



## Spanish seafarers' perception of themselves

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

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This article presents the findings of a survey conducted among the Spanish merchant marine in 2014 on the perception that they have on their public image in the media. This survey is intending to assess whether the image that the seafarers have of themselves corresponds to the image that is offered in the media about the professionals of the sea.

#### Keywords:

Image, Spanish Scafarers, Spanish  
Newspapers.

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### 1. Introduction

In my article published in Maritime Policy & Management, I made a summary of my doctoral thesis on the image of the marine in the Spanish press. Among the conclusions of this thesis we can highlight the following (REF):

- Little news on the Merchant Navy is published in Spanish newspapers, and when newspapers do it, most of it is bad news.
- Bad news is often published in the most important pages.
- The subjects given most emphasis are the most negative.
- Negative words are the most used.
- The Captain and ship are the main protagonists in the news, but normally in a negative sense.
- Journalist and others writing about these events are not experts on maritime questions.
- Journalists often express their own opinion, and often this opinion is not very well researched.

- The law criminalizes the captains of vessels involved in damage to the environment even if they are not guilty. This fact causes, unwittingly, a negative image of the sector on the general public.
- The image given of the profession of merchant sailor is negative.

In order to check directly with the Spanish seafarers if these findings are consistent with what they think of themselves, during the month of February 2014 I made an on-line survey on this topic. In this article I discuss the results of that survey.

### 2. Method

An on-line survey was made for the marine with these questions:

1. Age:
2. Professional situation:
3. Number of years sailing:
4. From my point of view, on current Spanish media the image of the profession of seafarer is...:
5. If you answered in Question 4 that you think the image of seafarers in the media is negative, say if you think if the following statements can be true or not:

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6. If in Question 4 you replied that you believe that the image of the marine in the media is negative, punctuate the following possible causes from 1 (Does not affect anything on the image) to 3 (strongly influences the image):
7. I think that abroad, in general, seafarers are treated in the media:
8. Please rate the following actions that theoretically could help improve the image of the profession of merchant seaman from 1 (I think that it is useless) up to 3 (I think that it can help a lot):
9. Do you believe that among the causes of low incorporation of young people to the profession of merchant marine one could cite the bad media image of the profession?
10. In the space below you can put your ideas what you think may be the cause of the bad image of the marine (if you think that is as well).
11. In the space below you can bring other ideas that you think can improve the image and the presence of the profession of merchant marine in the media.

After designing the survey, I analyzed the Universe to which the survey was directed: Spanish Merchant Navy officers. According to a study by the European Union (Sánchez-Beaskoetxea, 2013) in 2010 in Spain there were 3,181 Merchant Navy officers.

The survey was released in different forums, web pages, specialized online media and in professional associations of the Spanish Merchant Navy so it would reach the highest possible number of seafarers. The survey was kept active for one month. The survey was viewed by 828 people of whom 269 responded.

To analyze if with these data the findings can be extrapolated to the entire universe, I used the most extended formula to calculate the size of the sample in a survey.

$$n = \frac{k^2 p q N}{(e^2(N-1) + k^2)p q} \quad (1)$$

In the formula:

$N = 3181$  (size of the population)

$k = 1,96$  (for a confidence level of 95%)

$e = 5\%$

$p = q = 0,5$

With these data we get that  $n = 343$ .

As finally I got 269 responses, the level of confidence of the survey is about 95% with a margin of error of 5.7%.

On the other hand, of the 828 surveys delivered 269 responses were obtained, which is an Index of responses of a 32.5%, which can be considered quite high. Therefore, the survey can be considered valid.

Table 1: Results of the Survey

| Age                    |           |
|------------------------|-----------|
| <40 y.o.:              | 103 (39%) |
| 40-50 y.o.:            | 67 (25%)  |
| 50-60 y.o.:            | 62 (23%)  |
| >60 y.o.:              | 35 (13%)  |
| Professional Situation |           |
| Working at Sea:        | 91 (34%)  |
| Working on Land:       | 94 (35%)  |
| Unemployed:            | 36 (13%)  |
| Retired:               | 31 (12%)  |
| Others:                | 16 (6%)   |
| Years Sailing          |           |
| <5 years               | 66 (25%)  |
| 5-10 years:            | 71 (26%)  |
| 10-20 years:           | 77 (29%)  |
| >20 years:             | 54 (20%)  |

### 3. Result of the Survey

Now let's look at the results obtained after analyzing the 269 responses to the survey.

Regarding the question: "From my point of view on current Spanish media the image of the profession of seafarer is...", the answers were these:

Table 2: Answers to Question 4

|            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| Negative:  | 101 (38%) |
| Neutral:   | 146 (55%) |
| Positive:  | 10 (4%)   |
| DK/NA/REF: | 10 (4%)   |

Figure 1: From my point of view on current Spanish media the image of the profession of seafarer is...

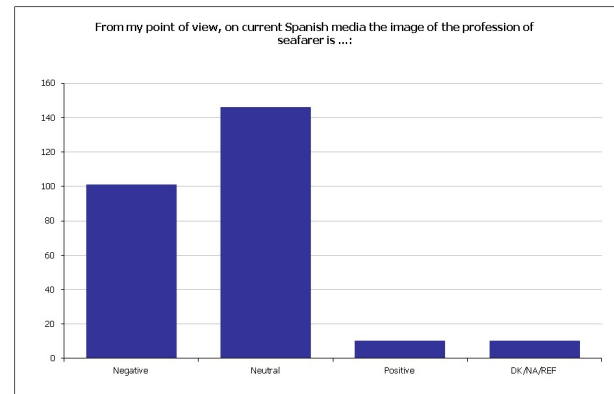


Figure 2: If in question 4 you have answered that you believe that the image of the seafarers in the media is negative, say if you think that the following statements may be true or not:

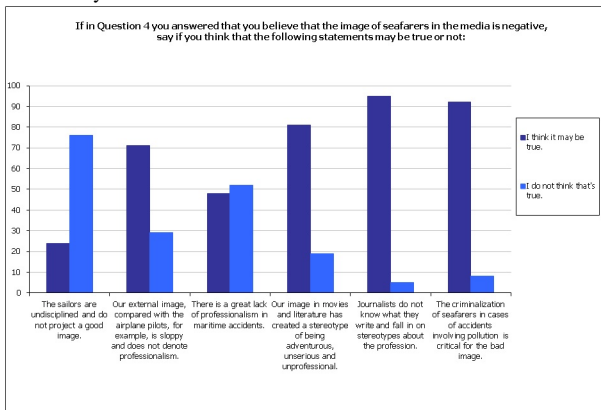
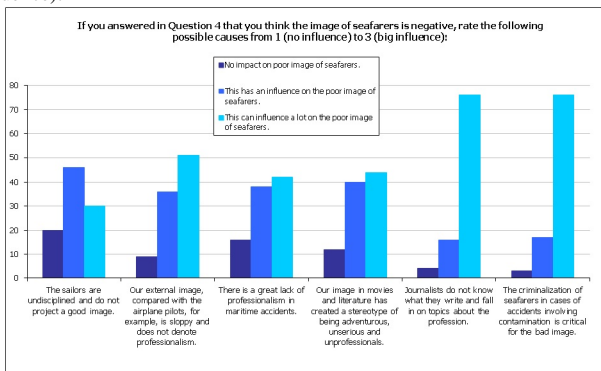


Figure 3: If you answered in Question 4 that you think the image of seafarers is negative, rate the following possible causes from 1 (no influence) to 3 (big influence):



In addition to these closed questions, these two open-ended questions were raised:

- In the space below, you can bring your ideas about what you think can be the causes of the poor image of seafarers (if you think that that is the case).

Of all the received responses (103), 53 noted the ignorance that exists about the profession in the population in general as a main cause of the bad image. 10 pointed to the "bad reputation" of mariners, and 5 spoke of the maritime accidents as a cause of the bad image. The rest of the responses were more varied, on flags of convenience, incorporation of seafarers from countries of the third world, etc.

- In the space below you can bring other ideas that you believe that can improve the image and the presence of the profession of merchant marine in the media.

This question was answered by 91 people, of which 49 contributed ideas and the rest rather expressed complaints about the sector. About contributed ideas, most referred that there must be more information on the importance of the maritime sector in society; that journalists must be more knowledgeable about

Figure 4: I think that abroad, in general, seafarers are treated in the media...

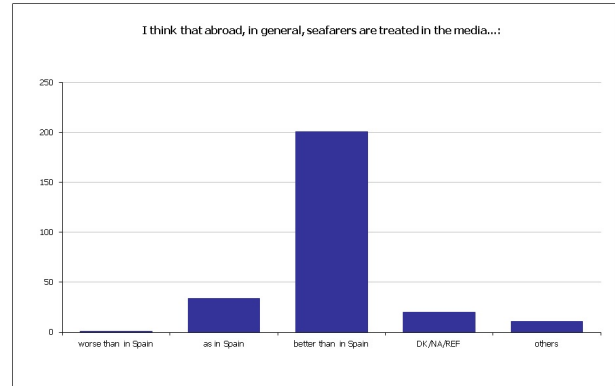


Figure 5: Score the following actions that could theoretically help to improve the image of the profession of seafarer from 1 (I think it is useless) to 3 (I think it can help a lot):

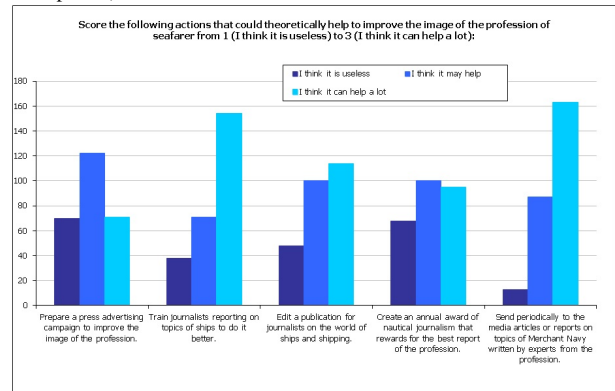
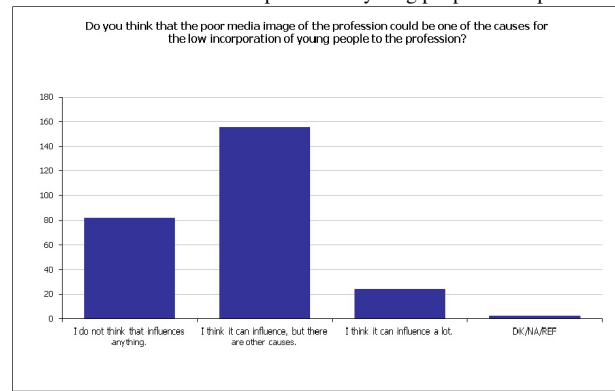


Figure 6: Do you think that the poor media image of the profession could be one of the causes of the low incorporation of young people to the profession?



what they write; that there must be more information in society on the training of the seafarers; and, finally, that the seafarers should be worried about giving a good image.

#### 4. Conclusions

After the analysis of the data from this survey we can conclude the following:

- A majority of Spanish seafarers (55%) think that the image of the profession in the media is neutral, although it is notable that 38% of them think it is negative against only 4% who say that it is positive. Selecting the answers among those who have sailed more or less than 10 years, there is a substantial variation in the results, since among those who have sailed more than 10 years, 44% consider that the image of the profession is negative, while among those who have sailed less than 10 years this percentage drops to 32%.
- Among those who think that the image of sailors in the media is negative, 95% believe that it may be true that the journalists do not know what they write and use stereotypes about sailors; 92% believe that it may be true that the criminalization of seafarers in cases of accidents involving pollution is determinant in the bad image; and 81% believe that it may be true that cinema and literature have created a stereotype of the marine adventurer, little serious and unprofessional. On the other hand, 71% believe that it may be true that the external image of the Marines, compared with the aviation pilots, is neglected and does not denote professionalism.
- Regarding how seafarers are treated in the media outside Spain, a large majority, 75%, think that seafarers are treated better abroad than in Spain, while 13% think that they are treated as in Spain.
- Regarding possible actions that can be done to improve the image of the seafarers, a majority consider useful to educate journalists reporting on issues of ships to make it better and send periodically to the media articles or reports on topics of Merchant Navy written by professionals linked to the profession. Also there are many who would support a publication for journalists on the world of ships and the Merchant Navy.
- On the influence of the image in the ever-smaller incorporation of young people into the profession, 59% think that it can influence but that there are other causes, and 31% do not believe that it will influence at all.

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