



Edita: LAboratorio de Tecnologías de la Información y Nuevos Análisis de Comunicación Social

Depósito Legal: TF-135-98 / ISSN: 1138-5820

Año 12º – 3ª época - Director: [Dr. José Manuel de Pablos Coello](#), catedrático de Periodismo

[Facultad y Departamento de Ciencias de la Información](#): Pirámide del Campus de Guajara - [Universidad de La Laguna](#)

38071 La Laguna (Tenerife, Canarias; España)

Teléfonos: (34) 922 31 72 31 / 41 - Fax: (34) 922 31 72 54

[Research](#) – [how to cite](#) – [referees' reports](#) – [agenda](#) – [metadatos](#) – [PDF](#) – [Creative Commons](#)

DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-64-2009-868-880-893-Eng

## Media harassment of public figures from the ethical perspective of journalists in Madrid

**Dr. Carlos Maciá Barber** [\[C.V.\]](#) Professor - Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, UC3M - [cmacia@hum.uc3m.es](mailto:cmacia@hum.uc3m.es)

**Dra. Susana Herrera Damas** [\[C.V.\]](#) Professor - Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, UC3M - [dherrera@hum.uc3m.es](mailto:dherrera@hum.uc3m.es)

**Abstract:** In the area of journalistic ethics, there is very little exhaustive fieldwork on group behaviour in the processes for obtaining information, much less on media harassment of public figures and the ethical evaluation of the professionals themselves. In-depth interviews (30) and surveys of media professionals (410) indicate that journalists in Madrid show themselves largely in favour of harassment of politicians currently in office. Supporters and detractors of pursuing celebrities who sell exclusives are divided in equal numbers. On the other hand, those surveyed overwhelmingly reject the persecution of members of the royal family, especially their relatives, and are against the hounding of relevant personalities who do not trade in their private lives.

**Keywords:** Journalistic ethics, reporters; press; famous people; paparazzi.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction. 2. Method. 3. Results. 4. Conclusions. 5. Bibliography. 6. Notes

Article translated from the original Spanish by **Dr. Fiona Robb**

### 1. Introduction. After the truth – or the celebrity?

Whereas Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) may have established Pararazzo (Walter Santesso) as the prying photographer of the celebrity world which inhabited the Roman night, as well illustrating a particular approach adopted by certain journalists, the director Louis Malle, in *A Very Private Affair* (*Vie privée*) (1962), a feature film starring Brigitte Bardot and Marcello Mastroianni, captured the feeding frenzy and persecution by the press of public figures. A damning verdict to which the versatile Mel Gibson has recently added his voice as the producer of *Paparazzi* (2004), whose plot—a film star whose family are severely injured in a car crash apparently caused as a result of being chased by some photographers—inevitably takes us back to the very personification of the suffering caused by media harassment: Princess Diana.

Even the British press, usually plagued with rampant sensationalism, unanimously condemned the diffusion of a photograph of Princess Diana in the Italian magazine *Chi*. The black-and-white image showed Diana, unconscious or already dead, while someone is giving her oxygen. To the magazine's editor, Umberto Brindani, the subject of the snapshot, "touching" and "tender", looked like "a sleeping princess". He defended its publication for the simple reason that the picture had never been seen before: it was news.

Perhaps it is hard for a normal private person to imagine the stress, anxiety or oppressiveness caused by the constant harassment of reporters. For although it may be simply a form of virtual entertainment, the experience can be tried out thanks to a game available on the internet, already a classic, with the eloquent name of *Paparazzi Chase*. To get away when the situation becomes unbearable the player in the role of the celebrity can simply switch off the computer to stop being bothered by untiring "snappers" and "hacks"; forever even.

In view of these kinds of journalistic practices, the general public must wonder whether journalists are really trying to find out the truth (the information, the news story) or are, in fact, simply going after the public figure, any which one of them or just whoever is considered as such, with the sole objective of financial gain whatever the cost. That is hardly surprising given that the business is the spectacle and the journalistic product nothing more than merchandise or a launching pad for someone's own self-promotion in an environment as competitive as journalism, which is even more so the case at a time of economic crisis.

The situation described by some researchers is disturbing (Pérez Ariza, 2007):

"The sources and the journalists take part in equal measure in the journalistic game. Bullfighters, sports stars, the unknowns who leap to fame after being the occupants of houses, islands or farms; the wives, girlfriends or possible liaisons of any of these; people genuinely famous for being singers, actors, those who get married or divorced or pretend to do so. In short, not even the Spanish monarchy nor that of other countries, generally at the fringes of this phenomenon, has been able to escape this merry-go-round, for they are also the foodstuff of this ravenous form of journalism, which harasses, chases and presses into a corner people, with half-truths, partial truths, or deliberate lies."

Along the same lines are media reports which recount and describe the distress felt by those who have been the object of media harassment, such as Eugenia Martínez de Irujo, the daughter of the Duchess of Alba, who is Spain's wealthiest and most famous aristocrat, "followed day and night, whether on foot or by car, blinded by the lights of the cameras and microphones thrust in her face, asking for a comment, a gesture, some image to repeat over and over again in the ever increasing number of gossip and celebrity programmes" (Ordaz, 2003: 10).

The daughter of the Duchess of Alba made a public appeal for protection: "I live as if I were a criminal, constantly being followed whether I'm in Seville, here or Barcelona. I decided a while ago to lock myself up with my daughter. I can't let her be exposed to this kind of anxiety: running from photographers all day, doing crazy manoeuvres in the car to get away from them. Is that fair?" (Ordaz, 2003: 10). The forms of open harassment or covert pursuit, with endless hours of work in the field, have made some reporters into private detectives of the lives of any person susceptible of being newsworthy in the tabloid media, the "pink press" (*prensa rosa*) as it is known in Spain (Pérez Ariza, 2007).

There are even some thought-provoking documentaries which deal openly with the issue, such as *Chasing Angelina: Paparazzi & Celebrity Obsession*, which shows the media pursuit of the American actress Angelina Jolie. This is a work which touches upon the classic dilemma of who is more at fault, the person who violates the norm or the person who either applies pressure, pays or allows others to do so (So who is at fault for stalking Angelina? Is it the paparazzi who are accused of going to any extreme to snap a money-making shot? ", comments the narrator).

Some news events confirm the social relevance of a topic that has caused concern among well-known personalities and institutions or, in some cases, even unequivocal condemnation by society. For it should not be forgotten, as Sinova points out (2003: 174), that if "information is a necessity and a right, and is, moreover, set up as one of the principles of democracy, it cannot remain subject to the discretion of those who have no clear sense of the public dimension of their work."

After the death of the singer Rocío Jurado on 1 June 2006, the Spanish deputy prime minister, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, speaking on behalf of the government, expressed regret at the fact that the media frenzy in competing for the right to gain access to the private life of a sick person (she died of cancer after a long illness) and her family took paramouncy over everything else. The degree of reporters' persecution of family members was so savage that Fernando González Urbaneja, president of the Press Association of Madrid (APM), urged journalists not to make fools of themselves by violating the basic principles of good citizenship and manners.

In 2008, Telma Ortiz, together with her partner Enrique López, filed a claim against 57 media outlets in the Court of First Instance, number 3, in Toledo. She asked that pictures of herself and her family only be taken when she was participating in official events as sister of the Princess of Asturias. At that time there was talk of a gagging order against the press in view of the legal action to prevent the newspapers, magazines and television channels being sued from taking, publishing, distributing, disseminating, broadcasting or reproducing her image. Indeed, the first judgments pronounced in the United States in the area of protection of the right to privacy and the right to be let alone dealt with issues relating to images (*Robertson v. Rochester Folding Box Co.* and *Pavesich v. New England Life*

Insurance Co.).

In this case, however, the argument specifically put forward was not that of media harassment, which indeed might have led a judge to weigh up the option of prohibiting reporters from coming within a certain distance of the subject. In a memo issued by the APM, its governing board regretted and condemned cases of harassment and abusive invasion of privacy, in the face of which it expressed its faith in the judges.

In her ruling the judge point out that there was no provision for a general prohibition such as the one requested, since this was not legal, and that although the Spanish Constitution of 1978 excludes any form of prior censorship (which would not be the case), it would then indeed restrict the general public's right to information relating to a figure in the public eye, a condition concerning which, as applicable to the claimant, doubts have been explicitly raised. However, the argument about media persecution of the person concerned was left to one side. The appeal later submitted by Telma was dismissed.

The journalistic profession itself, at given moments, can be seen to take stock (editorials, articles, interviews, declaration) of the approach adopted towards public figures, whether as the subjects of a news story or in their capacity as sources of information. Even the stories told, or the stereotypes of the reporter shown, in feature films provoke social, professional and scholarly debate (Bezunartea *et al.*, 2007: 369–393).

To sum up, in relation to the application of professional ethics, Pernau (2006: 101), president of the Press Council of Catalonia (*Consell de la Informació de Catalunya*), which oversees the code of ethics in Catalonia, reminds us that the individual citizen may choose to collaborate with the professional journalist but is not obliged to do so. It is not permitted to harass an individual to force him or her reveal how much he or she knows about a newsworthy event and that everyone has the right to speak off the record, which must be honoured by the journalist, just as journalists must also respect the right to one's image and privacy from others, especially at moments of personal pain and suffering.

As for the comparative study of the norms and standards that constitute the fundamentals of journalistic ethical practice, this clearly shows the existence of certain principles and recommendations aimed at protecting the fundamental right to privacy and a private life, the dignity of the individual, as well as affirming the repudiation of certain professional practices because of their dishonesty.

Without attempting to be exhaustive, it is sufficient to cite the following texts for their relevance: International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism UNESCO, art. 6 (1980); Resolution 1003 on the ethics of journalism of the Council of Europe, art. 23 (1993); Code of Ethics of the Federation of Spanish Press Associations (*Código deontológico de la profesión periodística de la Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa de España*), art. 4 (1993); Code of Ethics of the Journalists' Trade Union of Madrid (*Código deontológico del Sindicato de Periodistas de Madrid*), art. 13.2 (2000); Telemadrid Style Guide (*Libro de estilo de Telemadrid*), art. 2.8.a (1993); Principles of Conduct for the Media of the Catalan Broadcasting Corporation (*Principios de actuación de los medios de la Corporación Catalana de Radio y Televisión*), art. 1[B] (2002); Style Guide of COPE radio (*Libro de estilo COPE*), art. 1.1.b (2003); Vocento Style Guide (*Libro de Estilo Vocento*), art. 1.2.12.a (2003); Canal Sur Style Guide (*Libro de estilo de Canal Sur*), arts. 1.7 y 2.5.6 (2004).

Nor is there a lack of recent publications in which the working methods of the reporters generically known as *del corazón*, literally "of the heart", meaning of human interest, are compiled in a comprehensive, collective or personal way (González, 2005; Susperregui, 2006). These are works of undoubted interest insofar as they abundantly illustrate the shared and diverse daily working strategies of well-known reporters, but nevertheless still tend to towards a certain congratulatory tone regarding their exertions, a defence of professional honour and reputation, combined with an underlying attitude exonerating and justifying their methods, which are so often called into question. These are, moreover, monographs in each case restricted to an insufficient number of personal testimonies.

At the same time, there is still a dearth of empirical studies which use scientific methods and preserve anonymity by means of a sufficient sample of subjects and which deal with the specific approach of the reporter, for instance, in relation to a range of figures in the public eye in Spanish society.

Pérez Curiel distinguishes between "the ephemeral personality, who is the object of attention because of some specific circumstance; the sporadic personality, who is only pursued occasionally; or the constant personality, who, regardless of what he does or says, is always the object of attention of the tabloid press..." (2001: 307). To cover the wide spectrum, members of the royal family or their relatives are deemed potential subjects of news stories, as well as politicians currently in office and relevant public

figures, regardless of whether or not they sell exclusives. Moreover, on rare occasions, the end justifies certain actions and types of conduct (Bovee, 1991): the media and the reporter's approach in obtaining information must be pertinent, proportionate and respectful of the principles that govern the profession and the subjects dealt with.

Given this context, the aim of present study is to unravel the current position of media professionals in their daily routine as regards the information which they may obtain about relevant public figures as personal sources of news.

In other words, the objective is to contrast the journalistic standards currently applicable with the value system which predominates within the ethical criteria internalised by professionals of social communication, in this case, those who work in the Madrid autonomous region, which comprises the city and its surrounding area. This study is carried out under the auspices of a national project entitled "Ethics and excellence in news journalism. Journalistic ethics from the point of view of the public's expectations in Madrid", [1] developed by the Carlos III University of Madrid. Parallel research was undertaken at the Pompeu Fabra University of Barcelona, which is coordinating the project, and the universities of País Vasco (Basque Country) and Seville.

## 2. Methodology

To achieve this objective the project consists of two fundamental tasks. Firstly, an analysis of the content of the greatest number possible of documents on the subject of self-regulation ethics. Secondly, a survey of the opinions of the media professionals who prepare news stories. Two research techniques were adopted in order to establish their attitudes in relation to ethical issues. First, an in-depth interview to examine the discourse of the 30 news journalists selected on the basis of their proven professional background. [2]

The sample was structured using various independent variables in such a way that the entire profession could be found represented *in some form*.

This portrait of the profession was subsequently completed by carrying out 410 questionnaires of media professionals with the object of obtaining data which could be extrapolated for the entire group of professionals in the Madrid autonomous region. This article presents the most relevant results obtained following a comparison of the quantitative and qualitative analyses.

The following steps were taken in the qualitative analysis:

- 1) Structure of the interview by the coordinating team at the Pompeu Fabra University. The model questionnaire initially consisted of 60 questions of ethical interest, in each case formulated in an open-ended way. To avoid any chance of the interviewee getting tired, the qualitative questions were left in while the quantitative ones were extracted for the group questionnaire.
- 2) Correction of the interview model based on the contributions of the researchers from the other coordinating teams in the study. In the end, 26 questions were selected, structured according to area. The questions alluded to general subjects, such as: a) what does telling the truth consist of in journalism; b) the relationship between the journalist and news sources; c) how should journalistic information be presented; d) treatment of disadvantaged groups; e) objectivity in face of the ideology of the media; f) influence of political power; g) influence of advertisers; h) ethical conflicts; i) mechanisms for self-regulation; and j) other questions of interest.
- 3) Drawing up a sample of potential interviewees with the aim of ensuring the entire profession is represented in some form. To this end, the following independent variables were used: type and ownership of media, position, section, area of dissemination, sex, ideology and age.
- 4) Realisation of the fieldwork by the Carlos III University of Madrid in collaboration with the Official College of Political Scientists and Sociologists of Madrid (*Colegio Oficial de Polítólogos y Sociólogos de Madrid*).
- 5) Interpretation of the results based on the interview tape recordings [3] and transcriptions.

At the second stage, the main tasks involved in carrying out the quantitative analysis were:

- 1) Structure of an online questionnaire [4] by the team at the Pompeu Fabra University of Barcelona based on the questions which had initially been envisaged for the in-depth interviews, but which were

ultimately rejected.

2) Correction of the questionnaire based on the contributions of the researchers from the teams involved in the study. In the end, the questionnaire consisted of 40 questions, organised in the same areas as those foreseen for the in-depth interviews.

3) Drawing up a sample of potential interviewees with the aim of ensuring that the entire profession is represented in some form, just as with the qualitative analysis except with more exacting standards in terms of statistical rigour. Once again, the following independent variables were used to this end: type and ownership of media, position, section, area of dissemination, sex, ideology and age.

4) Realisation of the fieldwork by the Carlos III University of Madrid in collaboration with the Official College of Political Scientists and Sociologists of Madrid. [5] This step also included the design of a web application to enable interviewees to fill in the survey online.

5) Interpretation of the results based on measuring the frequency and cross-tabulation of the variables.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Monovariate analysis

It is worth recalling the question put to those surveyed: "In what cases do you think it is legitimate to approach a famous person in the street to obtain certain statements which the person concerned has made clear he or she does not wish to make?"

The following cases were asked about:

- a) Members of the royal family;
- b) Relatives of members of the royal family;
- c) Politicians currently in office;
- d) Famous people who sell exclusives and
- e) Famous people who do not sell exclusives.

In each case, two alternative responses were made available: yes (it is legitimate) and no (it is not legitimate).

The results present divergent meanings depending on the category considered in each case (Table 1). Thus in general terms the people considered by journalists "most legitimate" of being pursued were politicians currently in office and famous people who sell exclusives. Conversely, those surveyed showed greater opposition to harassment of members of the royal family– and even more so against those who hound their relatives– and declared themselves reluctant to hound famous people who do not trade in exclusives.

**Table 1. Pursuit of people in the public eye**

	No	Yes
Members of the royal family	<b>77.5%</b>	22.5%
Relatives of members of the royal family	<b>83.4%</b>	16.6%
Politicians currently in office	47.7%	<b>52.3%</b>
Famous people who sell exclusives	<b>51.3%</b>	48.7%
Famous people who do not sell exclusives	<b>84.6%</b>	15.4%

The data are fairly consistent with the opinion expressed by the journalists surveyed for the qualitative analysis, in which they had to answer the following two questions: "What do you think ought to be the limit to the right to one's own image?" and "What do you think of the zeal for pursuing famous people?"

The results allow us to point out that all those interviewed show a high respect for the right to personal privacy. However, in those cases in which the public life of those concerned is at issue, the right to information prevails. In this respect, the dividing line between the public realm and the private sphere of the lives of public figures proves to be the enclave in which the interviewees express divergent opinions.

Soto maintains (2005: 199) that current gossip and celebrity news tends towards stories and personalities that lend themselves to spectacle, which encourages "dubious, mistaken and questionable

patterns of behaviour to become instilled and established in the journalistic profession as something normal and everyday". This conduct corresponds to the idea that in journalism the boundaries can be pushed back and that "many practicing the profession have been left behind on numerous occasions: journalists, media entrepreneurs, as well as the personalities who sustain it."

During the interviews, journalists justify the right to tell stories about the public life of individuals known to society with the argument that this is a personal free choice and that therefore these individuals should accept the consequences or drawbacks that may result from such public exposure. This public exposure would exclude pictures of children under eighteen and individuals who find themselves in situations which they have neither sought out nor wished for. In such cases, their privacy should be completely maintained. [6] However, the consensus disappears regarding the treatment which ought to be given to those who obtain an economic benefit from selling their private life. [7]

Two majority opinions can be emphasised in this regard. On the one hand, one third of interviewees reveal an attitude of greater tolerance as regards the violation of the right to one's image, since they take the view that "someone who has consistently sold their private life does not have a private life" and, therefore, has no right to complain. Thus asked about the right to one's own image, one of the journalists asserted: "I think it has to be respected up to the point at which they themselves respect it". Within this group can be found both professionals who work for the gossip and celebrity press (prensa del corazón) and those who consider themselves completely removed from that subject matter and who, precisely for this reason, do not feel the need to defend people whom they consider do not respect themselves.

In the opposing group, just over half those interviewed think that the right to one's own image should be safeguarded above everything else. [8] Within this second opinion, arguments are repeated with frequency which reflect more a concern for the very state of journalism than for the affected individuals' own image. Thus 6 of the 30 interviewees are so ashamed of the work undertaken by the gossip and celebrity press that they think that the individuals working in this area should not be considered journalists. [9]

From this perspective, journalists have the responsibility to put a stop to "false journalism", which would essentially involve never reporting on the personal life of anyone or disseminating news stories that are not relevant for public opinion, of genuine general interest.

As for the other question regarding the practice of harassing famous people on the street, the responses are along the same lines as the considerations expressed regarding the question of the right to one's own image. As well as repeating the division into two groups— those whom we might define as "tolerant" and "intolerant"— we come across two journalists who, although they are critical of the gossip and celebrity press and the hounding of famous people, also think that it is necessary to bear in mind the severe pressures to which the professionals working in this sector are subject.

### 3.2. Bivariable analysis

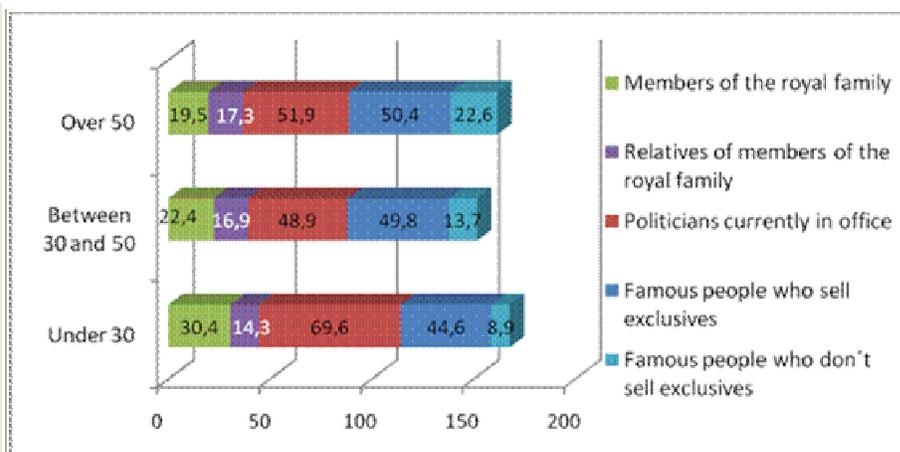
Following the statistical analyses, the independent variables which feature a greater correspondence with the media pursuit of public figures are age, gender, the area of media worked in, the type and size of the company, professional status, the subject area, ideological position and income level.

There are other variables, however, which do not appear to bear any relation to the legitimacy or abusiveness of hounding famous personalities. These include such variables as current employment situation, the town or borough in which the person works, level of studies, professional function, the area of diffusion of the medium and the perception of those problems most affecting the profession.

#### 3.2.1. Politicians: preferred quarry of young reporters

Looking at the cross-tabulation of the variable "object of the study" with that of "age of the reporters", it can be seen that the responses of the two groups over 30 years old show noticeable similarities. However, young journalists reveal themselves to be considerably more in favour of approaching or confronting politicians currently in office and members of the royal family and less so of following celebrities, especially if they have not sold exclusives. The data is presented in Figure 1, which shows the share of responses in favour of approaching a famous person in a public place.

**Figure 1. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to age group %)**

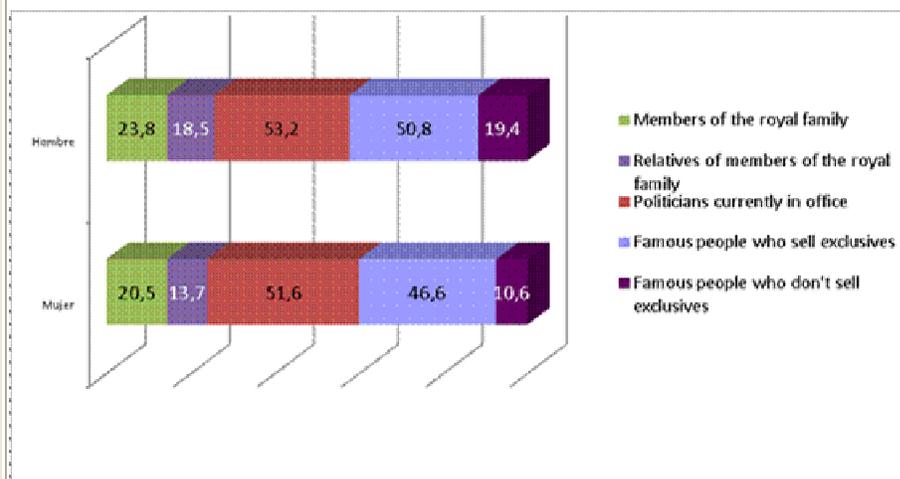


### 3.2.2. Female journalists: respect for the privacy of those who do not sell exclusives

When the variable “pursuit of famous people” is crossed with that of “gender”, it can be noted that there are slight indications of a correlation between the two (Figure 2). [10]

Bearing in mind that the figure represents the affirmative responses to the question, it can be observed that, in general and in each category, men –in greater numbers than women– describe themselves as in favour of approaching famous people with the purpose of obtaining information. The differences can be seen in particular in the specific instance of pursuing famous people who do not sell exclusives, since the affirmative responses given by men are almost double those given by women.

Figure 2. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to gender (in %)



### 3.2.3. Television and agencies: after the sellers of exclusives; the press after politicians

Depending upon the medium which one works for, the significance of the cross-tabulations is repeated once again for “politicians currently in office” and “famous people who sell exclusives.”

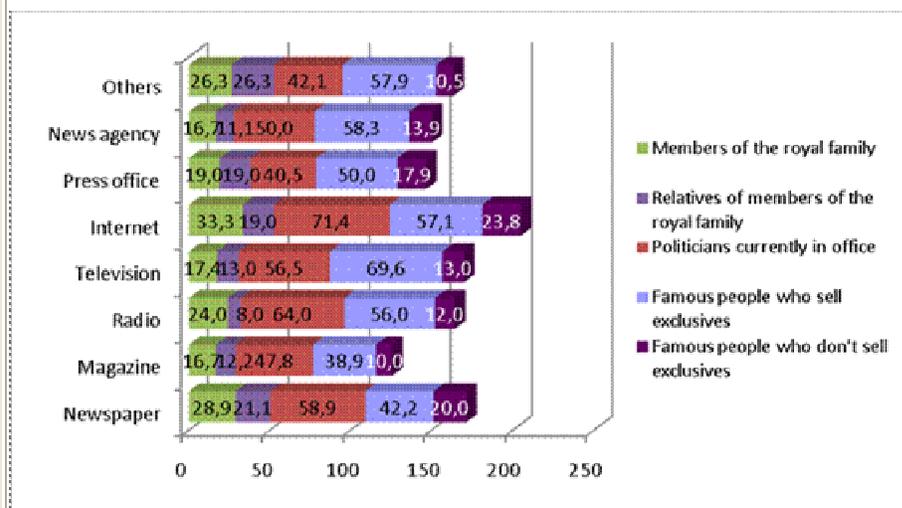
The media professionals most inclined to pursue members of the royal family are those working in digital media, newspapers and radio stations (Figure 3). [11]

Those who work for newspapers also prove to be the journalists most in favour of confronting relatives of members of the royal family, although the proportion is admittedly a minority and shared in greater degree by journalists from the other media companies.

Harassment of politicians currently in office is defended particularly by those working for radio stations, newspapers and television channels. Those in favour of pursuing famous people who do not sell exclusives are reporters working in digital media, newspapers and press offices; although it must be pointed out that the majority opinion –including for these media– is that of professionals who are against this practice.

There is a different result as regards famous people who do sell exclusives. In general, journalists from all media think it is more legitimate to pursue these figures than as compared to those who prefer to keep certain aspects of their lives private. Specifically, the largest shares are concentrated among journalists who work in television and news agencies, closely followed by digital media. This also happens to coincide with the fact that it is the journalists practicing in these media who confront this dilemma –on a daily basis and because of the nature of their work–, a feature which was also confirmed in the qualitative analysis.

Figure 3. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to medium (in %)

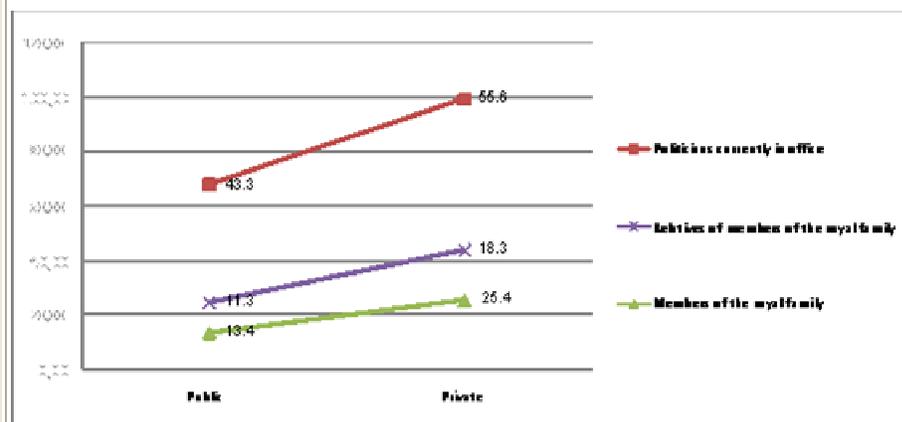


### 3.2.4. The reporter from the private company: more tenacious

When this question crosses with the type of company in which the journalists work, a certain correlation can be observed for three of the five categories surveyed (Figure 4). [12]

In these three cases, journalists employed at private companies think it is more legitimate to approach famous people at any price as compared to those who work for public companies. It would be valid to consider whether the pressures to which employees in the public sector find themselves subject to are fewer, given their possible greater job security and stability.

Figure 4. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to type of company (in %)



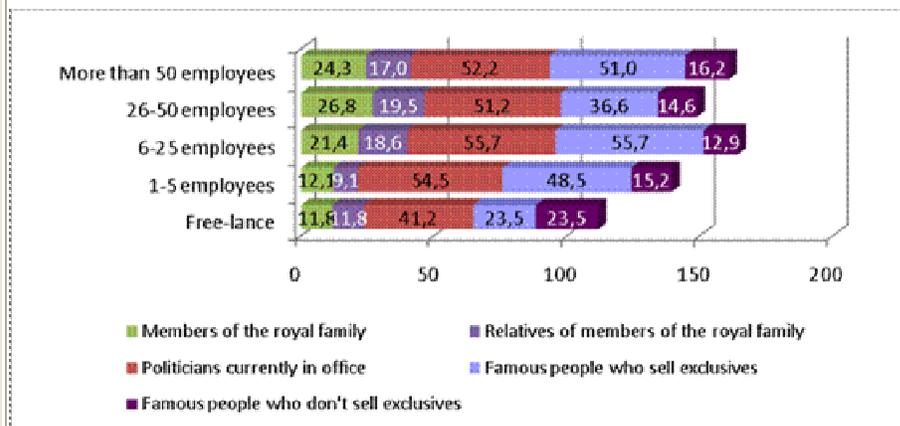
### 3.2.5. The greater the size of the company, the greater the harassment of the famous person

Various relevant outcomes can be determined for this cross-tabulation of variables (Figure 5). [13]

Thus the journalists who prove to be the most in favour of pursuing politicians currently in office are those working in small companies of 6 to 25 employees as well as 1 to 5 employees. These news providers also declare themselves to be extremely in favour of pursuing famous people who do not sell exclusives.

Bearing in mind that a large majority of journalists work for companies with more than 25 employees, it is significant that nearly 80% of employees in this category consider it legitimate to pursue famous people who sell exclusives. Exactly as found in the qualitative analysis, it is at the news agencies and large-scale media where high levels of competition are more prevalent. This may lead to the exploitation of markets in which news related to famous people represents an important source of information.

**Figure 5. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to company size (in %)**



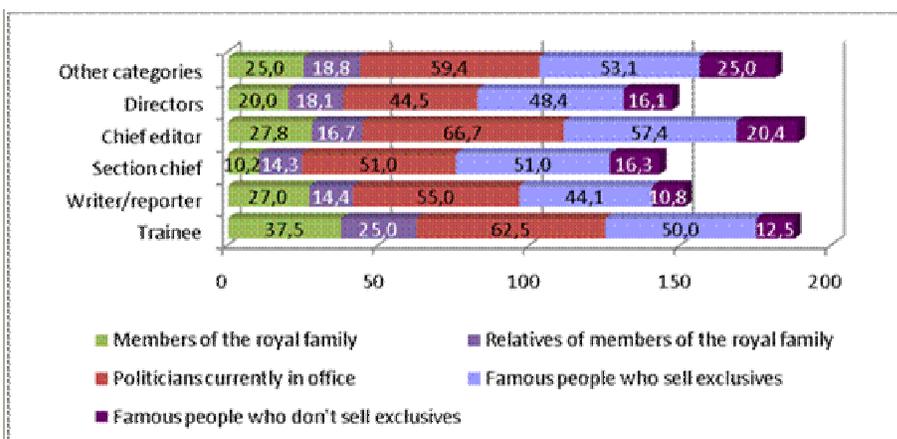
### 3.2.6. Politicians and famous people who sell exclusives: the targets of journalists in positions of responsibility

As far as professional status is concerned, the cross-tabulations are once again illustrative, particularly as regards politicians currently in office. Hence, it is the chief editors and trainees who show the highest support for the proposition that elected representatives be approached (Figure 6). [14]

Among writers/reporters, directors and heads of sections the responses are slightly less affirmative. In addition, chief editors are also those most in favour of harassment of famous people who sell exclusives. This may corroborate a worrying dysfunction in Spanish journalism denounced by Rodríguez (2009: 14):

"The link with teaching, which joined experienced journalists to those less experienced, as been broken, with highly enthusiastic but inadequately prepared journalists being thrown into the news jungle. Instead of instilling in them ethical types of conduct, they are told to go after what sells, expressing it in the most commercial language possible, in short, whatever achieves the maximum audience."

**Figure 6. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to professional status (in %)**



### 3.2.7. The gossip press: at the forefront of besieging the famous

Looking at subject area, the analysis again throws up some extremely interesting results. Thus, as should be expected, those working in politics –Spanish in particular but also international, local or in the autonomous regions– strongly advocate the stalking of politicians currently in office, a preference shared by journalists registered under culture and entertainment, gossip and celebrity press, sport, society and economy (Table 2). [15]

The proposition that both members of the royal family as well as their relatives should be pursued is received enthusiastically by journalists working for the gossip and celebrity press –something also comprehensible– and to a considerably lesser extent by the remaining categories, with the exception, perhaps, of the local politics and opinion sections, the majority of whom are against such practices.

All the categories except local politics reveal a strong disposition towards pursuing famous people who sell exclusives, in the same way that they all, this time again apart from the gossip and celebrity press, tend to be against the idea that public figures who do not make money from their private life be pursued without justification.

**Table 2. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to subject area (in %)**

	International	Spanish politics	Politics in the autonomous regions	Local politics	Opinion	Economics	Society	Science and technology	Culture	Sports	Gossip press	Other areas	Several areas at once
<b>Members of the royal family</b>	30.8	33.3	25.0	20.0	12.5	39.1	22.2	28.6	46.7	28.6	100.0	40.6	43.9
<b>Relatives of members of the royal family</b>	30.8	18.5	25.0		25.0	32.6	14.8		46.7	21.4	100.0	37.5	24.6
<b>Politicians currently in office</b>	76.9	92.6	50.0	80.0	75.0	84.8	77.8	71.4	100.0	85.7	100.0	81.3	84.2
<b>Famous people who sell exclusives</b>	92.3	70.4	75.0	20.0	62.5	82.6	77.8	85.7	73.3	71.4	100.0	81.3	82.5
<b>Famous people who don't sell exclusives</b>	30.8	11.1	25.0		37.5	43.5	11.1		33.3	21.4	100.0	21.9	24.6

### 3.2.8. The conservative journalist: a lenient attitude towards pursuit of the famous, regardless of whether or not they sell exclusives

Given the size of the sample, the two poles of the political spectrum do not register a high frequency, and thus it follows that the most important correlations are to be found in the middle of the table.

Those surveyed who state themselves to be “on the left” question to a lesser degree the hounding of members of the royal family, politicians and famous people who sell exclusives (Table 3). [16]

For these last two categories, the tendency is similar as for those journalists who state themselves to be “on the right”, although the latter show themselves to more lenient of the pursuit of famous people, regardless of whether or not they sell exclusives.

The greatest differences can be observed in relation to the legitimacy or otherwise of putting members of the royal family under duress. Specifically, fewer than 37% of journalists on the centre right show themselves tolerant of this practice, whereas 100% on the extreme left declare themselves strongly in favour. It would be worth contrasting to see whether this attitude echoes the fact that in general the institution of the monarchy gets more support from conservative journalists.

**Table 3. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to political ideology (in %)**

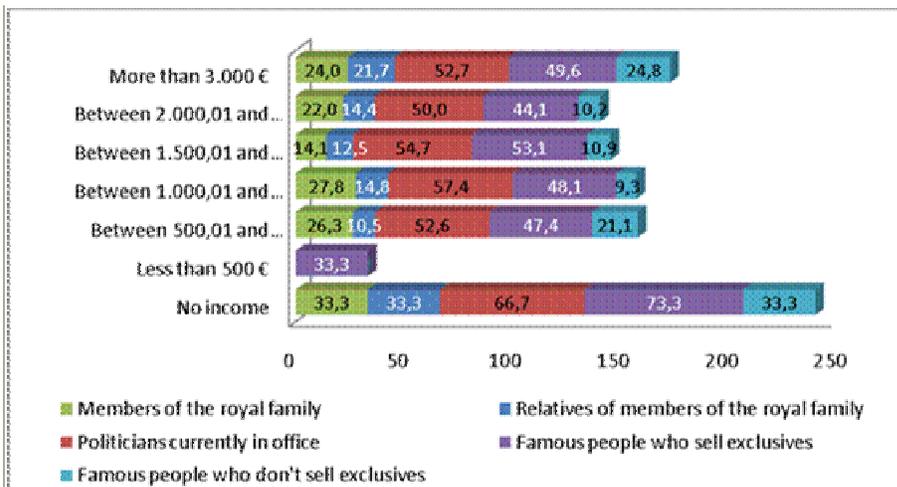
	Extreme left					Extreme right
<b>Members of the royal family</b>	100.0	28.6	26.1	17.4	19.4	
<b>Relatives of members of the royal family</b>		15.7	21.0	13.0	19.4	
<b>Politicians currently in office</b>	100.0	57.1	50.7	46.0	61.1	
<b>Famous people who sell exclusives</b>		50.0	43.5	50.3	63.9	
<b>Famous people who don't sell exclusives</b>		8.6	16.7	16.1	27.8	

### 3.2.9. The higher the salary, the greater the persecutory zeal

Taking into account the income level of the journalist, the most powerful relation is found between the groups of journalists who have no income and those who earn more than 3,000 euros. They are both more disposed towards approaching well-known figures on the street (Figure 7). [17]

Their percentage share relative to the other groups is particularly high for the variable “relatives of members of the royal family”, for which 33.3% of those who have no income and 21.7% of those who earn more than 3,000 euros agree with approaching them, whereas in the other groups this figure hardly reaches 15%. The remaining categories register results very similar to one another.

**Figure 7. Respondents in favour of pursuing famous people, according to income level (in %)**



#### 4. Conclusions

1. Journalists working in the mass media in the Madrid autonomous region show themselves more in favour of pursuing the class of politicians currently in office than others (52.3%). Supporters and detractors of the hounding of famous people who sell exclusives are divided in almost equal numbers (48.7% and 51.3%, respectively). Conversely, the journalists surveyed strongly reject the pursuit of members of the royal family (77.5%), and particularly their relatives (83.4%), and are also against the hounding of relevant personalities who do not trade in their private lives (84.6%).

2. Politicians are established as the preferred news quarry of young reporters, media professionals in directorship positions and the press (newspapers, magazines, news agencies).

3. Female journalists show more respect for the privacy of those who do not sell exclusives, as opposed to professionals at the centre of the scale politically, who are more lenient.

4. Those, however, who do trade in their private lives are harassed to a greater extent by television channels and news agencies. They are most sought after by the directors of media. The news providers of the gossip and celebrity press are at the forefront of besieging them. Conservative journalists also reveal themselves in favour of following them.

5. Journalists employed at private media companies show themselves more tenacious with personalities relevant in society. The greater the company and the higher salary, so too increases the sense of justification as regards harassment of the public figure.

#### 5. Bibliography

Bezunartea, O.; Cantalapiedra, M.J.; Coca, C.; Genaut, A.; Peña, S. y Pérez, J.A. (2007): "Periodistas de cine y ética", *Ámbitos*, 16, pp. 369–393.

Bovee, W.G. (1991): "The End Can Justify the Means, But Rarely". *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 6 (3), septiembre, pp. 135–145.

González, G. (2005): *Diario de un paparazzi: el otro lado de la prensa del corazón*. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori.

Ordaz, P. (2003): "Los famosos se sienten acosados". *El País*, 16 de febrero, suplemento *Domingo*, p. 10.

Pérez Ariza, C. (2007): "El periodismo rosa como telenovela de no-ficción en el marco de la libertad de expresión". *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 62. Recuperado el 30 de junio de 2009 de:

[http://www.revistalatinacs.org/200712Perez\\_Ariza.htm](http://www.revistalatinacs.org/200712Perez_Ariza.htm)

DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-62-2007-738-151-159.

Pérez Curiel, C. (2001–2002): “La actualidad informativa del ‘corazón’ desde la especialización periodística: el periodismo rosa de Contraportada (Canal Sur Televisión)”. *Ámbitos*, 7–8, pp. 305–325.

Pernau, Josep (2006): “Cataluña, pionera del autocontrol en España”. *Cuadernos de Periodistas*, 6, abril, p. 94–111.

Rodríguez, N. (2009): “La batalla perdida”. *Cuadernos de Periodistas*, 13, abril, pp. 9–18.

Sinova, J. (2003): “Acerca de la responsabilidad pública del periodista: la verdad, los derechos de los públicos y otras exigencias éticas del trabajo informativo”. *Doxa Comunicación*, 1, pp. 171–184.

Soto, L. (2005): “Prensa rosa: el juego sucio de periodistas y famosos”. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 11, pp. 193–209.

Susperregui, J.M. (2006): *Famosos pillados*. Madrid: Espejo de Tinta.

## 6. Notes

[1] “Ethics and excellence in news journalism. Journalistic ethics from the point of view of the public’s expectations in Madrid” [SEJ2006–05631–C05–03/SOCI], research project funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation in Spain under the auspices of national research and development plan (*Plan Nacional de I+D+i* (2004–2007)). The lead researcher is Carlos Maciá Barber.

[2] Participants are journalists from general, free, sporting and local newspapers (*Abc*, *As*, *Diario de Alcalá*, *El Mundo*, *El País*, *La Razón*, *Marca*, *Público*, *20 minutos* and *Latino*); public and private radio stations, both national and local (Cadena SER, Cadena COPE, Intereconomía, Onda Cero, Onda Madrid and Punto Radio); public and private television channels (Antena 3, CNN+, Cuatro, La Sexta, Telecinco, Telemadrid and TVE); news agencies, both generalised and specialised, public and private (EFE, Europa Press, Servimedia and Teleobjetivo); digital media (elplural.com and Madridiario.es); and press offices of institutions (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, Casa de América).

[3] The tone in which the subject being interviewed says a word or phrase, the pauses in the response, as well as the silences during the discourse, are in some cases extremely significant.

[4] The choice of this type of questionnaire was based on the fact that web technologies allow the well-known limitations in time and space of communication professionals to be circumvented, which enables those surveyed to answer at any time or from any place with internet access. A total of 427 valid questionnaires were conducted in this research project, from which the size of the sample calculated was 410 questionnaires. The selection was a simple random sample.

[5] The fieldwork began on 21 January 2009, when the letters of introduction were sent to the 1,134 professionals who had been initially identified in the census, and was completed on 16 March 2009. A total of up to six reminders were sent by e-mail.

[6] In this respect, one of the conclusions of the qualitative analysis is the substantial agreement among journalists that it is appropriate that news stories concerning minors should receive special treatment.[]

[7] One of those interviewed argued that “there is a double standard in this whole game. There are famous people who start to live from the show, and the fact of being famous, and those types of programme; and when they don’t need it or it doesn’t suit them, they make out that they’re being hounded. It’s true that many of them are hounded, but they are simply being devoured by the wild beast that they themselves fed earlier. They are victims of their own greed and avarice. And it’s at that point I lose sympathy with them”.

[8] One interviewee gave the following defence: “I think that anyone, including people who sell their private life, have a right to decide when they sell it and when they stop selling it. And it’s something that affects, I think, the most fundamental values; of freedom, of ownership and control over your own life and personality.”

[9] “You see, the gossip and celebrity press is an abomination, it’s not journalism as far as I’m concerned, it’s anti-journalism. Anti-journalism because the rumour is heightened to the nth degree and

multiplied by the media; without sources, without facts, without comparisons, without absolutely anything; and that it flames people's most base emotions. News from the waist downwards and gossip, that's it. That's not journalism, there's no need for it. There are so many other things apart from the waist downwards", admitted one journalist. In the judgment of another, "what they call gossip journalism, journalism "of the heart", I would call it butcher journalism. There's not much heart, but everything else: liver, kidneys and then... well of course, these personalities who sell their exclusives, no one really knows if later you don't want them to be hounded so that they can carry on selling their exclusives". A third interviewee was also adamant about this issue: "I simply refuse to consider that I work in the same profession as those people, those programmes and those supposed journalists. In fact, I will do everything possible to make sure that they stop calling them journalists or they stop calling me a journalist. But I feel as little associated with that profession as with that of the priest or the United States marines; they have nothing to do with one another. It's one thing that we use similar resources but another that we are working in the same profession. With a knife, you can kill someone or you can slice ham. So, I slice ham and they kill; or the other way round, if you prefer, but it's not the same. And so, to me it's a scandal against which we proper journalists should rebel."

[10]

Análisis: Personajes famosos que no venden exclusivas		Cruce: Sexo	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	5,820440091	Grados de libertad	1
Coefficiente de Phi	0,117538415	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,116734819
Existe evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Vote Cítmers	0,117538415

[11]

Análisis: Políticos en activo		Cruce: Principal medio	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	15,57192794	Grados de libertad	7
Coefficiente de Phi	0,195123483	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,191911807
Existe evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Vote Cítmers	0,195123483

Análisis: Personajes famosos que venden exclusivas		Cruce: Principal medio	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	12,71820959	Grados de libertad	7
Coefficiente de Phi	0,173363693	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,173364116
Existe evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Vote Cítmers	0,173363693

[12]

Análisis: Miembros de la Casa Real		Cruce: Tipo de empresa	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	0,093325312	Grados de libertad	1
Coefficiente de Phi	0,122237637	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,121334635
Existe evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Vote Cítmers	0,122237637

Análisis: Familiares de miembros de la Casa Real		Cruce: Tipo de empresa	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	2,99941973	Grados de libertad	1
Coefficiente de Phi	0,079819799	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,079806734
Existe evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Vote Cítmers	0,079819799

Análisis: Políticos en activo		Cruce: Tipo de empresa	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	4,508007476	Grados de libertad	1
Coefficiente de Phi	0,105114404	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,104538400
Existe evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Vote Cítmers	0,105114404

[13]

Análisis: Personajes famosos que venden exclusivas		Cruce: Tamaño de empresa	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	8,038175533	Grados de libertad	4
Coefficiente de Phi	0,146231622	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,143744011
Existe evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Vote Cítmers	0,146231622

[14]

Análisis: Políticos en activo		Cruce: Categoría profesional	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	9,54896214	Grados de libertad	5
Coefficiente de Phi	0,152781411	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,151026806
Señala evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Valor Chi-cuadrado	0,152781411

[15]

Análisis: Personajes famosos que no venden exclusivas		Cruce: Ppal. Área temática	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	23,3390501	Grados de libertad	12
Coefficiente de Phi	0,238172417	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,232011835
Señala evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Valor Chi-cuadrado	0,238172417
23,3% de las celdas tiene un valor esperado menor que 5			

[16]

Análisis: Políticos en activo		Cruce: Bases ideológicas políticas	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	12,0392239	Grados de libertad	5
Coefficiente de Phi	0,171948812	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,169461573
Señala evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Valor Chi-cuadrado	0,171948812
21,6% de las celdas tiene un valor esperado menor que 5			

[17]

Análisis: Personajes famosos que no venden exclusivas		Cruce: Ingresos mensuales medios netos	
Valor Chi-cuadrado	18,2643115	Grados de libertad	6
Coefficiente de Phi	0,212478501	Coefficiente de contingencia	0,207638891
Señala evidencia de relación, con un nivel de confianza del 95%		Valor Chi-cuadrado	0,212478501
21,4% de las celdas tiene un valor esperado menor que 5			

#### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES / REFERENCES:

Maciá Barber, Carlos & Herrera Damas, Susana (2009): "Media harassment to public figures from the ethical perspective of journalists in Madrid", at *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 64, pages 880 to 893. La Laguna (Tenerife): Universidad de La Laguna, retrieved the \_\_\_\_th \_\_\_\_ 2\_\_\_\_\_, from [http://www.revistalatinacs.org/09/art/868\\_UC3M/69\\_94\\_MyH\\_Eng.html](http://www.revistalatinacs.org/09/art/868_UC3M/69_94_MyH_Eng.html)  
DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-64-2009-868-880-893-Eng

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