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## **Pre-professional journalistic culture of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela: Motivation, expectations and professional experience of students of Journalism and Social Communication**

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### **Abstract**

This article presents a comparative analysis of the pre-professional journalistic cultures of Ecuador, Cuba and Venezuela focused the aspects that motivate students of Journalism and/or Social Communication to pursue these careers and their expectations and professional experiences. In the fieldwork, 1273 students from 21 universities enrolled in Journalism and/or Social Communication were surveyed during the first semester of 2016 (Cuba = 383, Ecuador = 500, Venezuela = 390). A sample that has a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of less than 5. The results indicate that students in Ecuador, Cuba and Venezuela, although they do not have professional experience in the area -with the exception of Cubans- and acknowledge their doubts about the job security offered by the profession, have journalism as the main professional option for their future and, specifically, television. The regression analysis shows that in general terms only occupational safety ( $B = -0.108$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), vocation ( $B = -0.083$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and gender ( $B = 0.079$ ,  $p < 0, 05$ ) have a significant influence on the perspectives of personal development of the students in the three countries,  $F(6, 1190) = 19.455$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , explaining 8.5% of their variance.

**Keywords:** Pre-professional journalistic culture; Cuba; Ecuador; Venezuela; motivations; professional experience; students.

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## 1. Introduction

The tripartite group formed by Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela consolidates their political strategies in socialist, progressive and Bolivarian models related to the ideological / political current called “socialism of the 21st century” (Dieterich, 2003). Hence, in the political discourses of their leaders it is proclaimed that the consolidation, organization and formation citizen bases is one of its reasons for being, promoting the university as the institution of higher education responsible for instructing citizens and future professionals.

Based on the Pre-Professional Journalistic Culture paradigm (Oller et al., 2017), the students' own and singular perception of Journalism and Social Communication of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela is studied, based, first of all, on the associated professional considerations of their work experiences, internships and pre-professional practices and, secondly, on the motivations and expectations that led them to study these university careers. The conjunction of these factors becomes fundamental when it is intended to know the social and cultural features that define the decisions of future journalists during their period of regulated higher education. Hence, the reasons that lead students to pursue careers in Journalism and / or Social Communication, and the work experiences they have, are presented as aspects to take into account when trying to understand their perception of the journalistic profession.

However, according to previous studies at an international level (Ortega & Humanes, 2000; Mellado, 2009), the factors and conditions that induce and form the motivations for conducting careers in Journalism and Social Communication, as well as professional expectations of work, vary according to the social, political and professional contexts of each country.

Of the countries studied, only in Cuba there is a previous research - thesis to obtain the Degree title (third level) - that, based on a sample of 198 students surveyed in the University of Havana, indicates that the “motivations of individual type (referred to the nature of the profession and its attractiveness) were the most marked influence exercised on these young people when choosing the career (91%). The social factor also has an important weight (38%). To a lesser extent family (19%) and economic factors (4%) participated in this election” (Estenoz & Martínez, 2006: 92).

Consequently, this is a first comparative approximation on journalistic cultures and, specifically, the pre-professional journalism cultures in the three countries. The field work is based on 1273 surveyed

(Ecuador= 500, Venezuela= 390, Cuba= 383), students who were doing Social Communication and Journalism during the first semester of 2016 in 21 universities (Ecuador= 10, Venezuela= 4; Cuba= 7). In this article the results related to their motivations, professional expectations and professional experience in journalism are shown.

Likewise, as a general approach according to the references reviewed, it is estimated that the previous work experience, the vocation, the perception of job security, age, gender and the year studied of Journalism and Social Communication students from Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela influence their motivations and expectations of a personal nature (*personal development*).

The questions of this investigation are:

P1. What aspects motivated students of Journalism and Social Communication in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela to study these careers?

P1.1. What are the fields and professional areas they would like to work when they finish their studies?

P1.2. What are their professional expectations?

P2. Do Cuban, Ecuadorian and Venezuelan students of Journalism and Social Communication have professional experience?

P2.1. In what kind of media or organizations linked to journalism and social communication do they have professional experience?

P2.2. In what informative area are they interested in specializing?

Pre-professional journalistic culture: Motivations, expectations and professional experiences of students of Journalism and Social Communication

In the last two decades, international comparative studies based on journalists and journalistic cultures of countries belonging to both the North and the Global South have grown exponentially (Weaver, 1998, Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Mellado et al., 2012; Garcés and Arroyave, 2017; Oller et al., 2017a). This investigative current is becoming more complex thanks to the inclusion of a section devoted to the analysis of future journalists, referring in particular to university students of the careers of Journalism and / or Social Communication - and related specializations (Bowers, 1974; Sanders et al., 2008; Mellado et al., 2013; Mellado and Scherman, 2015; Hanusch et al., 2016; Oller et al., 2017b; Arcila et al., 2017).

During the period of higher education in the Journalism and / or Social Communication specializations, students have the opportunity to establish relationships, personal, academic and professional, that allow them to develop and perfect the necessary skills to carry out their future tasks and functions as journalists. The same ones that imply preparation and training at a theoretical, technical and practical level.

In these formal spaces of instruction and theoretical / practical preparation - although fundamentally the first one - the students build their own professional identity of what it means to be a journalist,

what is journalism and, at the same time, get socialized from a guild analogy. It is obvious that they, in addition to training as journalists in these formal academic spaces, share other indirect ways of learning in their educational daily life and their informal times and spaces. Moments and places in which students assimilate a number of shared ideas with the rest of the academic, professional and citizenship community.

At the confluence of all these factors and actors lies the enormous difficulty in establishing exactly the origin of the motivations to carry out the careers of Journalism and Social Communication and the professional expectations of the work as journalists. From the results of Ortega and Humanes (2000) in their analysis of the characteristics of journalism students in Spain, we can say that, in the first place, the functions that these confer to the media are as varied as the contexts that circumscribe the process of professionalization and the type of media to which they are exposed. For the students, the media is, fundamentally, an entertainment channel with a great weight in society, where the news is subject to the exercise of informing, entertaining, influencing and instructing. Secondly, the motivation to be journalists is based on limited information about the reality of the profession, a stereotyped image of their prestige and the adventurous lifestyle and the possibility to act as defenders of citizenship in the face of abuses of power.

These motivations are grouped into three fundamental dimensions according to Ortega and Humanes (2000): First, those related to personal factors of positive or negative sign. Regarding this dimension, Bowers (1974) and Pastor (2010) affirm that the attraction of the profession begins with a personal interest in the aspects related to communication, written expression, creativity and the desire to tell the current situation, these being characteristics that most affect the degree of job satisfaction of journalists.

Secondly, those associated with the characteristics of the journalistic activity and the individual benefits derived from its development, as well as the positive elements of the profession that attract the attention of young people. According to Pastor (2010), the pleasure for an extraverted life, agitated in pursuit of the last event, is one of the main ingredients of the journalistic task and, at the same time, one of its most widespread attractions. So, following this author, the very essence of the profession has helped to promote that image of the bohemian, self-taught and independent character, whose professional life seems to be much more fun than that of other professions. In addition to this, the fact that the rise of journalists as a social group has a significant influence on students, as they associate the increase in the prestige of this profession with the assumption of certain political and intellectual roles.

Thirdly, those related to the consequences or effects of journalistic activity. Pastor (2010) highlights these positive elements in a double sense: the personal qualities suitable to practice the profession, a factor in which he agrees with Adams et al. (2008), Clark and Monserrate (2011) and Fischman et al. (2004), and the benefits derived from it as being creative and meeting new people (Smith, 1987). Recently, Carpenter, Hoag & Grant (2017) refer, at a general level, to the set of motivations - intrinsic and extrinsic - of students to pursue a career in journalism: social responsibility, ego, excitement, writing, photography, creativity, and social opportunities.

Mellado and Scherman (2015), in their analysis of Chilean students, state that the motivations can be grouped into four dimensions: 1) Personal development, students identify elements such as the dynamism of the profession, lifestyle, the possibility of travel, write and meet different people and, even, become famous. Although it is valid to note that these "incentives" are of a symbolic nature. 2) Professional development, students stress the importance of helping people in their daily lives, influencing the public, fighting against injustice, working for freedom and democracy, helping in the construction of the country and monitoring or supporting those in the power. 3) Occupational safety, students focus on elements such as earning money, the prestige of the profession and having a fixed / secure job. 4) Vocation and creativity, students stand out the ability to be creative and the pleasure of writing, as well as talent for journalism and establishing professional relationships.

The professional expectations of Journalism and Communication students are directly related to the perception they have about the profession, their future as journalists and the performance of the media. That, in many cases, when journalism graduates leave the school, are filled to the brim with theory, having no practical experience, and inflated with grandiose ideas of their value to the newspaper profession (Sugarman, 1946).

The final decision made by the students at the time of selecting the career of Journalism is based on the conjunction of the dimensions raised above. Subsequently, the university plays a fundamental role in the perceptions of students about the journalistic profession, since higher education in this area translates into greater attention by professionals to the social and political context, as well as to a high degree of specialization (Mellado, 2009).

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample and procedure***

In the first semester of 2016, 1273 surveys were carried out with students of the careers of Journalism and / or Social Communication [Cuba (n = 383), Ecuador (n = 500) and Venezuela (n = 390)] in 21 public and private universities [Cuba (n = 7), Ecuador (n = 10) and Venezuela (n = 4)]. The sample of students is statistically representative, with a level of confidence in Cuba of 99% and in Ecuador and Venezuela of 95% and a margin of error of 2.78 in Cuba, 2.7 in Ecuador and 5 in Venezuela.

### ***Measures***

From the *Worlds of Journalism Study* (WJS) and *Journalism Students Across the Globe* projects, as well as the publications they have developed (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2017; Hughes *et al.*, 2017; Josephi, 2017; Hanusch, 2013; Mellado and Scherman, 2015, Hanusch *et al.*, 2015, Mellado *et al.*, 2013, among others), the following variables were critically established:

*Motivations and professional expectations* of students of Journalism and Social Communication of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela:

Professional development: On a scale of 1 (not interested) to 5 (extremely interested) the level of interest they have in specializing in any of the proposed areas of communication and journalism is evaluated. This variable has 13 indicators, but it does not make up a single construct.

Personal development: On a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important) the aspects that motivate them to a greater extent to study these careers are qualified. A variable is generated (scale 1-5) with the average of 19 indicators ( $\alpha = 0.855$ ). Higher scores specifically indicate a positive expectation of a career as a source of personal development.

Occupational safety: First, on a scale of 1 (definitely yes) to 5 (definitely not) the possibility of obtaining a job as a journalist is established at the end of the university education. Variable of a single indicator. Secondly, on a scale of 1 (definitely yes) to 5 (definitely not), the ability to stay economically working only as a journalist is analyzed. Values close to 5 indicate a low perception of job security with respect to the career.

Vocation: On a scale of 1 (absolutely) to 5 (definitely not) the desire to dedicate and pursue a career as a journalist is studied. Variable of a single indicator; values close to 5 indicate a low vocation towards the career.

#### *University education and specialization in Journalism:*

Professional experience: First, on a scale of 1 (yes) to 2 (no) the type of work experience is established. This variable is structured based on the average of 6 indicators. Secondly, on a scale of 1 (yes) to 2 (no) the type of organization in which the work or professional functions associated with journalism are carried out is verified. This variable is structured based on the average of 15 specific indicators that do not make up a single construct. To assess the professional experience in a generic way, an indicator has been generated of whether the student has (1) or not (0) previous work experience, based on 1 of the 15 previous indicators.

Specialization in the area of work: On a scale of 1 (not interested) to 5 (extremely interested) the interest in specializing in the proposed areas related to journalism is measured. This variable is structured with 15 indicators, but it does not form a single construct.

The index variables (constructed from several indicators) had a reliability for acceptable internal consistency with values in Cronbach's Alpha above 0.70 (Cronbach, 1951; Hayes, 2005).

The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) of IBM version 21. First, we worked at a descriptive level, with the objective of obtaining frequencies and percentages. Second, inferential analyzes with ordinary least squares, specifically multiple linear regressions, were performed to check the linear relationships between variables and the weights of these relationships. Multicollinearity was ruled out by observing the values of Tolerance above 0.2 and the Inflation Factor of the Variance below 5.

## **2. Results**

### **2.1. Motivations of the students of Social Communication and Journalism of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela to study the career**

#### **2.1.1. Professional development**

Journalism (62.7%) is the main professional field in which students of Social Communication and Journalism of Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela would like to work, with the case of Cuba standing out, where three out of four (75.5%) choose this option. On the other way, Ecuadorian students are the least

interested in the journalistic profession, as one in two (47.4%) opts for other job options, mainly public relations and advertising (23.6%). At a general level, one fifth (20.9%) of future journalists chose this last option. The other options appear as minority possibilities - teaching and research (5.2%), institutional communication (3.7%) and community communication (1.3%).

As stated in the previous paragraph, while Cuba is the country where students decide for journalism to a greater extent, in Venezuela they show a greater tendency to the market and the business world (25.9% chose public relations and advertising) and in Ecuador there is the most diversified group regarding future professional options (7.7% was decided by the “other” option) [Table 1].

Community communication, despite the efforts made by the governments of these countries in their dissemination and promotion [1], is the alternative least demanded by students (1.3%), which suggests the dilemma about the real effect on future professionals of these governmental proposals.

**Table 1.** Professional field in which students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela would like to work when they finish their studies

Preferences in the labor field	Country			Total
	Cuba	Venezuela	Ecuador	
Journalism	75.5%	63%	52.6%	62.7%
Public relations / Advertising	13.3%	25.9%	23.6%	20.9%
Teaching and research	5.2%	3.7%	6%	5.2%
Other	1.6%	3.1%	7.7%	4.5%
Institutional communication	3.1%	2.5%	4.8%	3.7%
Does not know	1%	0%	3.4%	1.7%
Community communication	0.3%	1.9%	1.8%	1.3%

Source: Made by the authors.

Proof that journalism is still the professional choice most demanded by students of Social Communication and Journalism in these three countries, is the fact that the specific areas where they would like to work mainly are television (28.4%), newspapers (11.3%) and radio (9.6%). An evident example that they, even today, estimate that in the journalistic exercise conventional media of communication continue having a remarkable force. A fact corroborated by the students’ low inclination to develop their professional future in online and digital media: online news sites (2.5%) and online magazines (1.7%).

Even though there is a major tendency among students of the three countries to work in television, Ecuador is the country where this option stands out, since one in three opts for this as the main professional area (33.1%). In second place, the radio is located as the favorite professional field (11.4%). A privileged place for the radio medium that could be due to the long and solid tradition of

religious radios (Oller and Chavero, 2016) and community radios (CORAPE, ALER, CONAIE, among others). On the other hand, in Cuba 30.4% of them lean towards written journalism as the main job possibility (newspapers: 18.1%, magazines: 8.9%, online magazines: 3.4%) and, in addition, 5% want to be freelancer, at a higher level than their colleagues in the other two countries. A professional alternative that we estimate is associated with the possibility of working in areas such as audiovisual production and / or in several media simultaneously to improve income levels. 18.5% of students in Venezuela opt for more commercial (advertising agency: 11.2%, public relations agency: 4.7%) and artistic channels (cinema: 14.9%) [Table 2].

**Table 2.** Specific area in which students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela would like to work

Preferences in the work area	Country			Total
	Cuba	Venezuela	Ecuador	
Television	27.2%	23.5%	33.1%	28.4%
Newspapers	18.1%	11.7%	5.8%	11.3%
Radio	9.4%	7.3%	11.4%	9.6%
Cinema	4.2%	14.9%	6%	8.1%
Advertising agency	5%	11.2%	5.4%	7%
Magazine	8.9%	7%	4.4%	6.6%
News agency	4.7%	7.3%	6.4%	6.2%
Public relation agency	1.6%	4.7%	6.8%	4.6%
Department of communication of State institutions	2.4%	1.6%	6.8%	3.9%
Teaching and research	3.4%	2.6%	3.8%	3.3%
Anyone	2.1%	4.7%	3.2%	3.3%
<i>Freelancer</i>	5.0%	1%	2%	2.6%
Online news sites	4.7%	1.3%	1.8%	2.5%
Online magazine	3.4%	1%	0.8%	1.7%
Other	0%	0%	0.4%	0.2%

Source: Made by the authors.

### 2.1.2. Personal development

With regard to the motivations that have led students to opt for this professional career, there are the possibility of being creative ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 0.997$ ), meeting different people ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.048$ ), the dynamic lifestyle ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 1.108$ ) and having a varied and entertaining job ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD$

= 1.115) - options with a greater weight in a scale 1-5, being 1 “Not important” and 5 “Extremely important”.

These results reveal that the main motivations of future journalists to pursue a career and, therefore, to exercise in the future journalism and / or social communication are based on an individualist vision based on their own development and personal interests. This behavior contrasts with the following motivations, mainly focused on the community: opportunity to influence public affairs (M = 3.84, SD = 1.439), opposing injustices (M = 3.82, SD = 1.167) and work for freedom and democracy (M = 3.75, SD = 1.663). However, this possible incongruity is not surprising, since two of these last three motivations have the most pronounced standard deviation, offering clear evidence of the disparity of opinions among the students.

On the other hand, alternatives such as the possibility of being famous (M = 2.38, SD = 1.223), the amount of money that can be earned (M = 2.69, SD = 1.297), watch that the facto powers give account of their work (M = 3.03, SD = 1.260) and helping the government to achieve its national development goals (M = 3.08, SD = 1.341) have been the ones that have shown the least motivation. A result that shows two prominent points: Firstly, that the individualistic nature that characterizes the students with respect to their personal motivations to pursue the career does not have a mercantilist and interested sense, but is focused on a flexible, active, personal development, enterprising and disinterested - from an economic point of view, and, finally, more altruistic - to grow on a personal level in order to be able to help others.

Although, at a general level, most of the proposed factors have had a notable weight (M = 3.54), which reflects the multiplicity of motivating elements that influence the students' decision, the standard deviation is also relatively high, almost always higher than 1, signalling the disparity in the responses.

The motivations of Cuban students of Social Communication and Journalism to carry out these careers differ from those of their Venezuelan and Ecuadorian colleagues in three fundamental aspects. They are more stimulated by the journalistic profession for the pleasure of writing (M = 4.21, SD = 1.071), the opportunity to influence public affairs (M = 4.12, SD = 1.033) and the prestige of the journalism as a profession (M = 3.91, SD = 1.137). The money that can be earned (M = 1.94, SD = 1.130) is by far the least motivating factor for future journalists in Cuba. On the other hand, the students in Venezuela and Ecuador keep values similar to the average of the three countries, with the exception in the Ecuadorian country regarding the possibility of having a stable job (M = 3.91, SD = 1.182) [Table 3].

**Table 3.** Motivations of the students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela to study the career\*

Motivations	Country						Total	
	Cuba		Venezuela		Ecuador			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Possibility of being creative	4.29	.899	4.08	1.041	4.12	1.026	4.16	.997

Possibility of meeting different people	4.07	1.015	4.03	1.056	4.08	1.067	4.06	1.048
Dynamic lifestyle	3.89	1.143	4.05	1.090	4.00	1.092	3.98	1.108
Have a varied and entertaining job	3.81	1.144	4.02	1.072	3.96	1.119	3.93	1.115
Motivated by the opportunity to influence public affairs	4.12	1.033	3.74	1.189	3.71	1.807	3.84	1.439
Oppose injustices	3.87	1.157	3.73	1.204	3.86	1.145	3.82	1.167
Work for freedom and democracy	3.75	1.241	3.74	1.265	3.77	2.146	3.75	1.663
Pleasure to write	4.21	1.071	3.55	1.320	3.40	1.284	3.69	1.282
Opportunity to help people in their daily activities	3.86	1.145	3.43	1.187	3.74	1.148	3.69	1.171
Prestige of journalism as a profession	3.91	1.137	3.34	1.370	3.71	1.206	3.66	1.258
Have a stable job	3.16	1.285	3.69	1.203	3.91	1.182	3.61	1.258
Help build the Nation	3.68	1.103	3.66	1.177	3.50	1.134	3.60	1.140
Talent for journalism	3.37	1.259	3.26	1.352	3.69	1.149	3.46	1.259
Autonomy that you have	2.91	1.252	3.61	1.108	3.64	1.077	3.41	1.187
Opportunity to travel	2.63	1.225	3.31	1.299	3.61	1.212	3.22	1.308
Help the government achieve its national development goals	3.35	1.276	2.77	1.405	3.11	1.295	3.08	1.341
To encourage the de facto powers to give an account of their work	3.15	1.378	2.84	1.290	3.08	1.119	3.03	1.260
Money that can be earned	1.94	1.130	3.06	1.245	2.96	1.218	2.69	1.297
Possibility of being famous	2.35	1.177	2.43	1.257	2.36	1.232	2.38	1.223

\*1 = Nothing important; 5 = Extremely important. Source: Made by the authors.

### 2.1.3. Labor Security

The students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela show certain doubts at the time of referring to the job security that the journalistic profession will offer them [Table 4]. Although they think that they will probably have the opportunity to obtain a job at the end of their university education (M = 2.08), they are not so sure about the economic possibility to remain working only as journalists (M = 3.06).

Cuba is a contradictory country with respect to job security transmitted by the journalistic profession. Although it is where the students have greater conviction when talking about the possibility of obtaining a job as a journalist ( $M = 1.63$ ); similarly, it is the place where they are most clear that it is unlikely that they can be supported by the remuneration received for their work. The case of their Venezuelan colleagues is somewhat more complicated. They estimate that they do not know if they will have the possibility or, at least, it is unlikely, to sustain themselves economically ( $M = 3.14$ ) and, furthermore, they are not even sure of obtaining a job as journalists ( $M = 2.43$ ).

Ecuador is the country where students with the most favorable perceptions about their professional future as journalists are located - considering both indicators as a whole. This result would be expected given that in the first quarter of 2016 the national unemployment rate was 5.7%, according to the National Survey of Employment, Unemployment and Sub-employment (ENEMDU) published by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) in April of 2016. This index, although higher than in the same period of the previous year (3.8%), still remains one of the lowest in the Latin American region.

**Table 4.** Idea of students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela about the possibility of obtaining a job at the end of their university education and the ability to stay economically working only as journalists

Labor security	Country							
	Cuba		Venezuela		Ecuador		Total	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Get a job as a journalist	1.63	.783	2.43	1.376	2.14	1.038	2.08	1.133
Sufficient salary to stay economically	3.71	1.153	3.14	1.359	2.49	1.148	3.06	1.319

\*1 = Definitely; 5 = Definitely not. Source: Made by the authors.

#### 2.1.4. Vocation

The interest of the students of Social Communication and Journalism of the three countries to pursue a career as a journalist is clear in their answers [Table 5]. On a general level, they are prone to practice journalism ( $M = 1.88$ ), especially in Cuba ( $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = 0.838$ ). A result in line with the specialized nature of the Journalism career in the country, where Social Communication is also studied, but with an institutional, advertising and strategic communication orientation.

Venezuela is the main exception, being the country where there is a greater uncertainty among students about the real possibility of exercising journalism ( $M = 2.22$ ). Although there is a marked dissent among the students ( $SD = 1,296$ ), this answer is consistent with the results obtained about the field and the work area where they wish to develop their work, more focused on the business and commercial areas of communication.

**Table 5.** Desire of the students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela to pursue a career as a journalist

Vocation	Country						Total	
	Cuba		Venezuela		Ecuador			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Dedicarse y seguir una carrera como periodista	1.66	.838	2.22	1.296	1.79	1.035	1.88	1.094

\*1 = Absolutely; 2 = Definitely not. Source: Made by the authors.

## 2.2. Professional experience of students of Journalism and / or Social Communication in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela.

### 2.2.1. Professional experience

The students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela have very little experience in the professional journalistic field [table 6]. Only Cuban students have completed a period of work experience (M = 1.05, where “Yes” is 1 and “No” is 2), worked in a communication medium without receiving any payment (M = 1.58) and / or made some type of practice at university, both as an assistant student (M = 1.76) and in a newspaper or internal medium (M = 1.65). This behavior is associated with the fact that in Cuba

undergraduate training guarantees points of contact with the professional subfield through the conception, organization, realization and evaluation of pre-professional practices in the spheres and fields of action institutionalized in the different areas of public communication as part of the study programs that nourish both fields in general [Journalism and Social Communication] and the student, particularly (Saladrigas and Olivera, 2016: 12).

**Table 6.** Work experience of students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela\*

Professional experience	Country						Total	
	Cuba		Venezuela		Ecuador			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Period of professional practices	1.05	.223	1.92	.262	1.85	.355	1.63	.481
Media of communication without receiving payment	1.58	.492	1.90	.296	1.86	.345	1.79	.405
Not	1.98	.134	1.55	.497	1.85	.353	1.80	.399

In the newspaper or internal media of the university	1.65	.475	1.97	.165	1.88	.319	1.84	.363
Other Labor Area	1.91	.286	1.80	.400	1.87	.332	1.86	.344
Student Assistant	1.76	.432	1.95	.198	1.89	.301	1.87	.331
Media of communication and my work is remunerated	2	1.490	1.89	.303	1.93	.245	1.94	.845
Do not know - No answer	1.99	.072	1.92	.262	1.95	.205	1.95	.200

\*1= Yes; 2= No. Source: Made by the authors.

On the other hand, the great majority of Venezuelan and Ecuadorian students do not have any kind of professional practice. A problem that exposes two shortcomings of tertiary education in these countries: the marked gap between the university and the media market and the theory-practice distinction of the training models.

When studying media in which students have performed functions [table 7], we found very high means ( $M = 1.89$ ), which implies that the majority of respondents have denied having worked in the mentioned media (1 means having performed functions in the medium in question and 2 would imply not having performed them). Thus, we find many values - 9 of 15 - with means higher than 1.90; that is about media of communication in which very few respondents have performed functions.

It should be mentioned that the media where the largest volume of students have claimed to have participated are, in this order, newspapers ( $M = 1.68$ ,  $SD = 0.469$ ), radios ( $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD = 0.459$ ), television ( $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = 0.412$ ) and news agencies ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $DE = 0.551$ ). However, they are still a minority, which suggests that there are few students who have performed functions of any kind in the media. The values closest to 2 - which would imply the absence of students who have worked in the media in question, are achieved in advertising ( $M = 1.99$ ,  $DE = 0.823$ ), as freelancer ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $DE = 0.826$ ), communication departments of state institutions ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.169$ ) and cinema ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.161$ ).

In Cuba, that is the only country in which most students have professional experience in journalism, the most popular communication organizations are still conventional media: newspaper ( $M = 1.05$ ;  $SD = 0.262$ ), radio ( $M = 1.30$ ,  $SD = 0.465$ ), television ( $M = 1.42$ ,  $SD = 0.495$ ) and news agencies ( $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = 0.856$ ).

The degree of agreement is high and the greatest standard deviations are observed in those media with lower averages, that is, in which a greater number of students break the rule and claim to have worked.

**Table 7.** Media or organizations where students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela had experience or completed some internship or pre-professional practices\*

Organization where students have professional experience	Country							
	Cuba		Venezuela		Ecuador		Total	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Newspaper	1.05	.262	1.95	.210	1.95	.218	1.68	.469
Radio	1.30	.465	1.92	.262	1.82	.379	1.70	.459
TV	1.42	.495	1.97	.165	1.90	.295	1.78	.412
News Agencies	1.38	.856	1.98	.123	1.97	.146	1.80	.551
Online news portal	1.64	.494	1.92	.258	1.96	.176	1.86	.353
Magazine	1.84	.368	1.97	.141	1.96	.186	1.93	.252
Online magazine	1.89	.301	1.97	.141	1.98	.133	1.95	.203
Public relations	1.97	.241	1.95	.210	1.95	.209	1.96	.219
Teaching and research	1.93	.664	1.98	.100	1.98	.1250	1.97	.375
Do not know, no answer	2	1.036	1.92	.270	1.95	.213	1.97	.601
Cinema	1.96	.203	1.98	.123	1.97	.153	1.97	.161
Department of communication of state institutions	1.96	.216	1.98	.123	1.97	.159	1.97	.169
<i>Freelancer</i>	2	1.489	1.94	.220	1.97	.159	1.98	.826
Advertising	2	1.474	1.94	.226	1.96	.196	1.99	.823

\*1= Yes; 2= No. Source: Made by the authors.

### 2.2.2. Specialization in the area of work

Students from the three countries are more interested in specializing within their careers in the areas of Culture (M = 3.82, SD = 1.199), International News (M = 3.65, SD = 1.614), Travel and Tourism, Development issues (M = 3.45, SD = 1.319) and Entertainment (M = 3.36, SD = 1.340). Despite maintaining a similar logic, there are nuances that distinguish the informative propensity of students in these countries [Table 8].

**Table 8.** Interest of students of Social Communication and Journalism in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela in specializing in certain information areas\*

Especialization	Country							
	Cuba		Venezuela		Ecuador		Total	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Culture	3.86	1.208	3.67	1.213	3.89	1.175	3.82	1.199
International News	3.82	2.183	3.54	1.185	3.58	1.210	3.65	1.614
Travels and tourism	3.58	1.614	3.45	1.277	3.83	1.219	3.64	1.391
Development Issues	3.46	1.384	3.14	1.247	3.66	1.269	3.45	1.319
Entertainment	3.08	1.358	3.49	1.292	3.52	1.318	3.36	1.340
Community News	3.26	1.364	3.09	1.331	3.58	1.238	3.34	1.322
Lifestyle	3.10	1.362	3.20	1.270	3.37	1.312	3.23	1.322
Science and Technology	3	1.171	2.93	1.282	3.41	1.262	3.13	1.254
Politics	3.33	1.277	3	1.374	2.87	1.354	3.06	1.346
Environment	2.88	1.229	2.83	1.309	3.36	1.270	3.05	1.289
Sports	2.65	1.450	2.83	1.484	2.99	1.515	2.83	1.491
Economy and business	2.99	1.218	2.61	1.256	2.65	1.196	2.76	1.230
Police, courts and tribunals	2.07	1.110	2.57	1.311	2.83	2.580	2.49	1.886

\*1 = Nothing interested; 5 = Extremely interested. Source: Made by the authors.

In Cuba, students are more interested in politics ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.277$ ) and, despite the fact that the International News area is one of the most desired, there is a greater divergence of opinions. In Venezuela and Ecuador, although the entertainment area is one of the most demanded by students (Venezuela,  $M = 3.49$   $SD = 1.292$ ; Ecuador,  $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 1.318$ ), in the second country, areas of Environment ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 1.270$ ) and Science and Technology ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.262$ ) have a higher demand than in the other two. It also highlights the fact that the Sports information area ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 1.491$ ) is one of the least mentioned by students, when in Ecuador, as an example, is one of the sections that greater informative space and workers accumulate (Oller, 2017).

One of the most outstanding facts in relation to the specialization of students in the specific information areas is that the so-called hard news are the least “longed for”. A problem to be addressed regarding the informative interests of future journalists and the media realities, since in the newsrooms they will

be forced to deal fundamentally with the areas of Politics, Economy, Police, Legal, among others; with the exception of the Sports and Entertainment area (Oller, 2017).

### 2.3. Influence on personal development - motivations and professional expectations- of students of Journalism and / or Social Communication in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela of their work experience, vocation and perception of job security

Through a regression analysis we verify if the previous work experience, the vocation, the perception of job security that gives the career, age, gender and the academic year that influence the motivations and expectations of a personal nature (personal development) of the students [Table 9].

**Table 9.** Multiple linear regression with personal development as a dependent variable

Regress variable: <i>Personal development</i>	Cuba		Venezuela		Ecuador		Total	
	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$
Constant	3.535		4.183		3.254		3.744	
Previous work experience	-0.041	-0.012	0.104	0.082	-0.012	-0.008	0.043	0.033
Job security	-0.054	-0.071	-0.122 **	-0.244 **	-0.13 ***	-0.187 ***	-0.108 ***	-0.177 ***
Vocation	-0.136 ***	-0.197 ***	-0.037	-0.077	-0.119 **	-0.177 **	-0.083 ***	-0.144 ***
Gender	0.086	0.07	-0.091	-0.066	0.209 **	0.151 **	0.079 *	0.059 *
Year old	0.012	0.039	-0.013	-0.048	0.034 *	0.107 *	0.007	0.023
Academic year	-0.016	-0.042	0.042	0.075	-0.075 *	-0.118 *	-0.022	-0.046
R2 corrected	0.05		0.088		0.116		0.085	
Model	F(6, 365)= 3.913, p<0.01		F(6, 355)= 6.795, p<0.001		F(6, 456)= 11.007, p<0.001		F(6, 1190)= 19.455, p<0.001	

Source: Made by the authors. \* <0.05 \*\* <0.01 \*\*\* <0.001

The results show that, in general terms, only occupational safety (B = -0.108, p <0.001), vocation (B = -0.083, p <0.01) and gender (B = 0.079, p <0.05) have a significant influence on the perspectives of personal development of the students in the three countries, F(6, 1190) = 19.455, p <0.001, explaining 8.5% of their variance. Similarly, it is observed that the positive perceptions towards job security offered by the career and the high levels of vocation to the profession are related to better motivations and expectations of personal development. There is a relationship with gender, in such a way that being a woman also influences in increasing the expectations of personal development in the career of Journalism.

The model is significant in Cuba, F(6, 365) = 3.913, p <0.01 (explaining 5% of the variance), Venezuela F(6, 355) = 6.795, p <0.001 (explaining 8.8% of the variance), and Ecuador F(6, 456) = 11.007, p <0.001 (explaining 11.6% of the variance). However, in Cuba only the vocation (B = -0.136,

$p < 0.001$ ) is a predictive factor and in Venezuela only occupational safety ( $B = -0.122$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). On the contrary, in the case of Ecuador, in addition to job security ( $B = -0.13$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), vocation ( $B = -0.119$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and gender ( $B = 0.209$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), are also significant the age ( $B = 0.034$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and the academic year they attend ( $B = -0.075$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), in such a way that, at older age of students and lower academic year attended, the greater personal development expectations are.

## Conclusions

The career of Journalism is located within the communication sciences Faculties in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela - there was found a lack of academic specialization in journalism most remarkable in Ecuador. The truth is that most of the students are interested in working in journalism or in a related area, a result similar to that found by Hanna and Sanders (2007) in their study of British students. However, there is a remarkable group of students in these countries that prefer other more commercial and business branches of communication such as public relations. A trend that is observed in other Latin American countries such as Brazil (Schwingel, Melo & Figueiredo, 2004) or Chile (Mellado & Scherman, 2017).

What is contradicting in the arguments offered by the students is that, firstly, although the functions assigned to journalism and journalists are directed to a greater extent to the citizens and the community, only a minimum part of the students is interested in working in the areas of community and institutional communication. A fact that suggests that, probably, the answers from the students are more normative than real. Secondly, the gap between the media consumption of students and their professional expectations. Although students increasingly consume alternative media, digital and social networks (Oller et al., 2017), they continue to opt for television as the best option to develop their professional career. This low inclination for online media and cyberspace could show a flaw in the curricular meshes of universities, since they are not able to generate interest in digital journalism, one of the main job and business offers currently. Thirdly, the motivations that led students to study journalism. Although through their work as journalists they pretend to influence public affairs, oppose injustice and work for freedom and democracy, values closer to the function of social service of journalism, their motivations to study the career are more related to the possibility of individual growth. Despite this, these personal values focus more on subjective estimates of development and not on the possibility of being famous and earning a lot of money. Thus, the students do not consider journalism a professional “springboard” or a job that offers great economic possibilities -especially in Cuba.

The fact that Cuban, Ecuadorian and Venezuelan students do not identify among their main motivations to do the career of Journalism the possibility of earning money, could be a factor associated to the political system of these countries, close to the socialist ideas that advocate a more egalitarian social organization among all the people directed to the social and common good and not to the economic one. However, the results found in recent decades by Bowers (1974), Endres and Wearden (1990), Smith (1987), Crawford et al. (2013) and Coleman et al. (2016) in their studies on American students showed a similar altruistic trend. Therefore, one might think that certain normative ideals of journalism tend to be shared by the students of this profession around the world, or, in another sense, that the inclination of journalists for material success is developed a posteriori.

With respect to professional experience, students in Cuba distance themselves from their Ecuadorian and Venezuelan colleagues. While the latter receive an eminently theoretical training and hardly have experience in the area of journalism and / or communication, Cubans are much more active, either by personal initiative or through the institutions of higher education in the country. In the three countries, among students who have experience, most of them obtained it in conventional media.

The motivations and professional expectations of students of Social Communication and Journalism to study the career are positively influenced by the job security offered by the profession in Venezuela, the vocation to practice journalism in Cuba, and the gender, age and academic year taken by students in Ecuador. The confluence of all these variables offers an explanation of the choice of being a journalist on the part of the students, although, as Santos-Sainz (2013) points out, other aspects such as social origin have an impact. Hence it is important to continue to contribute more information to the study of the profile, personality and preferences of students.

Journalism enjoys prestige among students, since they consider it a profession that will allow them to train and grow as professionals in a field in which they are interested. A result that coincides with those obtained by Santos-Sainz (2013) in his study of journalism students in France, since they still consider the profession as “a noble profession” and are aware of their social recognition. However, Ecuador is the country that best reflects a decline in the motivation to practice the profession with the passing of the academic years, a trend similar to that found among British students (Hanna & Sanders, 2007). A result that must be taken into account and alert the academic institutions.

From this empirical perspective, and taking the students as subjects of study, we obtain a concrete sense of how the theory learned in the university classrooms has its equivalence in the newsrooms of the media. Evidence shows that the perception and professional experience of future journalists are determined by the interaction in their day-to-day at university with colleagues and professors and by the other systems that, directly or indirectly, affect and influence their professional ideas about journalism. A sign of the contextual and environmental influence is the fact that, despite sharing trends, experiences and certain opinions about the journalistic profession, the students of these countries have a fairly diversified opinion; especially in the case of Cuba.

Beyond that it is possible to speak of the existence of a specific function of journalism according to the students of these three countries, their commitment to citizenship and to the established political order is made visible. Without losing its reformist and active nature against what they may consider as abuses of power. Regarding this point, there is a certain contradiction, probably associated with the ideological polarization accentuated by each country. Although, everything indicates that the students' professional objectives do not consist of acting as agents “servile” to the powers, but as figures managing public affairs. A result that belies in Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela that students of Journalism and Social Communication, despite their positive self-esteem that leads them to a greater awareness and responsibility of themselves (Sosa, 2006), consider following the professional trend proposed by Cortiñas and Pont (2006) when they affirm that journalists in recent years have opted for sensationalism and the invasion of private life.

We warn, however, that as indicated at the beginning, this has been an exploratory study, which will require to be complemented in a contextualized manner by each country, comparative way at a regional

and global level as well as through longitudinal investigations. It would be necessary to evaluate, with more thoroughness and empirical evidence, the mechanisms of access to the career of journalism, the social legitimacy of the profession, the use value of the university certifications as a procedure of accreditation and incorporation into the professional market to, ultimately, contrast the perception of journalism students with the objectification of the real practices of the profession in the different media organizations. That, according to Goyanes and Rodríguez-Gómez (2018: 13), in their research about the effect of uncertainty on job expectations of journalists in the newspaper *El Mundo* (Spain), “news workers’ reluctance to change professional practices are not catalyzed by the culture of job insecurity *per se* but by how they socially construct it according to their own experience and past performance”. To which one could add, “and his previous training”.

#### Note.

[1] In Ecuador, for example, the Organic Communication Law (LOC, 2013) places special emphasis on the promotion of community media and the distribution of the radio spectrum in its favor in the triad: public (33%), private (33%) and community media (34%).

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