

# The independence of journalists from gifts and financial interference; a comparative perspective between journalists and citizens

La independencia de los periodistas frente a los regalos e interferencias económicas; una perspectiva comparada entre periodistas y ciudadanía

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## ABSTRACT

In research about “MediaACES. Accountability and Journalistic Cultures in Spain. Impact and proposal of good practices in the Spanish media “, funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of Spain, fieldwork has been carried out between journalists and citizens on good journalistic practices and the accountability system. Among the questions raised has been raised how journalists could be compromised their information independence in more or less close relations with political and economic powers, as well as when they can mediate gifts that can range from a simple gesture of institutional courtesy to certain forms of compensation for a favorable information treatment. In this communication, the position of professionals and citizens is analyzed.

**KEYWORDS:** media accountability systems, journalistic cultures, self-regulation, transparency, journalism ethics, Spain, gifts.

## RESUMEN

Dentro del proyecto de I+D+I, “MediaACES. Accountability y Culturas Periodísticas en España. Impacto y propuesta de buenas prácticas en los medios de comunicación españoles”, financiado por el Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad de España, se ha llevado a cabo un trabajo de campo entre periodistas y ciudadanos sobre las buenas prácticas periodísticas y los sistemas de rendición de cuenta. Entre las cuestiones formuladas se ha planteado de qué manera los periodistas podría ver comprometida su independencia informativa ante relaciones más o menos estrechas con poderes políticos y económicos, así como cuando puedan mediar regalos que puedan ir desde un simple gesto de cortesía institucional a ciertas formas de compensación por un tratamiento informativo favorable. En esta comunicación se analiza la posición de los profesionales y de los ciudadanos.

**Palabras clave:** rendición de cuentas, autorregulación, transparencia, ética periodística, España, regalos,

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## 1. Introduction

The objective of the R+D+I project “MediaACES. Accountability and Journalistic Cultures in Spain. Impact and proposal of good practices in the Spanish media” is to analyze the ethics of journalism both from a self-critical point of view of the professionals and from the perspective of communication experts and the opinion of the citizens. In this way, we seek to triangulate these three positions to verify their coherence and effectiveness. That is, to what extent good professional practices are perceived as such by the audience, and an interaction between both parties is achieved for a higher quality of information. In the protagonism of ethics in the exercise of journalism, it is exposed in different works inside and outside our borders, for example, Aznar, 1999; García Avilés, 2011; Kovach, B.; Rosenstiel, 2001, among others.

Specifically, this project has tried to address three issues: 1) A general assessment of ethics in current journalism; 2) The instruments to guarantee the ethics of the media; 3) The opinion on the ethics of journalists.

To carry out this work, a survey of journalists and a series of focus groups with citizens have been carried out to find out their opinion on the exercise of the journalistic profession. Furthermore, a series of in-depth interviews with communication ethics experts or professional representatives was conducted. This article analyzes the opinion of professionals and citizens on how gifts can affect the independence of the professional. Both the survey and the focus groups were carried out in the six autonomous communities participating in the project: Andalusia, Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque Country, Madrid, and Valencia.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Survey to journalists

The survey to journalists consisted of a questionnaire made up of 29 questions. To guarantee its operability, dichotomous, multiple-choice, and rating scale questions were combined (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). The profile of the journalists selected for this study had to meet the following

characteristics: (1) Work for a journalistic communication medium (professionals who perform public relations tasks are excluded in this way); (2) Carry out journalism (professionals who perform technical or organizational tasks in the media industry are excluded); and (3) Have a full-time or primary occupation, that is, earn 50 percent or more of their income from their profession as a journalist (Freelancers are also included if they earn 50 percent or more of their income from journalistic activities).

The questionnaire was administered online through the SurveyMonkey platform, being open for three months (October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017 – January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018). During this period, the entered responses were monitored weekly. The total of responses obtained was 228 (N=228). 52.2% (n=119) of the informants were women and 47.8% (n=109) were men. Most of the informants (71.1%) have a university education in journalism. 53.1% are part of an association or professional college of journalists. Once the material was collected, the descriptive, monovarietal, and bivariate statistical analysis was carried out using the specialized software IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The resulting data was subsequently triangulated with the qualitative information obtained from the discussion groups with citizens and the in-depth interviews with experts.

## **2.2. Focus group with citizens**

To carry out this analysis, the focus group discussion technique was used. The focus group consists of a qualitative technique in which a group of between 6 and 8 people, generally strangers, is brought together to discuss a specific topic under the direction of a moderator who introduces questions from a previously defined script.

The focus group is a very valuable technique to obtain qualitative material since a series of interactions are generated between the people who make up the group that allows obtaining information different from that which would be obtained individually. In this sense, the participants in the group are influenced by and influence the rest of the participants, interacting and sharing opinions and experiences.

Before conducting the focus groups, the topics to be discussed have been planned and the questions to guide the discussion have been defined. The topics discussed during the groups have been structured in three large blocks (see the script in Annex I). The first block has been devoted to making a general assessment of ethics in current journalism. The second block has focused on the analysis of the instruments to guarantee the ethics of the media. And, finally, the third block has been devoted to analyzing the opinion on the attitudes of journalists from an ethical point of view.

Six focus groups were carried out, one in each of the following cities: Barcelona, Castelló, Madrid, Seville, Mondragón, and Santiago de Compostela, with the participation of 38 people in total, 22 women and 16 men. The age of the participants is balanced, with 42% in the middle ages and the rest distributed almost equally between those under 30 and those over 60.

## **3. Results**

In the first place, we will present the main results obtained from the surveys carried out with Spanish journalists, on which are the factors that most affect the exercise of the journalistic profession. Specifically, we focus on the importance of economic pressures, the education of the journalist, and their connection with various professional organizational structures. These circumstances are relevant to understand the purpose of this article about their attitudes towards gifts and perks.

### **3.1. Economic pressures**

Economic pressures are the second most valued factor when asked to what extent it affects the general situation of journalism in their autonomous community (7.91 out of 10). For its part, government pressures are scored with 7.62 and political pressures with 7.54. The assessment of economic pressures as a harmful assumption for journalism is correlated with years of work experience (with a 99% confidence level). Thus, the assessment of the assumption is higher among journalists with fewer years of work experience. Likewise, it can be affirmed, with a 95% confidence level, that the age of the informant is correlated with the assessment given to “economic pressures”. Both in this case and in that of government and political pressures, there is, in general, a higher score the younger the person who responds is.

By Autonomous Communities, economic pressures are considered the assumption that most affect the general situation of journalism in the Balearic and Canary Islands (8.33 in both cases); meanwhile, government and political pressures are in Galicia (8.78 and 8.51 respectively). On the other hand, it is striking that depending on the type of medium in which the informant works, economic pressures are the most valued element among professionals who work in newspapers (8.14 out of 10), journals or magazines (8.63), and private radios (7.92). Meanwhile, government and political pressures are especially valued among journalists who work in digital newspapers and news agencies, although, in neither of these two cases are they the most valued assumption.

### **3.2. Journalist's training and forms of professional organization**

Regarding education, intern journalists especially value the incidence of economic pressures (8.83 out of 10), while those with non-approved studies give more importance to political and government pressures (9 in each case). For their part, those who belong to a journalists' union give a slightly higher score to each of the three assumptions (economic, political, and governmental pressures) than those who are not members of an organization of this type. It is not exactly the same with belonging to a professional association or college. Those who are members of this type, give a higher score to governmental and political pressures than those who are not, while in the case of economic pressures the opposite is true. Finally, the percentage of income that comes from journalistic work is another variable that affects the score given to these three assumptions. Those who receive at least half the money they earn from their journalistic work, rate it lower than those whose income from their journalistic work accounts for less than half of the total.

### **3.3. The position of professionals on gifts**

Journalists consider it admissible to give lectures or carry out other well-paid activities (70.2%); accept promotional merchandise-type gifts (64.5%), paid trips to accompany the information source (50.9%).

They do not consider it admissible to accept gifts worth more than 200 euros (91.7%); between 30 and 199 (82.9%); individual meals paid for by the source (57%)

Likewise, they are especially blunt when it comes to rejecting gifts worth more than 200 euros (91.7%) and even those other gifts worth more than 30 and up to 199 euros (82.9%).

**Tabla 1.** *Promotional gifts (merchandising)*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid Yes	147	64.5	64.5	64.5
Valid No	81	35.5	35.5	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

**Table 2.** *Gifts worth more than 30 euros and up to 199 euros*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid Yes	39	17.1	17.1	17.1
Valid No	189	82.9	82.9	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.** *Gifts worth more than 200 euros*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid Yes	19	8.3	8.3	8.3
Valid No	209	91.7	91.7	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.** *Individual meals paid for by the source*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid Yes	98	43.0	43.0	43.0
Valid No	130	57.0	57.0	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5.** *Paid trips to accompany the information source*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid Yes	116	50.9	50.9	50.9
Valid No	112	49.1	49.1	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.** *Give lectures or do other well-paid activities*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid Yes	160	70.2	70.2	70.2
Valid No	68	29.8	29.8	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

### 3.4. The attitude of citizens towards gifts and perks

In this section, the public perception of some of the relevant assumptions that could likely affect the independence of the journalist is collected. We made a brief presentation of the different situations raised, in which the most significant answers given in each one of them will be collected.

For many, the gifts and perks that are *acceptable or not depend on the intention of the issuer*. Gifts should not condition the news in the future, they should allow the journalist to work freely.

It depends if the gift is before they speak, that is, I am going to give this journalist something so that he can speak well of me, or if you give it to him afterward, as a prize, or maybe because you feel like it and that's it because you give it to any journalist who has invited you. In other words, there are differences in intentions, but each one will accept what he wants.

(THEY TALK) (DG01-W)

*Gifts should not be accepted in any case*, according to some of the people in the discussion groups. Gifts are bribes and are always accompanied by some intention. Someone comments that this practice is more common in Spain because culturally it has been more likely to receive gifts in exchange for influence.

The company can do better or worse depending on what I say. But there are many ways to give gifts in political journalism: a collaboration with a public medium or that the politician speaks good or bad to your boss about you, that they give you more or fewer facilities.

(DG03-M)

Some draw the line between *what is ethical and what is not in the quantity, relevance, or price of the gift*.

[The limit is] Well, in the value of the gift. (DG05-W)

For others, *it depends on the journalist*, who is the one who knows if this gift can really influence their work or not, or if they accept this conditioning.

I think that if it's a soccer match ticket one day, the next, the next, and the next, and then a trip on a cruise ship, this is too much. An entry to a soccer match is a conditioning, well, it depends on the journalist, if he wants to be conditioned, that too... (DG05-M)

The gift is a symbol of something that *can intervene in the journalist's objectivity*, but it is neither the only nor the most dangerous in terms of influence.

In any case, there is currently *more transparency about this type of perks* and gifts. For this reason, the politician uses this resource, less as a way of influencing the journalist. Before it was a much more common practice.

### 3.5. Promotional gifts (merchandising)

These types of gifts can be systematically given to anyone who comes into contact with the company that carries them out, therefore it *does not have to be associated with an intention* to influence the news or the opinion of the journalists.

But in other ways I have to tell you that if you go to a place, you as a journalist, you as a medium, you as a company and everyone is given the detail, that has nothing to do with it...

(DG02-W)

If the gifts *come from the companies on which the journalist has to comment*, it would not be ethical to receive them. This is frequent in the field of technology, in which gifts are also of considerable economic value and can condition journalistic work.

### 3.6. Gifts according to their economic value

There is no general agreement on this point. It is insisted that accepting the gift or not depends on the intentionality and ability to influence the person to whom it is given. For some, any gift is an attempt to influence, therefore it should not be accepted even for one euro. In the opposite case, an economically valuable gift is proposed but that does not have the capacity to influence since the journalist is already positioned on the side of the issuer of the gift. In that case, that gift would not play a specific role in influencing the news either.

### 3.7. Free tickets, passes, or services

At this point, a difference is made between those journalists who go to the show to work and those who receive tickets as *gifts to use in their free time*. For example, paying admission to people who will later review a show is simply to facilitate the talk about the show but does not condition the negative or positive nature of the subsequent criticism.

This is common for journalists and I also believe that it is fine, obviously, the journalist is going to cover information, he can at least enter for free (DG03-M)

If you are a journalist who is dedicated to making film criticism, it would only be missing...

(DG02-W)

A unique case is that of sports tickets. The *boxes are considered a space of influence*. In this case, ticket giveaways are also generally frowned upon.

Or you have to provide information on the loans that Atlético de Madrid still owes and that they do not know how they are going to pay them, at the time of writing for sure it will be conditioned, most certainly. (DG03-M)

Other people put the accent on *who receives the tickets*, if the person who will make the news, or their family and friends. In the latter case, it is understood more as a gift and is frowned upon.

But that he has tickets for his whole family or, for example, that I like Rafael, that my brother is a journalist and gave me a front-row ticket... well, I would like it, honestly, but I admit...

(DG02-W)

Gifts to the person, *detached in principle from the performed work*, are considered a personal gift that can be exchanged for a personal favor.

Sure, a personal favor, right? (DG04-W)

### **3.8. Individual meals paid for by the source**

Meals with sources *should not be individual*, this could condition the journalist who is going to make the news.

Not individual, but collective ones are held, for example at Christmas, parties, not all, what they do is that they have a Christmas dinner and invite all the media, and if all the media are invited well, I don't know, maybe... (DG02-M)

Individual meals may be legitimate but the *limit of what is considered ethical or not is in some cases difficult to define*. The economic value of meals could be a parameter to measure it, but a more personal encounter with a politician leaves the limit a little more blurred and can be questionable.

Well, I think it is admissible for a parliamentary chronicler or political journalist to have a day in I don't know where with the politician on duty so that he or she knows that politician more in-depth, or knows other facets or they go to eat. That does seem admissible to me, now, the line that marks the admissible of the inadmissible may be a bit fuzzy and very dangerous. (DG03-M)

### **3.9. Paid trips to accompany the information source**

Some journalists must travel to find the news. In this sense, the lack of agreement, write *who should pay for the trips*: the source, the medium, the journalist himself? The ethical questioning is made because the payment by the source could condition the news.



Paid tickets and trips to go to the news source, I think that they would not be considered gifts since they are tools that the journalist needs to develop his work, that is, you are not rewarding the journalist but you are allowing him to do his job. (DG01-W)

This fact can become much more evident when they *regularly accompany a political figure on his professional travels* to generate news.

It seems to me that it is a prostitution of information because it is going to be tendentiously influenced. (DG03-M)

*It depends on the conditions* in which they travel. Some emphasize the importance of the amount of expenditure: if it is an unnecessary splurge, it is unethical.

It seems terrible to me and nobody has criticized it until the crisis has arrived. (DG03-M)

### **3.10. Give lectures or do other well-paid activities**

The logic of payment in conferences or other activities between journalists is similar to that in the case of tickets or trips. In general, these activities are considered *to be inherent to the professional's practice*, and therefore must be remunerated. Whether they are well paid or not depends in any case on the prestige of the professional, therefore it is not ethically questionable.

But they are paying you as a qualified person, because if that person thinks they are being paid too little then they will tell you: you want me at a conference because I am someone relevant in this matter, and if you are not willing to pay me that money, then take anyone you meet on the street who is a person whose opinion does not count. (DG01-W)

Other times the same lectures or extra activities may be benefits in return for favors: lectures are "gotten" by someone who has the power to offer them to journalists. This fact means *taking advantage of power as a journalist*, and it is reprehensible.

For me, it is serious, obviously. A manipulation and misrepresentation of the activities of journalists, which should not be bought, come on, for me, I see it as a purchase (DG03-M)

*Accepting to attend conferences or other activities can also be a concession from the professional due to a close relationship with a political party*, not necessarily of their ideology. Rather, it is seen as a *state of mutual aid* in which both parties need to make concessions to maintain that relationship. This is the case of journalists who are assigned to monitor a certain political party.

Yes, but the moment you follow up on a party, whether you like it or not, you have a total public relations relationship with the teams of that party, and they give you and you have to

give in and that is the relationship so that none of the two parts falls into excess, then you would consider it as..., I am not saying it was, but you would consider it from another point of view. (DG03-M)

Some people question whether reputable journalists, with solid credibility, should agree to advertise. I have a bit of doubt about whether it is ethical for journalists, especially those who have a public image, who are known from television or the media, to advertise other products; I don't like this very much because it seems that professionals may seem to some people like a real reference and then if I tell you Ribes water is very good, you will believe me because you trust me... (DG01-W)

For this reason, for some of the participants, the ethical codes should include a section on these issues.

I mean that each house is a world, it cannot be generalized, that is why the journalists' association would have to make an ethical book, which we are talking about here, and specify when the cases are, the same as the gifts, of course, some gifts are courtesies that have no value. (DG06-M)

#### **4. Discussion**

The journalist must not only be honest and independent but must also appear so since his public function could raise doubts if he is prone to be treated with gifts by one of the parties. The honorability of a public position, and that of the journalist is one, even if he does it on his own, must invite moderation in his relationship with the different parties that are part of his professional work.

In this regard, the journalist must take into account circumstances such as whether the gift is related to the promotional activity of the company or if it is only made to him exclusively, which can be a sign of marking a preferential treatment with the expectation that it is reciprocated. Besides, this receptivity to the gift can generate distrust on the part of the public in his professional independence. Trust also has a public dimension.

On the part of the citizens, we find a very wide panoply of options. From those who believe that gifts should never be accepted, to those who believe that gifts can be reasonable if they acquire more a symbolic than economic meaning. It is not the same to give a key ring or a bottle of wine, of a discreet value, to very distinguished gifts with a high economic cost. For some citizens, in the Mediterranean culture, so accustomed to obtaining benefits through favors, gifts always have an intention. And surely, even if they start with small details, they will tend to slide down a slippery

slope of perks with which to influence the journalist's work. In other words, they are subtle forms of bribery, in which a certain *de facto* "right" to influence is bought.

As a gift, it is not necessary to simply understand a material object, it can also be exceptional activities whose economic value is also significant: food in certain restaurants, trips, tickets to shows, or leisure activities. It is not about living in a bubble. Journalists also have their personal affinities and can cultivate affective relationships, within which mutual expressions of sociability or friendship can be generated, such as the invitation to a meal or a certain financially reasonable gift. But the journalist should be wary of those other disproportionate or exclusive gifts that may be interpreted as a gesture of proximity that may condition their professional independence.

A gesture of social cordiality should not be confused or reciprocated with favorable treatment. For this reason, it seems especially relevant not to accept gifts *from the companies on which the journalist has to comment*, it would be unethical to receive gifts. This is frequent in the field of technology, in which gifts are also of considerable economic value and can greatly condition journalistic work. On the other hand, they consider that "giving conferences or carrying out other well-paid activities for journalists can also be a double-edged sword. They can be reasonable when it comes to emoluments proportional to the prestige of the speaker and not as an extra and repeated complement that could generate debt with those who promote said conferences". Some consider that some payments are exorbitant and *may involve the return of favors* or issues not specifically related to what is paid. Others, that these payments should be regulated and the remuneration should not be left at market prices.

Another assumption raised is that renowned journalists star in advertisements. In their opinion, this double activity is contrary to the code of ethics, because he uses his professional prestige at the service of the advertised brand, which can confuse the public who associate him with his informative credibility. On the other hand, the fact that journalists with this professional background choose to provide their services to advertising as if they were a media star does not give a good image. The information must be distinguished from advertising and, therefore, the simultaneous exercise of both activities should be defined. In this regard, there is an interesting report from the FAPE Commission for Arbitration, Complaints, and Ethics, which distinguishes between the performance of the journalist's media popularity and his professional activity. Advertising that can be confused with current news would not be admissible, but it would be excessive to forbid his participation in other market contexts. Advertising soups is not the same as advertising a financial product. In summary of the presentation, it says the following:

The Commission for Arbitration, Complaints, and Ethics of the Federation of Associations of Journalists of Spain (FAPE for its acronym in Spanish) considers that journalism fulfills a constitutional function that should not be compromised by practices that are not very sensitive to its values of independence and informative honesty. In this regard, the participation of journalists in formats that may confuse their social role and weaken the credibility of the profession is not acceptable. On the other hand, this position does not presuppose that the specific participation of journalists in advertising spots implies *per se* a

lack of ethics, as long as it is adequately delimited both by its context and by its content that is not related to their informative function (Resolution 2014/93). Recent works have been published on the result of the Commission's activity, such as Suárez-Villegas, 2015a; Serrano-Moreno, 2015.

Journalists recognize that the purpose of gifts is to positively predispose the communicator towards the issuer of these gifts or the entity they represent, and for this reason, they point out that it is difficult for them not to condition the content of the news. Based on this reflection, they respond in a majority way that, in the face of certain gifts and benefits that other companies, institutions, or individuals may offer them, they must act with honesty and common sense, because "there is no one who has not accepted a detail of companies or institutions." Likewise, they affirm that there are no reasons to reject gifts of small value since in many cases they are received as thanks and their non-acceptance would be unpleasant. For example, *merchandising* items with very limited value, such as company advertising, would not have to have any effect on communicators. These are the gifts the profession accepts without compromising its independence.

There does seem to be a consensus opinion of being suspicious of gifts of significant value without admitting that there may be a clear intention of the donor to influence the news. For this reason, it is necessary to differentiate between the acceptance of symbolic gifts (free tickets and passes, for example) and those that imply a way of being entertained by a company, entity, or institution on which the journalist reports in his medium, especially if a certain value is exceeded.

The codes of ethics are blunt when establishing the rejection of any gift, no matter how insignificant its value is. In this sense, the example of the newspaper *El País* is cited, which is used to returning all gifts that arrive at its company. In the case of Canal Sur Televisión's style book, a laxer attitude is proposed, since it states the following: "Gifts from news sources will not be accepted either, except in the case of socially acceptable courtesies." In this same sense, *El Mundo's* Style Book warns of the risk of the slippery source that constitutes the possibility of accepting gifts that could jeopardize the independence of the informant. For this reason, it is important to be careful that the nature of the gift does not go beyond a mere courtesy and becomes a form of payment in kind for the expectations that are aroused to receive favorable treatment. It is also different when the gift occurs, if before a news item appears, which could clearly seek that the journalist echoes the donor source with greater attention, or after the news, in which it is a thank you for a job well done. We must not ignore that the introduction of new technologies has contributed to a culture of greater vulnerability of journalistic work, which may favor that some professionals feel more predisposed to consider their work more communicative than informative, and in this sense act as a transmission belt of commercial interests, in an undeclared symbiosis of mutual collaboration (Suárez-Villegas, 2015b).

In short, gifts should never be able to silence a news story or soften versions of events to favor one of the parties. There is also a tendency on the part of most professionals to reject the participation of prestigious journalists in advertising activities. They consider that it conditions their image of independence and confuses the public. In this regard, a FAPE report resolution warns of this danger but understands that it should not be taken to the extreme of considering that the audience does not distinguish the contexts in which journalists appear. In this sense, given the servitude of his image for appearing on television, a certain use of his popularity in other contexts may also be reasonable,

as long as it is not linked to sensitive areas such as economic activities or current affairs. But this would have nothing to do with the appearance of the journalist in other situations such as the advertising of wine or a type of food. It is not the professional part of him that would be profitable, but his popularity in the television village.

## 5. Conclusions

Journalism professionals consider that pressures of all kinds are one of the main problems that journalism suffers today, especially those of an economic nature, above the governmental or political ones. However, factors such as the type of medium, previous education, membership in a trade union, association, or professional college, and the volume of income influence this perception. Likewise, the position regarding the possible acceptance of gifts or perks differs depending on their nature. In general, giving lectures or accepting promotional merchandise gifts is considered permissible, while accepting other types of gifts or individual meals paid for by the source is strongly rejected.

In general, most citizens consider gifts and perks *acceptable or not depending on the intention of the issuer*. The journalist must assess whether this gift is intended to condition his informative impartiality since certain forms of courtesy should not be confused with favors or perks that generate a feeling of debt. Some citizens warn of the possibility that it is a “gift-cheat”, subtle ways of generating an interested-trust to access the journalist more easily and thus achieve a certain favorable treatment. Among others, these are the main opinions of citizens regarding gifts and the main problems they pose:

- For many, the gifts and perks that are acceptable or not depend on the intention of the issuer. Gifts should not condition the news in the future, they should allow the journalist to work freely.
- Gifts should not be accepted in any case, according to some of the people in the discussion groups. Gifts are bribes and are always accompanied by some intention.
- In any case, there is currently more transparency about this type of perks and gifts. For this reason, the politician uses this resource, less as a way of influencing the journalist. Before it was a much more common practice.
- Paying admission to people who will later review a show is simply to make it easier for people to talk about the show but does not condition the negative or positive nature of the subsequent review.
- The boxes are considered a space of influence. In this case, ticket giveaways are also generally frowned upon.
- Individual meals may be legitimate but the limit of what is considered ethical or not is in some cases difficult to define. Meals with sources should not be individual, this could condition the journalist who is going to make the news.
- Some journalists must travel to find the news. In this sense, the lack of agreement in the debate write who should pay the cost of travel. Some emphasize the importance of the amount of expenditure: if it is an unnecessary expense, it is unethical.
- It is considered that giving conferences or carrying out extra activities are typical of the professional's exercise, and therefore must be paid. Whether they are well paid or not depends in any case on the prestige of the professional, therefore it is not ethically questionable. Some consider that some payments are exorbitant and may involve the return of favors or issues not specifically related to what is paid.

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