

JOURNALISM ETHICS AND ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS:

A view from Madrid journalists

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em Jornalismo

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to present the partial results of a larger research project on journalistic ethics from the point of view of the professionals themselves. Specifically, the following pages analyze the perception of Madrid journalists with respect to the legitimacy of accepting various gifts when carrying out their work. The results of 30 in-depth interviews and 410 surveys of newspaper, radio, television, online and press office journalists who carry out their professional activity in the Autonomous Community of Madrid show that this group is very reluctant to accept gifts with a monetary value of over €200, or to carry out activities financed by a news source. Fewer problems arise regarding acceptance of presents of nominal value of a promotional merchandising nature, free tickets to shows and exhibitions, or paid meals and trips.

Key-words: ethics, journalism, gifts, self-regulation, Spain.

INTRODUCTION

In July, 2009, twelve reporters attended a press conference for the inauguration of a monument in the eastern Turkish city of Kars. During the bus trip which was taking the reporters to the luncheon being held for them, the head press officer of the Kars City Hall, on behalf of its mayor, Nevzat Bozkus, handed each journalist an envelope containing the equivalent of 250 Euros or \$350. Only two of the reporters rejected this gift. The president of the Journalists Union, Ercan Ipekci, felt this action on the part of journalists to be deplorable

Such events cause embarrassment within the profession and provoke an outcry from the public. Journalists are accused of acquiescing to the proliferation of *do ut des* ("I give so that you may give"). This Latin expression is used colloquially to indicate that a desire for reciprocation is the motive behind an action¹. With this aphorism we allude to favoritism or bartering, doing business, bribe-taking and bribery, and unfortunately to manipulation of news and information. Temptations abound in many distinct forms: cash, personal business, paid trips, free theater and concert tickets, gifts, donations, special treatment, subsidies, aid, favors

and promotional merchandise from companies, organizations or persons about whom they are reporting.

Given that the journalistic function does not seek any other form of financial reward except that of the reporter's salary and the knowledge that a job is well done as a service to society², how can acceptance of gifts by journalists be justified?

According to article VIII of the Declaration of Principles for the Conduct of Journalists of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), accepting financial compensation in exchange for dissemination of information is a serious professional offense. It is for this reason that the integrity of the profession prohibits journalists from accepting any form of illicit remuneration, be it indirect or direct³.

The underlying basis for these articles is the defense at any cost of the journalist's independence in his/her mission to discover the truth. This implies, in the last resort, tacit admission of the fundamental right to information which every citizen enjoys in a democratic society. For this reason, the reporter must avoid any improper promotion, orientation or influence by third parties regarding the journalistic information which he/she provides⁴. Also stemming from this is the exhortation for the journalist to reject any type of invitation, trip, compensation or gift⁵.

What is more, the codes prohibit journalists from using privileged information for their own profit, considering it to be personal gain emanating from journalistic endeavor, which must be subject to honest conduct. Significant cases have muddied the waters in the area of economic information (Tamblay, 2007), traditionally stigmatized by permanent suspicions of illegal profit (Coca, 1997).

It is likewise prohibited for a journalist to actively seek special favors in order to obtain advantages through use of his/her credentials, outside the exercise of his/her profession, or through pressure on organizations, business, or private citizens⁶. On certain occasions, even a firm call is made to not use the name of the information agency on business cards, letterheads, logotypes or to use them for private activities.

What then, is the limit? Is there a generalized agreement⁷ on accepting those gifts emanating from standards of common courtesy, provided that they are understood as socially acceptable? Even so, it is evident that the customs of each period, region and society vary significantly. That is what makes this recommendation unclear.

In other cases, the codes take into account exceptions with respect to favors that can be granted by the sources. These favors are not expressly and generally prohibited because in certain cases they can be acceptable:

“(...) for example, when a journalist can only access a newsworthy place, situation or person through an organized trip”⁸.

At the same time, there are a few occasions which facilitate acceptance by the reporter, with an approximate assessment of the articles that can be accepted of around €30⁹. The amounts for U.S. journalists are similar. Even so, the U.S. policy is unwavering with respect to accepting gifts¹⁰ – the dichotomy is clear: they must be returned or donated to charitable organizations–; in Spain there is still no consensus on this issue.

In this context, the objective of this article is to analyze what perception Madrid journalists have regarding the legitimacy or not of accepting gifts, favors, and services when carrying out their work. Before presenting the results, we briefly turn to the methodology used.

Method

This paper is registered with the research project “Ethics and Informative Excellence - Professional Journalism Ethics Compared to Expectations of the Citizenry”, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, within the National Plan of Research, Development and Innovation (2004-2007)¹¹. This project is being carried out jointly by the Universidad Pompeu de Barcelona (which is coordinating the project), the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, the Universidad de El País Vasco and the Universidad de Sevilla. The project has three main goals:

- a) To make a comparative inventory of the norms and standards which comprise the doctrine of the ethical practice of journalism;
- b) To compare these norms with the prevailing value system in the ethical criteria interiorized by media professionals;
- c) To determine the extent to which the existing norms and prevailing value system at the heart of the group are shared by the citizenry.

To achieve the second goal — to find out what value systems dominate in the ethical criteria interiorized by the professionals — each of the four universities participating in the study used the same methodology applied to its autonomous region, be it Catalonia, Madrid, the Basque Country or Andalusia¹².

First of all, each team interviewed at length 30 media professionals selected according to their documented careers. The sample was designed in accordance with different independent variables so that the entire profession was represented *in some way*. Specifically, in this phase the line of investigation was composed of the following steps:

- 1) Design of the interview guide by the coordinating team of the

Universidad Pompeu Fabra. At first, the guide consisted of 60 questions related to professional career points of interest and formulated so they were always open-ended. To avoid fatigue on the part of the interviewee, questions of a qualitative nature were left out, and the quantitative questions were taken out of the questionnaire given to the professional group.

2) Correction of the interview guide with the contributions of the researchers from the other coordinating groups in the study. In the end, we chose a total of 26 questions structured by areas. The subjects refer to general matters, like:

- a) what telling the truth in journalism consists of;
- b) what the relationship between the journalist and information sources should be;
- c) how news should be presented;
- d) how historically disadvantaged groups should be treated;
- e) objectivity versus ideology of the media;
- f) the influence of political power;
- g) the influence of the advertising industry;
- h) the main ethical conflicts faced by professionals in carrying out their activity;
- i) what professionals think of the different mechanisms for self-regulation; and
- j) other matters of interest

3) Formulation of a census of possible interviewees so that the entire profession was represented in some way. To this end, each team used the same independent variables: type of media, position, department, sphere of diffusion, gender, ideology and age.

4) Performance of field work by each of the teams, in collaboration with the different institutions and companies charged with carrying it out¹³.

5) Interpretation of the results on the basis of the spoken sounds¹⁴ and literal transcriptions of the contents of the interviews.

Next, each team completed its portrait of the profession with numerous surveys given to reporters¹⁵, with the aim of obtaining data that could be extrapolated to the whole universe of media professionals from the different autonomous regions. To this end, the main tasks of quantitative analysis were the following:

1) Design of the online questionnaire¹⁶ by the team from the Universidad Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona, on the basis of the questions that were initially designated for the in-depth interviews but were ultimately rejected.

2) Correction of the questionnaire with the contributions of the

researchers from the teams involved in the study. In the end, the questionnaire consisted of 40 questions, based on the same areas as those designated for the in-depth study.

3) Formulation of a census of possible interviewees so that, as in the qualitative analysis — although now with a greater need for statistical rigor — the entire profession was represented in some way. Again, to this end each team used the same independent variables: type of media, position, department, sphere of diffusion, gender, ideology and age.

4) Performance of field work by each of the teams in collaboration with the companies and institutions that were assigned in each case to carry it out. At this point, we also include the design of the web application to facilitate the task of completing the questionnaire for those surveyed.

5) Interpretation of the results on the basis of the measurement of the frequency and the cross tabulation of variables.

In this paper, we present the most relevant results regarding the acceptance of gifts that we have obtained after comparing the data of the qualitative analysis with the data of the quantitative analysis.

Results

Before presenting the results, it should be noted that in the qualitative part, the interviewees must respond as frankly as possible to the following questions:

“Do you think there should be some kind of limit on gifts or favors that a journalist accepts?” and

“What should those limits be?”

In the quantitative part the questions were:

Should it be admissible to accept...?”

a) Promotional gifts (of a merchandising nature)

b) Gifts worth over €30

c) Gifts worth over €200

d) Free tickets to shows, events, and services

e) Individual meals paid by the source

f) Paid trips to accompany a news source

g) Giving conferences or carrying out any other activity remunerated by the source.

In each case, the interviewees may choose between two options: yes or no.

Analysis

The results of the quantitative analysis confirm that the interviewees

do not have any problems when accepting gifts of a promotional or merchandising nature, free tickets, services, individual meals, or trips paid for by the source (Table 1). On the other hand, they indicate that they are extremely averse to accepting gifts whose value exceeds €200 and to giving conferences or carrying out activities paid for by the source. The reason: they are convinced that both practices could jeopardize their impartiality. Nevertheless, accepting gifts between €31 and €199 raises doubts in the minds of the professionals: while 50.9% of those interviewed would do so, the remaining 49.1% would not.

Table 1 It is admissible to accept...

	No	Yes
Promotional gifts (for merchandising purposes)	22.2%	77.8%
Gifts worth more than €30	49.1%	50.9%
Gifts worth more than €200	83.7%	16.3%
Free tickets to events, shows and services	23.9%	76.1%
Individual meals paid for by the source	34.4%	65.6%
Paid trips to accompany the news source	36.7%	63.3%
Giving conferences or carrying out other activities remunerated by the source	68.5%	31.5%

The results are in agreement with those expressed by the interviewees in the qualitative analysis. In the latter, the general conclusions are that small gifts are not a serious threat to the journalists' impartiality, because they involve tokens of scant value and are received in gratitude according to social conventions. In fact, it would be ill-advised to refuse them. However, payments of a greater value are not acceptable as that would signify that the journalist was giving up his/her professional independence. In this respect, 3 out of the 30 professionals interviewed stated that receiving expensive gifts did indeed influence the reporter, even if it were simply to enhance one's mindset at the moment of news writing, whether in an actual Stockholm syndrome situation or an authentic "emotional blackmail situation", in the worst case.

Starting from this common denominator, we find three positions:

- a) rigidity
- b) laxness
- c) flexibility

The most rigid view comes from those who hold that all gifts or favors must be eliminated. This perspective represents a third of the sample and is based on the fact that receipt of these gifts leads to an exchange of favors which can drastically contaminate information. In this way, an interviewee explicitly dismisses the claim that it is simply a matter of “disinterested gratitude”, and does not consider it legal for a journalist to accept gifts for carrying out his/her work, as he/she is being paid a salary to do so. Two of those favoring this viewpoint were adamant: no entity should give gifts, and no reporter should consent to accepting them. One of the interviewees added that offering gifts and favors is an ancient tradition which no longer makes sense in today's society, and therefore, should be eliminated little by little, in order to establish a strictly professional relationship between media and source. Lastly, another interviewee stated that if an entity wishes to advertise its brand, then it should purchase advertising space instead of using less ethical subterfuges, such as giving gifts.

The lax view contradicts the previous one, considering it unnecessary to eliminate gifts. Three arguments are offered: first, the social conventions surrounding gift giving; second, their practical utility; and finally, the conviction that these gifts do not always succeed in influencing the reporter/communicator. Five of the interviewees shared this opinion.

The first reason takes it for granted that gifts only represent a show of respect for the journalist on the part of the source. This, these interviewees state, is a simple and established way of working that is very difficult to get rid of as it is a social custom, and refusal could even be considered a very ill-mannered gesture. Furthermore, some festive celebrations such as Christmas partially justify certain gift giving.

Three of the others interviewed pointed out the practical utility of these gifts: some of them are promotional merchandising items of nominal worth, simple advertising which scarcely has any effect on the journalists. In other cases, they continued, the gifts consist of trips, meals, free tickets or attendance of an event with the aim of getting the reporter closer to the information; something that is not harmful provided that it is always in relation to the matter being investigated.

Finally, other interviewees state that they are convinced that these courtesies do not influence the journalist's way of working nor do they

obtain the desired effect of predisposing the professional to cover the news from a positive perspective. Along these lines, 5 journalists assert that they do not see a clear link between giving a gift and the opinion of the professional who, they affirm, “is above this type of influence”. Furthermore, another interviewee adds that even with a high economic value, a gift is simply an object, and as such is insufficient to influence the reporter. In fact, 300 of those interviewed admit to having accepted presents, and in spite of that fact, have made negative critiques of those entities who engaged in gift-giving. What is more, in 2 cases, the interviewees stated that receiving gifts could provoke the opposite effect of the one intended, by putting the reporter on guard regarding the institution in question.

In addition to these 3 reasons, one of the interviewees points out that gifts cannot be prohibited because there is no regulation outlawing them, nor is any such regulation foreseen in the future. This same reporter, who is over 50, went on to say that to eliminate them would be an overblown reaction as we do not live in a Spartan society, and at any rate, it is not such a serious practice to warrant such drastic measures. However, all of the professionals sharing this viewpoint agree on the fact that there is one limit: direct blackmail. For one of the interviewees:

“I think that there are two nuances here: one is the possibility that you as a journalist have to live and experiment things, which you otherwise could not do, and a very different thing is blackmail. I would really like to leave it crystal clear that blackmail in the form of “I will grease your palm to get that information”, should never be permitted. That is blackmail and extortion”.

That is, it is never legal for a source to give money or to explicitly state the intentional nature of the gift. Almost all of those interviewed indirectly spoke of a need to establish that limit, and 2 journalists expressly mentioned it.

Finally, the middle ground, the flexible point of view, is held by those who think that gifts do not have to be totally eliminated, but that certain limits should be imposed to avoid certain influencing factors. The majority of those interviewed actually adhere to this point of view. They offer diverse alternatives for regulating this subject:

a) The majority view, supported by 7 of the 30 journalists interviewed, calls for an appeal to personal criteria and argues that the limit for gifts should be established by each journalist, guided by his/her individual code of ethics. One of the interviewees expresses it along

these lines:

“I believe that there is a sixth sense that leads you to say, ‘this present is not just a show of social courtesy, or of unwritten social norms, but there is someone behind it who wants to buy you or who wants to shut you up”.

In similar terms, two other journalists, when questioned about these types of limits, responded:

“Yes, I suppose so. Everyone knows the price you have to pay for certain gifts; and that is also a question of each person making his own ethical assessment”.

“There has to be a limit, I mean, to know up to what point something is a small token and at what point you are being bought”.

These interviewees assert that the limit may be difficult to define since some may feel indebted for having received a pen, while others would not, even if the gift had been a trip. For this reason, they insist, the professional journalist must be mature, honest and have sufficient willpower and self-control to distinguish between gifts that can be accepted and those that should be turned down. One of the interviewees expresses it this way:

“It is very difficult to establish a limit. We are all big boys and girls and I believe that each journalist has to establish that limit”

Along these lines, another journalist interviewed indicated the need for professional training:

“The problem is when you begin with some bottles of Bitter Rosso and end up selling yourself for a song. The flesh is weak and temptation is strong, but that depends on your professionalism, to some extent, but overall it depends on the education and professional training of each individual. What I mean to say is that you can have a fantastic journalistic eye when it comes to news writing, but if you do not have adequate education and training you will not have any scruples when it comes to accepting a series of gifts that go beyond being a nominal present”.

b) For another 4 interviewees, presents should be limited to the smallest token as a sign of cordiality with nominal economic value. Delving further into this issue, they mentioned merchandising articles of a promotional nature or an invitation to get together for a meal.

c) For another 4, the limit cannot be strictly measured, but involves

those gifts that make the journalist feel indebted and truly influence his/her work.

d) A fourth solution, supported by another 3 journalists, is for gifts to be administered by a company and handed out equally or in a drawing for all the employees, although in reality this did not seem to them to be a fair or plausible measure.

e) Another 2 interviewees were of the opinion that the limit should be an economic one, and moreover it should be established by the news organization, even though the nature of the gift is not given in detail. When determining what the economic limit should be, the range is very wide as some journalists mention an amount between €50 and €100, while others speak of more expensive gifts, especially in those cases where the journalist receives a high salary, such as media executives, for example.

In any event, there is an axiom present in all limits that are mentioned, which is explicit in 3 of the testimonies: the more expensive the gift, the greater the intention to manipulate the one receiving it. Because of that, no gift should be accepted if it seems out of proportion or if the economic value is excessive, as could occur with a car or paid vacations.

For one of those interviewed, it is also important to differentiate between gifts given before and after publication of a news story. This journalist believes that the former are more harmful, and those that are given out of gratitude are more acceptable because they do not influence the information:

“It is not the same receiving a gift after the news story as having it offered to you beforehand. If they give it to you before, they are clearly paying you to write well about them. If they give it to you afterwards, that means they are happy with what you have done, but at least that does not influence you when carrying out your work”.

Even so, there are those who would question this statement since “if there is gratitude it is because someone has done someone else a favor”.

The nature of the present is mentioned in some of the talks - one has to distinguish between material gifts and trips. For 3 of the participants, the latter are dangerous because of their worth, because of the high level of enjoyment which they offer and because they submerge the reporter in an environment especially chosen by the source, in which it is easier to manipulate him/her and predispose him/her in the source's favor. In this respect, an interviewee elaborates:

“When they take you on a trip they play up to you in a way that you cannot imagine: they take you to some unbelievable hotels, and hey, you can really end up with Stockholm syndrome... It happened to me on a trip that I made to Belgium; it was in Brussels, something related to nuclear energy. This energy is cleaner, blah, blah, blah, and the truth is that everything that they said was totally true, and I really liked that trip, because even though I had always been influenced by what ecologists had told me here, there it was another view, and I really liked that a lot. But still, it is true that you do acquire a little Stockholm syndrome- Long live Nuclear Energy! But then I thought, no, you have to find a balance. Nuclear energy is valuable, but that is not the only thing. There has to be nuclear energy with security, because the truth is that it is a type of energy which is dangerous even when it is controlled. What I mean is that there are things that you have to get straight in your head in order to report on them well. That is how it is. On a trip you cannot believe how easy it is to let yourself be influenced”.

In the same vein, we have to distinguish between special favors provided by public institutions and by private companies. The former are not so well regarded, and it is preferred that their economic value be minimal:

“Another reason to reject them, applicable to all possible gifts that can be offered to a journalist, is that they come from public funds. I think in this respect, one must be very cautious, and as much as possible not let institutions spend citizens’ money on us”.

Because of this, several of those interviewed felt it was more legitimate for a private company to offer gifts since they make money from their own business. Along these same lines, a reporter stated that personal gifts among contacts are more legitimate than those of the company, since they emanate from personal money, and in this way they are justified by friendship and not by other interests. Finally, another journalist added that the limits for gifts seem to be a cynical practice since it lends itself to too much cheating. Because of this, he thought it is more honest to take drastic measures: totally prohibit them, or permit everything.

Analysis of the variables

Finally, before stating the conclusions, we shall briefly, for the sake of space, turn to the variables which show a greater relation to the acceptability of the different financial compensations. Statistically significant correlations can be observed for the following variables: age, gender, level of training, medium in which the journalist works, professional function and rank, type and size of company, specialty area of the journalist, scope of diffusion of the medium, scale of ideological

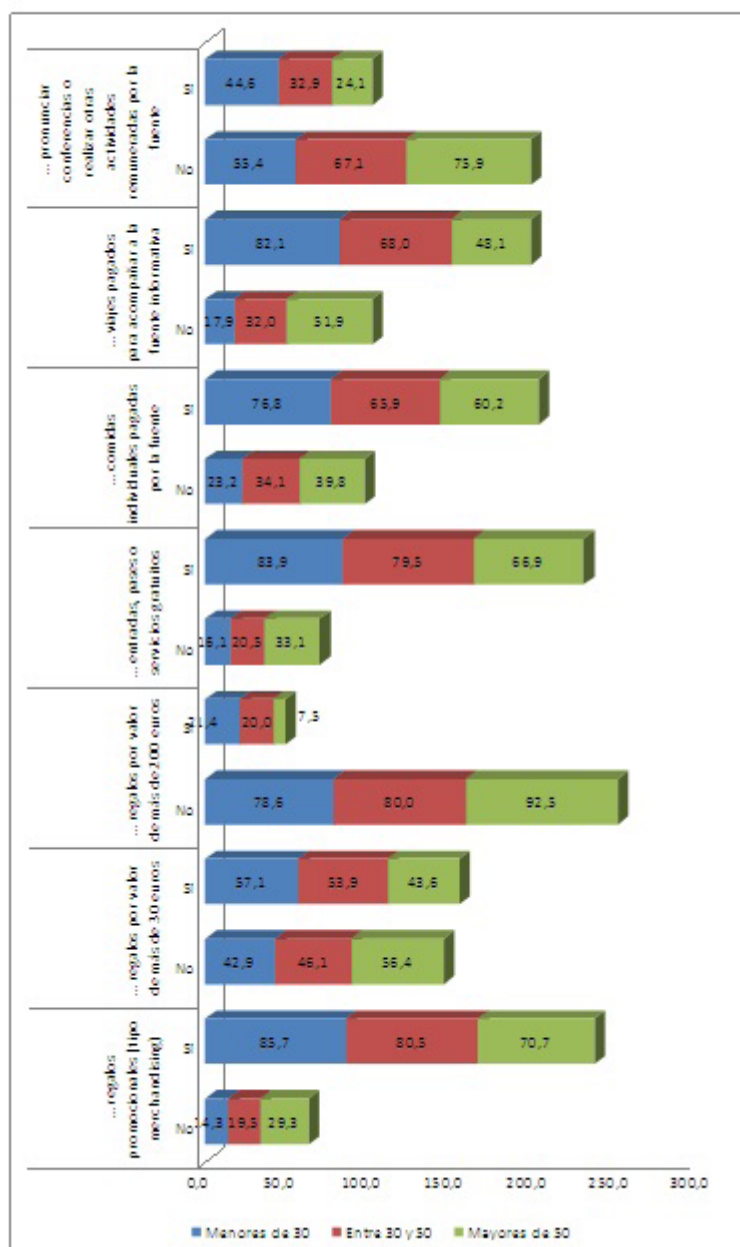
positioning and level of earnings. On the other hand, the variables involving current work situation, the municipality where the journalist works and perception of problems in the profession have not shown significant correlations.

Young reporters are more predisposed to accepting gifts

There exists a certain relationship between the act of accepting gifts and the age of those interviewed. Those over 50 are more likely to reject any type of payment, especially paid trips. Specifically, 8 out of 10 reporters less than 30 years of age would accept a trip paid for by an informant, while only 5 out of 10 reporters older than 50 would do so.

Despite the fact that there are differences between those under 30 and the group between 30 and 40, the results for both groups are quite similar. The difference, once again, can be seen between these groups and those journalists older than 50. For example, with regard to gifts over €200, almost a third of the young interviewees and 20% of the professionals between 30 and 50 would accept gifts as compared with scarcely 1 out of 10 reporters older than 50. As we can observe in graph 1, as the age of the journalist increases, his/her willingness to accept gifts decreases.

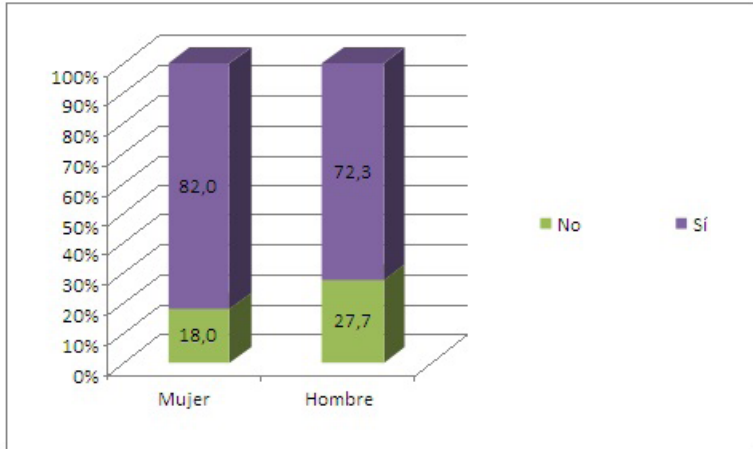
Graph 1. Acceptance of gifts by age groups



Women journalists are more inclined to receive tickets and free passes

Similarly, there are significant gender differences regarding the acceptance of tickets, passes or free services.. Although both men and women think that it is tolerable to accept them, women are more in favor (82%) than their male counterparts (72%).

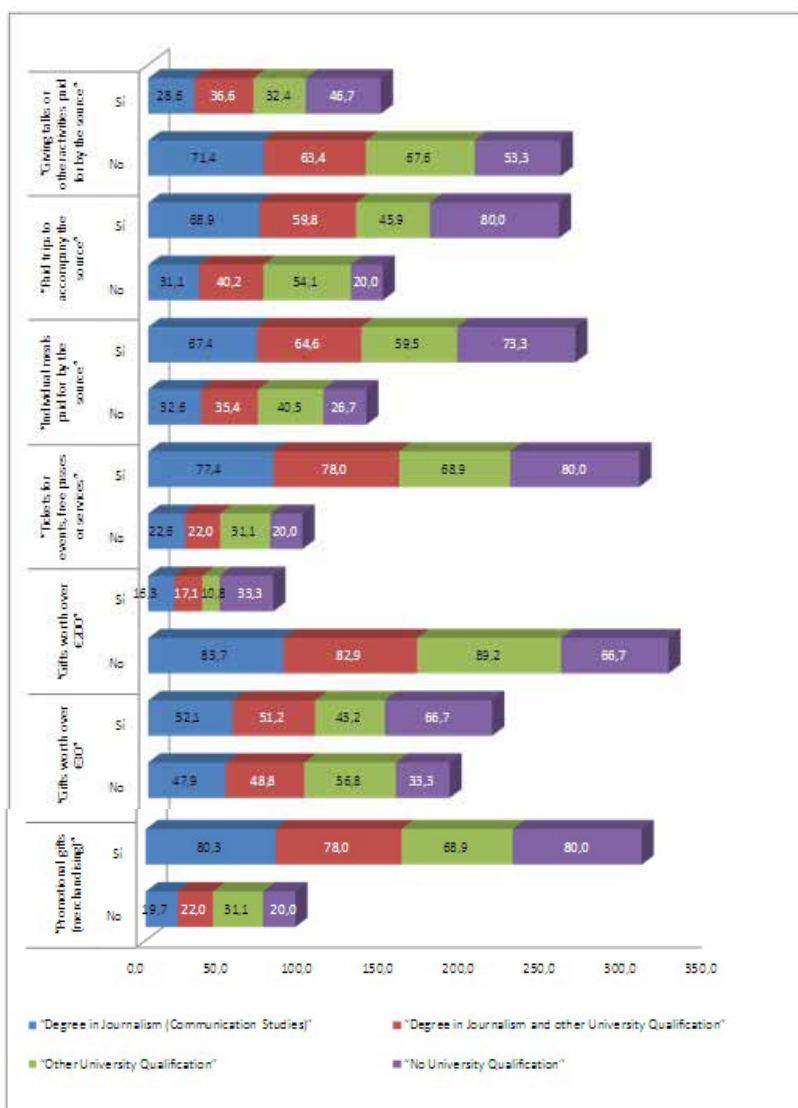
Graph 2. Acceptance of tickets and free passes by gender



The less skilled have fewer qualms in accepting any kind of gift

The willingness to participate in paid trips to accompany the source differs depending on the educational level of the respondents. While those with degrees in journalism and those holding a second degree present values very close to each other – although somewhat more permissive in the case of those with degrees only in journalism - those who hold a different degree are more reluctant: more than a half would resist. At the other extreme, respondents without a university degree are more likely to approve. This increased lenience extends also to all the gifts considered (Graph 3).

Graph 3. Acceptance of gifts by educational level



Internet professionals are more inclined to accept gifts

Professionals who are connected to magazines, Internet and TV channels show higher levels of acceptance for more expensive gifts. The greatest difference can be seen in those gifts valued at more than €200: while 28% of workers connected to digital media do not object at all to gifts of these types, only 4% of radio journalists would accept them.

If we look at the services offered by the source (meals, trips or tickets for events), professionals employed by magazines and television channels continue to show the highest percentages of acceptance, except for the case of individual meals paid for by the source, a practice which turns out to be illicit for half of the interviewees who work in television. Professionals connected to daily newspapers and – surprisingly – news agencies are the most critical of services of this type and both show high levels of disapproval.

Otherwise, and considering in general any type of gift, it is the Internet professionals who show the highest levels of acceptance, except for variable gifts worth more than €30 and [being paid for] giving talks (Table 2). In the remaining categories, the results are similar.

Table 2. Acceptance of gifts by principal place of employment in the medium

		Daily Newspaper	Magazine	Radio	TV	Internet	Press Office	News agency	Others
Promotional gifts (merchandising)	No	28,6	14,4	24,0	21,7	11,9	22,6	22,2	47,4
	Yes	71,4	85,6	76,0	78,3	88,1	77,4	77,8	52,6
Gifts worth over €30	No	46,7	41,1	64,0	39,1	42,9	60,7	44,4	63,2
	Yes	53,3	58,9	36,0	60,9	57,1	39,3	55,6	36,8
Gifts worth over €200	No	86,8	77,8	96,0	87,0	71,4	86,9	83,3	94,7
	Yes	13,2	22,2	4,0	13,0	28,6	13,1	16,7	5,3
Tickets for events, free passes or services	No	31,9	13,3	24,0	17,4	11,9	31,0	27,8	31,6
	Yes	68,1	86,7	76,0	82,6	88,1	69,0	72,2	68,4
Individual meals paid for by the source	No	34,1	32,2	28,0	47,8	23,8	33,3	38,9	57,9
	Yes	65,9	67,8	72,0	52,2	76,2	66,7	61,1	42,1
Paid trips to accompany the source	No	43,3	25,6	36,0	39,1	28,6	45,2	30,6	47,4
	Yes	56,7	74,4	64,0	60,9	71,4	54,8	69,4	52,6
Giving talks or other activities paid for by the source	No	75,6	62,2	68,0	69,6	71,4	61,9	75,0	73,7
	Yes	24,4	37,8	32,0	30,4	28,6	38,1	25,0	26,3

Producers and editors are most disposed to accepting gifts

Journalists who work in production are the ones most inclined to accept gifts from their sources: seven out of ten of those surveyed would accept gifts valued at over €30, while three out of ten who work in photography or graphics share this attitude (Table 3).

Text editors are equally inclined to accept gifts. Together with the production staff, they are the professionals who have the greatest leaning for the following gifts: merchandising, gifts valued between €30 and €200, individual lunches and trips that are paid for. Editors also show the greatest acceptance of tickets for events, free passes or free services: eight out of ten confess that they are in agreement with receiving them.

In contrast to this, both press photographers and television cameramen/women are somewhat more critical of these practices. The difference may be seen above all in the acceptance of tickets for events, free passes or free services, given that half of the photographers or cameramen/women are opposed to bonuses of this type. Otherwise, the scant sample of professionals working in graphics or design warns us not to confer too much reliability on the results for this variable.

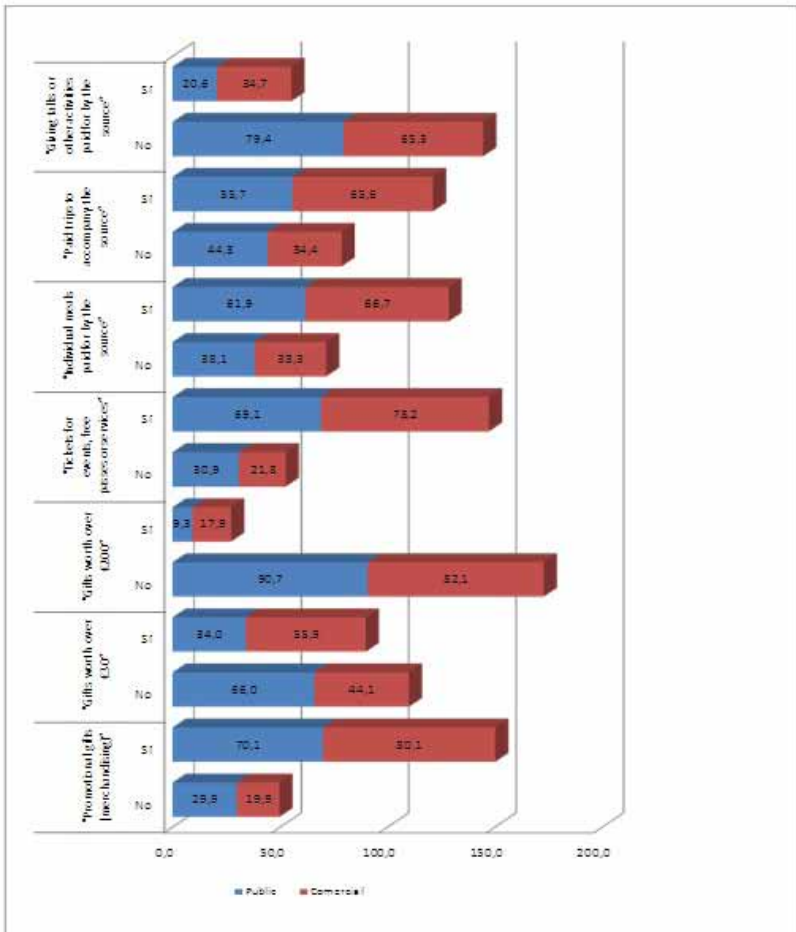
Table 3. Acceptance of gifts by professional function

		Text editor	Press photographer or television cameraman	Integrated text and image	Production	Graphics and Design
Promotional gifts (merchandising)	No	20,2	44,4	29,7	27,3	33,3
	Yes	79,8	55,6	70,3	72,7	66,7
Gifts worth over €30	No	48,2	66,7	64,9	33,3	66,7
	Yes	51,8	33,3	35,1	66,7	33,3
Gifts worth over €200	No	82,6	88,9	94,6	81,8	100,0
	Yes	17,4	11,1	5,4	18,2	
Tickets for events, free passes or services	No	21,4	44,4	37,8	30,3	
	Yes	78,6	55,6	62,2	69,7	100,0
Individual meals paid for by the source	No	33,3	44,4	43,2	33,3	33,3
	Yes	66,7	55,6	56,8	66,7	66,7
Paid trips to accompany the source	No	35,6	55,6	45,9	36,4	
	Yes	64,4	44,4	54,1	63,6	100,0
Giving talks or other activities paid for by the source	No	69,0	66,7	81,1	54,5	33,3
	Yes	31,0	33,3	18,9	45,5	66,7

Public sector journalists are more critical of the acceptance of gifts

For all the types of gifts evaluated, workers employed in public media are less permissive [about accepting them] when compared to the results obtained for those employed in private media (Graph 3). The most important difference can be observed in gifts valued at over €30. The percentages are more similar when it comes to accepting tickets for events, free passes or free services.

Graph 3. Acceptance of gifts by type of company



Workers in small companies are the most reluctant to accept gifts

The results show that workers in medium-sized companies, with between 26 and 50 employees, are most given to receiving simple gifts of a merchandising type (Table 4). In any case, and with a wider reading/interpretation, it is confirmed, once again, as was pointed out in the qualitative analysis, that journalists in general do not think it unsuitable to accept gifts with low value. Their acceptance of this practice, however, decreases as the value of the gift rises. Otherwise, workers in small companies of between one and five employees are the most opposed to any type of gifts, especially paid trips to accompany the source.

Table 4. Acceptance of gifts by company size

		Self-employed	Between one and five employees	Between six and twenty-five employees	Between twenty-six and fifty employees	Over fifty employees
Promotional gifts (merchandising)	No	29,4	27,3	15,7	7,3	25,4
	Yes	70,6	72,7	84,3	92,7	74,6
Gifts worth over €30	No	47,1	48,5	48,6	53,7	48,6
	Yes	52,9	51,5	51,4	46,3	51,4
Gifts worth over € 200	No	82,4	87,9	84,3	87,8	82,7
	Yes	17,6	12,1	15,7	12,2	17,3
Tickets for events, free passes or services	No	17,6	27,3	21,4	22,0	25,0
	Yes	82,4	72,7	78,6	78,0	75,0
Individual meals paid for by the source	No	47,1	42,4	32,9	31,7	33,5
	Yes	52,9	57,6	67,1	68,3	66,5
Paid trips to accompany the source	No	35,3	51,5	37,1	31,7	35,6
	Yes	64,7	48,5	62,9	68,3	64,4
Giving talks or other activities paid for by the source	No	70,6	63,6	60,0	68,3	71,7
	Yes	29,4	36,4	40,0	31,7	28,3

Editorial assistants are more lenient when it comes to justifying various gifts

If we look at professional ranks, we can see that assistant newsroom staff members are those most disposed towards traveling free to accompany the source. Their attitude is also more lenient when justifying the acceptance of gifts valued at over €200, individual meals or giving talks which are paid for by the source.

However, it is useful to recall that according to the qualitative analysis, two of the thirty interviewees recognized that those most smothered with attentions were those who hold relevant posts in the media – especially managers/directors – while both assistant editors and editors only had access to gifts with low value (merchandising).

Table 5. Acceptance of gifts by rank

		Assistant editors or equivalent	Editors or equivalent	Manager or equivalent	Executive Editor or equivalent	Directors	Others
Promotional gifts (merchandising)	No	25,0	18,0	22,4	25,5	20,0	40,6
	Yes	75,0	82,0	77,6	74,5	80,0	59,4
Gifts worth over €30	No	50,0	44,1	53,1	50,0	47,7	65,6
	Yes	50,0	55,9	46,9	50,0	52,3	34,4
Gifts worth over €200	No	62,5	83,8	85,7	81,8	82,6	96,9
	Yes	37,5	16,2	14,3	18,2	17,4	3,1
Tickets for events, free passes or services	No	12,5	17,1	32,7	18,2	27,1	31,3
	Yes	87,5	82,9	67,3	81,8	72,9	68,8
Individual meals paid for by the source	No	12,5	36,9	42,9	25,5	31,6	46,9
	Yes	87,5	63,1	57,1	74,5	68,4	53,1
Paid trips to accompany the source	No		30,6	32,7	33,3	42,6	50,0
	Yes	100,0	69,4	67,3	66,7	57,4	50,0
Giving talks or other activities paid for by the source	No	37,5	71,2	73,5	64,8	67,1	71,9
	Yes	62,5	28,8	26,5	35,2	32,9	28,1

Art and entertainment, an area prone to receiving tickets for events, free passes and services

Depending on the area that journalists cover, significant correlations arise regarding promotional gifts and meals that are paid for. In this connection, journalists working in the areas of local politics, art and entertainment, technology or the gossip press are those who in greater measure accept gifts. As was to be expected, the area of art and entertainment shows itself to be clearly in favor of taking advantage of tickets for events and free passes, something which has in fact become a habitual practice in these departments.

Nevertheless, the small sample and the unequal involvement of the interviewees with the different areas suggest prudence when looking at the results for some of them, in which the involvement was minor (technology and gossip press).

The results are again in line with the qualitative analysis, in which three of the interviewees coincided in warning of a difference between subject areas. Thus, in the political ambit – especially at the national and regional levels – gifts are notably scarcer and less well-regarded than in other informative areas, since the intention to influence the journalist

Table 6. Acceptance of gifts by subject area

		International	Spanish politics	Regional politics	Local politics, Opinion	Opinion	Economics and Finance	Society	Arts and Entertainment	Science and Technology	Sports	Gossip column	Others	Indifferents at the same time
Promotional gifts	No	23,5	41,9	25,0	10,0	36,4	15,1	30,6		20,7	33,3		11,1	22,0
	Yes	76,5	58,1	75,0	90,0	63,6	84,9	69,4	100,0	79,3	66,7	100,0	88,9	78,0
Gifts worth over €30	No	64,7	60,5	25,0	60,0	45,5	32,9	58,3	30,0	51,7	47,6	100,0	46,3	52,5
	Yes	35,3	39,5	75,0	40,0	54,5	67,1	41,7	70,0	48,3	52,4		53,7	47,5
Gifts worth over € 200	No	88,2	93,0	50,0	90,0	90,9	79,5	86,1	70,0	79,3	85,7	100,0	79,6	86,0
	Yes	11,8	7,0	50,0	10,0	9,1	20,5	13,9	30,0	20,7	14,3		20,4	14,0
Tickets for events, free passes or services	No	23,5	39,5	25,0	30,0	45,5	24,7	22,2		17,2	28,6		14,8	23,0
	Yes	76,5	60,5	75,0	70,0	54,5	75,3	77,8	100,0	82,8	71,4	100,0	85,2	77,0
Individual meals paid for by the source	No	29,4	39,5	25,0	50,0	54,5	20,5	52,8	10,0	31,0	42,9		35,2	35,0
	Yes	70,6	60,5	75,0	50,0	45,5	79,5	47,2	90,0	69,0	57,1	100,0	64,8	65,0
Paid trips to accompany the source	No	47,1	55,8	25,0	20,0	63,6	30,1	33,3	20,0	34,5	52,4		29,6	35,4
	Yes	52,9	44,2	75,0	80,0	36,4	69,9	66,7	80,0	65,5	47,6	100,0	70,4	64,6
Giving talks or other activities paid for by the source	No	76,5	83,7	50,0	70,0	72,7	65,8	66,7	50,0	62,1	81,0	100,0	57,4	70,7
	Yes	23,5	16,3	50,0	30,0	27,3	34,2	33,3	50,0	37,9	19,0		42,6	29,3

Journalists at the provincial level are prone to receiving presents

Regarding the scope of coverage of the medium, professionals who work at a provincial level are those most given to admitting presents from their sources, above all those worth more than €30, and trips which are paid for by their sources. It is in this last category that the biggest difference with respect to their colleagues may be observed.

Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out that these same journalists are those who reject most vehemently the idea of accepting gifts worth more than €200, while those working on a more local level would be the most disposed towards accepting them. In contrast, the most severe in this respect are the journalists who work on an international level. These professionals, in fact, are those who show the lowest levels of acceptance of practically all gifts studied.

Table 7. Acceptance of gifts by scope of the medium

		Local or regional	Provincial	Spain	International	Other
Promotional gifts (merchandising)	No	14,3		20,9	25,2	34,6
	Yes	85,7	100,0	79,1	74,8	65,4
Gifts worth over €30	No	50,0	23,1	45,5	54,5	69,2
	Yes	50,0	76,9	54,5	45,5	30,8
Gifts worth over € 200	No	71,4	92,3	82,1	87,0	88,5
	Yes	28,6	7,7	17,9	13,0	11,5
Tickets for events, free passes or services	No	28,6	23,1	23,5	23,6	26,9
	Yes	71,4	76,9	76,5	76,4	73,1
Individual meals paid for by the source	No	35,7	23,1	31,6	40,7	34,6
	Yes	64,3	76,9	68,4	59,3	65,4
Paid trips to accompany the source	No	42,9	7,7	33,0	41,5	57,7
	Yes	57,1	92,3	67,0	58,5	42,3
Giving talks or other activities paid by the source	No	57,1	61,5	68,2	68,3	80,8
	Yes	42,9	38,5	31,8	31,7	19,2

Coincidence between professionals who are most ideologically opposed

Those journalists who are positioned at either extreme of the ideological scale show practically identical results concerning the gifts

evaluated. The greatest differences are to be found in their acceptance of tickets for events, free passes or services and in giving talks which are paid for by the source. Thus, while the interviewees most linked to the left are more disposed to giving talks or to carrying out other activities paid for by the source, those more akin to right-wing positions are more partial to taking advantage of tickets for events and free passes.

Regarding journalists who take more moderate stances, those professing center-right ideologies seem more inclined to accept gifts than those who are situated closer to the left. This tendency is evidenced when evaluating the acceptability of gifts worth more than €200 and the possibilities of giving talks which are paid for by the source. In the latter case, center-right journalists appear to be highly predisposed, when compared to the average results for the overall sample.

Table 8. Acceptance of results by ideology

		Far left	2,0	3,0	Center	5,0	6,0	Far right
Promotional gifts (merchandising)	No		28,6	19,6	23,5	16,7		
	Yes	100,0	71,4	80,4	76,5	83,3	100,0	
Gifts worth over €30	No	100,0	48,6	50,0	52,2	30,6	100,0	
	Yes		51,4	50,0	47,8	69,4		
Gifts worth over € 200	No	100,0	80,0	87,0	85,8	69,4	100,0	
	Yes		20,0	13,0	14,2	30,6		
Tickets for events, free passes or services	No	100,0	22,9	24,6	24,1	19,4		
	Yes		77,1	75,4	75,9	80,6	100,0	
Individual meals paid for by the source	No	100,0	30,0	37,7	35,2	22,2	100,0	
	Yes		70,0	62,3	64,8	77,8		
Paid trips to accompany the source	No		31,4	36,2	40,4	33,3		
	Yes	100,0	68,6	63,8	59,6	66,7	100,0	
Giving talks or other activities paid for by the source	No		71,4	70,3	67,1	61,1	100,0	
	Yes	100,0	28,6	29,7	32,9	38,9		

Those earning less are more critical of the acceptance of physical gifts

According to their level of earnings, it is curious that those professionals who have no earnings are the least predisposed to receiving gifts, either promotional or worth more than €200. This reluctance, however, is reduced if free services such as tickets for events, meals and trips are evaluated.

Professionals earning between €1,000 and €2,000 monthly are the most given to accepting courtesies. Those whose monthly salary is higher than €2,000 are also receptive, though less so.

Table 9. Acceptance of gifts by level of monthly earnings

		"No earnings"	"Less than €500"	"Between 500,01 and 1.000"	"Between 1.001 and 1.500"	"Between 1.500,1 and 2.000"	"Between 2.000,1 and 3.000"	"Over 3.000"
Promotional gifts (merchandising)	No	33,3	33,3	21,1	11,1	18,8	26,3	23,8
	Yes	66,7	66,7	78,9	88,9	81,3	73,7	76,2
Gifts worth over €30	No	73,3	66,7	47,4	37,0	48,4	50,0	50,4
	Yes	26,7	33,3	52,6	63,0	51,6	50,0	49,6
Gifts worth over € 200	No	86,7	100,0	73,7	75,9	87,5	82,2	87,7
	Yes	13,3		26,3	24,1	12,5	17,8	12,3
Tickets for events, free passes or services	No	13,3	50,0	10,5	14,8	20,3	24,6	30,8
	Yes	86,7	50,0	89,5	85,2	79,7	75,4	69,2
Individual meals paid for by the source	No	46,7	83,3	21,1	35,2	40,6	32,2	31,5
	Yes	53,3	16,7	78,9	64,8	59,4	67,8	68,5
Paid trips to accompany the source	No	40,0	66,7	26,3	24,1	40,6	28,8	47,3
	Yes	60,0	33,3	73,7	75,9	59,4	71,2	52,7
Giving talks or other activities paid for by the source	No	66,7	83,3	63,2	53,7	70,3	71,2	71,3
	Yes	33,3	16,7	36,8	46,3	29,7	28,8	28,7

Conclusions

Gifts which cause journalists the fewest ethical dilemmas are promotional ones of low value, such as *merchandising*, tickets for events, services and free passes as well as meals and trips which are paid for by the source. On the other hand, a good many journalists seem reluctant

to accept presents of more than €30 in value, to give talks which are paid for by the source and, above all, to accept gifts of over €200 in value, as these are understood to be excesses which are usually aimed at seriously compromising their journalistic impartiality. In general, services are seen as more acceptable than any other type of material compensation.

The qualitative analysis allows for three views of the problem: one that is rigid, another which is lax, and a third that is flexible. The first proposes drastically eliminating all gifts to avoid information becoming contaminated. The second is opposed to this and suggests not limiting them at all. The motives for this are: a) returning gifts could be seen as discourteous; b) gifts may be useful for understanding information better and c) they are in any case not enough to distort the journalist's judgment. The third stance, more flexible and occupying a middle ground between the first two, proposes not to eliminate gifts but to restrict them in some way. To this end various formulas are suggested. Most of them point once again - as we have been able to see in different parts of our research (Alsius *et al.*, 2009; Maciá, Herrera and Real, 2009; Herrera, Maciá and Real, 2009; Herrera *et al.*, 2009 y Maciá y Herrera, 2009) - to personal judgment and individual ethics, which once more appear as constant factors when it comes to discerning "that which is ethical" and that which is not.

Analyzing more deeply, the variables which maintain a closer statistical correlation with the acceptance of different gifts and presents are: age, level of training, the medium in which the journalist works, professional function and rank, the type and size of the company, the subject area that the journalist covers, the scope of diffusion of the medium, the scale of ideological positioning and the level of earnings. However, other variables seem to have no relation to the object of the study. They are: current work situation, the municipality where one works and the perception of problems which most affect the profession.

In general, journalists who are most predisposed to accepting gifts are young journalists, those who do not have a degree, those who work on the Internet and producers, editors and assistant editors. Those who are most critical [of the giving and accepting of gifts] are journalists who are employed by public enterprises and those who work in small companies. Journalists who are situated at the ideological extremes show - curiously - identical results for all types of gifts.

Finally, certain groups are willing to accept a certain type of gifts or attentions, although not necessarily all of them. This is the case of women, who are more partial than men to receiving tickets for events and free

passes. It is also the case of journalists who do not receive any earnings, who are more critical of the receipt of physical objects but are less so when it comes to accepting services which are paid for by the source.

NOTES

- 1 Spanish sayings and proverbs are rich with phrases which colloquially transmit the image of gifts and the threat that gift giving can pose for personal integrity. “Hoy por ti, mañana por mí” (Today for you, tomorrow for me), “Favor con favor se paga” (A favor is repaid by another favor), and “Regalos, regalos, ¿a cuántos buenos hicisteis malos!” (Gifts, gifts, how many good men have you made bad?) or “A la sombra del favor, crecen vicios”(Vice grows in the shadow of favor).
- 2 The concept can be found in a ruling on independence and gifts (number 3, point 1) written by the Tribunal Nacional de Ética y Disciplina del Colegio de Periodistas de Chile (National Court of Ethics and Discipline of the Chilean Journalists Association).
- 3 According to the Society of Professional Journalists: “Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity”.
- 4 See for example, article 19 of the Código deontológico de la profesión periodística (Deontological Code of Journalists) of the Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa de España (the Federation of Spanish Press Associations) or article 7 of the Código deontológico de los periodistas catalanes (Deontological Code of Catalanian Journalists).
- 5 See article 22 of the Código de Ética Periodística del Foro Periodismo Argentino (Journalistic Code of Ethics of the Journalists Forum of Argentina); article III [B] 5) of Estatuto Marco. Colegio de Periodistas de Cataluña (Statute of the Journalists Association of Catalonia); article 7 of the Código Deontológico do Jornalismo Galego (Deontological Code of Journalism in Galicia) and article 9.10 of Estatuto de Información de Radiotelevisión Española (Statute regarding Information for Spanish Radio-Television).
- 6 See article 2.5 of the Libro de Estilo de Telemadrid (Telemadrid Style Guide); articles 2.3 and 2.4 of the Libro de Estilo de Canal Sur Televisión (Canal Sur Television Style Guide); Chapter II, article IX of Código de Ética dos Jornalistas Brasileiros (Code of Ethics for Brazilian Journalists).
- 7 In this respect, see, for example, article 16.2 of the Código deontológico

- de Sindicato de Periodistas de Madrid (Deontological Code of the Journalists Union of Madrid), article 9.1 of the Estatuto de Redacción de *El Mundo* (El Mundo News Editing Statute) , article 11 of the Estatuto de Redacción (The News Editing Statute) of *El Periódico de Catalunya* or article 4.6b of the Estatuto de Redacción de la Radiotelevisión Valenciana (News Editing Statute of Valencia Radio-Television).
- 8 Article VI of the Libro de estilo (Style Guide) of *El Mundo*; article 4.2 of Principios de actuación de los medios de la Corporación Catalana de Radio y Televisión (Principles of Conduct for Media of The Catalanian Radio and Television Corporation). Along the same lines, article 3.16 of the Estatuto de Redacción (The News Editing Statute) of *La Vanguardia* states that “internships and professional activities will not be affected by this restriction”.
 - 9 See Article 17- Estatuto de Redacción (News Editing Statute) of the EFE Agencia (Agency).
 - 10 According to the *Washington Post*: “We accept no gifts from news sources. We accept no free trips. We neither seek nor accept preferential treatment that might be rendered because of the positions we hold. Exceptions to the no-gift rule are few and obvious—in invitations to meals, for example—. Free admissions to any event that is not free to the public are prohibited. The only exception is for seats not sold to the public, as in a press box. Whenever possible, arrangements will be made to pay for such seats” (“The *Washington Post* Standards and Ethics”). For the *Chicago Tribune*: “No merchandise, cash, services or anything else of value should be solicited. Unsolicited merchandise whose value exceeds that of a key chain will be returned or donated to charity by the newspaper. Please send any such merchandise to the Operations Editor or his assistant for processing. Staff members will be notified of the donation. Merchandise used for a story or its illustration should be purchased by the Tribune or returned to its source immediately. If return is not practical, the merchandise should be disposed of by the newspaper. Merchandise should not be kept for a staffer’s personal enjoyment. Exception: A staff member may keep a book or recording that was reviewed in the Tribune. Staffers may also keep unsolicited books sent to them as individuals by publishers or authors seeking attention for the work. In either case, such items may not be sold. Books or recordings sent to staffers strictly as gifts must be dealt with like any other gifts of significant value” (“The *Chicago Tribune’s* editorial ethics policy”).
 - 11 The head researcher for the whole project is Dr. Salvador Alsius Clavera, from the Universidad Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona. The head researchers of the other three universities participating in the study are Dr. Carlos Maciá Barber (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), Dr. Begoña Zalbidea (Universidad

d*El País* Vasco) and Dr. Juan Carlos Suárez (Universidad de Sevilla).

- 12 In presenting the results of the analysis, we proceed in the following order: Madrid, Catalonia, Andalusia and the Basque Country. This order corresponds to the size of the group of professionals in each of the autonomous regions.
- 13 On this point, each team had full autonomy to entrust the field work to the institution of its choice, always provided, of course, that maximum quality of the study was guaranteed. The Universidad Pompeu Fabra assigned its field work to the Catalonia College of Political and Social Scientists; the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid team assigned its field work to the Madrid College of Political and Social Scientists; the team from the Universidad d*El País* Vasco chose the public opinion research company Quor and the Universidad de Sevilla team chose the company IC Comunicación.
- 14 The intonation with which the interviewee pronounced a word or phrase, the delays in their replies and the silences during the talk sometimes turn out to be the most significant aspects.
- 15 The exact number of these surveys varied according to the different sizes of the groups of professionals registered in each autonomous region. Accordingly, a total of 410 surveys were carried out in Madrid, 225 in Andalusia, 172 in the Basque Country and 1198 in Catalonia, the autonomous region which achieved a more acceptable response rate.
- 16 This type of questionnaire was chosen because web technologies can overcome media professionals' well-known limitations of *Time* and space, so those surveyed could respond at any *Time* and from any place with access to the Internet. In all cases, the sampling was of the simple random type.

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