

# MEDIA ROLES AND ETHICS

## Perceptions of Brazilian, American and French Journalists

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes self-perceptions of media roles and ethics of a sample of Brazilian journalists and compares them with American and French journalists. French and American styles of journalism have had major influences on Brazilian newspapers at different points in time. The study included a self-administered survey with 402 journalists working for 13 leading news organizations and personal interviews with renowned journalists of Sao Paulo-Brazil's main media hub. The typical Brazilian journalist in this study was a young white middle-class male, politically left leaning oriented, more likely to be married and Catholic. Respondents held a pluralistic view regarding media roles and expressed higher tolerance of controversial journalistic practices compared to that of their counterparts. Findings are in line with the social-political environment in which journalists operate. They do not enjoy special rights of access to government information, tend to distrust public institutions and have still been adapting to press freedom since the country's redemocratization.

**KEY-WORDS** media roles, ethics, survey, self-perceptions, journalists

The analysis of the forces that shape media content at different levels, such as journalists and their social environment, seems crucial to the understanding of how news is produced and reported to the audience. One area of the study of influences on media content, especially the analysis of journalists' attitudes and orientation, has been known as media sociology, a specialty inspired by occupational sociology.

This body of empirical research has focused mainly on journalists in developed countries and not as much on journalists in developing countries that are still in search of their own definition of democracy. The study of journalists in developing countries involves the replication of hypotheses about influences on media content in different cultural settings. According to McLeod and Blumler (1987), the replication of

hypotheses forces research to reconceptualize theories and transcend what they called “naive universalism”(p.279). For example, journalists’ professional orientation and ethics should differ in varying conditions and produce different influences on media content.

This paper analyzes perceptions of media roles and ethics of a sample of Brazilian journalists and compares them with American and French journalists. French and American styles of journalism have had major influences on Brazilian newspapers at different points in time. This paper focuses on two research questions:

1. To what extent do Brazilian journalists hold a different mix of interpreter, disseminator and adversarial roles compared to American and French journalists?

2. To what extent do Brazilian journalists have standards of journalistic practices that differ from those of American and French journalists?

Brazilians cope with a great number of social and economic disparities. The country fits the description of Latin America as a region located “halfway between accelerated underdevelopment and compulsive modernization” (Martin-Barbero, 1988). Reinforcing Barbero’s view is the existence of a contemporary, sophisticated print media read by the country’s elite and ignored by the country’s millions of illiterate citizens.

Thus, one expects to find in Brazil signs of a modern press operating in an underdeveloped environment. It is in this scenario, amid so many social contrasts, that Brazilian journalists practice their craft. It may be that these journalists have their value system defined mostly by the local social-political environment. However, it is possible that “journalists approach their jobs under the influence of highly similar self-images, news values and legitimating creeds” (McLeod and Blumler, 1987, p. 278). This phenomenon appears to happen among journalists in some developed countries to varying degrees. It might also be the case of journalists in a developing country such as Brazil.

### **The Brazilian Context**

Brazil has one of the largest and best-developed press systems in all Latin America. There are about 300 newspapers in Brazil. Only four dailies, however, have the circulation and national clout to significantly influence national opinion and politics. They are *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, *Jornal do Brasil* and *O Globo*, the latter two being located in Rio de Janeiro. The country’s elite and the middle class read these newspapers, while most of the population gets its news from television and radio.

In addition, a few weekly newsmagazines such as *Veja* and especially the influential television network *Globo* play a significant role in national politics.

In the past fifteen years, the Brazilian media have enjoyed thorough press freedom because of the country's democratization. This new political situation has benefited both the newspaper industry and journalists. Such an environment presented an excellent opportunity to examine journalists as a professional group in a fresh democratic society. Democratization and press freedom have initiated a national debate about the journalists' role in Brazilian society after 22 years of military dictatorship (1964-1986). Such a debate has been systematically covered by websites dedicated to media criticism such as *Observatório da Imprensa* (<http://www2.uol.com.br/observatorio>) as well as by other websites linked to journalists' associations such as the National Federation of Journalists, Fenaj (<http://www.fenaj.org.br>), and by ombudsmen columns at daily newspapers such as *Folha de S. Paulo*.

The controversy about the journalists' role escalated after a series of political events that began with a popular national campaign for direct elections in 1984 that was embraced by the media. It continued with the media accusations of corruption and clientelism against President Jose Sarney, who ended his term in 1989, and had its apex after the media played a powerful part in the impeachment of former President Collor de Mello for his participation in a corruption ring in 1992 (Amaral and Guimarães, 1994).

The Collor scandal gave the media an opportunity to try their own agenda. First, professionals and their news organizations' managers joined forces to send the state a message, that is, the media were ready to act as a real watchdog of the government. Second, the belligerent coverage carried on by the print media was a successful marketing strategy boosting circulation and advertising sales. Finally, the media reaffirmed the return of press freedom by confronting the state in a democratic environment free from government censorship, confiscation, harassment or prosecution.

Apparently, the new democratic environment intoxicated news organizations. According to some Brazilian researchers, the media turned into a new political force in the country and adopted an adversarial role by denouncing everything and everybody to a point where they may have caused Brazilians to lose faith in most institutions in the country (Amaral and Guimarães, 1994; Marques de Melo, 1995). Signs of media dissatisfaction were everywhere.

Major flaws in the profession were noted by journalists from *Folha de S. Paulo*, a major daily newspaper that conducts public discussions about its norms through the ombudsman's column and seminars:

"Today's journalism is based on investigations sometimes inaccurate about wrongdoings in the public administration. Stories are told in authoritative, sometimes bombastic form. The impeachment... revitalized the political-institutional function of journalism and revealed flaws due to increased influence by the media. As the critical perception of the media toward the institutional and public powers has grown, so has the criticism toward the media. The hostility toward the media consists of three charges: the media is superficial, aggressive and pessimistic." Dudi Maia Rosa and Carlos Fajardo, "Projeto Editorial 1997" ([www.uol.com.br/fsp/brasil/fc170805.htm](http://www.uol.com.br/fsp/brasil/fc170805.htm) August 17th 1997).

A national poll conducted by the Vox Populi Institute in November of 1997 with 790 people around the country reported that 65% of the respondents thought the main role of the media was to report facts objectively, avoiding bias. Subjects pointed out four main problems within the media. About 57 percent said the media made accusations without evidence; 41 percent said the media violated people's privacy; 36 percent said the media neglected important information in the stories; and 35 percent accused the media of favoring issues according to the news organizations' own interests.

Also, the respondents ranked their degree of distrust regarding professional categories. Forty percent said they mistrusted journalists, along with judges, and 42 percent said they mistrusted media owners. The degree of suspicion toward journalists and media owners was superseded by the respondents' distrust of Congress representatives (92 percent), state secretaries (88 percent) and business owners (51 percent) (Antunes, 1997).

The media's mood has alternated between short periods of optimism and long periods of skepticism since the consolidation of the democratic transition conducted by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, elected in 1994 and reelected in 1998. Cardoso, a distinguished sociologist who embraced professional politics, said in 1997 that Brazilian newspapers were prisoners of their own headlines. Asked in an interview to evaluate the press performance under democracy, he answered:

"The press is searching for tragedies. The headlines need to shock readers. Instead of showing the normalization process, they focus on possible deviations. Newspapers' opinions change frequently.

Therefore, they misguide the reader. When I read about an issue on a paper, I check the competition for confirmation. It is like watching fireworks all the time. This permanent flickering of half-truths, that is, of subjective perceptions of reporters, editors and sources, may help to sell newspapers. Everybody plants fake stories. When I read the newspaper, I know who planted what. The planters of fake information end up believing each other... Does that inform the public?" (*Folha de S. Paulo*, March 9th 1997, [www.uol.com.br/fsp/mais/fs090304.htm](http://www.uol.com.br/fsp/mais/fs090304.htm)).

### **Brazilians' value system**

Brazilian journalists' value system appears to be formed by three distinct but related sources: the newsroom routines and organizational constraints shared by these professionals; the foreign influences on local journalistic patterns; and specific historical conditions and contextual variables such as the route taken by democratic consolidation. The interplay of these three sources pervades journalists' self-perceptions of their profession and helps them to define who they are and what they do.

In Brazil, journalists traditionally have shaped their professional orientation according to values inherited from both their indigenous culture and from European and American influences (Lins da Silva, 1991). Latin American newspaper editors have had access to European and American journalistic standards at different points in the evolution of newspaper development in the region. This access was facilitated by the nation's linkages to Europe and the United States to varying degrees (Pierce and Kent, 1985).

In the 19th century, Brazil's main source of cultural inspiration became France and its liberal ideals. French cultural missions visited the country in response to invitations by the Portuguese royal family established in the colony. French immigrants controlled all kinds of businesses, including major newspapers, while the elite sent its children to French schools (Sodré, 1976; Bahia, 1990). By then, getting an education meant acquiring a diploma--a distinguishing title--and a literary and abstract knowledge transmitted through commentary and speculation (Sodré, 1976). At the end of the 19th century, Brazilians experienced major changes with the end of the monarchy and of slavery and the beginning of the Republic. In the same period, the government stimulated European immigration while the newspapers sent their first foreign correspondents to Europe.

The first signs of American influence in Brazil and on Brazilian newspapers appeared in the 1920s, after economic and political interests held by the United States replaced traditional European interests such as the German, the British and the Dutch at the end of the First World War. The proximity between Brazilians and Americans translated into a strong economic and cultural move by the latter. After the 1940s, Brazilians became more familiar with American film, music and literature. The flow of Brazilian journalists and writers to the United States increased in the 1940s when Nelson Rockefeller, then director of the office of the Coordinator of Interamerican Affairs, sponsored excursions of Brazilian journalists to the United States (Lins da Silva, 1991). Many of these journalists sought the application of elements of the American style to Brazilian papers.

In recent years, Brazilian journalists have appeared to be more integrated into a global culture of journalistic practices, following growing globalization trends encouraged by the American press model. Therefore, foreign journalistic practices, especially the American model, have had a pervasive influence on Brazilian newsrooms and have ultimately affected news selection and decision-making processes in a possibly conflicting way while intertwining with Brazilian values.

### **Theoretical Approach**

The theoretical basis for this project comes from the perspective of occupational sociology. As Hirsh (1980) explained, occupational sociology in mass media focuses on roles and careers, the interaction of organizations and the individuals working for them as well as the routines and newsroom constraints faced by mass media workers.

Occupational sociology in mass media turned into a track termed “media sociology” and was launched by two classic studies done in the 1950s in the United States: the gatekeeping study by David White and the social control study by Warren Breed (White, 1950; Breed, 1955). Since these classical studies in the 1950s, American research has focused mainly on a micro-level sphere by describing how individuals within a social and occupational setting construct news. Conversely, European research has focused on ideological and institutional analyses by tackling questions involving the power exerted by various social institutions and structures and the entire society itself.

American research has been associated with a liberal-pluralist approach and is heavily grounded in empirical data. European research

has taken critical, cultural and Marxist approaches to study how social forces shape the news. Researchers in the two traditions examined the media in different contexts with divergent theoretical preoccupations and different research methods that stemmed from cultural and historical differences between the United States and Western European societies (Reese, Ballinger and Shoemaker, 1993; Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott, 1982).

In Latin America, scholars have usually followed European research trends for three major reasons. First, the region's Iberian and Hispanic cultural heritages, followed later by English and French influences, affected social science's practices. Secondly, Latin America's history of class relationships, political movements, poverty and economic instability have strongly influenced the region's communication scholarship and matched the conditions of critical, cultural and Marxist approaches. Third, media-government relations in Latin America have taken a distinct path from that of the United States because of cultural, economic and historic reasons (Marques de Melo, 1988; Martin-Barbero, 1988; Chaffee, Gomez-Palacio and. Rogers, 1990).

In sum, the American liberal-pluralist tradition sees society as a complex of equivalent competing groups and interests. Media organizations are perceived as autonomous enterprises in which journalists enjoy great autonomy free from the state, political parties and institutional pressures. European critical, cultural and Marxist traditions see society dominated by an elite. Media organizations are perceived as part of the ideological arena that rules society. Journalists have the illusion of autonomy, but in fact they internalize the norms of the dominant culture and reproduce them at work (Gurevitch, 1982, p.1-3).

At one time, the two competing perspectives seemed irreconcilable. More recently, the liberal-pluralist and the critical, cultural and Marxist perspectives have moved to a new path in which they form a diverse coalition of intellectual positions that can complement each other. Both American and European researchers have emphasized the interdependency of their approaches and managed to live in happy contradiction (Carey, 1997). It became clear that the study of the forces shaping the news requires levels of analysis that are interrelated. Hirsh (1980) proposed the study of three interdependent levels that he called models: occupational, organizational and institutional. Hirsh's argument was that individual in roles and occupational careers could not be divorced from organizational contexts, from technologies and markets, or from the surrounding political and cultural values of their societies.

This study hopes to offer a small step toward a conceptual integration in the field. The unit of analysis here is the individual--the journalist--through a self-administered survey of Brazilian journalists working at major news organizations in São Paulo, followed by personal interviews with renowned journalists. However, results of individuals' self-perceptions are contextualized in the light of elements of other levels of analysis such as newsroom routines and organizational constraints shared by these professionals, the foreign influences on local journalistic patterns, and specific historical conditions that have shaped the social-political environment. Elements from other levels were explicitly mentioned by journalists in the survey's open-ended questions and at personal interviews as factors that affect the professional views of journalists.

### **Method**

A self-administered survey was distributed to about one thousand full-time journalists working at five daily newspapers (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, *Jornal da Tarde*, *Gazeta Mercantil* and *DCI*), two news weekly magazines (*Veja* and *Isto É*), a bimonthly magazine (*Exame*), a monthly magazine (*Imprensa*), three TV stations (*Globo*, *Cultura* and *Bandeirantes*) and two news agencies (*Agência Estado* and *Agência Folha*) of São Paulo, Brazil, in May of 1998. The population sampled was obtained from an updated list owned by the local association of public relations agencies containing the names and the job titles of all full-time journalists working for all news organizations in São Paulo.

News organizations were selected based on their prominence. The news organizations selected for the study have national recognition, serve as role models to other media in Brazil, are more likely to produce serious, dependable journalism, have large circulation or audience, and are technologically updated. Furthermore, management at these news organizations was expected to cooperate with the survey and journalists were expected to be somewhat familiar with survey questionnaires. American techniques designed to improve response rates such as Dilman's method did not work with Brazilian subjects as anticipated. Personal contacts and networking were more efficient in prompting collaboration and generating trust than formal letters and follow-up cards. The questionnaire partially replicated Weaver and Wilhoit's 1982 and 1992 surveys with American journalists, published in 1986 and in 1996. It included some questions that were of specific interest to Brazilian journalism research. The questionnaire was refined after



a pretest with Brazilian foreign correspondents and stringers based in the United States. Results were compared to Weaver and Wilhoit's data, as well as to a French study conducted by Aralynn A. McMane in 1989. Some questions mirrored Weaver and Wilhoit's questions, especially those that allowed for comparisons among Brazilian, American, and French journalists. The questionnaire comprised 53 questions. It included a battery of questions about job satisfaction, autonomy, perceptions on public opinion, journalistic practices, ethics, and media roles. About 20 questions focused on demographic aspects.

## Results

The questionnaire had a response rate of 40%, which is considered satisfactory for Brazilian standards. A similar survey conducted in 1994 by Brazilian sociologist Adalberto Cardoso with journalists from different regions got a response rate of 32%. Out of the 402 subjects who returned the questionnaire, 57.5% were males and 42.5% were females. About 55% worked for daily newspapers, 19.4% worked for TV stations, 18.8% worked for newsmagazines, and 6.3% worked for news agencies.

The typical Brazilian journalist working for the leading news organizations in São Paulo-- the country's main media hub-- tended to be a young white middle-class male, politically left-leaning oriented, more likely to be married and Catholic. More than 80% of them were college graduates who majored in journalism. Having a degree in mass communication is more than an academic option; it has been a legal requirement for a journalist to have a registration at the Ministry of Education since 1969. Television was the medium that concentrates the highest percentage of journalism graduates, with more than half of them under 45 years.

Journalism is a profession that attracts young people in Brazil. More than two-thirds of the respondents were between 25 and 44 years old, with female journalists being younger than male journalists. The mean age for females was 34, with a mean of 11.33 years of experience as a full time journalist, while the mean age for males was 38, with a mean of 15.29 years of experience as a full time journalist. Females, perhaps because they were younger, were more likely to be single than married. Minorities were under-represented in the sample, as they tend to be in most professions in Brazil. Only 2.2% of the respondents classified themselves as African Brazilians and only 1.2% as Native Brazilians. However, about 16% of the respondents classified themselves as having mixed ancestry.

While most Brazilians tend to come from a mixed racial background and form a racial landscape that includes all colors, especially browns and tans, they hardly recognize themselves in terms of racial background.

While journalists are required by law to have a degree in communication to enter the field, very few continued their education beyond that. They said they would like to attend more workshops and complained that their news organizations did not allow them any free time to pursue further training or education. Some news organizations do promote workshops and offer their employees English courses. About 75% of the respondents said they were fluent in English, which in reality means they are more likely to read in English than to speak, and 45.3% said they were fluent in Spanish. Both languages are perceived as essential tools in the field.

The three foreign publications most frequently read by respondents were the *New York Times* (48.8%), *Newsweek* (38.3%), and *Time* (38.3%), followed by British publications such as *The Economist*, read by 33.3% of the respondents and *The Financial Times*, read by 24.4%. *Le Monde* was the only French publication read by a significant number of respondents, along with the Spanish newspaper *El País* and *Clarín of Argentina*. All three were read by 22% of respondents. CNN, which is constantly monitored in newsrooms, was watched by almost 80% of the respondents, followed by CBS (26.9%), and by BBC, along with other European public channels (22.1%).

Like journalists in other countries, respondents were not supportive of professional associations. Membership in these associations was low. Even the union, which defended journalists' rights during the military rule, has lost hundreds of members after membership became voluntary with the redemocratization process. At the time of this survey, 43% said they belonged to a union. These journalists tended to be more than 40 years old and had at least 15 years of professional experience.

In spite of distancing themselves from the union--traditionally a left-leaning organization--findings support the notion that Brazilians placed themselves left of the center (62.1%). Only 11% of the sample placed themselves to the right of center. Being at the left of the center is a long tradition among Brazilian journalists. In the last decades, journalism suffered the effects of a right-wing military rule that included censorship in the newsrooms and political persecution. Therefore, being to the left of the political spectrum is perceived by journalists as a logical choice.

However, there were limitations regarding the investigation of political views. In order to understand journalists' political views, the questionnaire should have included both verbal and numerical assessments of political

leaning to assure the accuracy of labels both within and across cultures, as suggested by McMane (1989) in her dissertation about French journalists (p. 95). McMane classified journalists as extreme left, left and center-left as well as extreme right, right and center right, which gives a more clear idea of their political position.

The majority of the respondents had no affinities with political parties. This finding was a major surprise compared to a survey conducted in 1994 (Herscovitz & Cardoso, 1998), when 30% of the journalists supported the left-leaning Worker's Party. The decreasing support for the Worker's Party by journalists parallels the population's indifference toward politics in Brazil. While the country's democratization process progresses, major continuities from the old order persist. Political parties are still weak, politicians lack credibility, and the state bureaucracy retains tremendous power over most aspects of social life.

### **Media Roles**

To what extent do Brazilian journalists hold a different mix of interpreter, disseminator and adversarial roles compared to American and French journalists? The questionnaire replicated Weaver and Wilhoit's inquiry on journalistic roles. Journalists were asked to rate the importance of the following eight "things the media do" (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996, p. 135): getting information quickly to the public, concentrating on news which is of interest to the widest public, providing entertainment, providing analysis and interpretation of complex problems, investigating claims and statements made by the government, developing intellectual and cultural interests of the public, being an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions, and avoiding stories with unverified content.

Table 1.1 indicates that respondents considered investigating government claims (65.7%), also known as the "watchdog role," as the most important of all "the things the media do," followed by getting information to the public quickly (63.7%). Providing analysis of complex problems and developing intellectual/cultural interests were also roles considered extremely important by respondents. About one-third of the respondents considered avoiding stories with unverified content as extremely important. Only 21.6% considered it extremely important to concentrate on the widest audience. Serving as an adversary of the government was rated as extremely important by 22.4% of the respondents. The adversarial role had the highest percentage of respondents saying it

was not important: 17.2.

Brazilians’ perceptions of some media roles had changed significantly by 1998 compared to a similar survey conducted in 1994, two years after the impeachment of President Collor de Mello (Hersckovitz & Cardoso, 1998, p. 425). Brazilians’ support for serving as an adversary of the government decreased drastically from 55% in 1994 to 22.4% in 1998. So did support for providing entertainment, which decreased from 30% to 16.2%, as well as concentrating on the widest audience, which went from 30% to 21.6%. This study confirmed the same trend verified in 1994, that is, Brazilians are more likely to support a combination of statements related to interpretive and disseminator roles.

**Table 1.1: Importance journalists assigned to media roles N= 402**

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Extremely Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Not Important</b>
Investigate government claims	65.7	29.4	4.5	5
Get information to public quickly	63.7	32.8	3.5	-
Provide analysis of complex problems	59.7	33.1	7.2	-
Develop intellectual/cultural interests	46.5	37.1	15.2	1.2
Avoid stories with unverified content	33.3	29.6	26.9	10.2
Serve as adversary of the government	22.4	26.6	33.8	17.2
Concentrate on widest audience	21.6	39.3	32.6	6.5
Provide entertainment	16.2	39.6	40.3	4.0

A comparison of the importance assigned to media roles by Brazilian, American, and French journalists, presented in Table 1.2, indicates similarities among the three groups. The three main media roles classified by Brazilians as extremely important were

“investigating government claims “(65.7%), “getting information to the public quickly” (63.7%), and “providing analysis of complex problems “(59.7%). Americans selected getting information to the public quickly (69%), investigating government claims (67%), and avoiding stories with unverified content (49%).

The French journalists chose avoiding stories with unverified content (73%), getting information quickly to the public (69%), investigating government claims, and providing analysis of complex problems (both with 40%). The three groups agreed on the importance of investigating government claims, which is the traditional “watchdog role,” and getting information to the public quickly as major media roles, which suggests that Brazilians, Americans, and French subscribe to a combination of interpretive and disseminator roles. Brazilian, American, and French journalists rated serving as an adversary of the government in sixth place with very similar percentages: 22.4%, 21%, and 17%, respectively. The media role providing entertainment and relaxation was perceived by the three groups as the least important.

**Table 1.2: Importance assigned to media roles by Brazilian, American and French journalists - percentage saying extremely important**

<b>Media Roles</b>	<b>Brazilian N= 402 1998</b>	<b>American N= 1,156 1992</b>	<b>French N= 484 1989</b>
Investigate government claims	65.7 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	67 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	40 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Get information to public quickly	63.7 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	69 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	69 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
Provide analysis of complex problems	59.7 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	48 (4 <sup>th</sup> )	40 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Develop intellectual/cultural interests	46.5 (4 <sup>th</sup> )	24 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	29 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
Avoid stories with unverified content	33.3 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	49 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	73 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
Serve as adversary of the government	22.4 (6 <sup>th</sup> )	21 (6 <sup>th</sup> )	17 (6 <sup>th</sup> )
Concentrate on widest audience	21.6 (7 <sup>th</sup> )	20 (7 <sup>th</sup> )	28 (5 <sup>th</sup> )
Provide entertainment	16.2 (8 <sup>th</sup> )	14 (8 <sup>th</sup> )	8 (7 <sup>th</sup> )

These results, however, should be viewed with caution since the Brazilian sample was taken six years later than the American sample and nine years later than the French was. Yet they do offer some latitude to examine the relationships of Brazilian, American and French role statements. Answers to the battery of questions on media roles were aggregated into attitudinal clusters through factor analysis in order to locate clusters of common elements. In Weaver and Wilhoit’s 1982 and 1992 surveys, factor analysis resulted in three main media roles named interpretive/investigative, disseminator and adversary. In 1992, the American study added a fourth role named populist mobilizer, which was not included in the Brazilian survey.

According to the latest Weaver and Wilhoit's study (1996), the interpretive/investigative role "remained the larger perception of American journalists" (p.137). This role combined investigating government claims, analyzing and interpreting complex problems, and discussing public policies in a timely manner. It was supported by 62.9% of the American journalists. The disseminator role, which combined getting information quickly to the public and avoiding stories with unverified content, was supported by 51.1% of the American journalists. The adversary role, supported by 17.6% of the American sample, consisted of serving as an adversary of the government and of businesses.

As in Weaver and Wilhoit's statistical analysis, this study employed a factor analysis procedure with principal component analysis with Varimax rotation and 1.00 in the diagonals of the correlation matrix. The three clusters that emerged accounted for 52.7% of the common variance and consisted of a different combination of variables than that of the American clusters. Table 1.3 presents the factor weights on media roles distributed in three clusters (interpretive, disseminator, and adversary) and the Cronbach's alphas, a measure of inter-item reliability for the clusters.

**Table 1.3: Factor loading on media roles**

<b>Media Roles</b>	<b>Factor 1 (Interpretive)</b>	<b>Factor 2 (Adversary)</b>	<b>Factor 3 (Disseminator)</b>
Get information to public quickly	-	-	.773
Provide analysis of complex problems	.680	-	-
Provide entertainment	.656	-	-
Investigate government claims	.665	-	-
Concentrate on widest audience	-	-	.673
Develop intellectual/cultural interests	.559	-	-
Serve as adversary of the government	-	.743	-
Avoid stories with unverified content	-	.681	-
<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>.5167</b>	<b>.3291</b>	<b>.3097</b>

Findings show that Brazilians support a different mix of interpreter, disseminator and adversarial roles than that of American journalists. Factor 1--the interpretive role--had a different weight than that of the U.S.

survey. The interpretive role consisted of providing analysis of complex problems, investigating government claims, providing entertainment, and developing intellectual and cultural interests. Factor 2--the adversary role-- had a different weight than that of the U.S. survey as well. The adversary role consisted of serving as an adversary of the government and added avoiding stories with unverified content. Factor 3--the disseminator role--consisted of getting information to the public quickly and concentrating on the widest audience.

The particular factor weight among Brazilians had some roles considered more important by respondents than others. This can be observed by examining the means for each question and the mean total for each media role as shown in Table 1.4. The outcome points to a combination of the interpretive and the disseminator roles as the larger perception of Brazilians journalists.

**Table: 1.4 Media roles and their mean values for each factor N=402**

<b>Functions</b>		<b>Means*</b>
<b>Interpretive</b>		
	Investigate government claims	3.60
	Provide Analysis of Complex Problems	3.52
	Develop Intellectual/Cultural Interests	3.28
	Provide Entertainment	2.67
	<b>Mean total</b>	<b>3.26</b>
<b>Adversary</b>		
	Avoid stories with unverified content	2.86
	Serve as adversary of the government	2.54
	<b>Mean total</b>	<b>2.70</b>
<b>Disseminator</b>		
	Provide information to the public quickly	3.60
	Concentrate on widest audience	2.76
	<b>Mean total</b>	<b>3.18</b>
*4 = extremely important, 3 = very important, 2 = somewhat important, 1 = not important.		

Respondents perceived investigating government claims and analyzing complex problems as the most salient components of the interpretive role. Journalists working at news agencies and at newspapers were more likely to perceive both dimensions as extremely important. Journalists working at TV stations were more likely to consider as extremely important developing cultural interests of the public and

providing entertainment. Journalists working at TV stations were less likely to support the roles of serving as an adversary to the government (14.1%) and avoiding stories with unverified content (29.5%). Television journalists' low interest in supporting an adversary role may be partially explained by the medium's dependence on government advertising. In 1999, Brazilian television stations received 67.8% of all the federal government stipend earmarked for advertising, with 58% of it being assigned to *Globo* network (Rodrigues, *Folha de S. Paulo*, <http://www.uol.com.br/fsp/brasil>, March 3, 2000).

The two components of the disseminator role received different ratings by journalists at all media. While getting information to the public quickly was rated as extremely important by about 64% of respondents, only 21.6% of the sample gave the same rating to concentrating on the widest audience. About one-third of the journalists working at TV stations rated concentrating on widest audience as extremely important, while less than 20% of each of the other media groups perceived this role as extremely important. Findings offered limited support to predictors of media roles. Salary, years of professional experience, age, and chance to help people somewhat predicted media roles although some of them in an awkward direction. Respondents who strongly endorsed the adversarial role were more likely to justify at least four of the eight questionable journalistic practices discussed below, although by narrow margins. These practices included using confidential information without authorization, claiming to be somebody else, getting employed in a firm to gain inside information, and making use of personal documents without permission. Findings revealed that adversarial supporters were more likely to be older and experienced males, married, and members of a union.

The eight questions that weighed on three factors (interpretive/investigative, adversary and disseminator functions) were combined to form three scales with equal weight each. The majority of the Brazilian journalists, like their American colleagues, appeared to hold a pluralistic view. Most of them endorsed more than one media role. While the disseminator (77.6%) and the interpretive/investigative (66.2%) prevailed as core media roles, the adversary function emerged as a strong one (47.2%) as well. About half of the respondents who endorsed the disseminator role also supported the adversary role, and more than two-thirds of them supported the interpretive role. There were no single adversary proponents. About 70% of those who endorsed the adversary role also supported the interpretive role, and 82.6% supported the disseminator role. Male journalists were more willing to support both the



adversary and the disseminator roles than females.

### Ethical Perceptions

To what extent do Brazilian journalists have standards of journalistic practices that differ from those of American and French journalists? The survey replicated Weaver’s battery of questions on ethical perceptions regarding journalistic practices. Findings showed that Brazilians justified most journalistic practices at higher proportions than their counterparts, except for paying for confidential information and agreeing to protect confidential sources. The majority of respondents did not approve of paying people for confidential information. This has been an uncommon practice in Brazil not only because of ethical and professional concerns, but also because of a lack of funds to spend on sources. The percentage of journalists willing to disclose their sources on confidential matters increased by 5.4 points in this study compared to a 1994 survey (Herscovitz & Cardoso, 1999, p. 428). As shown in Table 1.5, male journalists were slightly more willing than female journalists to accept most journalist practices, except on using hidden microphones or cameras and claiming to be somebody else.

**Table 1.5: Ethical perceptions of journalists practices according to gender**  
**N= 402**

Practices	Percentage saying may be justified		
	Males	Females	Total
Using confidential information without authorization	84.4	78.4	81.8
Using hidden microphones or cameras	75.3	83.0	78.6
Badgering unwilling informants to get a story	76.6	74.3	75.6
Getting employed in a firm to gain inside information	62.8	60.2	61.7
Claiming to be somebody else	55.8	68.4	61.2
Making use of personal documents without permission	58.9	54.4	57.0
Paying people for confidential information	23.8	23.4	23.6
Agreeing to protect confidentiality and not doing so	13.0	11.7	12.4

Acceptance of the eight journalistic practices varied according to the type of medium journalists worked for, as shown in Table 1.6. Using confidential information without authorization was less favored by journalists working at news agencies (76%). Journalists at TV stations highly favored the use of hidden microphones and cameras (91%) as well as getting employed in a firm to gain inside information (69.2%). Journalists at newsmagazines were more likely to accept badgering unwilling informants to get a story (84.4%) as well as making use of personal documents without authorization (66.2%). Paying people for confidential information was more likely to be justified by journalists at TV stations (34.6%). Agreeing to protect confidentiality and not doing so was more likely to be accepted by journalists at newsmagazines (15.6%).

**Table 1.6: Ethical perceptions of journalists practices according to type of medium**

Practices	Percentage saying may be justified			
	Newsp.	Magazines	TV	Agencies
Using confidential information without authorization	81.5	85.7	80.8	76.0
Using hidden microphones or cameras	76.1	74.0	91.0	76.0
Badgering unwilling informants to get a story	72.1	84.4	6.9	76.0
Getting employed in a firm to gain inside information	60.8	57.1	69.2	60.0
Claiming to be somebody else	59.9	58.4	65.4	68.0
Making use of personal documents without permission	54.5	66.2	52.6	64.0
Paying people for confidential information	23.4	14.3	34.6	20.0
Agreeing to protect confidentiality and not doing so	13.5	15.6	6.4	12.0

A comparison of Brazilian, American, and French journalists on ethical perceptions is presented in Table 1.7. Except for using confidential information without authorization, Brazilians were generally more tolerant of the eight practices than Americans. The use of hidden cameras and microphones was favored by less than a third of the American journalists, while more than two-thirds of the Brazilian respondents were likely to support this controversial practice. Badgering unwilling informants was

the only practice highly favored by the French journalists (82%). The French also exceeded Brazilians and Americans in their support for paying people for confidential information (36%) but were the least supportive of breaking source confidentiality. Brazilians were more likely than the others to break source confidentiality.

**Table 1.7: Acceptance of ethical perceptions by Brazilians, Americans and French journalists**

Practices	Percentage saying may be justified		
	Brazil	U.S.*	France**
Using confidential information without authorization	81.8	82	69
Using hidden microphones or cameras	76.6	28	-
Badgering unwilling informants to get a story	75.6	49	82
Getting employed in a firm to gain inside information	61.7	63	56
Claiming to be somebody else	61.2	22	40
Making use of personal documents without permission	57.0	48	12
Paying people for confidential information	23.6	20	36
Agreeing to protect confidentiality and not doing so	12.4	5	4
<b>* Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; **McMane, 1989.</b>			

Analysis of the data could not find variables that strongly predicted ethical perceptions. Older journalists in higher and better-paid positions such as editing or management were more willing to accept controversial practices to obtain information. In addition, journalists who enjoyed more autonomy than others felt they had credentials to employ questionable journalistic practices. It is not surprising that awareness of the Brazilian professional code of ethics did not correlate with respondent's ethical perceptions. About 60% of the respondents did not know the code. Some 30% said they knew the code and did employ it, and another 10% said they knew the code but did not employ it.

Those who knew the code (about 40% of the respondents) answered a follow-up question on how strongly they agreed with two statements on the topic: "The ethics code is in harmony with my company's editorial

policy” and “The ethics code matches my own sense of personal and professional ethics.” Only 4% strongly agreed that the code was in harmony with their company’s editorial policy, and only 10% strongly agreed that the code matched their personal and professional ethics.

Respondents who did not know the ethics code or who knew it but did not employ it, which totaled 70% of the sample, were asked to describe their ethical orientation. About one-third of these respondents said they followed their own ethical sense at work. Another 30% claimed they combined their own ethical sense with the company’s norms. A small group (3.2%) said their ethical perception at work was defined by the company’s norms alone. Some respondents cited their values, such as being responsible, being nonpartisan, or respecting people’s privacy. Others cited Christian values and norms they learned at the journalism school.

### **Conclusion**

Brazilian journalists working for leading news organizations of Sao Paulo-- Brazil’s main media hub-- held a pluralistic view regarding media roles at the end of the 20th century. They perceived themselves as a combination of disseminators (77.6%) and interpreters (66.2%) of information as well as adversaries of government officials (47.2%). To some extent, their pluralistic view parallels the one found among Americans, who also perceived themselves in the early 1990s as interpreters (62.9%) and disseminators (51%) of information, with a small group favoring an adversary role (17.6%).

However, the nature of Brazilian’s pluralistic view is dissimilar than that of Americans because the three clusters consisted of a different combination of variables. The study conducted by McMane in 1989 also found that French journalists held a distinct mix of role perception. Findings, though, reveal more than a statistical discrepancy. The particular nature of Brazilians’ pluralistic view mirrors the cultural context in which journalists operate and the way journalism has developed in the country. While Brazilians and Americans share some perceptions regardless of their nationality, their local social-political environment mostly defines their value systems.

Respondents’ higher tolerance of controversial journalistic practices compared to that of their counterparts points to a similar conclusion. Findings are in line with journalists’ level of general distrust of political institutions--an aspect not measured by this survey but reported by other

studies (Herscovitz & Cardoso, 1998). In contrast to Americans, Brazilian journalists do not enjoy special rights of access to government and business information. In addition, Brazilian public institutions produce unreliable statistics, and business institutions usually embellish their own facts and figures, which creates an information environment that lacks accuracy.

Furthermore, journalists and news organizations have still been adapting to press freedom since the country's redemocratization. In the meantime, journalists helped to impeach the first elected president in 30 years and felt that any questionable journalistic practices they employed to uncover the truth in that case were justifiable, as suggested by personal interviews conducted.

Journalist Mino Carta, who played a crucial role in the "Collorgate" scandal as the director of the news magazine *Isto É* in 1992, would do it again if he could get documents proving the current president is involved in corruption, for example. "Almost all the so-called questionable journalistic practices in the questionnaire can be justified if they can help to educate people and to improve the nation's social conditions," said Carta (personal interview, May 1998). Nonetheless, Carta--a role model to more than one generation of Brazilian journalists-- was cautious about revealing confidential sources and believed that a journalist should always identify himself as such.

Further research must find new paths to explore the process of absorption of professional values transmitted by journalism of developed nations to journalists of developing nations. Cross-national studies need to be based on the results of simultaneous surveys instead of post hoc comparisons. The mere replication of survey instruments in cross-national studies faces cultural and technical constraints that prevent generalizations. A more effective approach might be the study of professional values among journalists with compatible cultures and similar social-political environments such as professionals in neighboring Latin American countries. Before that, it would be useful to redo parts of the questionnaire and replicate this study by e-mail with journalists currently working for similar news organizations.

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