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# Processing of political and institutional information in TVE

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** The research analyses political and institutional information on the news broadcasted by the Spanish public service media TVE, in order to know the processing of events involving political parties, institutions and representatives. **Method.** A mixed methodology is used. The quantitative analysis is needed to determine the degree of formal diversity and the qualitative analysis serves to know the details of news' approaches. Also, a focus group, composed by five editors, is included to figure it out the reporting process on the public broadcaster. **Results and conclusions.** Data show that 97 percent of the news have a proper formal processing, but these figures contrast with the results of the content analysis. 74 percent of topics related to institutional information have an approach that promotes, improves, and endorses the image of the government and related bodies.

## Keywords

political information; institutional information; public service media; censorship; manipulation.

## Contents

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approach and prioritisation. 6.3. Topics, sources and players. 6.4. Results of the focus group. 7. Discussion and conclusions. 8. Acknowledgements. 9. References.

## 1. Introduction

Information is a needed good that affects people in different ways and acquires different values that depend on many factors. Media outlets know the effects and possibilities of information and take steps to find the best way to exploit them, according to their interests, which in many cases are out of line with those that benefit society in a collective manner (Campos-Freire, 2012; Fernández-Lombao & Campos-Freire, 2013). The relevance of information is also understood and appreciated by the political power, hence the need and intention of the parties to influence the selection and approach of the news in order to guide contents in the most favourable way. Who is able to convince, is also able to influence the opinion and behaviour of citizens. This premise, applied during elections and on a daily basis, may favour and harm, through the media, the image of certain leaders, with important consequences for the parties and the sectors they represent (Quintana-Paz, 2005; Casero-Ripollés, 2009).

Studies on the importance of the media are not something recent. In 1974, Noëlle-Neuman considered that journalists have the power to decide the outcome of elections. In 1982, Chaffee & Hochheimer openly talked about the influence of the media in politics and the relationship between the two. The authors state that the role of the press, radio and television is mainly informative for the people, more than persuasive, but insist on the ability to influence, a feature that served as an inspiration for McCombs & Shaw (1972) to start the study of the agenda setting, which equates information with power.

The theory of the agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1986) seems appropriate to address many theoretical approaches of our work. The principles of the theory are in line with many of the aspects that we assess in this study on informative contents, and more specifically on the processing of political and institutional information in TVE.

McCombs (1992: 820-821) maintains that the news not only tell us what to think but how to think about it (McCombs lets us see that there is a configuration of the public opinion). Both the selection of topics for the news' agenda and the selection of frameworks on these topics are powerful roles of the agenda setting. McCombs & Shaw (1993:63) state that "whatever the attributes of an issue presented on the news agenda, the consequences for audience behaviour are considerable. Agenda setting is a process that can affect both what to think about and how to think about it". Indeed, one of the aspects of our research coincides with one of the core issues of the agenda setting: "the mass media do not tell people 'what to think' but 'what to think about'" (Edelstein, 1993).

McCombs & Shaw (1986) managed to demonstrate that the campaign's agenda in the media influenced the public opinion. Therefore, it was the media that directed the agenda setting. This is one of the keys that explains the enormous interest in controlling the mass media, especially by political parties and institutions. Most of the interferences in the labelled sensitive news, particularly political and institutional news, must be explained from this perspective.

The power and ability of the media to influence on people's opinions generate automatically a need to control contents by those who wish to maintain their privileged position and hold the reins of society (Murciano, 2004; Casero-Ripollés, 2009; Soengas, 2015). According to Valbuena (2005), the agenda setting explains the power of the media on the public opinion with a psychological resource, arguing that citizens have a need for guidance. And the audience may find that orientation in the media (Quintana-Paz, 2005). However, as there exist many media, the possibilities of orientation are multiple, and this way the conflict and competition to control specific sectors arise (Murciano, 2004). The approach serves to explain the alignments of some media with certain political parties and how they become speakers of their ideological and economic postulates (De-Miguel & Pozas, 2009; Humanes, Montero-Sánchez, Molina-de-Dios & López-Berini, 2013; Humanes & Fernández-Alonso, 2015; Soengas, 2015). In the paper, however, we focus exclusively on TVE, as we are interested in identifying the editorial policy of the public service broadcasters on political and institutional issues.

The media do not select topics followed by abstract guidance. That is why their agendas allow identifying the role of the current affairs' major players in society, as well as understanding their ideological positions and their particular and collective interests (León-Gross, 2006).

The great question here is: who establishes the news' agenda? Finding the answer allows to figure it out who controls information and, by extension, who exercises political and economic power in society, as the starting question addressed by McCombs (1922) was, 'who sets the public agenda?', which was an excellent input to adapt many of his research to the communication process.

We are also interested in the approaches to the mobilizing effects of the media, established by Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet (1948) and, above all, the contributions of Hovland (1957), who assessed the formulas so that a message was more persuasive than another. Hovland, among other things, analysed the influence of the order when presenting contents to persuade more people. At present, this could be applied to the hierarchy of the news and the design of a newscast. Although persuasion should not be linked to information, we must understand these approaches in the context in which they were formulated, the Second World War, when the news had a very specific purpose: to convince, which is still in force in today's news (Fernández-Baena, 2005). In order to adapt Hovland's theory to present, it is important to differentiate between social responsibility that corresponds to a public television and the actions and purposes of those responsible for the news, who do not always respond to journalistic criteria (Laverón & Goñi, 2009; Fernández-Lombao & Campos-Freire, 2013; Núñez-Ladeveze, Irisarri & Morales, 2015).

The agenda setting emphasizes the power of the media, but this is not an absolute nor free power. It depends on many factors, as the media also depend on who is using them to remain powerful (Reig, 2011). It is a spiral that reveals the price of news' independence and the difficulty of applying journalistic criteria without conditions (Soengas & Rodríguez, 2015). Therefore, when analysing TVE's news, specifically the processing of political and institutional information, we must remember the social responsibility of public service broadcasters (Manfredi, 2009; Fernández-Lombao & Campos-Freire, 2013).

## 1.2. The value of the news

The value of the news is relative, as the factors that determine the importance of an issue are diverse: journalistic criteria, commercial criteria, interest of a specific target in an event...Producing a piece of news always imply an ideological approach that forces to include elements and discard others. And then, within the selected elements, some preferences, some categories and some order are established, depending on the approach (Soengas, 2008). Therefore, the speech of the news will also depend on the criteria used by the editor and not only on the nature of the facts. It would be naïve to forget that, when processing news, ideological and professional criteria coexist, but there is always a tolerable margin of approach, whose result is a customised version that, precisely, makes the difference and avoids the homogenization of contents that serve for news agencies (Rodrigo-Alsina, 1989).

During the news' process, a series of circumstances –many of them contradictory- converge. On the one hand, the exhaustive control of contents and, on the other, the neglected mass production, consequence of work systems introduced in most of newsrooms (Villafañe, Bustamante & Prado, 1987). Nonetheless, to understand the duality, it is necessary to remember that in the media agenda there are two types of content: committed and profitable (León-Gross, 2006). In the first case, the information is almost related to political and economic topics that affect sectors that influence the media, and those topics are thoroughly reviewed (De-Miguel & Pozas, 2009). Political and institutional information, which is our object of study, is one of the most sensitive issues within the departments that make up newsrooms and is framed within contents labelled as committed (Pestano-Rodríguez, 2008). This is why, in most of the cases, it is subjected to permanent review, in order to ensure that the approach is in line with the editorial policy.

On the other hand, there are contents that do not directly affect political interests of the company, but have an audience due to its spectacular component, so they are profitable from the commercial point of view. There is barely any information control on these pieces, and most of the time they are issued as they were produced by an international agency, without changes to adapt them to the media standards. In fact, it is not difficult to find the very same piece of news in different stations (García-Avilés, 2007).

Frequently, some other factors affecting the selection and approach of the news are added to the political control of the information, which have an impact in the quality of contents. Although TVE is a public service media organization, establishes criteria of commercial broadcasters (Laverón & Goñi, 2009; Gómez-Montano, 2013). Paying attention to audience figures entails demands that contaminate the entire informative process and reduce quality. New audiovisual values set guidelines that determine the selection and treatment of information to suit it to the interests of the company, which are, mainly: reducing producing costs and meeting the needs of a market to ensure large audiences. These approaches encourage the inclusion of topics-entertainment and the lack of rigour in the processing of facts, converting informative approaches into interpretative ones (Cebrián-Herreros, 2004; Ortells-Badenes, 2009).

Rodrigo Alsina (1989) highlights two key phases in the news production: selection and prioritization of contents. The selection determines what facts and aspects of a topic the audience will know, while

the hierarchy gives more or less importance to a topic and, therefore, conditions its informative value and the preferences of the broadcaster.

Newspeople are conditioned by a series of circumstances, from production routines, which impose a celerity incompatible with the contrast of sources, to the specific interest of the media, which determine the approach of contents and the rigour of the news, as above mentioned. The conditions for producing information have also a direct impact on the content of the piece of news, which has been studied by many authors such as Elliot (1981) & Tuchman (1983). For this paper, works by Villafañe, Bustamante & Prado (1987) have a particular interest, as their assessment model is still a reference, while the digitization of newsrooms has significantly changed the conditions of the news' processing.

### **1.3. Rigour and manipulation**

News' rigour is incompatible with sensationalism, with television as spectacle, with manipulation and with censorship, which prevents knowing versions of reputable sources. The duty of the media is to provide people with truthful, rigorous and plural information (Gómez-Montano, 2013; López-Olano, 2016). Avoiding manipulation is not an easy task. First, it is necessary to define it, to identify it and then check it. During the process, applying methods to determine whether an information is manipulated or not is a must. Subjective opinions on the informative treatment of a fact usually respond to interested criteria and, in addition, sometimes it is very difficult to mark the barrier that separates manipulation from the different perspectives of a specific subject. That is why it is very important to differentiate between censorship, manipulation and approach of a piece of news. In order to do this, the first step is to determine which are the essential and mandatory elements to include and what are the nuances that allow the construction of the different approaches, that serve to identify editorial policies and preferences of the media. Paying attention to the downsides of an event and minimizing the problems of a person respond to a desire to create a certain image for the public opinion. Those approaches, however, cannot be automatically associated to censorship and manipulation, nor to lack of some details. The media have the right to publish everything that it is not subject to legal restrictions and focus it in the way they consider most appropriate, provided that they do not go beyond the barriers established by deontological codes.

It is essential to respect the editor's professional criteria, who is the person in charge for giving a topic a particular approach, and thus avoiding homogenization of information. Style guidelines include the standards to apply during the processing of news (*Manual de Estilo de RTVE*). All the news has to be treated with journalistic criteria. When information is managed with different interests, one of the most fundamental citizens' rights is usurped: to provide quality information and access to it on equal terms. Censorship and manipulation, apart from creating a biased and partial version of reality, prevent people from knowing data that may be essential for them.

The present governance of RTVE is configured by an organization chart with all the needed elements and resources to guarantee a truthful, rigorous and plural information. Thus, for there to be censorship and manipulation, there must be a series of circumstances: newspeople willing to break the rules established in the style book, and executives with room for manoeuvre to impose a non-journalistic approach. When the elements design to guarantee quality of information become allies of political and ideological parties, rigour vanishes.

#### **1.4. Interpretation of facts and influence of information**

The complexity of messages, both in terms of production and de-codification, make it difficult to control their consequences. Informative processes imply a series of risks that are beyond the control of a media outlet once the news is published. One of these risks is the unintended effect, due to the direct response of the audience and the expansion of the news made by other media, paying attention to non-interesting facts and thus disowning the original version.

Domke & Shah (1995) found that the audience interprets the facts based on ethical and social concerns, and the citizens will support one candidate or another depending on the values they defend. Therefore, there are two general interpretation of facts that impact on the configuration of a later opinion: the ethical interpretation and the social interpretation. Extrapolating this to political and institutional information, we would have two big areas for analysis that serve to determine how the news are going to be decoded depending on the conditions.

Values and beliefs act as a filter, but also influence the processing of information. When talking about news, we have to differentiate two phases: filters included by journalists, consciously or unconsciously, and audience's filters, which show preferences for specific topics and versions of a fact. The key is what to do to influence the interpretation of facts. This approach may be considered the basis of manipulation, as it is consciously orienting public's opinion and artificially damaging or favouring the image of a certain person or institutional body.

When there is an interest to build up a specific version of facts, the first step is to design the adequate framework to make the message credible (Humanes, 2001) and, also, to get the attention of a large audience. McCombs & Shaw (1993) state that the way an object is framed within the agenda may have consequences; for instance, when the attributes of a highlighted topic in news coverage have a direct impact on the public opinion. That way, the desired idea is transferred to a large number of spectators able to create a groundswell of public opinion and, this, to influence the results with explicit support. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that levels of persuasion vary depending on the target audience.

#### **1.5. Social responsibility in TVE news**

Theoretical approaches carried out so far refer to mass media as a whole, but our research focus on TVE news, and it should be noted that public service media have a specific social responsibility that entails a wide range of obligations, including the task of providing citizens with plural and quality information, representing all sensitivities and keeping respect for diversity and minorities (Manfredi, 2009; Campos-Freire, 2012; Fernández-Lombao & Campos-Freire, 2013). Also, public service media should give priority to useful information, that with immediate and future validity for societies, as it allows them to access resources and have knowledge of facts and opportunities that may affect their well-being. Political and institutional information could be included within the label "useful information", as parliamentary decisions and agreements of political representatives affect citizens' daily lives.

Texts to which we have referred so far allow us to create a sound foundation to carry out a thorough analysis of political and institutional information broadcasted by TVE. Conclusions by consulted authors provide a comprehensive overview to build up the background to properly place the research.

Also, the literature review on the topic show that TVE controls political and institutional information, a necessary point for the approach and development of this paper. Many publications, such as those from Casero-Ripollés (2009); Humanes, Montero-Sánchez, Molina-de-Dios & López-Berini (2013) and Soengas & Rodríguez (2015), draw similar conclusions and prove that there is a constant control of the news, specially of political and institutional information, although censorship and manipulation indexes differ substantially depending on the stage (Gómez-Montano, 2013). The results also reflect the different degrees of interventionism of the Government depending on the legislature, which make us reflect on the independence of TVE and cast doubt on the role that the public broadcasting plays in society. And, at the same time, we bring up issues such as: who is controlling information? how information is controlled? and why there is interest in controlling it? (Azurmendi, 2007; Zallo, 2010). The discussion group with which we have worked, composed by five editors from TVE news, will help us to answer these questions.

## **2. Objectives**

The goal of the research is to analyse political and institutional information of TVE news in order to understand the processing of news referred to the four majority parties and their leaders, labour unions, the Government, the Royal House and the other regional institutions. Also, and thanks to a discussion group formed by five editors, we are interested in finding out how the public broadcaster process the news, in order to identify factors, elements and protocols that guarantee the quality of information and, at the same time, to check whether or not there are gaps in the organizational chart that allow for censorship and manipulation. We also want to know whether in extraordinary events such as the Catalan independence process, receive a great deal of attention and whether the informative balance is distorted among the different sections.

## **3. Subject of study**

Our object of study is the information on the State, the Royal House, the central and regional governments, the central and regional administration, the four major political parties, the labour unions and their corresponding leaders, broadcasted during September 2017 in the 15 p.m. TVE's news, from Monday to Friday. As for weekends, there is not parliamentary activity, so we omitted those two days from the analysis. Also, we will analyse the news referring to Spanish politics and institutions, as well as that information affecting the interest of Spain, even if the protagonists are foreigners. We are interested in assessing how support and criticism to internal affairs and measures adopted by the Government from third countries and non-Spanish leaders are processed by the public broadcaster. We work with the following ideas and concepts: the processing of information in TV, the processing of political and institutional information, control of public service media, control of information in TV, politicization of information, pluralism in the news and the social responsibility of public service media.

## **4. Assumption**

We start from the hypothesis that TVE controls contents, especially political and institutional information, and politicizes information. Censorship and manipulation are not manifested in the formal treatment of news, but may be detected in the agenda setting and the approach. Another hypothesis is that TVE has the required resources to offer rigorous information, but the structures

designed to guarantee quality are sometimes used to defend interest incompatible with journalistic criteria.

## **5. Method**

We believe that, in order to achieve the research goals, a mixed methodology should be applied. The quantitative analysis will allow us to identify the formal aspects and the content analysis is required to deepen the particularities of the news' approaches.

First of all, we calculate the time TVE devote to political and institutional information, in order to identify the time these contents appear with respect to the other information. In addition, as we have data of the same characteristics obtained in other periods, we may compare them and check if the volume of the different sections remains stable or if these sections are affected by extraordinary events, such as the process on the independence of Catalonia.

In the content analysis, we have identified three possibilities in the approach and development of an information, namely neutral, critical and favourable. And to identify each of these modalities we work with a series of elements considered objective indicators to assess the processing of a piece of news. The indicators have already been used in other research with similar approaches (Humanes, 2001; Soengas 2015) and, therefore, its validity to determine rigour and quality of contents is ensured. The indicators are: topic approach; contextualization; processing of opinions; degree of balance between for and against versions; characteristics, pertinence, quality, processing and plurality of used sources; number and time of interventions; association of the topic or character; type of shot depending on the character; formal processing; use of resources that encourage understanding of information, and attitude of presenters in the narration of events.

We also deem necessary to separate the processing of information from parties, labour unions and institutions from the processing of information from leaders and representatives, as there may be significant differences that are worth being known and commented.

We completed the research with a discussion group formed by five TVE's who understand the informative process in the public broadcaster and, also, are specialized in our object of study, as they have been working with political and institutional information for more than five years. We have therefore the required references to compare and complete the results of the data analysis obtained from the sample. These interviews will allow us to understand the structure of TVE, specifically the organization chart of the news, and assess whether the requirements and recommendations on the protocols included in the Style Manual of RTVE are always respected. And we can also know the degree of freedom with which the editors work, if they receive permanent and punctual pressures, who exercise it and when it is done.

## **6. Results**

### **6.1. Times and formal aspects**

When assessing TVE news, it may be noted that there is a relevant increase in political and institutional contents broadcasted in 15 p.m. news during September 2017, when compared with the volume from similar periods in previous years. In 2015 and 2016, political and institutional information in 15 p.m. news occupied 25% and 27% of the time, respectively, while in 2017 the

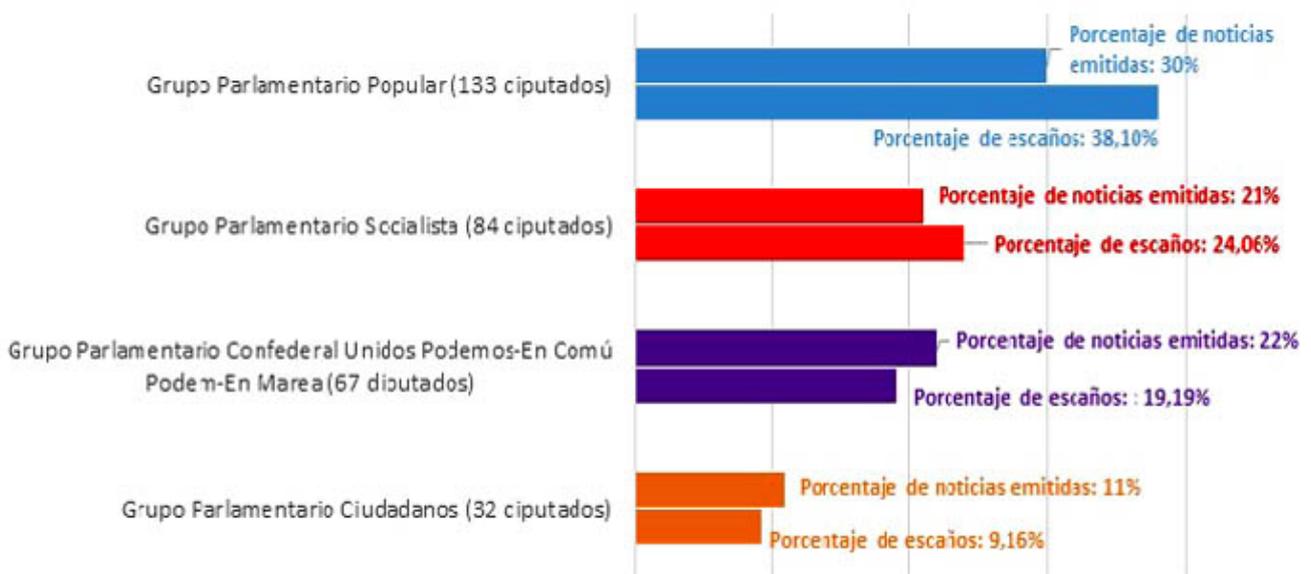
figure was 38%. Data show that there are new elements that have acquired an extraordinary protagonism and have moved other issues. We attribute these changes to the situation in Catalonia, as 65% of political and institutional news broadcasted in September 2017 are linked to the independence process, which results in an increase of 51% of news referred to the regional community, with respect to the same period of the previous year.

We also deem necessary to highlight that 17% of the political news referred to Partido Popular contain institutional information in the same story, a formula that allows to reinforce the presence of the party in the news and, at the same time, link the action of the Government to the proposals of the party supporting it. By not separating political from institutional information, there is a politicization of information and an inadequate treatment of the facts because both contents correspond to different spheres.

The results of a detailed analysis of the different aspects involving the news, both structural, narrative and formal, are included below, in order to obtain an in-depth knowledge of how TVE processes political and institutional information.

The degree of presence of the different political parties corresponds with their parliamentary representation, as it can be verified in graphic 1. That is a detail that confirms that, in order to maintain a formal pluralism, the public broadcaster design the running order applying a formula to political parties during elections, which consists on assigning to parties a time proportionate to the seats obtained in the previous term. The formula implies that the selection and hierarchy of stories are not always done with journalistic criteria, a practice repeatedly denounced by the TVE' news board (*Consejo de Informativos*).

**Graphic 1.** Degree of presence of political parties in TVE's news.



30% of the news on political information refer to Partido Popular (their deputies occupy 38% of seats in the Spanish Parliament); 21% to the socialist party PSOE (their deputies account for 24%); 22% to Podemos (their deputies represent 19% of seats); 11% to Ciudadanos (the party has 9% of parliamentarians), and the remaining 16% is unevenly distributed among minority parties and labour unions. The figures show that the daily presence of the different parties in noontime news is guaranteed, regardless the information is or not newsworthy.

The degree of presence of political leaders in noontime news does not always correspond to the percentages of news of their corresponding parties. Taking the previous data as a reference, Mariano Rajoy absorbs 37% of time as regards the slot devoted to Partido Popular, followed by Pablo Iglesias, which accumulates 30% of the time. Albert Rivera is present during 26% of the time given to Ciudadanos and Pedro Sánchez occupies 23% of the time allocated to the PSOE. These results may be explained as the news of political parties are not always starred by their leaders. In many occasions, the parties' spokespeople are those who inform the media, a strategy often used to unite the message and to avoid the overexposure of leaders and to erode their image when addressing complicated issues.

97% of the analysed news group the needed formal requirements: the structure of the story is right and contains all the viewpoints linked to the facts. In this regard, there are not substantial differences in the treatment received by political parties, their leaders and labour unions. However, the formal correctness does not always correspond to the approach of all the news, as it may be observed in the content analysis.

## **6.2. Content analysis: approach and hierarchy**

Peculiarities of information processing are best appreciated in the approach to news. That is why we are interested in knowing how themes and characters are framed in order to verify in which environments they appear, as contextualization is a determining factor when assessing the approach to news.

As it has been already pointed out, 97% of the analysed news satisfy the formal requirements. But this apparent compliance does not correspond with the results obtained in the content analysis, which reflect disparity of criteria in some cases and, also, revealing details evidence a politicization of information in TVE.

74% of the news on institutional information have an approach that favours, reinforces and underlines the image, management and criteria of the government, the State and the Royal House. And 62% of critical approaches correspond to events involving institutions from autonomous regions without ties to the government. The processing of 98% of the events on the independence of Catalonia is critical of the Catalanian government and the narrative reiterates arguments about the negative consequences involving the secessionist process, both for Catalonia and the rest of the country. Economy, social divide and external image are the most common topics.

These data show that TVE tries to convey a positive image of the government and the State in the eyes of citizens.

As regards political information, 80% of the news referring to Partido Popular adopt positive approach towards the group, 11% a neutral approach and 9% a critical approach. In the case of the PSOE, 59% of approaches are favourable, 10% neutral and 31% critical. News involving Podemos are favourable in 17% of cases, neutral in 25% of cases and critical in 58% of cases. And topics linked to Ciudadanos adopt a favourable approach in 65% of cases, a neutral approach in 20% of cases and critical in 15% of cases.

There are also differences in the processing of information involving leaders. News on Mariano Rajoy are favourable in 89% of cases, while neutral ones occupy 6% and critical ones 5%. Events involving Pedro Sánchez are supportive in 42% of cases, 31% neutral and 27% critical. For its part, news on Pablo Iglesias are favourable in 25% of cases, neutral in 41% and critical in 34%. Events involving Albert Rivera are supportive in 54% of cases, neutral in 29% of cases and critical in 17% of cases.

The order in which news are broadcasted gives them added value, regardless of their content. Usually, location respond to operational reasons, in order to facilitate the continuity and encourage the informative rhythm, but sometimes it hides the intention to highlight, magnify and minimize the impact of a topic. And to achieve this purpose, broadcasters look for a strategic site on the running order. Sometimes it is also intended to produce a connotative transference between two events. If the audience links two facts, the relation they establish affects the decoding and may have an impact on the image of a particular group and leader. In order to assess that hierarchy, we take as reference the total number of news in the newscast and so we can ascertain the location of information referred to political groups, institutions and labour unions.

81% of the news on Partido Popular broadcast among the first five have a favourable approach. On the other hand, most of the information from other parties that appear in the same position have critical approaches, although with different percentages: 79% Podemos, 54% PSOE and 52% Ciudadanos.

56% of institutional information with a positive approach is also among the first five pieces of news.

In 73% of cases, the location of contents favours continuity, so the place they occupy may be considered a logical decision. The order in which the other contents are broadcast, according to the criteria applied in this research, can be interpreted as an intention of TVE to modify the impact of events, placing them in strategic slots.

If we analyse the news involving Spain with a focus abroad, we verify that the editorial policy of TVE is in line with the political criteria of the government on the current situation of international relations. In this area, special mention should be made of differences between Venezuela and Spain, which are evident in the approach to statements by President Nicolás Maduro and his government (92% of the are critical), as well as the information processing of the Venezuelan opposition when it has a say on the same topics (89% are favourable). There is a critical approach to public interventions by the British government on the Spanish situation in 68% of cases, while 87% of the news reporting on the position of the German government on Spanish issues have a favourable approach. Also, all the information on the Brexit support the German arguments. References of the French government to Spain also have a positive approach in 83% of cases.

### **6.3. Topics, sources and protagonists**

There is low diversity in the analysed political and institutional information. Regardless approaches, most of the contents are repeated in a systematic manner throughout the month which was object of study, as TVE is nurtured by the institutional agenda and activity of political parties. Government's management, independence of Catalonia and European problems occupy 78% of the time devoted to political and institutional information. 63% of the news are integrated by the same people and 81% of statements used to document stories come from official sources. Settings are also repeated; 55% of topics are developed in the same scenarios.

### **6.4. Results of the discussion group**

The five journalists selected for the discussion group have a professional career that allows them to understand the structure, organizational chart, procedures and protocols of TVE newscasts, as they have been working as editors of political and institutional information for more than five years. First of all, we agree with them that there is control over information when journalists select a topic, as they considered it newsworthy, and then the information is banned or the journalist is asked to modify the approach in order to provide an incomplete and manipulated version, adapted to some specific interests. The assumption implies that journalists do not work freely, according to their ethical principles and their professional criteria, and they are forced to perform a processing of news that alters reality of facts or hides a part of it.

According to the goals of the research, the five journalists were asked if they consider that there is control of political and institutional information in TVE. In the event of an affirmative answer, the following questions were foreseen: who is controlling information? how information is controlled? and why there is interest in controlling it?

To differentiate the answers and endure anonymity of participants in the discussion group, we encoded them as editor 1, editor 2, editor 3, editor 4, and editor 5.

The five agree that, in many cases, it is difficult to know if there is control of information, as it is sometimes difficult to know whether the focus of an information responds exclusively to the point of view and professional criterion of an editor, or to instructions of someone else. However, they agree the processing of news has been always being supervised, although they disagree on the degree of freedom when working in TVE news.

Editors 1, 2 and 4 say that the monitoring of contents is permanent, as control systems are strategically installed so they can operate automatically. In turn, their colleagues 3 and 5 argue that not every political and institutional information is subject to the same filters, as not all the news are equally sensitive. That is why they point out that, in specific cases, when dealing with sensitive issues, political criteria predominate over journalistic ones, in order to safeguard external interests.

When asked who controls information and how is it controlled, there is not consensus. The five agree that the structure of TVE news has the sufficient and adequate resources to guarantee a plural, rigorous and quality information, but editors 2 and 4 consider that the organization chart has weak points and favours interventions in contents, as there are no mechanisms nor protocols to avoid interferences of managers in the daily work of journalists, so that their professional criteria are

always respected and their independence is guaranteed. Editor 5 notes that the complexity of the information process facilitates controls, as there are activated procedures to guarantee quality that sometimes do not fulfil the functions they were designed to. This observation is also made by editor 1. And editor 3, relying on what had already been said, deems necessary to define the functions of the heads of area, so that their responsibilities were limited to strictly professional issues.

Editors 3 and 5 affirm that the key lies in the appointments of those responsible for the area, as their position allows them to carry out a direct control over everything that happens and to intervene if they consider that a topic should be treated in a special way. Editor 4 agrees with them and points out that, apart from those responsible for the area, who act as ideological filters and political commissaries during the processing of information, the most worrisome is self-censorship.

The five editors criticize appointments made following political criteria, as that entails a series of commitments and tasks and prevents working with freedom and following professional criteria. Also, they recognize that the guidelines made from intermediate positions of the newsroom leave senior executives free of political responsibilities, although the order to intervene in contents comes from the board. And that is how the organization chart is contaminated.

Approaches to the news are also important. Editors 2 and 4 say that unnecessary details are often included in the news, which can alter the nature of events and condition the decoding of contents. They also add that decisions on hierarchy of news are not always taken with journalistic criteria. In this regard, editors 3 and 5 point out that most of the political and institutional information is usually relevant and therefore occupy a preferred position in the running order. And they also consider normal that the news involving Partido Popular appear in the first positions, as it is currently the group with more responsibilities. That is why they do not see anything strange in the order of news broadcasting. Editor 1 is more critical and believes that hierarchy sometimes involves specific intentions and interests not reflected in the editorial policy.

The five editors agree that there is an intention to give voice to all political sensitivities in the news. Editors 3 and 5 justify the data on the degree of presence of the different groups arguing that those parties with a greater parliamentary representation have often a greater activity and public presence, as they have more time for speaking at the Congress of Deputies. Both state that this is the main reason why they have appeared highlighted. The formula is a disadvantage for minority parties, as it reduces the possibilities of giving visibility to their proposals through the public broadcaster.

As regards the third question -Why is there an interest to control information? -, the five editors agree in the main arguments, although with some nuances. There is unanimity in the reasons why there is an interest in controlling information. All of them insist that politicians are aware of the importance of television and its ability to influence society and the construction of the public opinion, especially in wide sectors of society that may be framed within the so-called passive audience, which is the most influential, as noted by editors 1, 3 and 5. Thus, editor 2 considers that controlling information increases the possibilities for orienting decisions of citizens, and editor 4 points out that controlling the public opinion helps conquering the power or maintaining it; that it is why there is an interest to control television.

## 7. Discussion and conclusions

97% of analysed news have an adequate formal processing, as they include all the perspectives and opinions. In this regard, no substantial differences are appreciated in the treatment received by parties, their leaders, institutional information and labour unions. Also, every political groups are present in proportion to their seats, as, in order to maintain a formal plurality, TVE applies a formula designed to regulate propaganda spaces during election periods, which consists on assigning each party an equivalent time to their parliamentary representation.

The distribution of times favours majority groups, so the degree of presence of political information cannot always be considered an indicator of the relevance of contents. Some events are not broadcasted for their newsworthiness, but for the need to maintain an apparent plurality on the news. That is why the formal correctness above mentioned does not guarantee a rigorous approach to the news, nor an adequate selection of topics.

The processing of political and institutional information reflects that TVE has a pro-governmental editorial policy. The analysis shows that the news transmits a positive, efficient and modern image of the functioning of public institutions, especially the Royal House, the central government and the autonomous regions governed by Partido Popular. The picture does not correspond to the reality, if the results of the research are compared with the data of the surveys of the Center for Sociological Research. In turn, critical approaches predominate in the news involving opposition parties. The same criteria defining the editorial policy are repeated in the hierarchy of the news. Most of the news broadcasted in preferred slots with positive approaches benefit Partido Popular, institutions governed by this group and the State, while most of the events a critical approach as regards the discourse and management of the government are relegated to more discrete positions.

Editors that have been part to the discussion group recognize that there are inadequate interferences in contents, as the organizational chart of information services, as it is not insulated from external pressures. TVE does not have an adequate procedure to resolve with guarantee professional conflicts when there is a clash of criteria between a journalist and the media. In those cases, the view of editors-in-chief prevail.

To them, the key lies in the appointments of executive positions, especially area coordinators, who are not always done on the grounds of professional merits. Editors also recognize different degrees of information control, manifested in the selection of topics and the approach to the news and, also, confirm the second hypothesis. They also consider that TVE news have the adequate elements and resources to offer rigorous and plural information, but the structures designed to guarantee quality, are sometimes used to control contents and satisfy political, economic and ideological contents, inconsistent with journalistic criteria.

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