Ethical attitudes of Andalusian journalists to deal with especially sensitive issues

JC Suárez Villegas [C. V.] [ORCID] [Google Scholar] Professor of Journalistic Ethics and Deontology. University of Seville - jcsuarez@us.es

Abstract
Introduction. This research article analyses the positions of Andalusian journalists in relation to especially sensitive issues. **Methods.** The study combines qualitative and quantitative techniques: in-depth interviews and a questionnaire-based survey, respectively. **Results.** The professional work of Andalusian journalists is based more on the predominant values of their communities than on the deontological codes of the profession, which are unknown by the vast majority. **Conclusions.** Journalists exhibit a liberal spirit, which is characteristic of a secular society, and believe that the freedom of expression should be respected when dealing with especially sensitive issues, which must be resolved according to the particular circumstances of each case.

Keywords
journalist; ethics; deontology; responsibility; vulnerable groups; social issues.

Contents
1. Introduction. 2. Methods. 3. Results about the convictions and attitudes of journalists towards especially sensitive issues. 4. Discussion: Debate on the nature of journalistic ethics: ethical principles or deontological codes? 5. Conclusions. 6. References.

Translation by **CA Martinez Arcos** (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas)

[**Financed**] [**Research**]

| **How to cite this article** | **Timing** | **Metadata** | PDF | **Dynamic presentation** 🔴 | ⓒⓞⓢⓔ | **References** |
| **mobi** | **htmlz** + **lit** + **lrf** + **pdb** + **pmlz** + **rb** + **snb** + **tcr** + **txtz** |

1. Introduction

This article presents the results of a research study carried out as part of an R&D project investigating the ethical attitudes and principles of journalists from several autonomous communities of Spain. This project has had the participation of researchers from five Spanish universities: the Pompeu Fabra University, the University of the Basque Country, the Carlos III University of Madrid, the University of Malaga and the University of Seville.

The content of this research article is based on the acceptance of the following four basic ethical principles of journalism:

1. Justice. This principle refers to the mechanisms that guarantee the equality of rights and duties of journalists in the media, and also applies to the associations of journalists. This principle involves the commitment of journalists to adopt self-regulation measures to protect journalism as a social institution and to prevent individual interpretations from altering the mission of this profession.

2. Independence. This principle defends the professional status of journalists and their commitment to citizens against the pressures of media organisations. This principle is particularly related to the protection of journalists within media companies, to guarantee not only the freedom of expression of the media but also, and mainly, the freedom of expression within the media. This principle gives priority to the protection of the professional conditions over the working conditions.

3. Due diligence. This principle tries to guarantee the existence of measures to verify the veracity of the information included in news stories and the use of honesty and rigour criteria in their transmission to the public. This principle controls matters such as objectivity in the field of news making (Berganza Conde, Oller Alonso, Meier,

2010), and issues related to the confidentiality of sources, among others required to produce quality and ethical information.

4. Social responsibility. This principle highlights the fact that, in democratic societies, journalism has to meet some social responsibilities in order to preserve its social legitimacy, like denouncing attitudes or behaviours that are against such values as gender equality, respect for the most vulnerable groups, and the task of educating through communication. The journalist has a public responsibility (Sinova, 2003), as an agent commissioned to build a vision of reality and promote states of opinion that allow people to understand their cultural, political and economic spheres, among other perspectives. According to the Hutchins Report, the social responsibility of the media is a critical horizon that allows journalists to reflect on the cultural and social deviations of journalism, when they forget their values and are at the service of other objectives that violate the right to information and democratic values. In other words, the objective is to bind the practice of journalism to the social responsibility of the profession (Aldridge, Evetts, 2003; Sanchez, Rodríguez, 1999).

These principles summarise the variety of behaviours that characterise the exercise of journalism (Coca, 1997; Aznar, 2004). The initial objective of this study was to determine whether these values, which are controlled by the principle of responsibility, were learned through the professional practice of journalism, or were adopted from the deontological code for the journalistic profession. To this end, this study focused on comparing the positions of journalists on some of the most significant aspects of this principle and on investigating the degree of importance granted by journalists to the deontological codes of the profession to shape the practical criteria they use in news reporting. This study gives continuity to similar research works carried out a decade ago by Maria Luisa Humanes (1998) and María José Canel and Teresa Sábada (1999), among others. Here it is also important to note the contribution made to the debate on the ethics and new social challenges of journalism by Professor Hugo Aznar (1997, 2009), who has also maintained a more theoretical debate on the effectiveness of the various self-regulation measures, which has had the participation of researchers like Carlos Ruiz (2008), to cite just a few of the most recent and important works.

As it will be explained in the methods section, this study on the ethical attitudes of journalists took into consideration both professionals and citizens, using the same sociological techniques and the same questions. One of the striking results of this comparison, which is not included in this work, was the high degree of similarity in the positions taken by journalists and citizens in the questions raised about the principle of social responsibility; such as gender violence, the positive discrimination of women in news reporting, the respect for people's privacy, the relevance of providing personal identity details of the protagonists of the news stories, and the complex question of how to reconcile the freedom of expression and religious sensibilities. This study allowed us to verify that most journalists adopt the moral principles of the communities in which they live and work. In a kind of social osmosis, journalists internalise the community values and convert them into practical criteria to guide their professional work, as if they were the guardians of the community's moral code.

After establishing that the personal professional criteria of journalists were mostly based on values learnt from their socio-cultural background, the initial objective was to investigate journalists' degree of knowledge and acceptance of the deontological code of their profession. For this reason, after drawing the most relevant conclusions on these especially sensitive issues, the study focused on investigating the importance granted by journalists to the deontological code of their profession. We will not mention the results yet, but we can advance that the ethical positions of most journalists in these controversial issues are based more on their social sensitivity, in line with the criteria of their communities, than on the deontological codes of their profession.

As a result, journalistic ethics is experiencing a dialectical tension between the prevailing community values, which inform journalists' professional principles, and the deontological codes, which set out criteria that counteract the inertia of certain professional practices that are based on the dominant prejudices and stereotypes. Therefore, to resolve this tension it is important to introduce a thoughtful perspective, based on other journalistic cultures, in the education programmes of the future journalists. In addition, the introduction of the culture of human rights, as an interpretative principle of the professional practices to tackle unyielding social attitudes, would prevent journalists from becoming mere reproducers of social prejudices. In this way, the journalistic ethics would provide a more external and impartial perspective which, without obviating the characteristic elements of each cultural context, would contribute to the promotion of the defence of the shared democratic values. In this sense, self-regulation is an exercise of social commitment that must guide the work of journalists in order to protect journalism from short-sighted people who interpret and accept the general interest as it is conceived by the social majority even when it may oppose the democratic and quality values that must guide the profession of journalism. Otherwise, journalists could become mere reproducers of the values of the social majority, and their informative work could strengthen micro-discourses that are part of ideologies that justify social discriminations, which are made invisible by the representations of reality that are offered by the media.

2. Methods

This article is based on an R&D project titled *Ética y excelencia informativa* ("Ethics and informative excellence"), which was carried out by five Spanish universities, from 2007 to 2010 and completed in 2011, with the objective of measuring the extent to what some of the ethical parameters of the deontological code of journalism were valued by the journalists and citizens of each of the autonomous communities where the participating universities were located.
This study investigated citizens' expectations of the ethical canons of journalism that are aimed at ensuring a quality social service, and the opinions of journalists about the importance of the values of the profession and the potential difficulties to exercise them, because these two aspects seemed to be essential parts of the same problem: the right to

information seen from a double perspective.

To achieve this objective, the study was divided into three phases:

a. Collection of the large variety of deontological documents (75 in total), which were introduced in a database which classified the various deontological concepts in order to facilitate subsequent consultations. In this way, we could choose a topic, e.g. "hidden cameras and surreptitious recordings", and get the different ethical recommendations available in the various documents.

b. Identification of the positions of journalists on various ethical aspects of the profession, through two sociological techniques: in-depth interviews and a survey (based on closed questions). The number of in-depth interviews conducted in each of the communities is as follows: 30 in Catalonia; 30 in the Community of Madrid; 24 in Andalusia; and 20 in the Basque Country. On the other hand, about 2,000 people were surveyed: 1,198 in Catalonia; 417 in Madrid; 225 in Andalusia; and 172 in the Basque Country.

c. Identification of the positions of citizens on various ethical aspects of journalism, through the focus groups method and a survey system similar to the one used with journalists. Seven focus groups were conducted in Catalonia and Madrid, 6 in Andalusia, and 4 in the Basque Country. All of these groups included a mixture of social, cultural, and age profiles. The number of people surveyed is as follows: 403 in Catalonia; 407 in Madrid; 600 in the Basque Country; and 400 in Andalusia.

This article only presents the results about the positions of the 225 Andalusian journalists who participated in the survey. The main sociological features of this group of Andalusian journalists are the following:

- 52.7% of them are men and 47.3% are women;

- In terms of age, the younger group (20-39 years of age) accumulates the greatest percentage of bachelor's degrees in journalism, 73.2%, in comparison to the older group (40-71 years of age), with 26.9%.

- The younger group also has a higher percentage of people with bachelor's degrees in journalism and degrees in another profession (68.8%), in comparison with the older group (31.1%).

- Of the older group, 81.8% do not have any qualification.

- Over half of the female journalists (53.6%) work in radio.

- 50% of both male and female journalists work in press offices.

- Most male journalists work in online media (87.5%), newspapers (74%), television (69.4%), news agencies (66.7%) and magazines (62.5%).

- Of all the participants, 64.5% works for private companies and the rest in public institutions.

- Of the young journalists, 64.6% work in several areas simultaneously.

- 87.5% work in the economy section.

- Of the older journalists, 80% works in the area of society and 66.7% in international politics.

- Based on a 7-point scale of political ideology (where 1 is left-wing and 7 is right-wing), over half of the journalists identified themselves as left-wing. There are no significant differences across age-groups with regards to political ideologically, as in all of the age groups the majority was left-wing.

As we can see, the interviews were applied to male and female Andalusian journalists of different age, working for different media companies, responsible for different tasks, and specialised on different information sections. The objective was to have a representative sample of respondents that allowed the identification of the differences and similarities in the ways Andalusian journalists address certain issues. The average age of the male and female participants was 36 years. Four in five interviewees were writers and one in five had managerial positions within the medium. Most of them had a bachelor's degree in journalism (nine out of ten), while two thirds were not members of any association of journalists. A quarter of these journalists worked in press offices, while the rest worked in the media sector, evenly distributed across television, radio and newspapers and news agencies. This survey also included freelance journalists and journalists experienced in the field of digital journalism.

The assessment of the ethical attitudes of journalists towards issues concerning social responsibility was based on the analysis of the quantitative results of the surveys and the critical comments obtained from the in-depth interviews. This combination of methods allowed us to provide a more complete description of the opinion of journalists on the various topics under study.

3. Results about the convictions and attitudes of journalists towards especially sensitive issues

The following sections present the results obtained about the convictions and attitudes adopted by journalists towards

each of the issues proposed in relation to the principle of social responsibility, i.e., especially sensitive issues whose treatment involves a long term effect on the democratic values protected by the responsible exercise of social communication (Maciá, Herrera, 2010).

3.1. Gender-based violence

In this section it is important to remark that the survey did not include a question specifically focused on this issue, so there are no quantitative data on this aspect. However, we consider that the opinions provided in the in-depth interviews suffice to get a clear idea of the opinions of journalists on this aspect.

Unanimously, all respondents believe that there have been very important improvements in this area. All of them believed that journalists must act responsibly and do not to conceal these types of events, since gender-based violence is a structural phenomenon of the patriarchal society that must be treated with zero tolerance. Some of the interviewed female journalists emphasised the benefits of having ethical codes and style manuals (created by both media organizations and associations of journalists) aimed at improving the treatment of this type of information. Respondents recognised that, thanks to the media, police and judicial proceedings in cases of gender-based violence have improved, but also remarked that there are still challenges to overcome and that some negative treatments, which have resulted from the "macho culture" in which "we have been raised", still persist. As a consequence, for example, when there is a murder, the news reports still continue to include neighbours saying phrases like "he was a nice guy", "they seemed a normal couple", "he was an alcoholic", which is not relevant information in cases of murder. Moreover, in these cases journalists never investigate the aggressor or report about the children of the dead mother, even though they are also victims (Marín, Armentia, Caminos, 2011).

As mentioned by some of the female interviewees, the treatment of gender-based violence has become a question of numbers. They insist that "counting the number of deaths" "or the number of stabs" is pointless because this actions do not highlight the real social problem. According to them, what is really important is to report each case without making generalisations in order to be able to identify the root causes; "a murder in a brothel is not the same than the murdering of a woman living in a luxurious residential area".

Female respondents recognised that improvements are occurring in this area, but also that this transformation "is difficult and [thus] gender equality should be taught as a subject in the education programmes of future journalists". They consider that the treatment of the media contributes to the public awareness of the existing violence against women and that this is positive, although they also insist on the need of establishing and following a set of guidelines to avoid sensationalism. "It is not ok to treat it as an isolated incident instead of a social problem; it is possible to die twice: when your partner kills you, and then when the media kills you". There are also those who believe that "errors are committed in the reporting of these events because no one knows how to do it, but still the media have been on the victims' side".

For other respondents, the severity of these events lies in the fact that it is violence against a human being and not only against women: "it seems that only men are abusers [but] it is violence exercised by a person who believes to be stronger than another". Many interviewees came to the conclusion that much time is dedicated to the morbid details of certain events with fatal consequences, like the murders of women, after they appear in television news programmes.

3.2. Positive discrimination in the news treatment of women

In this sense, both male and female respondents consider that women should not be given positive discrimination and that journalists "should not participate in [this type of] media bias and [instead] should be fair to both genders in order to enhance the social dialogue". From a professional perspective, journalists must be guided by professional criteria and not by gender-based criteria. However, it is a fact that women, even when they obtain better academic grades in their studies, find it harder to reach positions of responsibility in the media. The glass ceiling does exist in the journalistic profession and is clearly reflected in the professional structures of the media. As one of the female respondents pointed out, "the presence of women in the organisational hierarchy decreases as the levels of responsibility and power increase". Another female respondent pointed out that gender inequality "occurs not only in the working environments, but also in the 'informative' contexts, because the media offers representations of reality that do not include female perspectives". For this reason, some female respondents highlighted the need of taking positive steps in the informative treatment of women in order to normalise their incorporation to the various sectors of society. These measures would be temporary in order to achieve higher representation equality for women and encourage other women to participate in the effort and in the recognition of other women who acquire visibility in the public space.

The media control the flow of symbolic meanings of the different social identities. For this reason, some female respondents argue that women should be receive positive discrimination in the media because they do not have the same working conditions and opportunities for professional improvement than their male counterpart and, thus, this (positive) "discrimination" seems necessary to achieve gender equality. They argue that, unlike men, "women have to demonstrate what they are worth and to do so they assume male roles". Women have to be seen as writers, as sources and protagonists because they are part of society.

More than half of the respondents (53.3% of male journalists and 59.5% of female journalists) believe it is ok to identify the gender of the protagonists of a news story when this information is relevant to understand the event.

Should the gender of the protagonists of news stories be disclosed?	Never	When it is relevant to understand the story	When it is interesting for the audience	Always	
Man	2.9 %	53.3 %	22.6 %	21.2 %	100%
Woman	2.4 %	59.5 %	14.3 %	23.8 %	100%

Figure 1. Should women be positively discriminated in the media?
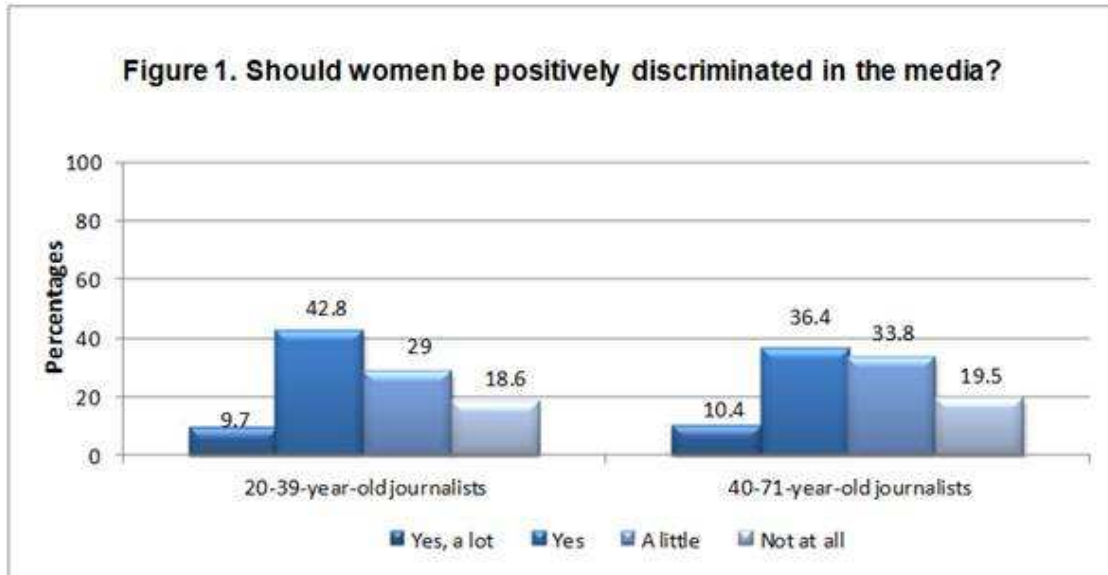
When asked whether women should be positively discriminated in the media to compensate for the alleged disadvantages they suffer from, 52.5% of the group of young respondents indicated that they supported this practice (42.8% said "yes", 9.7% said "yes, a lot") while only 46.8% of the group of older respondents are in the same position (36.4% said "yes", 10.4% said "yes, a lot"). From a gender perspective, 55.9% of the female respondents support this practice (44% said "yes", 11.9% said "yes, a lot") but only 47.1% of the male respondents are in the same position (38.4% said "yes", 8.7% said "yes, a lot"), as reflected in the following figure.

Figure 2. Should women be positively discriminatied in the media?
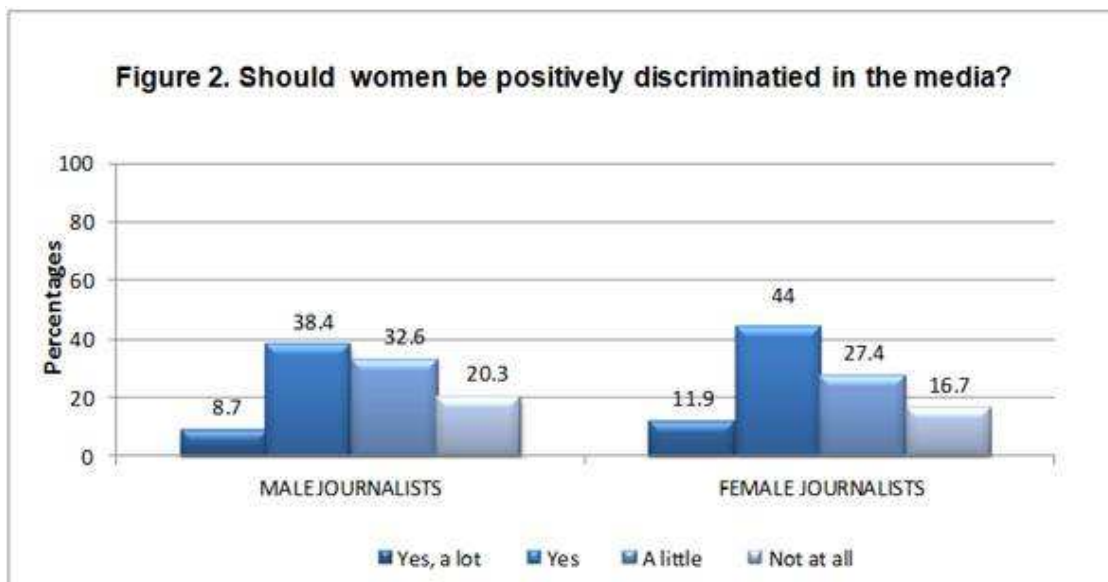
3.3. Conflicting information

Most male and female journalists would censor the opinion of a person or group opposing the Constitution. Less than half of the surveyed professionals would censor the opinion of a person or group infringing upon human rights, supporting Nazi ideas, defending the use of violence, or supporting racist or sexist ideologies. In these cases, the percentages in the group of female journalists are higher than in the group of male journalists, probably because the former group has been more affected by violence, discrimination and sexism. Most journalists would censor the opinions of people or groups that are disrespectful of any religion.

Would you reproduce the opinion of a person who is…	NO	YES	
… opposing the Constitution?	78.5	21.5	100 %
… infringing upon human rights?	41.9	58.1	100 %
… supporting Nazi ideas?	40.7	59.3	100 %
… defending the use of violence?	39.1	60.9	100 %
… being racist or xenophobic?	45.9	54.1	100 %
… disrespecting the Catholic religion?	84.3	15.7	100 %
… disrespecting any religion?	81.2	18.8	100 %
… belonging to a terrorist organisation?	52.5	47.5	100 %
… being sexist?	58.3	41.7	100 %

For most respondents, disclosing the personal information of the protagonists of the news stories is justified when this information is relevant to understand the news story; such is the case with the gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and ideology. In this sense, certain disadvantaged groups should receive special treatment, especially women, immigrants, Gypsies, disabled people, elderly people and mentally ill people. However, a smaller percentage of respondents supported the idea of giving homosexual people a preferential information treatment.

Would you disclose the following details about the protagonist of a news story?	Absolutely never	When it is very relevant to understand the news story	When it is interesting for the audience	Always, without any problem	
Gender	2.8	55.7	19.5	22.2	100 %
Ethnicity	6.8	67.1	17.6	8.6	100 %
Nationality	2.3	61.5	23.5	12.7	100 %
Sexual orientation	23.0	65.3	9.9	1.8	100 %
Religious beliefs	16.8	69.5	11.4	2.3	100 %
Ideology	9.0	70.3	16.7	4.1	100 %
Language	10.3	57.4	19.3	13.0	100 %

With respect to minority groups journalists believe that they should always be represented in the media and that "various methods can be used and legitimised to make the audiences more tolerant". For this reason minority groups should be overrepresented in the media, but this only happens when the actions of these groups are "unacceptable". That is why, for example, in winter nobody remembers the Sahrawi children or the prostitutes unless they are involved in some problem. However, there are also some respondents who believe that "there should not be distinctions between groups because all have the same rights".

3.4. Treatment of vulnerable groups

The question in the following table aimed to investigate the degree of importance granted by journalists to vulnerable groups, in order to know when and how it seemed relevant for journalists to identify them as such in news stories and whether journalists consider they should be more careful when referring to these groups in order to avoid stereotypes and clichés that could influence their perception by the rest of society.

Should the following groups receive a special treatment in the news?	Very much	Yes	A little	Not at all	
Women	9.9	40.5	30.6	18.9	100 %
Immigrants	14.3	46.6	23.8	15.2	100 %
Gypsies	9.9	37.7	33.2	19.3	100 %
Disabled people	22.4	43.5	21.1	13.0	100 %
Homosexual people	5.8	33.6	37.7	22.9	100 %
Elderly people	16.2	41.4	28.4	14.0	100 %
Mentally ill people	24.7	39.5	23.8	12.1	100 %

3.5. Privacy as educational value

Privacy, in addition to being a subjective right, is a human value that refers to the degree of respect that has to be maintained with respect to the lives of others. Therefore, when the media investigate the private affairs of people, they do not only violate their privacy but also shape the way in which the public understands personal relationships. For these reasons the gossip or tabloid press is strongly criticised because of the discomfort it causes to certain personalities and the bad example they set to the public on how to observe and learn from the lives of others. From the informative point of view, certain aspects of people's lives may be of interest to citizens, but the way in which they are treated and the degree of respect used to treat them will determine their value to educate the public on the human dimension of the public figures. For this reason, we have introduced privacy as a dimension of the social sphere of public personalities, in order to analyse the degree of responsibility of the media in educating the public on how to look at the lives of others. This issue can be connected to the degree of responsibility of the media towards minors, because they are those who see their right to educational programming sacrificed in favour of contents for adults, which precisely show distorted and non-positive models of intimacy to children, who are the most unconditional consumers of television (Fuente Cobo, Ruiz San Roman, 2011).

The boundaries of the right to privacy and personal image rights of celebrities and public servants are neither clear. The right to privacy must be more linked to the original concept of intimacy and not so much to the concept of privacy. In general, the only limits that are recognised are the legal ones but even the law is very unclear in these aspects. Whatever the case, the key for the journalist is to use its professionalism and common sense to exclude all the information that is not of public interest.

In this regard, the interviewed journalists were asked: "In which cases is it lawful to approach famous people down the street to interview them about topics they have made it clear they do not want talk about?" A very high percentage of respondents said it is lawful to approach famous characters that do not sell exclusive news stories (84.5%), family members of the Royal House (81%) and members of the Royal House (80.5%). Although respondents tended to remark that if these types of people do not want to make statements they should be respected.

Which of the following groups of people is it lawful to approach on the street to interview them about topics they have made it clear they do not want to talk about?	NO	YES	
Members of the Royal House	80.5	19.5	100 %
Family members of the Royal House	81.0	19.0	100 %
Politicians active	58.3	41.7	100 %
Famous people who sell exclusive	57.0	43.0	100 %
Celebrities that do not sell exclusives	84.5	15.5	100 %

Some respondents mentioned the case of Telma Ortiz as an example of a person whose private life is not relevant to for the citizens because she is not a public figure, and the cases of the Infanta Leonor and the Infanta Sofia, whose images appear in the media despite the fact that the image of underage people is protected by law. Other respondents mentioned the cases of the news stories that are written about ordinary people that are murdered (gender violence, terrorism) and present the opinions of family members during these tragic moments, which is an intrusion of their privacy. Some journalists believe that the limits should be set by the people involved in these events; "if they do not respect themselves, others will not respect them".

Consistently with the previous, most respondents do not consider the tabloid press to be journalism because their informative practices are inadequate and do not respect the codes of Federation of Associations of Journalists of Spain (FAPE). They often see this type of press as "deplorable" and "repulsive" entertainment. One respondent believed that this type of press "is attractive to people because human beings like to learn about the misery of others, through gossip". Respondents mentioned, for example, how the Malaysian case was intoxicated by the tabloid press and there was too much public pressure to give serious and rigorous information on the hidden aspects of this case of corruption. This type of press degenerates itself, with its commercial nature and the sums of money that it produces. As a result, this type of press devaluates 'normal' information, to the extent that people demands to be paid to make statements on any subject. Respondents point out that considering this type of press as journalism would be like "considering a witchdoctor as a real doctor". However, some respondents think that "the fact that we do not like the values transmitted [by this type of press] does not mean that it is not journalism; in addition, its exercise is often more rigorous than that of the serious journalism". *Hola* is mentioned as an example of serious social-interest journalism (not to be confused with the tabloid press).

Except in the context of war, the right to privacy is respected when it comes to showing images of dead people. The highest majority of respondents (92.8%) are against the publication of images of people who committed suicide. Over half of respondents believe that the images of people who have died in the context of war can be published or broadcast when these images can contribute to raising awareness about the negative effects of war.

Do you think that the press should publish images of people who have died in the following circumstances?	Yes, because the public has the right to know this	Only if they contribute to raising awareness	No, because the victim's right to privacy should prevail	
Road accidents	4.5	38.4	57.1	100 %
Other accidents and disasters	11.2	37.9	50.9	100 %
Wars	17.0	50.4	32.6	100 %
Violence against women	4.0	33.6	62.3	100 %
Terrorist attacks	10.7	39.3	50.0	100 %
Suicides of non-public people	1.8	5.4	92.8	100 %

The limits to report about death or the pain of the people involved in these events are clearer. Respondents believe these events deserve to be treated with the outmost care, respect and professionalism. If journalists want "to show blood they are violating their ethical principles", since "delving into lurid details is not information". Respondents exemplified their points with cases like the funerals of victims of gender-based violence, the death of children or the fatal victims of terrorism. Respondents wondered whether a funeral, the gory details of the death of the Alcàsser girls, or the images of the 11-M (whose publication was eventually stopped) can be considered to be news events? A respondent believes that the news reports about the case of Mari Luz (a girl kidnapped and murdered in Huelva) disclosed many details of judicial proceedings that never occurred, and that the reports of the accident in Barajas included unnecessary images of desperation and fainting. In short, most respondents believed that the publishing of images of "people losing their dignity" is definitively unjustified.

The quantitative analysis across age groups produced some interesting findings. First of all, there are no significant differences across age groups in relation to respondents' positions towards the unrequested interviewing of members of the Royal family or their relatives, as in all age groups the majority were against this practice. Secondly, approaching active politicians on the streets is not considered lawful by 55.9% of the younger group of respondents in comparison to 62.8% of the older group. Thirdly, approaching celebrities who sell news stories is considered to be lawful by half of the group of younger respondents (50.3%) but only by 29.5% of the group of older respondents. The majority of the group of older respondents considered that it is not correct to approach, on the streets, celebrities who do not sell exclusive news stories and do not want to make statements.

For newspaper journalists it is lawful to approach active politicians even if they have made it clear that they do not want to make statements. Radio journalists are evenly divided in this question: 50% believes it is lawful and 50% believes the opposite. Most journalists working in other media do not consider it is lawful to do so, being magazine journalists the group with the highest percentage (81.3%) of rejection for this practice. For over half of the journalists working for newspapers and magazines it is lawful to approach celebrities who sell exclusive news stories. Journalists from all the different types of media believed that it is not lawful to approach celebrities who do not sell exclusive news stories when they have made it clear that they do not want to make statements.
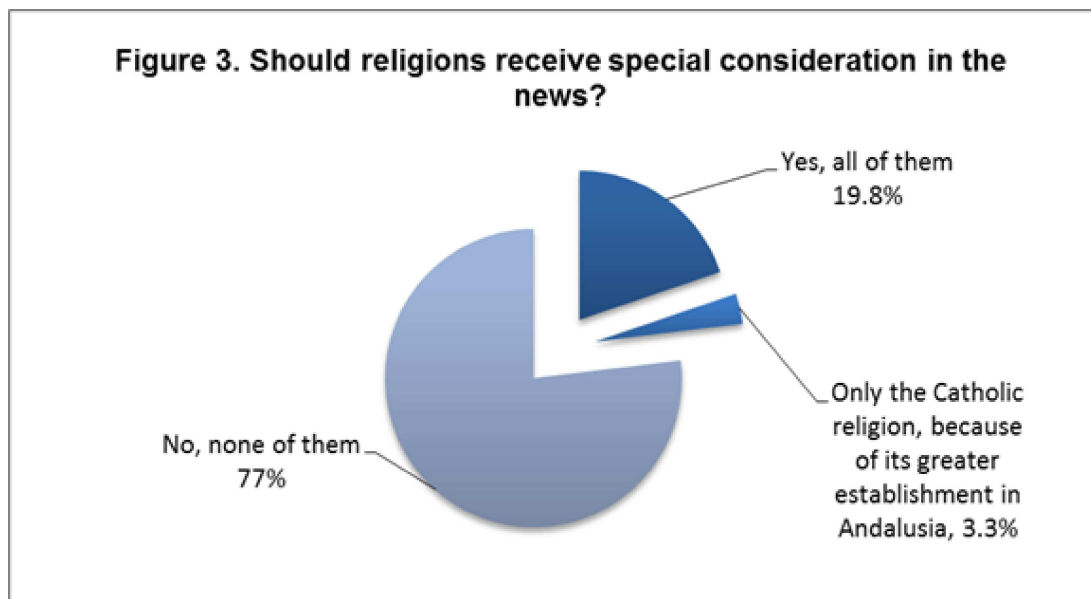
3.6. Religion and information

One of the most controversial issues in the practice of journalism is demarcating the border between the legitimate right to freedom of expression and the protection of other human values associated to the personal and cultural dimensions of individuals. Religiosity is a complex phenomenon that we cannot analyse here, however, we can say that it finds its clearest expression in the identification of individuals with certain symbols, rites or customs strongly associated to their feelings of belonging. As a consequence, those acts that unnecessarily and unjustifiably hurt these feelings are interpreted as an affront to people's religious freedom and feelings. Thus, one of the questions included in the survey intended to find out the degree of sensitivity that journalists granted to the publication of information related to the religious dimension of citizens.

Is it correct to publish the following content?	NO	YES	
A caricature of Mohammed?	26.1	73.9	100 %
A caricature of Jesus Christ?	25.7	74.3	100 %
A funny cartoon including nudity or sex?	41.4	58.6	100 %
Eschatological images?	68.0	32.0	100 %
Swear words in graphic jokes?	43.5	65.5	100 %
Blasphemous words said by an interviewee?	45.0	55.0	100 %
Swear words said by an interviewee?	33.8	66.2	100 %

Most respondents argued that, with the exception of eschatological images (68% against it), content affronting religions can be published or broadcast, even if the content in question is cartoons of Mohammed (73.9%) or Jesus Christ (74.3%).

Of the interviewed journalists, 77% believe that religions should not receive any special consideration in the news. In this regard, it was the older and the female groups of journalists which showed more determination to give priority to the freedom of expression over religious sensibilities. According to the respondents, religious and political ideas should be respected but should not condition the freedom of expression. For respondents, the limits should be set by journalists themselves. "Religion is part of the privacy of a person, and [for example] a view on abortion expressed at the Episcopal Conference should not matter in a secular society". For respondents, it seems inacceptable "that religious groups have media organizations at their disposal, be they COPE or the Vatican".

Figure 3. Should religions receive special consideration in the news?

Yes, all of them 19.8%

Only the Catholic religion, because of its greater establishment in Andalusia, 3.3%

No, none of them 77%

4. Discussion. Debate on the nature of journalistic ethics: ethical principles or deontological codes?

From the set of topics previously treated we drew a series of conclusions to understand the journalistic ethics that configures the basic scheme of unwritten guidelines that are adopted by journalists as pragmatic criteria to resolve the dilemmas they face on their daily work. Against the force of moral principles, it is striking that the majority of respondents admitted to ignore the deontological codes and other self-regulation mechanisms of the profession of journalism (Zalbidea, Pérez, Urrutia, López, 2010).

In Spain there are around twelve media organisations and associations of journalists that have created self-regulatory ethical codes, which have been integrated, to varying degrees, in editorial statutes, collective agreements, and even style manuals. Most of these documents emerged in the 1990s, and all of them address the ethical and deontological considerations that affect associations of journalists (such as the Association of Economic Information Journalists [APIE]; the Association of Journalists of Catalonia; and the Spanish Federation of Associations of Journalists [FAPE]) and large media companies (like El País, El Mundo, Abc, El Periódico de Catalunya, Correo group, Europa Press, COPE, RTVE, and Actualidad Económica). The number of organisations that have developed ethical codes has exponentially increased in Europe (Jones, 1980; Laitila, 1995; González-Esteban, García-Avilés, Karmasin, Kaltenbrunne, 2012).

When asked to rate the utility of the deontological codes using a ten-point scale, 68.2% of respondents rated them as quite useless (1 to 5 in the scale). In fact 30.9% of the respondents rated them as completely useless (as they rated them with 1 in the scale). However, while deontological codes are of no value for most respondents, 61.8% of them

think that there should be coercive instruments to enforce them.

	How would you rate the utility of the deontological codes created for the profession of journalism?									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
30.9	10.0	11.8	5.5	10.0	6.8	5.0	4.5	3.6	11.8	100%

When asked for more specific views, over half of respondents believed that the media should be controlled by an independent body in charge of ensuring informative pluralism and protecting the rights of citizens. Participants believed that an independent regulatory body is important to encourage journalists to respect the ethical codes of truthfulness, plurality and quality of content, "without imposing certain criteria". This regulatory body must ensure the quality of information without trying to control journalists because this could be seen as "censorship". In any case, there must be "control but not controllers". Regarding the members of this body, they must be communication professionals, not politicians, social agents or other figures. In relation to the audiovisual councils, respondents think that they should be "critical observatories of the media, but no controlling organisations". One respondent even believes that trying to exercise "control from an external body is stupid and a dictatorial anachronism".

Self-regulation is important. Virtually all of the respondents think that this is the only way to go, because "if someone tries to force us, we will do nothing". That is why for some respondents self-regulation must be accompanied by effective measures to compel journalists to comply with the missions of the profession. Although many believe that this would be desirable, they see it as a utopia, almost impossible in today's society where nobody is committed to self-regulation. An example mentioned by respondents in this regard is the self-regulation codes that were created by television companies to regulate advertising during children's schedules but are not respected by their creators or other media professionals. The question that arises from this situation is who should be self-regulated: companies or journalists? Should it be self-regulation or co-regulation? On the one hand, it is assumed that media companies have already adopted self-regulation agreements and frameworks but do not comply with them. On the other hand, it is more difficult that journalists will opt for self-regulation formulas given that job insecurity has strengthened the "anything goes mentality" in an increasingly fierce sector where the value of information has decreased. This suggests that "professional ethics" should be understood as a reference framework that is based on the journalist's adaptation of the personal ethics to the social sensibilities? However, this conception involves the risk of allowing journalists to act as mere reproducers of the morality of the majority, and to renounce to their critical role in making society reflect on their reality from a more impartial and critical point of view.

Some respondents point out that it is "necessary to establish the American model of complaints", in which "the ethical debate is constantly resolved in the newsrooms". In short, self-regulation is seen as a weak formula to make the practices of quality of journalists more effective. In fact, 63.7% of respondents believe that it is the law which sets the limits, as the deontological codes become worthless pieces of paper at the time of truth. On the other hand, 36.3% consider that the deontological codes are a complement to the law that allows journalists to wash the dirty laundry within the profession itself, in order to prevent the discrediting of one journalist from affecting the rest of the professionals. With regards to the validity of certain control mechanisms of the media, it is important to highlight the work recently carried out by Kaltenbrunner, Karmasin and García Avilés (2010).

Therefore, in practice, journalists give more importance to the social sensitivity and to the pragmatic meaning of the effects of their decisions on the public than to the deontological codes, which are ignored by the majority. However, they consider that associations of journalists can contribute to clarifying the social identity of the journalist and eradicating bad journalistic practices such as professional intrusion. From this perspective, journalists admit that the implementation of a minimum number of ethical principles do make the difference between those who act in a professional manner and those who do not, which is a circumstance that could be clarified by the deontological codes, which are more concerned with the veracity of the journalistic information than with issues of social sensitivity, which journalists adopt from their social environments.

5. Conclusions

After having established that journalists' ethics are more based on sociological and pragmatic criteria than on deontological codes, it seems appropriate to present the most relevant conclusions about the ethical attitudes taken by journalists towards especially sensitive issues. These conclusions are a sort of "portrait of the practical deontology" which is derived from the personal ethical principles of Andalusian journalists, in relation to especially sensitive issues:

1. Just over half of the respondents would censure the opinion of any person or group trying to infringe human rights (58.1%), support Nazi ideas (59.3%), defend the use of violence (60.9%), or perpetuate racist or xenophobic ideas (54.1%).

2. The great majority of journalists would no censor, under virtually any circumstances, the opinions and contents that are a little disrespectful of the Catholic religion (84.3%) or other religions (81.2%).

3. Generally, respondents consider that the personal identity details of the protagonists of news stories can be disclosed when they are relevant to understand the news story; such is the case with gender (55.7%), ethnicity (67.1%), nationality (61.5%), sexual orientation (65.3%), religious beliefs (69.5%), ideology (70.3%) and language (57.4%).

4. A very important percentage of respondents support the idea of giving certain disadvantaged groups a special information treatment: this is the case with women (40.5%), immigrants (46.6%), Gypsies (37.7%), disabled people (43.5%), elderly people (41.4%), and mentally ill people (39.5%). However, in relation to homosexuals, the answer selected by the largest percentage of respondents (37.7%) was "a little", which means that they believe this group should only receive a special news treatment in certain occasions.

5. The right of the public to receive truthful and complete information should be limited only by people's right to life and privacy (89.2%), the presumption of innocence (82.2%) and, to a lesser extent, by the security of the State (73.9%) and civil security (67.9%).

6. Religious beliefs should not limit the right to information, according to 77.2% of the respondents.

7. The great majority of respondents consider that it is lawful to approach the following types of people on the street in order to question them about a certain subjects even when they have made it clear that they do not want to talk about it: celebrities who do not sell exclusive news stories (84.5%); the family members of the Royal House (81%); and the members of the Royal House (80.5%). However, most of these respondents agree that if celebrities or personalities do not want to make statements on a certain topic their decision must be respected.

8. Except in the context of wars, the right to privacy should be respected when it comes to showing images of dead people. Almost all respondents (92.8%) believe that images of dead people should not be published or broadcast. More than half of the respondents believe that images of the fatal victims of war can be shown when they can contribute to raising awareness.

9. Most respondents consider that it is ok to publish or broadcast religious images that may hurt religious sensibilities like cartoons of Muhammad (73.9%) or Jesus Christ (74.3%). However, the majority of respondents are against the publishing or broadcasting of eschatological and disrespectful images with no taste (68% are against them).

10. Religions should not receive any special consideration in the news, according to 77% of the interviewed journalists.

   - This article is part an R&D project financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science: "Ética y excelencia informativa. La deontología periodística frente a las expectativas de los ciudadanos" ("Informative ethics and excellence. Journalistic ethics in comparison to citizens' expectations"). This project (whose reference key is SEJ2006-05631-C) involved the participation of researchers from five Spanish universities: the Carlos III University, the University of the Basque Country, the Pompeu Fabra University, the University of Seville and the University of Malaga.
   - From date of the investigation: 01/01/2007
   - It Dates of conclusion: 31/03/2010 (of 01/01/2010 to 31/03/2010) it was an extension

6. References

M Aldridge, J Evetts (2003): "Rethinking the concept of professionalism: the case of journalism". *British Journal of Sociology*, 54 (4), pp. 547-564.

N Almiron Roig (2010): "La regulación del pluralismo en Francia. Contexto, análisis e interpretación", in *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* (Tenerife): Universidad de La Laguna, pp. 472-487. Retrieved on 15 January, 2012, from: http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/913_Pompeu/35_Almiron.html
DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-65-2010-913-472-487 / CrossRed link

H Aznar (1997): "El debate en torno a la utilidad de los códigos deontológicos del periodismo". *Anàlisi*, 20, pp.125-144. Retrieved on 12 January, 2013, from: http://ddd.uab.es/pub/analisi/02112175n20p125.pdf

H Aznar (2004): "Nuevos códigos de ética y nuevas formas de entender el periodismo". In *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, nº 58. (Tenerife): Universidad de La Laguna. Retrieved on 14 January, 2012, from: http://www.ull.es/publicaciones/latina/20042158aznar.htm

H Aznar (2009): "Por una teoría normativa de la comunicación a la altura de los tiempos: ¿más derecho, más política, más ética? (A propósito de la publicación de *La agonía del cuarto poder*, de Carlos Ruiz)", *Dilemata. Revista Internacional de Éticas Aplicadas*, 3, pp. 77-94. Retrieved on 12 January, 2013, from: http://www.dilemata.net/revista/index.php/dilemata/article/view/36/43

MR Berganza Conde, M Oller Alonso, K Meier (2010): "Los roles periodísticos y la objetividad en el periodismo político escrito suizo y español. Un modelo de análisis de la cultura periodística aplicado". In *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 65. La Laguna (Tenerife): Universidad de La Laguna, pp. 488-502. Retrieved on 12 December, 2012, from: http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/914_Fuenlabrada/36_Berganza.html

DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-65-2010-914-488-502

MJ Canel, T Sádaba (1999): "La investigación académica sobre las actitudes profesionales de los periodistas. Una descripción del estado de la cuestión", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, Vol. XII, Nº 2, pp. 9-32. Retrieved on 8 January, 2013, from: http://www.unav.es/fcom/comunicacionysociedad/es/articulo.php?art_id=129

MJ Canel, R Rodríguez, JJ Sánchez (1999): "La influencia de las actitudes profesionales de los periodistas españoles en las noticias", *Anàlisi*, Nº 23, pp. 89-108. Retrieved on 10 January, 2013, from: http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/analisi/02112175n23p151.pdf

C Coca (1997): "Códigos éticos y deontológicos en el periodismo español". *Zer*, 56, pp. 107-128. Retrieved on 21 December, 2012, from: http://www.ehu.es/zer/hemeroteca/pdfs/zer02-08-coca.pdf

Comisión Hutchins (1947): *Una Prensa Libre y Responsable*, by The Commission on Freedom of the Press. Chicago University Press, Chicago.

A Fernández Martínez, MC López de Ayala (2011): "Televisión e infancia: cinco años después del código de autorregulación", *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 66, pp. 31-62. Retrieved on 20 January, 2012, from: http://www.revistalatinacs.org/11/art/923_Fuenlabrada/02_Ayala.html
DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-66-2011-923-031-062 / CrossRef link

C Fuente-Cobo, JA Ruiz-San-Román (2011): "Protección de la infancia en la nueva regulación audiovisual en España", in *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 66. La Laguna (Tenerife): Universidad de La Laguna, pp. 153-177. Retrieved on 28 January, 2012, from: http://www.revistalatinacs.org/11/art/928_UCM/07_Ruiz.html
DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-66-2011-928-153-177 / CrossRef link

P Giménez, R Berganza (2008): *Género y medios de comunicación: un análisis desde la objetividad y la teoría del framing*, Fragua, Madrid.

JL González Esteban, JA García Avilés, M Karmasin, A Kaltenbrunner (2011): "La autorregulación profesional ante los nuevos retos periodísticos: estudio comparativo europeo", in *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 66. La Laguna (Tenerife): Universidad de La Laguna, pp. 426-453. Retrieved on 15 January, 2012, from: http://www.revistalatinacs.org/11/art/940_Elche/19_Esteban.html
DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-66-2011-940-426-453 / CrossRef link

C Maciá Barber, S Herrera Damas (2010): "La deontología periodística: praxis, disfunciones y retos desde la perspectiva de los profesionales de la Comunidad de Madrid (2006-2009)". *Comunicación y sociedad*, Vol XXIII, nº 1. Pamplona. Retrieved on 21 November, 2012, from: http://www.unav.es/fcom/comunicacionysociedad/es/articulo.php?art_id=351

ML Humanes (1998): "La profesión periodística en España", *Zer*, Nº 4, pp. 265–278. Available at: http://www.ehu.es/zer/hemeroteca/pdfs/zer04-12-humanes.pdf

C Jones (1980): *Mass Media Codes of Ethics and Councils. A Comparative International Study on Professional Standards*, UNESCO Press, Paris.

T Laitila (1995): "Journalistic Codes of Ethics in Europe", *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 10, Nº 4, pp. 527–544.

F Marín, JI Armentia, J Caminos (2011): "El tratamiento informativo de las víctimas de violencia de género en Euskadi: *Deia, El Correo, El País y Gara (2002-2009)"*. *Comunicación y Sociedad* Vol. XXIV – N° 2, pp. 435-466. Retrieved on 4 January, 2012, from: http://www.unav.es/fcom/comunicacionysociedad/en/resumen.php?art_id=402

C Ruiz (2008): *La agonía del cuarto poder. Prensa contra democracia*, Barcelona, Trípodos.

JJ Sánchez, R Rodríguez (1999): "Profesionalidad y ética. El caso de los periodistas españoles", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, Vol. XII, Nº 2, pp. 93–114. Retrieved on 22 October, 2012, from: http://dspace.unav.es/dspace/handle/10171/8802

J Sinova (2003): "Acerca de la responsabilidad pública del periodista. La verdad, los derechos de los públicos y otras exigencias éticas del trabajo informativo", *Doxa Comunicación*, Nº 1, pp. 171-184. Retrieved on 23 September, 2012, from: http://www.uspceu.com/CNTRGF/RGF_DOXA11_614.pdf

B Zalbidea Bengoa, JC Pérez Fuente, S Urrutia Izaguirre, S López Pérez (2011): "Los periodistas españoles ante el tratamiento informativo de los grupos minoritarios y desfavorecidos" *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico,* nº 457, Vol. 17, N° 2, pp. 457-476. Retrieved on 2 January, 2012, from: http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/ESMP/article/view/38125

B Zalbidea Bengoa, JC Pérez Fuente, S Urrutia Izaguirre, S López Pérez (2010): "Valoración profesional y social de los códigos éticos del periodismo en Euskadi". II Congreso Internacional Latina de Comunicación Social. Retrieved on 31 October, 2012, from: http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10SLCS/actas_2010/36Karlos.pdf

THIS ARTICLE IN BIBLIOGRAHIES / REFERENCES:

Note: the DOI number is **part** of the bibliographic references and it must be cited if you cited this article.

The author
Juan Carlos Suárez Villegas
jcsuarez@us.es
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2199-7028
http://scholar.google.es/citations?hl=es&user=2zCN-zIAAAAJ