible way” (e.g., avoiding any alarming or sensationalistic tone). In this vein, one noted,

I remember using the moving stories of two startups that went bankrupt last year to explain the complex economic reality of self-employment in Spain. I think this is a valid way to use emotions when you want to be understood. I don’t use them to make my stories colorful or more dramatic. (female, 29, *expansion.com*)

This echoes Pantti’s (2010) findings about the role of emotions in enhancing audiences’ knowledge, and Wahl-Jorgensen’s (2013) findings about journalists using emotions to stress the social and political import of some events.

Objectivity, Reason, and Emotion

When comparing the views of journalists who strategically avoid using emotions and those who strategically use them, it was evident that there is significant variation in the way journalists in the sample perceive and implement the objectivity norm. Among the personal beliefs and professional convictions that appeared to mark the attitudes of journalists who strategically avoid using emotions are their allegiance to the traditional ideal of objectivity and a deeply ingrained opposing relationship between reason and emotion. These beliefs and convictions are particularly illustrated by one participant’s comment:

We live in a society that is clearly emotional, but at the same time, as a journalist, you have to try to be as rational and objective as possible . . . I try in my work, and this is what I was taught at the university, to keep things apart, that a journalist transmits knowledge to the audience, that he or she shouldn’t transmit emotions, let alone her or his own. (male, age 46, *elpais.com*)

Comments like this are worth noting because they illustrate both the influence of doxastic presuppositions about the idea of “good journalism” that still pervade most journalistic practice (Schultz, 2007) and the extent to which those presuppositions influence journalists’ attitudes toward emotions. What transpired in the interviews with these journalists was that they kept preserving and reproducing the ideal of objectivity they learned in their education and professional experience, which goes hand in hand

with an axiomatic reason/emotion dichotomy. This resonates with Vos's (2011) research on how journalism education has historically contributed to naturalizing and legitimizing objectivity as an institutional norm and, by the same token, to mythologize journalism "as a mechanical process overseen by professionals who are like judges, scientists, and professors" (p. 435).

On the contrary, those who had a more positive attitude toward emotions and used them strategically—particularly for social and knowledge purposes—appeared to redefine the ideal of objectivity to align their beliefs about the news value of emotions with this professional prerequisite. For these journalists, being objective did not mean the complete eradication of emotions from reporting; rather, being objective was not in conflict with the ability to use emotions in suitable, relevant ways to draw attention to issues and situations that matter for public life. In so doing, these journalists did not take emotions to have intrinsic value as the "news itself," but they have instrumental value as signals pointing to social, political, or economic concerns in ways that turn out to be like the strategic ritual of emotionality analyzed by Wahl-Jorgensen (2013), the "functionality argument" described by Pantti (2010), and as legitimate means to connect with audiences and craft what Peters (2011) called the "experience of involvement." Nevertheless, it is worth noting that this redefinition of objectivity, which grants emotions a place in reporting, was accompanied by a strict policy on journalists' own feelings. All participants in this group asserted that their own emotions never were the subject of their stories and backed up this claim by invoking concepts like impartiality and professionalism, which suggests they valued a sort of "affect neutrality" in their professional practices: If emotions are to be granted a place in their stories, this boils down to reporting on news sources' emotions or structuring their stories so that they highlight affective atmospheres emerging out of social, political, or economic situations.

However, affect neutrality does not mean journalists cannot be affectively moved by some of the topics they cover. Indeed, most journalists pointed out that in some cases they short-circuited their positive or negative feelings about people or situations implied in their stories to comply with the norms of impartial, objective reporting. When asked how they went about that short-circuiting and whether they had been trained to do so, participants responded that they learned to cope with their feelings in their own way and mentioned different actions, such as talking about it with colleagues or distracting themselves by doing other activities (e.g., movies, sport) to overcome rumination. Interestingly, similar and more complex coping styles have been reported in the literature on the cognitive regulation of emotion (Gross & Barret, 2011). At the same time, these responses resonate with Hopper and Huxford's (2015) findings about newspaper journalists' engagement in emotional labor.

Professional Judgment, Emotions, and the Crafting of News

Journalists' attitudes toward emotions also influence whether and how emotions enter the news crafting and publishing process. When asked about their views on using emotions or adopting an emotional style in news reporting, professional judgment emerged as the common and differentiating factor between journalists who strategically avoided using emotions and those who strategically used them.

For the former, professional judgment translates into rigorous observation of detached storytelling aimed at cleansing as much as possible any traces of affect, be it emotion names or narrative styles

conveying an emotional atmosphere within the story. This need for control over what is said and how it is said about emotions was evident, for instance, in their accounts of the linguistic conventions they observed to write their stories. These journalists declared that they were careful about using clichés, adjectives, and adverbs because they are lexical elements that “imply evaluation and can be affect-inducing” (female, age 42, *abc.es*), and some emphasized the need to comply with reporting styles characteristic of their fields. For instance, a journalist who specialized in economic topics remarked, “I work in a field where the reporting tone must be restrained, formal, data-oriented, and we don’t have much poetic license to write in an emotional style because this has serious connotations and repercussions for society” (male, age 51, *expansion.com*). However, it should be noted that insofar as the dynamics of news production in these newsrooms implies that subeditors and editors can revise and copy edit journalists’ texts, their control over the linguistic framing may, in many cases, be only partial.

For those who endorse using emotions strategically, professional judgment also featured as a leitmotif marking their claims that emotions can be granted a place in reporting as long as they are used in a responsible, not overplayed way to shed light on important issues being covered in the stories. Some noted that they have used emotions as “explicit anchors in the leads” (female, age 36, *elmundo.es*) to stress from the outset the social or political significance of the issues being reported, while others pointed out they have written stories in such a way that emotions are not “the focus by itself but rather a property of the story’s structure” (male, age 44, *elpais.com*). Those who have used emotions strategically for Web traffic purposes saw no conflict with professional judgment as they have done so on occasion and focused on the obtained outcomes, while de-emphasizing any possible sensationalistic side effect of using emotions in their stories.

Furthermore, clinging to professional judgment was also the heuristic invoked by journalists who used emotions strategically when discussing the multimedia formatting of their stories. Given the division of labor characterizing the online newsrooms examined here, the formatting of online news is a collective endeavor that includes journalists, subeditors, editors, and members of the multimedia staff (the “lab guys,” as they were called in most interviews). Although most of the journalists interviewed here had different levels of training in photography, video and audio editing, and infographics, they were far from the “one-man band” journalist model (*periodista orquesta*) characteristic of the beginnings of online journalism in Spain in the 1990s and during the early 2000s (Salaverría, 2016). But here too, responses were divided. Some reported they seldom were involved in the stages of multimedia production of their stories. They preferred to leave this task to the multimedia staff and subeditors, thus relying on these colleagues’ professional judgment regarding the coherence of the written text and the audiovisual material affixed to the story. In this case, journalists delegated control over the articulation of emotional meanings between text, image, audio, and video to their colleagues. Others, however, commented that they were willingly involved in the multimedia process, usually by engaging in discussions with subeditors and multimedia staff about the audiovisual material that was most suitable for their stories and, in some cases, by providing such material themselves. This was particularly salient among journalists specialized in politics, economics, and business for whom data visualization, podcasts with experts, and analysis through infographics played an essential role in their reporting. This willingness to participate in the selection of audiovisual material reflects these journalists’ need to keep control over the multimodal articulation of emotional meanings conveyed in their stories.

But caring for and engaging in discussions about multimedia formatting when it comes to emotions in stories is not without problems; power clashes may take place between journalists and other staff members. Indeed, "frustration" and "loss of autonomy" were mentioned by these journalists when commenting on cases in which their suggestions were dismissed by subeditors and/or the "lab guys." When invited to expand on those frustrating feelings, some evoked reasons concerning professional reputation—for example, the fact that they did not want their stories to be associated with shocking audiovisual material that could be labeled "sensationalistic" by audiences or "catchpenny" by fellow journalists in the comments on their websites or on social media. Others alluded to ethical responsibility for any audiovisual material associated with their stories. Illustrating this point, one participant remarked,

We get closer to people with images and videos than with just written text. This is part of how we build empathy with our readers. People need a few minutes to read the written story, but with a picture or footage they get the message instantly and the emotional impact is higher. That's why we have an ethical responsibility for any audiovisual content we put into our stories. (female, age 49, *abc.es*)

It is worth noting here that these journalists' need to keep control over the multimodal articulation of emotional meanings in their pieces appears to be motivated by two precautionary projections: the audience's judgments on whether their stories are sensationalistic, and fellow journalists' appraisals of their pieces as superficially attractive. This suggests that, to some extent, audiences' preferences and fellow journalists' perceptions of the quality of their pieces play a role in how these journalists select the audiovisual material and articulate the emotional meanings in their stories. This point connects with Donsbach's (2004) contention that journalists' news decisions (what to publish and how to do it) are largely influenced by two psychological needs related to group dynamics and group norms: the social validation of perceptions and the need to preserve one's existing predispositions. Journalists' evaluative judgments, such as the news value of emotions or the "moral acceptability" of some audiovisual material, lack objective criteria that could either verify or falsify them. Those judgments and the decisions made on them turn out to be valid and reliable insofar as they are anchored in a group of people having similar opinions and beliefs and a "shared reality" (see Donsbach, 2004, p. 138). In this sense, we may argue that journalists' projection of audiences' judgments on the sensationalistic character of their pieces provides them with a sort of audience-oriented compass guiding their decisions on the appropriateness of the emotional framing of their stories. At the same time, fellow journalists' assessments embody professional norms that can validate (or not) their professional decisions about the journalistic quality (or lack thereof) of their emotional stories. On the other hand, as Donsbach (2004) has suggested, journalists' existing knowledge and attitudes constitute a major psychological factor influencing their news decisions. Thus, we may argue that for these journalists, keeping control over the multimodal framing of emotional stories reflects their attempts to be coherent with their existing attitudes and therefore to avoid any dissonance between their perception of the newsworthiness of emotions and how those emotions are made (audiovisually) salient in their stories.

Conclusions

The analysis of journalists' attitudes toward emotions in reporting provided here has showed the contradictory relationships that journalists in the sample have with emotions. Those who strategically avoid using emotions in their stories appear to pledge allegiance to the traditional conception of objectivity and exclude emotions from their reporting based on an idea of professional judgment that is built on what Peters (2011) called a "fairly rudimentary" conception of emotions (e.g., as "flammable materials"). Consequently, insofar as they systematically sidestep emotions in their stories, providing audiences with an experience of emotional involvement is not part of these journalists' professional practices. On the contrary, those who use emotions strategically for social- and knowledge-oriented purposes appeared to redefine the received notion of objectivity to grant emotions a place in their stories and draw on them as narrative and epistemic tools to craft an experience of involvement for their audiences, leading the latter to care for events and people whose stories are told in the media. Even those who use emotions pragmatically for Web traffic purposes also produce an experience of involvement, although in this case, they expressed no need to redefine or reshape their idea of objectivity. The stark opposition in terms of attitudes toward emotions between those who use emotions and those who do not is strongly related to different personal beliefs and professional convictions that mark their perception of the value of emotionality in the news and the degree of flexibility of their adopted views of objectivity.

The findings of this research lend empirical support to previous studies suggesting that journalists can reshape the conception of objectivity (1) to craft an experience of emotional involvement for audiences (Peters, 2011), (2) to strategically infuse their stories with emotions to highlight the social and political significance of issues and events in public life (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013), and (3) to use emotions to enhance audiences' knowledge about those issues and events (Pantti, 2010). The findings also provide some support for Beckett and Deuze's (2016) contention that emotions are linked to strategic ways of catching news consumers' attention to improve Web traffic (and revenue). Insofar as this study was concerned with online journalists and their attitudes toward emotions, the results suggest similarities with studies focused on journalists working in other media outlets, such as quality newspapers (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013) and television (Pantti, 2010). If there are medium-related differences worth highlighting, they concern the attitudes of those journalists who become explicitly and willingly involved in the multimodal framing of their stories and how those attitudes reflect the importance of what Donsbach (2004) has called the social validation of perceptions and the need to preserve one's existing predispositions.

It should be noted, though, that the exploratory, qualitative nature of this research has inherent limitations. Findings from interviews with journalists are not representative of the Spanish online journalist population, and the sample does not include journalists working in online local, regional, and sport-focused media. Given the political turmoil that Spain was experiencing at the time this study was conducted—with, for instance, continuous bursts of illegal migration across the Moroccan border and the political volatility of Catalan nationalism—interviewing journalists from Catalanian and Andalusian media probably would have added relevant and colorful layers to journalists' perceptions of the value of emotionality in the news. In line with this, the findings show that journalists' personal beliefs and professional convictions play a significant role in explaining journalists' attitudes toward emotion in reporting. Nevertheless, given the political polarization of the Spanish media system and the effects this

can have on its journalistic culture, it is also possible that those attitudes are to some extent determined by other factors, such as journalists' political affiliations and ideological worldviews. That this has not been addressed in this study does not mean those factors do not exist. To test this highly sensitive issue would require a different methodological approach that falls beyond the purposes of this study. In a similar vein, the findings of this research revealed attitudes, conceptions, beliefs, convictions, and decisions of journalists working within a media system with specific culture- and politically oriented dynamics. Following Hallin and Mancini (2004), this would suggest that the findings of this study, even if they are not representative, could in principle be compared with media systems that share the same background conditions (the Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model) determining the relationships between media organizations and political actors. However, cross-comparison with journalists working, for instance, according to the Anglo-American liberal model or the democratic corporatist model would imply a different approach that takes into account the historical and political characteristics of those models and the relationship between media/politics/economics within them.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides grounds for further research on the relationship between journalism and emotions. The most important may be linking journalists' attitudes toward emotions identified in this study and their perception of their professional roles. For instance, Berganza, Lavín, and Piñeiro-Naval (2017) have found that Spanish journalists' perceptions of their own professional roles (including 89 online journalists who participated in the study) can be classified into six types: watchdog, citizens' spokesperson, instructor of the audience, promoter of the status quo, infotainment journalist, and disseminator of objective information. Their results show that the most significant role with which Spanish journalists identify is the citizens' spokesperson, which is characterized by the promotion of tolerance and cultural diversity, enabling people to express their point of view, and telling stories about the real world. Although the present research does not address the issue of perception of professional roles, findings about journalists who strategically use emotions to tell stories with social and political import suggest that hypotheses can be formulated to examine potential relationships between this type of attitude and the citizens' spokesperson role. Moreover, the same rationale can be implemented to examine the extent to which journalists who strategically avoid emotions and hold on to the traditional ideal of objectivity fit into professional roles such as the disseminator of objective information (i.e., reporting events as they really are and acting as an impartial observer of reality). Understanding the relationships between journalists' attitudes toward emotions and their perceptions of their professional roles can provide answers regarding why we observe variations in both journalists' perceptions of the value of emotionality in journalism and the way emotions are (multimodally) represented in news stories.

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