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Submitted

April 8, 2017

Approved

November 20, 2017

© 2018

Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

doi: 10.15581/003.31.1.57-71

www.communication-society.com

2018 – Vol. 31(1)

pp. 57-71

How to cite this article:

Echeverría, M. & González, R. A. (2018). Media logic and journalistic commercialism. A longitudinal analysis of frames in campaign coverage. *Communication & Society* 31(1), 57-71.

Media logic and journalistic commercialism. A longitudinal analysis of frames in campaign coverage

Abstract

In recent years, election coverage has deemphasized the substance of politics (content related to issues or policy) to focus on a media logic treatment, as in the case of stories on human interest, conflict, and scandal. The latter has been connected to the increasing commercialism of news media, the printed press in particular; which – besides a constant decrease of readership, high competition from the Internet, and corporate acquisition – has tried to appeal to a less politicized market through that kind of treatment. In order to prove this assumption, we conducted a longitudinal content analysis of the last four Mexican presidential elections (1994, 2000, 2006 and 2012). The aim was to evaluate – on one hand – the presence of thematic meta-frames that represent the political substance, and – on other – the strategic frames, that manifest a media logic in action. The findings pointed out an increase only in the conflict frame, whilst the political process frame was steady across the elections, and higher than the issue frame. Our data does not allow us to establish neither a significant nor linear relationship between an ongoing commercialism of the press and the frames linked to media logic.

Keywords

Press, commercialism, infotainment, frame analysis, media logic.

1. Introduction

One of the main features of the contemporary election coverage is the constant loss of content related to substantive aspects such as issues, policies, and ideologies. On the contrary, there is an increasing emphasis on the mere competition between a set of actors that only seek power through strategic decisions, underlining their human face, and involved in conflicts of major/minor intensity. As a part of the mediatization of politics (Strömbäck, 2008), these patterns stress the salience of a media logic that determines the campaign communication; which is based upon the attractive and/or entertaining angle of the electoral race to the detriment of the normative role of the media. That

is, rather than considering audience members as citizens with a right to know, news outlets tend to see them as mere consumers of *infotainment*.

There are several explanations of this phenomenon that, on the one hand, point out an increasingly conflictive journalist-politician relationship (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; D'Angelo, Calderone & Territola, 2005) or, on the other, stress the inherent characteristics of the political context (Dimitrova & Kostadinova, 2013; O'Malley, Brandenburg, Flynn, McMenamin & Rafter, 2013). However, the arguments with more solid empirical support suggest – as an independent variable – the increasing media commercialism, particularly during periods of economic contractions. Their central hypothesis is that news organizations avoid a deeper and more serious coverage, because it is supposed to be boring for the audience. Therefore, they offer entertaining stories that could attract voters' attention. This is also a response to economic pressures from a highly competitive market, which is constantly shaped by consumers' tastes and desires (Cohen, 2002; Iyengar, Norpoth & Hahn, 2004; Gerth & Siegert, 2011; Takens, van Atteveldt, van Hoof & Kleinnijhuis, 2013b; Nord & Strömbäck, 2014). Notwithstanding, most of those studies have a transversal methodological scheme, comparing – within a specific period of time – a diverse set of news outlets with more or less commercial potential.

In spite of the publication of more recent longitudinal studies (Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Jelle, 2011; Dimitrova & Kostadinova, 2013; van Santen & Vliegenthart, 2013; Zeh & Hopmann, 2013; Sampert, Trimble, Wagner, & Gerrits, 2014; Magin, 2015; Karidi, 2017), few of them focus on media commercialism. This term refers to an issue that could explain the constant economic contraction of news organizations (especially newspapers), which could be detected via analysis of the coverage. This situation could even be traced back to the arrival of television or internet, being both of them a free and massive source of information that have challenged newsrooms worldwide. Research on the increasing political coverage shaped by media logic, which parallels that of the precarious process of printed press, would reinforce the empirical evidence of this hypothesis from a diachronic and structural perspective, less influenced by circumstantial factors.

The aim of this article is to prove that relationship by measuring the coverage that the main Mexican newspapers gave to several of the last presidential elections in this country. Mexico represents a viable case for testing the relation between the level of commercialism and the political coverage for two reasons: First, Mexican media – particularly printed press – underwent a pronounced shift from seventy years of economic and editorial control by the State to a more liberal and market-driven operation since the year 2000 (Hallin, 2000b; Trejo, 2004). Second, there is an increasing electoral campaign coverage with an evident spectacular tone, which has the explicit goal of generating revenues (Lozano, 2004; Meyer, 2015; Muñoz, 2015). Both aspects suggest a possibly ascendant relation between a progressive commercialism and a more superficial political coverage.

The following sections will present – on the one hand – the theoretical framework that connects commercialism patterns with coverage, which is based upon the concepts of framing and media logic. On the other, we present the analysis of the frames used by four of the main national newspapers during the coverage of the Mexican presidential elections from 1994 to 2012. The findings allow us to track down trends – either ascendant or descendant – in the use of specific frames during the authoritarian and post-authoritarian periods of Mexican political history.

2.1. Commercial pressures, organizational responses, and journalistic precariousness

Considered as the exploitation of the economic value of news, media commercialism used to be linked to tabloids, in which journalistic interest is focussed on scandals, sex, and violence. On the contrary, quality press tended to keep its distance from these kinds of papers, even though several news organizations developed sister tabloid publications in order to maximise revenues. Nonetheless, current market conditions have fostered a reorientation of certain media projects – initially interested in the practice of civic journalism – towards a more commercial approach to information production (Picard, 2005).

This transformation is the outcome of a system of pressures on media, which forces them to reorganise their processes in order to obtain larger economic gains. One of the most evident impacts of this trend is related to the news-making process, which has experienced a significant loss of journalistic autonomy. As a result, instead of producing quality contents with a civic orientation for informed citizens, news stories have become lighter and entertaining for an increasingly depoliticised audience.

It is worth noting that these commercial pressures may be either internal (from within the news outlet) or external (from the market). There are two clear trends regarding the former: On the one hand, media organizations have grown bigger and, thus, the gap between management and newsroom has become more evident (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). On the other, this entrepreneurial drive has also boosted the constant interaction between marketing strategies and content production (Hallin, 2000a).

Related to the external pressures, which are diverse and come from a wide array of sources, they involve a reconfiguration of the media market shaped by an abundant supply of information facilitated by cable/satellite television, free newspapers and – particularly – the internet (Baym, 2008). This situation clearly overcomes the audience's capacity of news consumption, both in terms of money and time; thereby creating a highly competitive market (Picard, 2007).

Another external factor has to do with the reconfiguration of media audiences, a situation that has an evident impact on news production. For instance, newspaper readership has been shrinking since the eighties. This is because of the dominance of television as an information supplier, the lack of replacement of older readers, and the reduction of the free time that people spend getting informed (Hallin, 2000a; Picard, 2004). This decrease has been fostered by the migration – of both media and receivers – to the digital space, which massive supply of content has boosted that the people have more choices and, hence, information has to compete against entertainment.¹ In order to attract audiences' attention, news outlets are compelled to reduce the complexity of the information, and stress the emotional angles of the stories (Aalberg, van Aelst & Curran, 2010; Lugo-Ortiz, 2012).

This situation makes the consumption of already scarce political and electoral news even more difficult, especially because citizens tend to consider that an informed vote is no longer significant (*rational ignorance*). Therefore, political information is mainly consumed by the person that considers voting as a moral duty, and feels an “ideological satisfaction” in doing so (Hamilton, 2006). On the contrary, most people do not share that obligation and,

¹ As an example: During the 2004-2015 period, American newspapers' circulation has decreased 7%, which has caused that 144 dailies closed down and, as a consequence, 21,200 jobs were lost (Barthel, 2016). Spain represents another case where printed press is declining, since between 2000 and 2013 circulation dropped from 11 to 7 million copies. As a result, advertising investments also dropped from 1,700 to 600 million euros (Martínez-Fernández, Castellanos-García & Juanatey-Boga, 2016).

hence, are not particularly interested in political news stories, unless the content is presented as a sport competition with winners and losers, or when it focusses on scandals (Iyengar *et al.*, 2004).

In that sense, media organizations have responded to those pressures by pushing their newsrooms staff to maximise productivity to the detriment of quality. That is, reporters and editors have to prioritise market demands over journalistic standards (Takens, van Atteveldt, van Hoof & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013a). For this reason, one of the most frequent measures that news outlets take is the continuous search for specific niches that are not originally interested in politics. In so doing, they offer a selection of both *hard* and *soft* news which could be interesting for each kind of consumers, as well as the better informed receivers (Hamilton, 2006).

Another response to economic pressures is the reorientation in terms of themes and style. Whilst professional standards emphasise the factual and deep treatment of information, market-oriented logic promotes a lighter approach, characterised by brief and sensationalist contents, closer to entertainment. Under this scheme, commercial television newscasts and online news sites represent the model for the press as a whole, because both platforms are in a permanent search for viewers and clicks (Berrocal, Redondo & Campos, 2012).

In summary, commercial pressures and organizational responses have altered the news-making process. The aforementioned argument emphasises that the internal and external transformations of quality press have fostered a reorientation of political information. In other words, organizational changes, an increasing supply of news outlets, the arrival of digital news platforms, and the permanent quest for new audiences, exert pressure on publishers; whose response is the adoption of specific formats that ensure revenues. The features of this trend in political coverage will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 Political coverage and framing

The political news-making process oscillates between political logic and media logic (Esser & Strömbäck, 2009). The former is related to the normative aspects that determine the interaction between government and constituency; which is found in the debate of policies, party deliberation, accountability, and elections. In that sense, public issues are at the core of the political logic (Esser & Strömbäck, 2009; Samper *et al.*, 2014). On the contrary, media logic involves a scheme for news production; in which content is easy to decode by the audiences due to the combination of information and entertainment, and it is presented in a narrative format that emphasises conflicts (Altheide, 2004).

Media logic is directly connected with three components: commercialism, professionalism (journalistic routines and normative aspirations), and technology (increasing dependence on new media). Nonetheless, there is a constant tension between media logic and professionalism, as the latter aims to facilitate citizens' right to know and, thus, is close to political logic; whilst the former seeks the maximisation of revenues, through a low-cost content production process with a massive reach in terms of audience. For that reason, market-driven media systems foster political coverage characterised by infotainment: spectacular, dramatic, and depoliticised news formats (Esser, 2013).

Furthermore, these formats could also be considered as generic journalistic frames, because they represent the way in which political events are transformed into templates for news stories (de Vreese, 2014). According to Aalberg, Strömbäck & de Vreese (2011), regarding political coverage, there are two dominant macro-frames: *Issue* and *Strategy*. The former is linked to political logic, and it emphasises factors such as public policy, political actors' debate, law initiatives, elections, *etcétera*. Under this scheme, media represent a

bridge between authorities and citizens (Lawrence, 2000). On the contrary, the *strategy* frame depicts elections as dramatic confrontations between opposite actors, which will result in winners and losers because candidates are only victory-oriented (Jensen, 2012). Therefore, their performance is evaluated in terms of the final result, rather than in their proposals (D'Angelo *et al.*, 2005).

There is also a set of more specific frames derived from the latter, which have relatively stable identities, even though they could be found mixed in any given news story. These frames are the following: *conflict*, which considers elections as polarised arenas, where confrontation between participants is emphasised to the detriment of their arguments. The *strategy* frame understands candidates' actions and proposals as mere means to a political end, which is winning the election. Closely connected with this last point, *game* frame imports the language of sports journalism and, thus, presents the election as a *horse race*. In this frame, surveys are used as predictors of who will win or lose the competition (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). Finally, *human-interest* frame is found when news stories include an emotional angle – a human face – of the campaigns (Pajoni, 2012).

To reiterate, the overall feature of these frames is that electoral coverage diverts its attention from political content (issues, problems, proposals) to report on partial results of a dramatic, conflictive, and exciting confrontation (Anikin, 2009). The aim of these kinds of news stories is to capture wider audiences, that are not particularly interested in politics, but might be attracted to political entertainment and, in so doing, media maximise their revenues.

2.3 Mexican press as a case study

Hallin & Mancini (2004) argued that the current process of commercialism has had a more significant impact on media systems where it was previously inexistent, such as the Mexican case. In Mexico, quality press has historically been an irrelevant business venture, due to a reduced newspaper readership – a sign of low levels of education – and limited circulation. During the seventy years that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) exerted an authoritarian rule (1930–2000), news outlets were propaganda vehicles for the regime, which – in exchange of loyalty – granted them all kind of subsidies (newsprint, advertising, tax exemptions...) and even bribes (Hallin 2000b; Hughes, 2006). Therefore, the target audience of political news were not citizens, it was government offices instead. This situation hindered the development of press commercialism, and the use of non-standard news story format. Ironically, political content used to be abundant, but – rather than the public interest – it represented submission to the hegemonic party (Hallin 2000b; Hughes, 2006).

The process of commercialization was supposed to start in 1993 with the then-president Carlos Salinas' neoliberal project of modernization, which promoted commercial openness and the end of monopolies. Since then, the market-driven model of media system has increasingly developed through the rise of new press organizations, and even the reconfiguration of already existent news outlets, which shared a common set of practices: diversification of contents and products, decision-making processes based upon the market, media mergers with larger organizations, creation of regional franchises, amongst other (Hernández, 2010). Today, Mexican national press has gained larger autonomy margins thanks to its organizational sophistication, and a relatively stable economic health. Nonetheless, it still has some endemic limitations: limited circulation (in 2010, 70% of the newspapers printed less than 20,000 copies, and only one printed more than 200,000); high centralization in Mexico City (38% of the market is located in the capital of the country); elite audiences rather than larger segments (only 15% of the Mexican population regularly reads newspapers); and high dependence on advertisers, especially the government (García, 2013).

Under these circumstances, the main response to these challenges has focussed on cuts in newsrooms staff and, as a result, the need of multitasking journalists, who – on the one hand – could produce content for different platforms, but – on the other – sacrifice the quality of their work (Hernández, 2010; Meneses, 2011). Regarding content, there has also been a transformation of the political coverage. Although empirical studies are scarce, there are some signs of spectacularization since the beginning of this century. For instance, 69% of news stories related to the 2000 presidential election were *totally* or *partially* spectacularised (Lozano, 2001). More recently, some findings related to the 2012 campaigns pointed out that half of the news stories used strategic, game, and human interest frames; whilst the other half stressed diverse political issues, and the organizational aspects of the election (Echeverría & Meyer, 2015; Muñoz, 2015). Despite methodological differences, the incipient literature found an emergent trend of electoral coverage.

The aforementioned structural conditions of the Mexican media system and its political coverage represent the context of our hypothesis: as a result of its liberalization from the hegemonic control of the State, Mexican press has been affected by market pressures and, in response, newspapers have promoted contents shaped by political entertainment frames, to the detriment of quality information. Therefore, the aim of the next sections is to prove this argument.

3. Methodology

In order to determine the existence and degree of a political coverage shaped by a media logic, and according to the quantitative frame analysis tradition, we conducted a content analysis of the news stories related to the 1994, 2000, 2006, and 2012 Mexican presidential elections. This longitudinal study facilitates, on the one hand, the understanding of the structural aspects of the press coverage and, on the other, the increasing commercialism boosted by a media logic (Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). As a starting point, 1994 represented a media system controlled by the State; whilst the following periods were supposed to show an increasing independence of newspapers from political power.

This inquiry includes the following publications: *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, *El Universal*, and *Excelsior*; which have high circulation, national distribution, they are all considered quality press, and have operated without interruptions throughout the period of analysis. The sample (N=1,027) was constructed as a composite week within the official periods of each election, which oscillated between 120 days in 1994, and 30 in 2012. The analysed messages were news stories that explicitly referred to any aspect of the elections, but opinionated texts – such as editorials or columns – were excluded.

The unit of analysis was the headline of the news stories. This was because of practical and theoretical reasons, since the headline represents the most evident factor of the frame, and it could also influence the reading of the text as a whole (Van Dijk, 1990; Klein, 2000). We conducted a deductive analysis, because of its replicability, and the possibility of coding just one frame per story. We did this to avoid the potential complications involved with categorising texts with multiple frames.

The codebook was developed and pretested by the authors of this article, following the different frames suggested by the literature (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Aalberg *et al.*, 2011; Klein, 2000; Lawrence, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006; Strömbäck & Luengo, 2008; Berganza, 2008; Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2010; Aalberg *et al.*; 2011). Regarding the frames oriented towards media logic, we chose *game*, *conflict*, *strategy* and *human interest*; all of which form part of the macro-frame *strategy*. We also selected three frames based upon the political logic, named for this study as macro-frame *politics*, which are: *political issues* (proposals and ideologies), *political processes* (organizational, legal,

and logistic processes of the election), and *leadership* (political and personal abilities of the candidates).

Coders located each unit of analysis within a specific frame. In so doing, they used a relationship of three descriptive sentences for each unit. The fact that the unit could be classified as one of the descriptors was enough to locate it into a specific frame.² An inter-coder reliability test between two coders resulted in Kappa 0.85 for macro-frames and 0.77 for general frames, which are satisfactory parameters for an exploratory study such as this.

4. Findings

Regarding the aforementioned hypothesis, the results point out several directions. First, one of the main signs of commercialism is the decrease of electoral coverage, because this kind of content is assumed not to be very profitable, since it involves high investments of resources – both human and material – and a limited audience. Nonetheless, our findings suggest otherwise: electoral coverage in Mexico did not decrease over time, it slowly increased instead. During the 1994 elections, each one of the newspapers included in this study published an average of 72 stories. This figure decreased to 46 in 2000, but slightly increased to 51, and by 2012 there was a significant increase to 89.

Related to macro-frames, Table 1 shows a steady increase of *strategy* since 1994, when it represented one third of the content (31%), which reached nearly half of the stories by 2012. On the contrary, *politics* had a significant decrease since 1994, going down from two thirds of the content (69%), but – despite the continuous decrease in the following two elections – it had a slight recovery in 2012 with 57%.

This means that the 1994 election, which is still part of the authoritarian period, is broadly different from the following three, which show a steady behaviour regarding frame proportion. This argument is reinforced by several facts. On the one hand, the range between the two macro-frames is much higher in 1994 (0.38) than in 2000 (0.22), and 2012 (0.15); but there is a parity between both macro-frames in 2006 (0.2). On the other, Chi square test shows statistical significance between these differences, $\chi^2(3, N = 1145) = 17.461, p = .001$; but a correlation of low significance (Cramer V=0.130).

² For instance, the unit of analysis “Candidate Peña strengthens ties with businessmen” (“El candidato Peña cierra filas con los empresarios”, in Spanish) could have been classified within the *strategy* frame as long as it fitted some of these descriptors, expressed as questions: Does the story stress conflicts such as attacks, counterattacks, self-defence, challenges, or controversies between political actors and/or society?; Does the story mention alliances, acclamations, or reconciliations between citizens – or groups of candidate supporters – and/or society?; or Does the story describe the tactics or strategies that political actors employ in order to strengthen his/her position or weaken that of his/her opponent?. The same logic was followed for the rest of the descriptors from the other frames, until we found the one which better suit the unit.

Table 1. Macro-frames behaviour across the elections, and its ranges.

	Macro-frame								
	Issue				Strategy				
	N	%	μ	SD	N	%	μ	SD	Range
<i>Elections</i>									
1994	197	68.9	10.3	10.8	89	31.1	10.4	11.2	0.38
Front page	57	69.5			25	30.5			0.39
2000	112	61.2	7.3	7.3	71	38.8	6.6	4.2	0.22
Front page	13	56.5			10	43.5			0.13
2006	104	51.0	10.0	6.0	100	49.0	9.2	7.4	0.02
Front page	9	42.9			12	57.1			-0.14
2012	203	57.3	7.2	5.2	151	42.7	6.8	4.1	0.15
Front page	24	64.9			13	35.1			0.30
<i>Period</i>									
Authoritarian	197	68.9	10.3	10.8	89	31.1	10.4	11.1	0.38
Front page	57	69.5			25	30.5			0.39
Post-authoritarian	419	56.5	7.9	6.1	322	43.5	7.5	5.4	0.13
Front page	46	56.8			35	43.2			0.14

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Finally, a comparison between both sets of data (see Table 1), from the last election of the authoritarian period and the following three of the post-authoritarian age, shows a relevant difference between both macro-frames. That is, the former's range is four times higher than the latter's, 0.38 and 0.13 respectively. Statistically, this difference is significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 1071) = 13.082, p = .000$. Although, both sets of elections and macro-frames have a weak association (Cramer V=0.113).

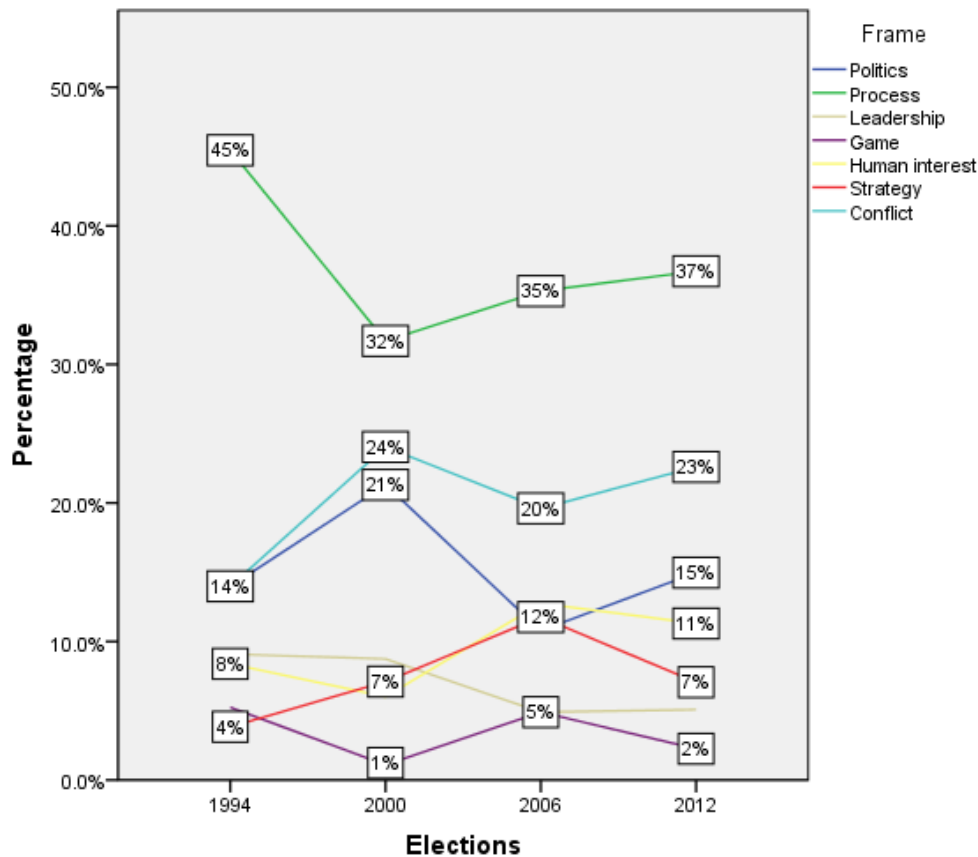
In order to analyse the visibility of these frames, we utilised two indicators: Firstly, the proportion of frames published on the front page, which suggests a higher editorial interest for the newspaper. Secondly, the average page where the stories were published; which indicates that the lower the average, the higher the importance. Regarding the first indicator, there is not a clear trend of front page publications: 1994 and 2012 elections coincided in the visibility of elections, because around 30% of *strategy* macro-frame stories were located there (30% and 35%, respectively); which differs from 2000 (43%) and 2006 (57%).

There is minimal variation within the second indicator, the page where the news stories were published: In 1994, both the *strategy* and *politics* macro-frame were published around page 10. Although there was a significant distribution, considering the Standard Deviation of 11 for both cases. In 2000 visibility increases, but the difference between both macro-frames is just one page in average, 6.6 for *strategy* and 7.3 for *politics*. These minor divergences are consistent during the other elections, hence, it cannot be argued that a specific macro-frame has more visibility than the other. Notwithstanding, there is a consistent decrease of election visibility, because coverage goes down from almost one third of front pages in 1994 (29%) to 2000 (13%), 2006 and 2012 (10%). The drastic reduction coincided with the regime change and, from that point, the trend is steady.

In other words, the findings stress a variation in the macro-frames connected with historical stages, which is evident between 1994 and the following elections. However, this

variation from several indicators is not statistically significant, especially considering the political and economic changes that Mexico has undergone; such as market contraction, the arrival of new communication technologies, and the reorganization of several media outlets.

Chart 1. Frame behaviour across the elections



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

On the other hand, particular frames' behaviour shares a smaller oscillation than expected (see Chart 1). Under an ordinal scale, frames have not practically change between 1994 and 2012. Even though there has been some minimal variation from one election to another, the order of frequencies goes like this: *political process*, *conflict*, *politics*, *human interest*, *leadership*, *strategy*, and *game*. This means that the *game* frame has a minimal visibility, as it is not found in more than 5% of the stories from any given election, being nearly non-existent in 2000 with 2%. *Leadership* presence is also very reduced, constantly descending from 9% in 1994 to 5% in 2012. On the contrary, *human interest* frame increases across the time, going from 9% (1994) to 13% (2006 and 2012); but with a decrease of 5% in 2000. *Strategy* has an evident increase from 4% (1994), to 7% (2000), and 12% (2006); but, in 2012, it decreased to 7%. Finally, *politics* frame fluctuates from 14% (1994) and 15% (2012); but it reaches 21% in 2000. In summary, this first set of frames shares a limited frequency, slightly fluctuating across the time, but little significant overall.

The other set of frames, which presented a higher degree of variation and salience, is integrated by *process* and *conflict*. The former clearly decreases from 1994 election (46%) to 2000 (32%), but slowly increases again in 2006 (35%) and 2012 (37%); nevertheless, it never reaches the level of 1994. On the contrary, *conflict* frame leapt from 14% (1994) to 24% (2000),

even though it decreases to 20% in 2006, but regains salience once again in 2012 (23%). This situation suggests – on the one hand – that these two frames dominate election coverage in Mexico; because in 1994 they both represent 60% of the stories, 56% in 2000, 55% in 2006, and 59% in 2012. On the other, there is a sudden position switch between the frames: initially, there was an important gap between *process* (46%) and *strategy* (14%) in 1994; but it reduces in 2006 and 2012 (37% and 23%, respectively). Once again, Chi square test shows a statistical significance between these differences, $\chi^2(18, N = 1027) = 52.643, p = .000$; although, correlation is less significant (Cramer V=0.131).

With regard to visibility, three frames show a sharp contrast in their behaviour. Besides its frequency decrease, *leadership* frame reduces its front page presence from 13% in 1994 to 3% in 2012; but it becomes slightly more visible when it moves from page 13 to 9 in both elections. On the contrary, *human interest* frame has an evident erratic behaviour: it moves from 11% (1994) to 4% (2000), and from 29% (2006) to 16% (2012). The same happens to *conflict* frame, since it almost doubles its frequency from 12% (1994) to 22% (2000); nonetheless, it stabilises afterwards at around 15% (14% in 2006, and 16% in 2015). In addition, the publication of the frames in specific pages does not show any clear or consistent pattern at all, which Standard Deviation indicates a high dispersion.

Table 2. Frequency and proportion of frames per election, front page publication, mean, and standard deviation of the pages where the frames were published.

Election	Frame																											
	Politics				Process				Leadership				Game				Human interest				Strategy				Conflict			
	N	%	μ	SD	N	%	μ	SD	N	%	μ	SD	N	%	μ	SD	N	%	μ	SD	N	%	μ	SD	N	%	μ	SD
1994	40	14.0	10.0	8.1	130	45.5	9.9	10.8	26	9.1	12.7	14.2	15	5.2	14.3	9.4	24	8.4	10.9	13.3	11	3.8	8.3	14.0	40	14.0	9.1	9.4
Front page	8	9.8			37	45.1			11	13.4			3	3.7			9	11.0			4	4.9			10	12.2		
2000	39	21.3	7.8	6.2	58	31.7	6.9	8.2	16	8.7	7.3	6.5	2	1.1	17.0	12.7	11	6.0	6.1	3.9	13	7.1	4.5	2.7	44	24.0	7.0	3.5
Front page	3	13.0			10	43.5			1	4.3			0	0.0			1	4.3			3	13.0			5	21.7		
2006	22	10.8	10.0	4.0	72	35.3	9.6	6.2	10	4.9	11.2	9.0	10	4.9	8.4	4.8	26	12.7	8.8	10.5	24	11.8	9.3	6.8	40	19.6	10.0	5.7
Front page	0	0.0			9	42.9			1	4.8			1	4.8			6	28.6			1	4.8			3	14.3		
2012	53	15.0	7.9	6.7	130	36.7	6.7	4.4	18	5.1	8.7	4.8	8	2.3	9.4	5.2	40	11.3	6.0	3.6	25	7.1	7.2	4.2	80	22.6	7.0	4.5
Front page	4	10.8			19	51.4			1	2.7			0	0.0			6	16.2			1	2.7			6	16.2		
<i>Period</i>																												
Authoritarian	40	14.0	10.0	8.1	130	45.5	9.9	10.8	26	9.1	12.7	14.2	15	5.2	14.3	9.4	24	8.4	10.9	13.3	11	3.8	8.3	14.0	40	14.0	9.1	9.4
Front page	8	9.8			37	45.1			11	13.4			3	3.7			9	11.0			4	4.9			10	12.2		
Post-Authoritarian	114	15.4	8.3	6.1	260	35.1	7.5	6.0	44	5.9	8.8	6.5	20	2.7	9.7	6.0	77	10.4	6.9	6.8	62	8.4	7.4	5.4	164	22.1	7.7	4.8
Front page	7	8.6			38	46.9			3	3.7			1	1.2			13	16.0			5	6.2			14	17.3		

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Finally, when comparing frame behaviour in both authoritarian and post-authoritarian periods (see Table 2), there are important variations: first, there is a certain decrease in the *process* frame (from 46% to 35%, respectively). Second, there is a significant increase in *conflict* frame (from 14% to 22%, respectively). Third, the rest of the frames sometimes present evident variations, but their overall frequency is not very significant. Even though Chi square test shows statistical significance between periods and frames, $\chi^2(6, N = 1027) = 26.710, p = .000$, their correlation is lower (Cramer V=0.161). In that sense, *leadership* frame experiences a more drastic visibility decrease in both periods, because its presence in front pages goes down from 13% to 4%. That is not the case of *human interest* (from 11% to 16%) and *conflict* frames (from 12% to 17%); which experienced increases, although not highly significant.

5. Conclusions

Based upon these findings, it is not possible to state that the increasing commercialism of the Mexican press involves the use of specific frames associated with media logic. There is an evident and statistically significant relationship between each election and the variables of frames and macro-frames, but it is less significant considering proportions and correlations. Therefore, there is not a clear and linear increase in the media logic frames. There is neither an ascendant trend regarding the visibility of those frames on front pages and on the first pages of the publications. However, the results do stress the difference between the electoral coverage before and after the democratic transition of 2000. In journalistic terms, the 2006 and 2012 elections had less visibility, and their coverage emphasised *conflict* to the detriment of descriptions of the electoral *process*; which underlines a contrast between a previous political logic and a current media logic. Nevertheless, the rest of the frames related to media logic (*strategy*, *game*, and *human interest*) have little relevance in both periods.

In other words, the rapid transformation that took place from 1994 to 2000 did not keep pace afterwards. This situation has been thoroughly discussed in previous studies, which argue that the democratic transition that started at the end of the last century has not paralleled a homogeneous modernization of the Mexican press as a whole. That is, although the media system is organised under the market logic, its operation is constantly determined by authoritarian features, such as clientelism and instrumentalization (Guerrero & Márquez, 2014; González & Echeverría, 2018).

On the other hand, our findings are also consistent with research conducted in developed countries, where even though media logic indicators increase over time, it does not resemble a linear trend; because the phenomenon is related to particular events, actors, or historic conjunctures (Vliegenthart et al., 2011; Zeh & Hopmann, 2013; Magin, 2015). Just like in our case, those tendencies do not always present the key elements of media logic, such as cynicism or negativity (Brants & Van Praag, 2006). Although it is not explicitly connected with the concept of commercialism, this literature supports a non-linear penetration of media logic and, hence, its development is associated with specific political and economic factors. In that sense, there is only one study conducted in Bulgaria that could be compatible with the Mexican case (Dimitrova & Kostadinova, 2013): both are developing countries with post-authoritarian regimes but, contrary to our findings, the former experienced a clear ascendant trend of the *strategy* frame.

It is worth mentioning that political content of the Mexican elections coverage mainly focusses on the electoral process, as well as legal, operative, and logistic issues. To a lesser degree, it reports on the candidates' leadership, political problems and how to solve them. In that sense, coverage lacks substantive information for voters. This is evident across the period of study, but particularly during the post-transition elections and, therefore, this situation characterises the Mexican press as an uninterested actor in the political angles of elections, just in the formal processes.

A possible explanation is associated with the rather stable normative nature of quality press, which is seen as the ultimate stronghold of traditional liberal journalism. Thus, it is reasonable to find some sort of balance between political and media logic, especially regarding processes and political conflicts. This could also be understood as a resistance to structural changes and market pressures, fostered by a constant negotiation between its public service aspirations and external commercial demands.

Under these circumstances, we suggest a future research agenda that could expand our findings by using more specific commercialism indicators for each newspaper, instead of using context information such as news consumption, online news sites, or media conglomeration. It may be the case that certain publications were better-prepared than

other to face these factors, or that the market pressure was not homogeneous across the sample. As a result, the effects of commercialism might have been slowed down in the Mexican media system. In a broader scope, it would also be useful to include other news outlets, and analyse the way they cope with similar problems. Finally, a qualitative approach would be most welcome in order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and, thus, provide a more detailed explanation.

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