The influence of Infotainment in the Role of TV Newscasts' Main Characters

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Abstract

Newscasts are one of the most easily recognisable elements of any TV channel. In Spain there is a tough battle for the audience between all open air stations in this field. Despite the increasing quantity of available newscasts, their content is still walking towards a higher homogenization (Vicente-Mariño & Monclús, 2009). Within this wider process of convergence, infotainment appears as a clear trend, following a similar pattern as the one described by Thussu (2008). This paper is focused on the role played by the main characters of broadcasted news, as they are a key part of any newscast.

One can detect this transition in the Spanish newscasts from a traditional way of reporting daily news to a new combination between anonymous and famous. Blurred boundaries are not enough to keep the distance and the way they are presented is sometimes biased. By means of a content analysis of six Spanish TV channels during a sample week, this paper presents the combination of these two social groups. TV channel's ideological position and thematic section are the two main cleavages leading to alternative models, but all of them devoted more space to anonymous than some years ago (Langer, 1998; Prado, 2003).

Keywords: Infotainment, TV News, News' Characters, Newscasts.

Introduction and theoretical background

TV newscasts are always full of faces, and all of them are telling very different stories to the audience. Journalists select these people trying to find the best way to illustrate the messages they pretend to send to the audience. But can these faces give us more information about how TV news stories are being produced nowadays? We consider that an in-depth analysis of the broadcasted main characters can give us a better understanding about how the media builds their agendas up.

Scientific literature collects diverse examples of well grounded studies about the role played by main characters on daily news. The second level of agenda setting theory walks in this direction (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997), looking for all those attributes belonging to both topics and characters that help the audience to re-create the journalistic message. However, most of these studies are extremely focused on a concrete type of characters, paying less attention to the whole faces' composition displayed during a newscast. It is relatively easy to find interesting researches about the representation on TV news of political representatives or social groups (Callejo, 2008), analyzing deeply their media portrayal and comparing them between different media companies or ideologies. Nowadays, one can even easily find diverse papers

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[1] *Grup de Recerca en Imatge, So i Síntesis* (GRISS) is a recognised research group (2009SG1013) by the Catalonian Government, belonging to the Audiovisual Communication and Advertising Department I of the Autonomous University of Barcelona. More information available at www.griss.org

analyzing how media are turning into main characters of their own news discourse (Sendín, 2006; Humanes, 2009). So, who and what is the protagonist of any piece of news turns to be one of the key questions to understand the whole Communication process, as most of the scholar traditions clearly show on their research topics and approaches.

Sadly, it is more complicated to find comprehensive analysis about the role of characters itself, about how the air-time is distributed amongst the limited number of persons appearing on the screen, and about which are the common lines and the differences between alternative types of characters.

On the other side of this theoretical framework, we can also find another good example of fruitful scientific production, as the study of the sensationalism in TV news (tabloid TV) is one of the most developed during the last decade (Langer, 1998; Lozano, 2004; Vettehen, Nuijten, Beentjes, 2005 & 2008; García Avilés, 2007; Thussu, 2008). The blurring boundaries between news and entertainment are dramatically shifting a lot of journalistic principles and professional routines. TV newscasts have evolved rapidly during the last decade, running parallel to the technological development. And it seems to be true that both content and form have also changed (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001).

The influence of the infotainment TV macro-genre (Prado et al., 1999; Prado, 2003) is capital in this process, as the traditional concept of information needs a permanent screening in order to catch all the ongoing transformations. Our approach is more interested in finding solid evidence about this process than in completing a critical discourse without empirical evidence (Monclús & Vicente, 2009). So our focus is devoted to news content, although we would like to compare our results with further research focused on news production and audience's reception.

Method

Quantitative content analysis is the research technique that gives all the information included in this paper. TV news bulletins were content-analyzed after having selected one sample week, from Monday to Friday, as one can find significant differences between weekdays and weekends in the Spanish newscasts. From 12th to 16th January 2009, the prime time newsreels of the six open air TV channels operating throughout the whole Spanish territory were recorded inside the framework of a wider research about infotainment and TV news.

Bearing in mind that one of these six channels (La Sexta) did not broadcast any TV news on Wednesday and Thursday, scheduling a live football match instead, our sample was completed with 28 newscasts, lasting 17 hours of air emission. Our analytical unit was the news story, conceptualized as any autonomous

part of the TV discourse with a clear independence in terms of content and form. After a preliminary analysis, the total amount of news stories included in the sample was 770.

As another solid argument to support the salience of the source of data, it should also be remarked that 70% of all the Spanish TV viewers stayed tuned to one of these six news bulletins. This rating information is a clear evidence of an ultra-competitive strategy in terms of scheduling, with up to four TV news bulletins being broadcasted simultaneously and congregating a huge part of the audience.

Table 1 shows the position chosen by each broadcaster to place its newscast. The four main channels in terms of audience (TVE1, Antena 3, Cuatro and Telecinco) start their main newsreel during a five minute period and displaying some interesting scheduling strategies, labelled as 'adjustment engineering' (Monclús & Vicente-Mariño, 2009b).

Table 1. Scheduling of Spanish TV newscasts[2]

Channel	Starts at	Ends at	Average duration
tve1	21:00	21:48	45-49
tve2	23:45	24:12	27-30
(Antena 3)	20:59	21:45	43-46
cuatro	20:55	21:28	31-34
Telecinco	20:58	21:30	32-34
laSexta	20:19	20:46	26-29

Source: Authors' own data.

Figure 1 provides us with the empirical evidence of the audience results, certifying the above mentioned concentration process. A total amount of around 8 million of viewers was watching one of these four newscasts (Barlovento Comunicación, 2009).

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[2] A more detailed analysis about the scheduling strategies of the Spanish TV newscasts was presented in Stockholm during the 2008 IAMCR World Congress (Monclús & Vicente-Mariño, 2008) and an in-depth book chapter is available in Spanish (Monclús & Vicente-Mariño, 2009a).
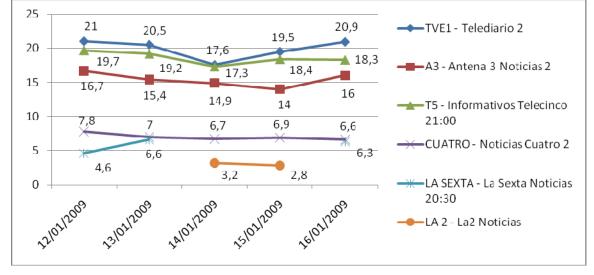
Figure 1. Audience results of the six newscasts during the sample week

Source: Authors' own data.

Consequently, our sample covers the reality of the Spanish open air TV system nowadays and tries to bring some light about how infotainment is, step by step, becoming a key factor if one tries to understand contemporary TV news. It is also necessary, nevertheless, to underline that our sample is not representative of the whole Spanish production, so all the results included in this paper must be read as useful trends and illustrative signals about how the process is evolving in Spain. Further research must be conducted in order to amplify this analysis to a higher number of newscasts and to compare it with other countries.

The approach to the news stories' main characters is one of part of a wider research project, so all the results we are presenting in this paper are focused on some questions included inside a wider content analysis protocol, briefly detailed on Table 2. The variables we are carefully looking at for this paper are the nine shadowed in grey, together with some other more contextual ones like channel, duration or section:

Table 2. Content analysis protocol

Group	Variable	Group	Variable
IDENTIFICATION	Date	NEWS COVERAGE	Live coverage
	Channel		Image appeal
	Day of the week		Impact
	Edition		Personalization
SALIENCE	Position		Biased locution
	Begins at		Background
	Ends at		Consequences
	Duration		Violence
	Type of unit		Type of violence
	Presence in headlines		Overall view
THEMATIC STRUCTURE	Section	CHARACTERS	Nature
	Wide Thematic		Name
	Scope		Nationality
	Topic		Dimension
	Brief report		Thematic ambit
	Type of news		Scope
			Voice
			Type

Source: Monclús and Vicente-Mariño, 2009a: 473.

This analytical protocol is designed to achieve a better knowledge about infotainment coming from an empirical point of view. Completing a grounded landing on this ongoing process by using data as the main source of information is the only way to avoid the temptation of falling into a void discourse, which is usually biased to critical approaches without solid empirical evidence.

This paper analyzes how the news content behaves in all those categories closely related with characters, trying to find how famous and unknown people are included inside daily media discourse and measuring how their weights are distributed during the week. The attributed roles and the broadcasted images will give us some useful information about the news selection process and about the current trends on news production as well.

Results

For this research's purposes, a news story was labelled as personalized when the main focus of the journalist's discourse was placed over a person, instead of over an event. However, personalization is a usual and legitimized resource in hands of journalists that is not directly related to the quality of information. For instance, one can find salient news stories focused on one relevant character, and it is actually highly recommendable to find those people that can work as a good example for explaining better our social reality. Nevertheless, when this practice leads to an abusive attitude and the final distribution is clearly focused on concrete human beings, we can consider that the final output of a newscast is somewhat biased. So we will not conclude that personalization means bad journalism, but we take as a starting point that an excess of personalization can potentially lead to a distorted representation of the public agenda.

Our sample week included a 43% of news stories with a clear personalization of the information, so it is to say that its content was appealing clearly to one (or more) main character, privileging a concrete person to the news facts.
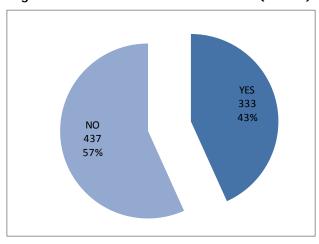
Figure 2. Personalization of news stories (N=770)

Source: Authors' own data

As a good point to reinforce the presence of personalization, we found that there is a higher proportion of personalized news included in the newscasts' headlines. 47'8% of the personalized news got into the headlines, whilst only 40'7% of non-personalized did it. Those news stories centred in one concrete individual proved to be more successful in skipping the gatekeeper barriers, achieving a higher saliency when they become part of the list of main topics of the day.

Figure 3. Presence in headlines and personalization of news stories (N=770)

Source: Authors' own data.

These results can stimulate the debate about two different ways of explaining TV news: on the one hand, those stating that there is a clear effort to broadcast events as the key unit of representation; and on the other hand, others considering that the true core position is occupied by individuals. Claiming for balance, we consider that these two trends can easily join their conclusions, as one can easily find how covering events is based, too often, in personalized views of the facts and self-centred ways of explaining the social reality. Events become a crucial appeal for journalistic interest, but protagonists are even more vital to report about the events.

Personalization is usually related to lower quality of information. Even though we do not necessarily agree with this wide spread stereotype, it is interesting to check the distribution of this variable between the sampled channels.
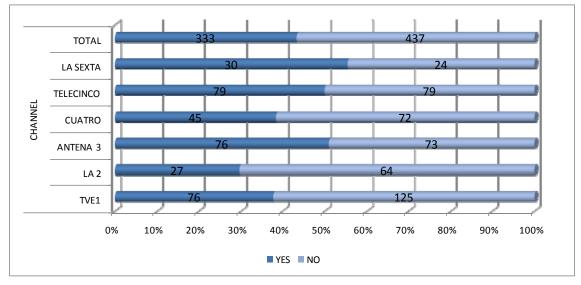
Figure 4. TV Channels' distribution of personalized news stories (N=770)

Although this is a traditional statement whenever the Spanish TV system is explained, there is a remarkable difference between channels regarding their source of funding[3]. One can find this operating cleavage in diverse items of analysis, and the personalization of news seems to be one of them. One can find a clear difference between the two channels belonging to the Public Broadcasting System, TVE1 (37'8%) and La2 (29'7%) and the remaining commercial companies.

But there is one significant exception among the market-driven channels. Cuatro, after its shift from a pay TV formula (Canal +) to an open air one, is showing a more traditional way of making news, with a predominant space devoted to the events, instead of persons (38'5% personalized news stories), as some of the upcoming data will confirm. We have also found this alternative in previous research results (Monclús & Vicente-Mariño, 2009a), leading to a more classical formula of newscast more close to the dominant style in the United States and in the United Kingdom.

The higher presence of personalization, with more than half of the broadcasted news, is found at La Sexta (55'5%), Antena 3 (51%) and Telecinco (50%). While the two latter ones are fighting with TVE1 to recover the leadership of the newscasts' strip during prime time, La Sexta is a newcomer in the field after being launched in 2006, so it is trying to find an audience niche with two main features: advancing its emission in

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[3] This difference was recently widened after the end of advertising funding for all the channels belonging to the Public Broadcasting Service.

the schedule and bringing a news style privileging young and urban audiences over a more classical audience profile.

As this paper is not as focused on the channels' distribution as in the news structure itself, we find even more interesting the analysis of the news section where that personalization trend is present. Figures 5 displays the overall thematic distribution of the sampled week, whilst Figure 6 synthesises the personalization results distributed in each section. A deeper analysis about the sections' distribution can be found in the bibliography (Monclús & Vicente-Mariño, 2009a), so we will only highlight here the two key factors included in Figure 5 that help to understand better how TV news are being organized in Spain:

- Politics (27'3%) and Sports (19'2%) are the main providers of news content.
- Information about crimes and about legal matters is remarkably increasing their daily presence, leading the statistics in some private channels like Telecinco (28'8%) or Antena 3 (22'1%).
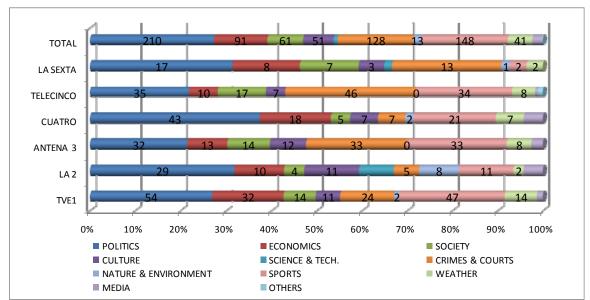
Figure 5. Section Distribution of News (N=770)

Source: Authors' own data.

All in all there is a wide distinction between newscasts following the traditional way of presenting information on TV (TVE1 and Cuatro) and alternative proposals giving more room to infotainment features, such as speculative manners and sensationalism. Between these new recipes, one can find solid proposals in terms of audience and historical evolution like Antena 3 and Telecinco; new ones pursuing urban viewers,

showing a critical approach and a high quota for sports (La Sexta); and one pure alternative newscast mainly devoted to minorities and scheduled in a non competitive slot (La2).

But it is even more important for this paper's purposes to focus on the analysis provided by Figure 6, where one can find the distribution of personalization in the above listed sections. All those categories with a lower frequency, such as Science, Nature or Media were not taken in consideration, although in further projects they should be also watched carefully as their marginal position is giving valid information about the news selection operated by newscasts' editors.

The aggregated results show that around 43% of the news stories included personalization, a significant proportion but not dominant yet. Looking at the section analysis, Sports and Crime & Courts are clearly on top of this ranking, with results comfortably placed above the 60% limit. These two sections are usually based on individual histories, where personalization is something almost taken for granted when journalists design their news reports. But it should be also remarked that 46'7% of the political news stories are personalized, contributing clearly to the overall result of personalization. And this personalization of political information is the result of mixing up a topic traditionally framed as one of the more serious parts of any newscast with the simplification of the ideological debate by means of prioritizing the leaders over more deep discourses and structures of representation.
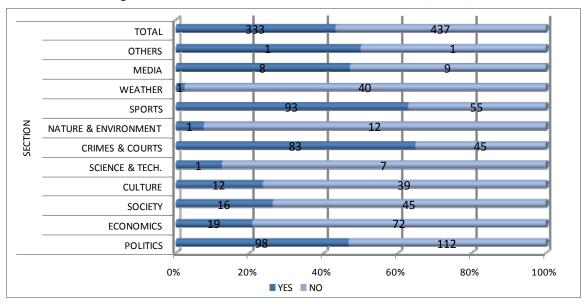
Figure 6. Section Distribution of Personalized News (N=770)

Source: Authors' own data.

On the other hand, Economics, Society and Culture are the sections with a lower quota of personalization, appealing to a more classical way of information based on facts. When journalists face any report about social statistics or economic indicators, it is quite difficult to find a unique example to clearly illustrate the content to be explained. Instead of personalization, it is very common to complete a so called survey, collecting anonymous opinions in the street. This is another trend to be analyzed about the characters, but it cannot be labelled as a personalized news story. Obviously, weather information is clearly a non-personalized section, regardless some news stories presenting the impact and consequences of climate phenomena.

Nevertheless when it comes to the concrete analysis, one can find very different examples proving that there is wide diversity of journalistic approaches to coincident news topics. Within the sampled weekdays one can see pieces of news about a diplomatic conflict between Russia and Ukraine about the transport of gases that was disturbing significantly a great amount of people in Eastern and Central Europe during a cold winter. This kind of news seems to clearly belong to an international politics section and also seems to appeal to build up a conflict frame in order to explain one country and another's demands and positions. Although this was the dominant approach in the relatively short space offered by the Spanish TV stations, one can easily find personalized news stories about concrete individuals suffering the consequences of this lack of understanding between the two former Soviet Union republics. Newscasts' editors relied on human interests' frames to report a diplomatic clash, even though the emotional distance towards the Spanish audience seems to be evident. This is only one example about how personalization is reaching news sections traditionally presented as hard news.

Another capital part of our study is focused on the main features of the characters. First, we analyzed their natures, identifying an expected domain of individuals, followed by events and groups, as Figure 7 shows.
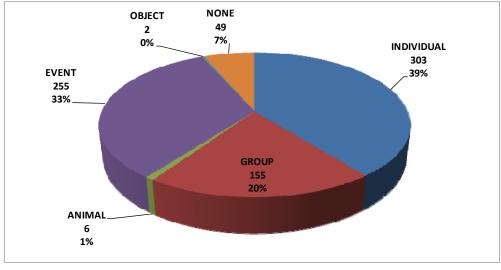
Figure 7. Nature of the Character (N=770)

Source: Authors' own data.

Newscasts give obvious priorities to those news stories with a clear presence of human beings. This group is the one that keeps almost 9 out of 10 personalized news stories. A good example of the predominance of individuals is given by the fact that its presence doubles the collective characters, all included inside the 'Group' category. And it is even more significant that events are the second highest frequency found, with a 33% of the sampled units. These evidences lead us to the conclusion that both individuals and events receive a higher attention by TV newsrooms. And this can also point to a couple of common trends in contemporary TV news: on the one hand, we have already found personalization elements; and now, on the other hand, we have detected the presence of TV events.

Exactly at the opposite situation, the journalistic interest on animals or objects is simply anecdotic. This kind of soft news stories shares a common interest towards human interest approaches placing the audience's emotions as one visible objective. Usually these pieces of news mix a optimistic and funny content with a use of image that pursues the generation of positive impressions among the spectators. The clear contrast with the traditional hard news is an unarguable signal of infotainment.

But where do these characters come from? This is a useful question to re-build the discourse performed by TV newscasts. Geographical and emotional proximity are ones of the stronger news values: it is very often presented to justify the whole news selection, as an answer to the journalistic demands coming from the audience. It is widely assumed that the public is more interested in what is going on in their neighbourhood than what it is happening at their antipodes. However, newscasts usually present their product to the

audience as a reconstruction of the daily world's current affairs. But when one approaches to the broadcasted characters, imbalances appear at first sight.

Figure 8. Nationality of the Character (N=458)

Source: Authors' own data.

Taking into account only the 458 news stories presenting an individual or a group as its main character, our sample offer a distorted composition, with a high dominance of Spanish protagonists. Almost two thirds of the identified characters (63%) are Spanish, while the presence of the rest of the world is reduced, with a comfortable second position for the Americas, clearly leaded by the US citizens. This distribution stands against the declared purpose of most newscasts to bring an accurate image of the whole outer world: any Spanish viewer will receive an imbalanced composition that is far away from the global connections lying behind the current status quo at the political, economic and cultural level. These data are completed with the analysis of the scope of the broadcasted news stories included in Figure 9.
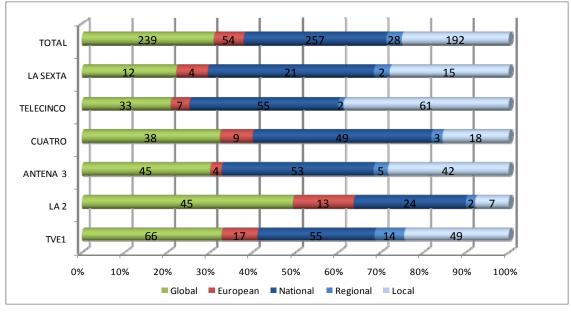
Figure 9. Geographical scope of the news stories (N=770)

Source: Authors' own data.

Once again, it should also be remarked that there are notorious differences between the six channels. Between the five channels that are competing almost face to face, we find another time that TVE1 and Cuatro are more likely to include international information, while the three other private channels (Antena 3, Telecinco and La Sexta) prefer to broadcast a higher proportion of local and national topics. The explanation can point both to journalistic (news selection) and to financial (higher costs of international information) reasons. There is only one news bulletin relying clearly on international information (*La 2 Noticias*), but it is the consequence of the previously mentioned alternative approach to minority audiences. The selection criteria are quite different from the format's dominant model, allowing the presence of environmental information or anecdotic pieces of news.

It is possible to find also some coincidences between the two previous figures, as the proportion of international news (taking always Spain as the initial point of reference to distinguish the different scopes) is quite similar to the proportion of international characters. But the fact of remaining at similar levels cannot hide the clear imbalance between Spanish based news and information coming from abroad.

Another interesting category is the one that analyzes the professional background of the main character, reinforcing partly the results of the study about the thematic structure during the sample week. When the main character is a person, Politics, Sports and Society keep almost one third of the valid cases, leaving

only a marginal 6% to Culture and a 3% to Economics. But this distribution shifts dramatically when the unit of analysis are collective characters, as Society locks half of the cases, Politics and Sports lose part of their dominance but remain over 15%, and Culture or Economics get a better, but low, result. The process of individualization of political information always focused on the main candidate and forgetting the political parties as one of the main actors of the social debate, together with the spectacular nature of Sports information, following a business-oriented way of creating stars, can give some firsts explanations to this path.

It should be remarked in both cases, the absolute absence of protagonists coming from the Science landscape, another significant point of the lack of depth of contemporary TV news. When almost everybody agrees on the increasing complexity of the current social world, it is quite paradoxical to realise that those people that are devoting their jobs to study these processes cannot access the more available and widespread media discourse. TV news are maybe not the best space to develop this kind of explanations, but it seems rational to suggest a higher presence of experts in the news stories.
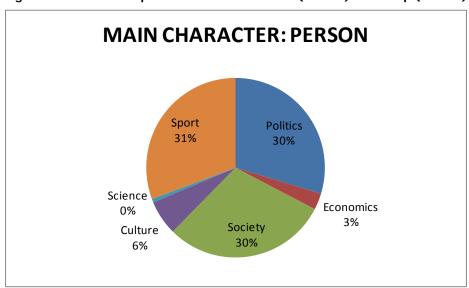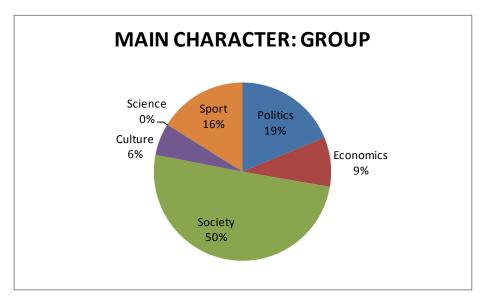
Figure 10. Character's professional field: Person (N=303) vs. Group (N=155)

MAIN CHARACTER: PERSON

Sport 31%
Politics 30%
Science 0%
Culture 6%
Society 30%
Economics 3%

MAIN CHARACTER: GROUP

Science 0%
Sport 16%
Politics 19%
Culture 6%
Economics 9%
Society 50%

Source: Authors' own data.

One of the main points to understand the relevance granted to anyone appearing in a newscast is focused on the decision of including their own speech in the news story. There is a big difference between having the chance to explain yourself with your own words (direct quotation), being 'translated' by the journalist by means of an off-voice (reported speech), or being only the object of the information without any chance to express your position (voiceless).

Figure 11 shows that almost one half of the characters are voiceless, so they cannot express themselves, or at least the audience following this newscast as their only source of information will only retain the public image broadcasted by the newscast. So it is to say that their own portrayal is completely drawn by the media, with the potential risks in terms of lack of control over their communication. It is important to remember once again that newscasts almost never last more than 45 minutes in Spain, and, even though they are between the longer ones all over the world, it is simply impossible to include all points of view. Nevertheless, only one third of the characters are framed in the newscast with their own voice, so the audience should keep an eye on the news discourse displayed in their screens. Trying to complete the information collected during the news bulletin with other sources is deemed to be the best way to build a proper explanation about the development of any social phenomena.

Figure 11. Inclusion of Voice in News Stories (N=458)

Source: Authors' own data.

In close relation with quotations, the popularity of the character should be taken into account if one tries to find signals of infotainment. There is no direct connection between anonymous characters and infotainment, but the process to include more and more popular and unknown characters can be an indicator of a spectacular approach to TV news (Prado, 1999 & 2003). A different behaviour between individual and collective characters is observed, as the first ones show a preference for popular persons at the Spanish space, while the second ones display a higher presence of anonymous.
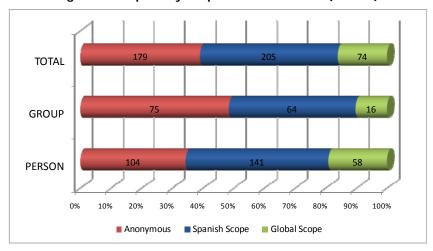
Figure 12. Popularity Scope of the Character (N=458)

Source: Authors' own data.

Strengthening the results of the thematic structure, the presence of popular persons at the global level is low, but we will clarify better this situation with the following data. Crossing the two previous charts, we can find an expected result about the distribution of time for direct quotations. As Figure 13 reports, unknown characters are voiceless in 59'2% of the cases, while the audience can hear the declarations of characters popular in Spain 51'7% of the times.
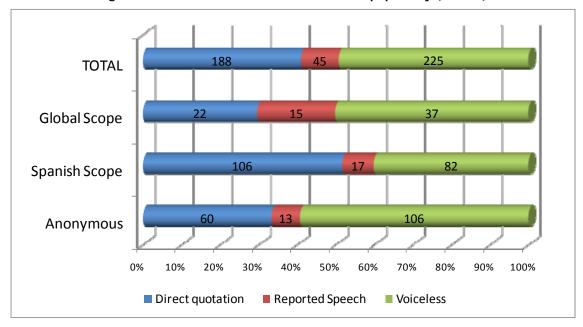
Figure 13. Characters' Inclusion of voice and popularity (N=458)

Source: Authors' own data.

One can easily wonder why there is a big presence of anonymous characters, but this is not translated into a higher presence of their expressions: it can be understood as an infotainment feature, as there is a clear attempt to approach the TV news discourse to the audience, but this approach is only supported on the shoulders of the characters, not on their arguments. We could also foresee that popular actors at the global level appear more often in the news stories by means of the reported speech, as the process to get the recorded quotes is more difficult than on the other groups. Last but not least, Figure 14 completes the overview after crossing those data with the professional field where the characters belong to:
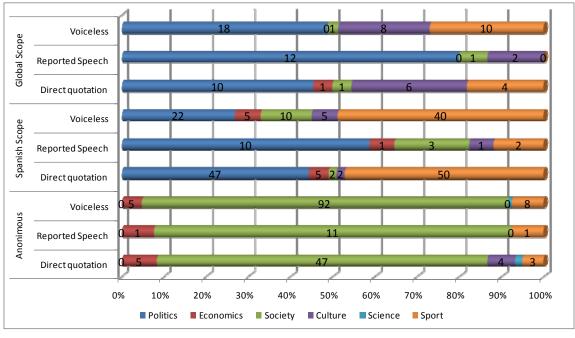
Figure 14. Inclusion of Voice, Popularity and Professional Field (N=458)

Source: Authors' own data.

Data provided above are manifest. Politics are clearly in the lead both at the global and national level, giving a clear signal the distribution of protagonists of the newscast is changing, but maybe this evolution is not as fast as some researchers imagine. The alliance between politicians and journalists is still reigning and clearly influences the TV news discourse. The political sphere keeps on being the main provider of information for the media, and this symbiotic relation leads to the current state of the art.

If we follow this close relation between professionals, we can find that Sports is another field where the links are clear and proved day by day. It is easy for sports journalists to get the information from sportsmen and clubs, and this lead to a solid position in the distribution of the characters.

And if we finally arrive to the anonymous voices' collective, we find that most of them come from the Society field: they are unknown and their opinion cannot be included in other field. One can wonder why there is no presence of experts –maybe anonymous, but with knowledge enough to explain concrete topics- in other fields as a good research question for the near future.

Conclusions

Personalization of news is one of the main current trends in contemporary Spanish newscasts. There is a clear attempt to reduce the gap between the broadcasted event and the audience, and the human approach seems to be the more established way to bridge this distance. Some thematic sections, like sports information, have traditionally used this technique, but nowadays it has been successfully transferred to other thematic fields. Political information is being simplified by news schemes focused exclusively on main characters, while the political discussion remains at the backstage, kept away from the newscasts' audience. The door for sensationalism is clearly open in the Spanish TV news. Nevertheless, there is an ongoing battle between traditional and alternative ways of presenting news to the audience. The market opening process experienced during the last two decades in Spain has lead to a diverse and interesting landscape, where public and private operators display different strategies. Some of them (TVE1, Cuatro) remain clearly on the classical news bulletin, with a professionalised approach to the news stories and with reduced room for sensationalism. Others, like Antena 3, Tele 5 or La Sexta, rely on a more impact-based option, with a wide space for news topics that some years ago would have not skipped the gatekeeping process. Whereas TVE1 and Cuatro are still relying on a rigorous journalistic approach, most of the commercial stations are more close to an entertaining approach to the news stories in order to gather the audience attention by means of an alternative to the traditional newscasts' discourse.

The Spanish newscasts are offering their screens to the audience. Under a so called democratisation label, we have showed that TV news stories are giving a big space for unknown citizens. The presence of anonymous voices on the news is increasing as a result of the growing number of operating channels urged to be singular and different in order reach a higher rating within a highly competitive landscape: it is hard to measure to which extent this strategy is paying them off, but it is even clearer that the rationale behind this programming behaviour is constructed over the belief that human interest and personalization is a good way to keep the public's attention.

However, one should also bear in mind the way all this people is introduced in the newscast, as their presence is quite often presented in an anecdotic way and it is very rarely a core part of the discourse. And one can even go further wondering if it is really necessary to include so many popular and fragmented anonymous quotations when the true goal for any newscast is to synthesise the daily agenda in approximately half an hour. One open question rose after checking our findings points to the fact that the traditional concept of agenda is turning from the general interest represented mainly by hard news coming from the political, economic and cultural spheres to a wider concept where the quota for social agenda and particular news stories is definitely growing.

The analytical protocol displayed within the methodology paragraphs gives also more light about the attributes of each actor, in order to explain the different approaches to the news story. Obviously, the kinds of characters included in the political or economical news are rarely common citizens; nevertheless, their presence is growing. A consequence as a softening of TV news stories is loudly criticized by a lot of scholars.

During the last two decades, the opening to the unknown actors is presented as an attempt to bridge the gap between the salient people of the political and public agenda and the common people. Any average citizen is now a potential main character of a news story, although the frame is not under the same control as between the famous. But do we –as society- want to lose the distinction between people holding the power to rule our lives and to transfer this authority to an army of 'anyones' or unknown citizens? The traditional model of news journalism is under debate and all the Spanish broadcasters are still trying to find the right combination.

To conclude, the spreading process of infotainment is still ongoing inside the Spanish TV newscasts. In fact, the transition towards a digital terrestrial system means an increase in the number of available channels and also the arrival of 24 hours news channels for the whole audience. Until 2009 every increment of the competency has lead to a higher reliance on infotainment as a good way to keep and to get more audience for the commercial stations. The right proportions for the cocktail between soft and hard news reported with alternative news styles and giving priority to different types of characters seems to have not been found yet, especially when one can find very different option all over the available schedules. In the meantime, the increasing presence of unknown main characters in daily TV news bulletins should be kept in mind by Communication scholars, as a valid signal to identify the potential risks of infotainment for the audience's participation in the public sphere.

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