

## From ‘Content Providers’ to ‘Key Social Structures’: A Turn to Practice in Citizens’ Discourses on Televisión Española (TVE)

*Eduki-iturrietatik funtsezko gizarte-egituretara:  
Espainiako Telebistari (TVE) buruzko diskurtsoetan praktikan jartzea*

De «fuentes de contenidos» a «estructuras sociales clave»: el giro a la práctica en los discursos sobre Televisión Española (TVE)

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**ABSTRACT:** This work analyses the evolution of citizens’ discourses on the national public service television in Spain (TVE) before and after the wave of social unrest occurring between 2011 and 2013. A shift from a demand towards more specific content, relating to the very structure of public service broadcasting, was detected. On the basis of an analysis of 11 focus groups formed by viewers of Televisión Española (TVE) and conducted in two stages (2008–2009 and 2014–2016), a paradigm definable as ‘turn to practice’ is confirmed. It has been observed that the practices pertaining to this paradigm have advocated for convergence and collaboration in the fields of information, the arts, critical thinking, and certain institutional policies, which are also present in the citizenry’s definition of public service broadcasting. This has led viewers to call for a greater say in public service broadcasting and to emphasise communitarian forms of relating to it.

**KEYWORDS:** public service broadcasting, ‘turn to practice’, viewers’ discourses, journalism, discourse analysis, Televisión Española (TVE).

**RESUMEN:** Este trabajo analiza la evolución de los discursos ciudadanos sobre el Servicio Público de Televisión (SPT) de carácter nacional en España antes y después de una ola de agitación social situada cronológicamente entre los años 2011 y 2013. Se detecta, pues, un cambio desde una demanda de contenidos escasamente definida hacia otra más específica, relacionada con la estructura del propio Servicio Público de Televisión. En este estudio confirmamos un paradigma que se podría definir como «giro a la práctica», a partir del análisis de 11 grupos de discusión de receptores de Televisión Española (TVE), realizados en dos fases: 2008-2009 y 2014-2016. En ellos se observa que en las últimas décadas, las prácticas que han conformado dicho paradigma han abogado por la convergencia y colaboración de los campos de la información, el arte, el pensamiento crítico y ciertas políticas institucionales, los cuales emergen también en la definición ciudadana del SPT. Ello, en consecuencia, mueve a los usuarios a demandar mayor voz sobre el servicio y a enfatizar las formas de relación con el mismo, con el fin de restablecer los lazos comunitarios.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** radiotelevisión pública, giro a la práctica, discursos de receptores, análisis del discurso, Televisión Española (TVE)

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## Introduction

Democracy requires a media ecosystem that allows for an informed and unfettered public opinion (Dahl, 1992; Dahlgren, 2001; Habermas, 2005; Sartori, 2005). As a tool to guarantee democracy, public service broadcasting (hereinafter PSB) falls into this category. Thus, academic doctrine assigns PSB the general mission of providing the citizenry with sufficient and timely information to ensure their participation in the system and, consequently, social and cultural cohesion (Arriaza *et al.*, 2015; Arribas, 2011; Bardoel and D'Haenens, 2004; Blumler, 1993; p. 90; Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham, 2007; Dahlgren, 2009; Steemers, 2001. p. 73).

In Europe, the public service concept applied to the media fully matured when radio and television were still in their infancy. Unlike developments in the United States (Smith and Patterson, 1998) and as a result of the historical circumstances of the post-war period, European television evolved as a service whose management was monopolised by the state during its first 50 years of history (Cascajosa Virino and Zahedi, 2016; Faus Belau, 1995). Since the 1970s and 1980s, when different states began to permit the participation of private operators, PSB has occupied a central position as a model for and counterbalance to commercial channels. This co-existence (Arribas, 2011, p. 12) gave rise to redefinitions of the role of PSB, but without it ever losing its relevance. The highest political authorities in Europe continue to regard it as an essential service that should be protected. According to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Recommendation 1641, 2004):<sup>1</sup> «Public service broadcasting, whether run by public organizations or privately owned companies, differs from broadcasting for purely commercial or political reasons due to its specific remit, which is essentially to operate independently of those holding economic and political power.' It is therefore necessary to continue to guarantee this service, and the legal systems regulating the industry in the different EU member states are of a similar mind.

The responsibilities of the media are not only dictated by parliaments and governments. For McQuail (2000), the media should uphold consensual social values and professional codes of self-regulation. In his theory of metajournalism, Carlson (2016) claims that viewers perception of journalism is essential as journalism «social acceptance is a necessary condition for a profession to establish cultural authority, which emanates from social discourses» (p. 350). Therefore, the ways of doing journalism are inseparable from the ways of understanding journalism (*idem*).

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17177&lang=en>.

Thus, this work explores the 'vision' that Spanish citizens have of their national Public Service Television (TVE) by analysing the 'system of discourse' circulating in society (Conde, 2010) to explore the relationship, role, values and expectations do viewers expect from Public Service Television?<sup>2</sup>

This study focuses on Spain, which, despite a significant improvement in 2019, only 32% of the citizens were satisfied with democracy (Mordecai, 2019<sup>3</sup>), and which figures among the three European countries whose citizens have the lowest level of confidence in the information provided by the media, with only 5% having full confidence in it. Notwithstanding this, 59% of Spaniards consider that the information offered by the media plays a 'very important' role, a proportion that reaches 88% if to these are added those who believe that it plays an 'important' role (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 8). Furthermore, although citizens in general have little confidence in the media, in the majority of the countries included in the survey, except for France, most resort to public television channels to keep abreast of the news (*ibid.*, p. 14), thus implying that PSB plays an important role as an information source.

## **1. The Crisis of Liberal Representative Democracy, Public Service, and Relational Society**

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, there was an international wave of social unrest coinciding with what Tarrow (1994/1997) identified as a protest cycle (p. 263-264) stemming from the economic and political representation crises (Martínez i Martínez and Artés, 2015; Rovira, 2013). This phase, which we have identified as a 'utopian moment', due to the regular presence of community practices of resistance and the formulation of projects for transformation and other possible worlds (Kumar, 1992; Marcuse, 1986; Misseri, 2015), occurred in Tunisia (2010), Spain, Greece, the United States, Chile (2011), and Mexico (2012). In these countries, the citizenry resorted to sociopolitical empowerment practices ('Tomar la plaza', 'Occupy', etc.) on streets and squares (i.e. public spaces), where a discourse rejecting the values of representative democracy emerged ('No nos representan', 'We are the 99%').

Therefore, this recent 'utopian moment' involved what could be called a 'turn to practice', understood as a critical response to the 'linguistic turn' of the previous

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<sup>2</sup> For other approaches to the citizenry's conception of PSB, see Lamuedra, Mateos and Broullón, 2019 and 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center report, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/11/04/5-facts-about-public-opinion-in-spain-as-its-election-nears/>

century by different Western schools of thought during the last half of the twentieth century (PSJM, 2017, pp. 49–50). The overview of twentieth-century aspirations for a sort of participation provided by Bishop (2006, pp. 10–12), from the perspective of aesthetics, which is extensible to all other cultural practices, is useful in this regard.

1. '[...] to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation' (*ibid.*, 11).
2. They emphasise the relational, balancing the organised control guiding practices on the basis of non-hierarchical forms of collaboration.
3. They seek to restore the community links severed by capitalist forms of production and consumption.

We situate these trends in the fields pertaining to PSB, i.e. the state-politics, the arts, and communication. First and foremost, it is essential to bear in mind the reconsideration of the philosophical and political consensuses that inspired social life up to the appearance of globalisation processes at the end of the twentieth century. For Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004; 1998), the political basis of modernity, namely, the social contract, has been plunged into crisis. Capitalist developments have shattered the definition of 'public interest' by fragmenting the socially shared interests and values of modernity. Those values do not now shape society, for 'they have an increasingly disparate meaning for different groups and people' (De Sousa Santos, 2004, p. 10).

In light of this, De Sousa Santos suggests recuperating the community in public administration, countering 'the proliferation of the logic of exclusion' (*ibid.*, p. 22). This implies restructuring the state as a movement—not as a business administrator—and a democratic refounding of public administration (*ibid.*, 82).

In the field of the arts, Nicolas Bourriaud (2008) puts the emphasis on another paradigm shift: relational aesthetics: «Art does not produce works, but relationships. It has ceased to be a place for 'producing a specific sociability' (p. 17), 'a place of encounter' that 'shapes more than it represents' (*ibidem*). In other words, art is moving towards an interactive future: «[...] the form of an artwork arises from a negotiation with the intelligible [...]. The essence of artistic practice would lie in the invention of relationships between subjects; each artwork in particular would be a proposal for inhabiting a common world» (*ibid.*, p. 23). Therefore, the production of art forms would consist of inventing 'possible encounters'. According to Daney (cit. Bourriaud, 2008, p. 25), there has been a shift from showing/seeing towards promoting/receiving; or, in the words of Royoux (2008), «from the narrative of experience to the experience of narrative» (p. 126).

If the relational conception of art is linked to a theoretical-practical tradition developed around participation as an ideal, as a problem, and as an objective, in the

media sphere these approaches have left their mark on the critical currents advocating for the democratisation of the mass media.<sup>4</sup> Critical demands not only now revolve around broadening the supply, the multipolarity of information flows, or the geopolitical balance. Even though these issues are still relevant, the model currently being called for hinges on appropriating the action with which the public sphere is built via the media (Carpentier, 2011). This participation is understood as a multi-layered condition or as 'a tool for better project outcomes' such as 'enhancing societal equity, empowerment, and social justice' (*ibid.*, p. 48). To the question of media ownership should now be added the active and creative participation of the citizenry in the construction of symbolic devices that shape our idea of reality (see also Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pascualli, 2013; Lamuedra, Mateos and Broullón, 2019). In the critical challenge that philosopher Marina Garcés (2017) has called 'new radical enlightenment', access to information and knowledge has given rise to a productive intelligence that makes it possible to intervene in the living conditions of the community.

## 2. Methodological Framework and Methodology

The health of a society's democracy is gauged by its ability to redefine institutions (Melucci, 1999, p. 21) and citizens' discourses are essential in such processes. In such discourses on PSB, we believe that there should be indications of the 'turn to practice' or a turn to participation that, as Bourriaud (2008) indicates, involves (1) the subject as an agent, (2) placing stress on relational aspects and (3) rebuilding the community.

The qualitative analysis performed here constitutes a fourth differential line of analysis, within the research on Spanish viewers 'discourses carried out as part of the project «Dinámicas de relación ante el cambio social: contextos, contenidos, productores, público y prousuarios en las noticias de TVE e YLE» (CSO2013-45470-R), led by M. Lamuedra and M. Á. Vázquez Medel. The first insights of the present work had emerged after a close and exhaustive reading of the group sessions' transcripts in previous studies, particularly with those of 2019 and 2020, both by Lamuedra, Mateos and Broullón. First, «Normative and Audience Discourses on Public Service Journalism at a Critical Juncture» explores the similarities and differences between the academic/legal/normative framework and audience discourses. In this way it shows that citizens' discourses are significantly influenced by the legal and normative realities of the Spanish media ecosystem and the specific context of Public Service Television.

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<sup>4</sup> Once the vindications of the failed NOMIC programme had been surmounted in the 1970s.

The Spanish media system is characterized by the dominance of television (IAMC, 2017, 2019), in ‘a perfect duopoly’ (Bustamante & Corredor, 2012) formed by the two main private television groups (Atresmedia and Mediaset). According to Spanish law, public service broadcasting cannot occupy more than 25% of available frequencies<sup>5</sup> and is considered to be pro-government (Lamuedra, Mateos, & Broullón, 2019. 3 and 13). Facts such as these are visible in viewers’ discourses. This perspective was later enriched by exploring dimensions relative to participation, such as the role played by the promotion of citizens’ voices in democracy, in 2020.

This paper also deals with participation. Specifically, it focuses and deepens on how viewers conceive and/or problematise their relationship with PSB before and after the utopian moment taking place between 2011 and 2014. For this purpose, this work compares the data obtained within the mentioned project, with that of a previous one<sup>6</sup>. In order to explore such question, subsequent analysis of the transcribed discussions identifies and contrasts the following:

1. Thematic fields or ‘isotopies’ activated during the discussions: terms, metaphors, descriptors and expression turns, because they conveyed assumptions and social values.
2. The relationship between what was said and the conditions of production of the discourse in which it was expressed: the speaker’s profile; the grammatical subjects of the arguments deployed; the choice of pronouns and subject pronouns; the type of conversational interaction (tension, consensus, agitation, etc.); the rationality of the arguments deployed; and the nonverbal variables accompanying them. The schemes used for translating the discourses into data (analytical process) were taken from the sociological analysis of discourse systems method (hereinafter, SADS) (Conde, 2010). Throughout this analysis, an attempt was made to identify (1.A) the discursive positions of the subjects; and (1.B) the polarised core elements of those positions in order to identify the main rationales of the system discourse as regards viewer’s relationship with PSB.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Ley 7/2010, of 31 March, General de la Comunicación Audiovisual (General Broadcast Act) (LGCA).

<sup>6</sup> R&D project entitled, «La Autonomía y el pluralismo de la nueva TVE: Contenidos de los informativos y percepciones de las audiencias, URJC/Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid» (URJC-CM-2007-CSH-1683), led by Luis P. Francescutti.

## DISCURSIVE POSITIONS

According to the SADS, each analysis should typify discursive positions in relation to the object of study (Conde, 2010, p. 149). In this case, the intention was to identify the subjects' positions as regards PSB. Those positions were implicitly defined in their discourses, for instance, using expressions such as 'I watch it', 'I'm paying for it' or 'it benefits me', which all describe a type of relationship. Each type of relationship implied that the subjects assigned themselves a particular role with respect to PSB ('customer', 'person responsible' or 'participant'), as well as attributing a function or value to the service ('democratic guarantee', 'content provider' or 'social glue').

Just as several subjects could defend the same position, so too could they produce discourses on several positions, for the aim here was not to study their behaviour but the concepts that they normally employed in conversation.

## POLARISED CORE ELEMENTS

The focus group members discussed different topics related to PSB, some of which appeared recurrently in the five groups, from which the most frequent themes or isotopes were chosen, for example, 'what is PSB for?' and 'who should finance PSB?'

The subjects gave different answers depending on the theme, that is, their discursive position, which was sometimes polarised: for example, PSB should produce 'only news'/'all types of content'. The range of positions between those two extremes made it possible to plot a map of the system of discourse, thus revealing the core narrative, to wit, the rational space in which the discussion on PSB developed.

Therefore, discourse analysis as a qualitative approach was used to study the discourses emerging in 11 focus groups, since it was considered to be the most appropriate when dealing with 'more magmatic and energetic situations in which the new possibilities for social discourse are being produced and developed' (Gordo and Serrano, 2008, p. 187). The analysis was performed from a socio-interpretative perspective in which social actors and groups are regarded as producers and receivers of meaning and not as mere pretexts for interpretation (Alonso and Callejo, 1999, p. 41). Accordingly, the fact that discourses are not produced in isolation but in connection with other surrounding ones and with their conditions of production was born in mind (Conde, 2010, pp. 22-23).

To have a frame of meaning in which to interpret the data, it was essential to 'periodise the fieldwork' (Álvarez-Uría, 2008, p. 12), in this case before and after

the ‘utopian moment’ noted above. The wave of social protests that characterised that ‘utopian moment’ entered a new phase when the forces and agents involved in the mobilisation began to adopt institutionalized forms of the previous social structure (consequently bringing the ‘utopian moment’ to a close). In Spain, this occurred in 2014 (Fundación de los Comunes, 2018, p. 39), with the advent of the political party Podemos and its network of political allies, for the purpose of participating in the state institutions.

The data was gathered and structured in two phases: (1) 2008–2009<sup>7</sup> (six groups) and (2) 2013–2016<sup>8</sup> (five groups). In the first phase, the general discourse of the group members was observed in terms of their sociodemographic status (sex, age and socioeconomic status). The six groups were held in Madrid.

In the second phase, social groups differentiated according to their specific relationship with the object of study, i.e., PSB. There were initially three particular positions: (1) activists, hypothetically prone to have incorporated the utopian moment hegemonic discourses; ; (2) professionals linked to culture in the public sector; and (3) Technophiles, who intentionally and selectively engaged with highly mythicized and aesthetic information products. After noting that there was a lack of subjects of conservative bent and given the predominance of subjects with university degrees, a fourth group (4) of conservatives and a fifth group (5) without higher education were created. The discussion groups will be referred to using the following codes: ‘Without higher education’ (WHE), ‘Public sector workers’ (PSW), ‘Conservatives’ (C), ‘Activists’ (A) and ‘Technophiles’ (T), followed by the letter S and the subject’s number (e.g., WHE-S1 and T-S5).

Furthermore, a reasonable degree of general diversity was needed to ensure that different positions were taken into account. Thirty subjects took part in the discussion groups: eighteen men and twelve women. Five of them were over five years old, twelve between thirty–six and fifty–five, and twenty one under thirty–five. Groups in different provinces: Madrid (PSW), Seville (C, A, and WHE) and La Laguna (T). Each group had between six to eight people, according to the approach recommended by Javier Callejo–Gallego (2002: 418).

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<sup>7</sup> The focus group sessions held between 2008 and 2009 formed part of the R&D project entitled, «La Autonomía y el pluralismo de la nueva TVE: Contenidos de los informativos y percepciones de las audiencias, URJC/Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid» (URJC-CM-2007-CSH-1683), led by Luis P. Francescutti.

<sup>8</sup> The focus group sessions held between 2013 and 2015 formed part of the R&D project entitled, «Dinámicas de relación ante el cambio social: contextos, contenidos, productores, público y pro-  
dusarios en las noticias de TVE e YLE» (CSO2013-45470-R), led by M. Lamuedra and M. Á. Vázquez Medel.



These focus groups were moderated with a minimum of intervention to identify the individual discourses of members on the issues that they associated with the PSB concept in relation to news services. The sessions of the focus groups lasted between 75 and 90 minutes and were literally transcribed.

In Spain, there is a national PSB Corporation (RTVE) and regional public media corporations in 12 of the 17 Spanish regions, comprising FORTA (Federación de Organismos de Radio y Televisión Autonómicos), in addition to numerous local public radio and television stations depending on local council funding. This paper develops some of the results of a larger comparative research designed to compare several dynamics and dimensions as regards television information services provided by two national PSB Corporations: TVE in Spain and the Finnish YLE. Only for this reason, the focus of this paper is limited to TVE.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. FIRST PHASE OF OBSERVATION: BEFORE THE 'UTOPIAN MOMENT'**

The results obtained in the first phase of observation (2008-2009) were homogenous in the six groups. The data saturation (Callejo, 2000, p. 77) showed that there had been no significant variations since holding the third focus group session, insofar as there was practically no mention of PSB. Specifically, Televisión Española (hereinafter, TVE) was only referred to as 'the television of the incumbent government', being perceived as just another option in the media ecosystem, ie, 'the channel of some or that of others'. In the discourse, no distinction was made between public service as a function and TVE, which, moreover, was not understood as belonging to the state or to a social subject, but to the government.

After reaching data saturation in the first three focus group sessions, a special feature was introduced in the next three. Specifically, an attempt was made to seek more directly some or other expression relating to PSB by formulating specific questions during the last few minutes of each session. In three cases, this led to a slight lapse in the conversation, which then veered in a new direction.

In short, the data obtained from the system of discourse in this first phase allowed for classifying the relationship of the viewers with a demand for PSB, as summarised below:

1. There was no differentiating concept of PSB. It was not elaborated on and, occasionally, it was said to be expendable.

2. References to the roles played by TV channels were limited to the type of content (product) that they offered or should offer. Viewer empowerment was not envisaged.
3. Neither was there any evidence to suggest an awareness of the legislation governing PSB, nor was its political nature perceived.
4. Exceptionally, when the moderators tried to ‘wheedle’ an answer out of the subjects, they defined public television (not PSB) in terms of ‘what it should be like’ and ‘objectivity’, without specifying the conditions that could guarantee this.

In summary, discourses at that period were so homogeneous and scarcely elaborated that no different positions or polarised core elements could be identified.

### 3.2. SECOND PHASE OF THE RESEARCH: AFTER THE ‘UTOPIAN MOMENT’

In contrast to the six groups involved in the first phase, in the five focus groups participating in this second phase, a number of arguments were deployed that assigned a unique role to PSB and justified its *raison d’être*. However, this difference needs to be qualified:

- (1) Rejection of its Public Service Television executive form but not of its role. Although not all of the subjects agreed on the need for public television, all of the groups deployed arguments that recognised its specific function (its *raison d’être*). Nevertheless, it should be noted that it was frequently claimed that it was not fulfilling that role.<sup>9</sup>

In all the groups, there was a tendency to decry its ‘misuse’, because the country’s governments had appropriated, ‘hijacked’ public television, there being a consensus on this idea:

SES-S5: ‘[...] the news broadcast depends on who is occupying the government’.

- (2) However, different positions as regards the media system, which entailed different perspectives towards PSB could be identified, and there were certain core elements which were key in the segmentation of positions. Both issues are dealt with in the following pages.

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<sup>9</sup> In another study (Lamuedra, Mateos and Broullón, 2019), we have already explained in greater detail that the clash between the/should be is a discursive constant that illustrates that the citizenry’s dissatisfaction with PSB lies in the way in which the service functions, but not in the role that it plays or should play.

*Discursive positions on the link between viewers and PSB*

The five discursive positions, identified can be described as (1) anti-isolation, (2) glance-catalogue, (3) selective, (4) guarantee-based, and (5) practitioner and are described below:

**Anti-isolation.** This position rests on the idea that, as part of the media ecosystem, television stations create a representation of the world in which we live. The subjects defending it engaged with the media to 'be in the world', to be able to have a conversation with other people, to be connected, or to feel like they belong to society. For them, it was governed by an implicit automatism: they identified the world with the content provided by the media and were incapable of differentiating between that which was represented and its representation.

Some of the participants claimed that they had been fully aware of that need for connection at a specific time in their lives when they had shunned the media narrative. For example, C-S1 on returning home after a period of hospitalization felt 'completely disconnected': 'I need to stay informed but not express my opinions on a topic, but to feel part of the world...'. Mark my words, I felt very strange during those four days.'

In relation to this position, viewers' relationship with PSB was unidirectional and no other interaction than the mere connection was envisaged:

SES S-3: '[...] at least you find out what's happening around you and you're not left in the dark, right?'

Therefore, the anti-isolation position did not seem to offer a conceptual space to value PSB.

**Glance-catalogue.** Regarding this position, subjects limited themselves to accessing an 'information catalogue'; they were 'interested' in knowing 'what each [media outlet] is about' for the presumable purpose of forming 'their own opinion': they demanded that the product be useful for their own lives and personal interests.

Those subjects defending this position did not only speak of the qualitative requirements that content should meet, but also believed in the possibility of an objective and uncontaminated representation of reality. Thus, their greatest demand was that content provided, as far as possible, information on 'the facts per se', while at the same time complaining that the menu offered by the media was limited. C-S5 who described the television service as 'a video club', a product dispenser, illustrates this point: 'I want to know the facts per se, politics, for example, in this case, and I will not let myself be influenced because the news outlet in question has a specific editorial line.'

As regards that ‘menu’ or ‘catalogue’, the role of viewers consisted in glancing at everything, without prejudice, in an attempt to discover that supposedly neutral (‘pure’) representation. They confessed that this was not always possible and, therefore, had to correct the biases of the information available, something that they believed that they did intuitively or automatically.

As a result, their relationship with PSB was defined by personal utility. The media ecosystem was considered positive as long as it provided a useful product ‘that it is of use to me’.

**Selective. The main feature of this position was the power to choose:** T-S3: ‘Yes, it’s true that we have a much greater capacity for choosing, for opting for one thing or another. But I think we are still not educated... because you are constantly learning to choose. And that is now our current battle».

The subjects considered that the relationship with the media content would be healthier if the viewers had the necessary capacity and education and dedicated more time to the issue: ‘[...] due to my personal circumstances, I have very little time to watch television or keep up with the news’. The solution to these problems was of a ‘technophile’ or ‘integrated’ nature; that is, to know or learn how to use digital tools, thus abandoning classic forms of consumption:

T-S3: ‘And there it’s the spectators who can really criticise directly what they watch on television. And you become an active member of what’s being shown on screen. You’re not just someone passively sitting in front of a screen, receiving information. You can participate [...]. At least you can do your bit to a certain extent.’

As in the previous position, the media ecosystem was seen as a content dispenser. Subjects still also demanded objectivity, but unlike the ‘glance-catalogue’ type, this ‘selective’ position assumed that the behaviour of viewers had a performative value: they could criticise, exert pressure, share knowledge, etc. Here, there was an opportunity to interact and influence the representation of the world (in the content). Although some saw this potential in a more optimistic light than others. An implicit automatism can also be perceived here: the product’s ‘defects’ could be remedied, but this could only be achieved if viewers had the ability to interact.

It was possible to glimpse a turn to practice on the part of the subjects, but this did not go beyond valuing what the dispenser supplied. To participate was to be able to choose, select, vote, criticise, share, and, at most, exert pressure on the information flow. There was no suggestion of co-production.

In short, with respect to the previous positions, this one involved a certain awareness of the receiver's capacity for action, but without abandoning the frame of individual solutions, as it is the viewer who needs to know how to select

***Guarantee-based. The PSB role is central to this position.*** It is viewed as an institution guaranteeing a certain aspect of the social system and demanded as part of a model of social co-existence. Even though viewers who upheld this position may not watch PSB themselves. There was more appreciation for the very existence of PSB than for the consumption of its products. Whatever they consumed, the subjects wanted to ensure the provision of that service as an available universal right, as with education, healthcare, and research, by virtue of an essential democratic imperative in a welfare state. Accordingly, the focus of attention shifted from content to the value of the structure producing it.

TS-1: 'I think the public information service is essential for the quality of any democracy [...] that is ... when there's a public information service that enriches democracy and when the only aim of information is gain, that's where there's a lack of objectivity and it's measured by other interests and I think we all lose out.'

The subjects now voiced their concerns about how that structure functioned. For instance, its independence:

A-S3: 'It's like, it's like the courts. It is that the courts had to be separated [from the executive and legislative branches of government] at some time.'

Here, the core aspect of PSB was the social guarantee that it provided, thus surmounting the idea of an individual solution posited in the three previous positions.

There was also an explicit reference to the political and cultural responsibility of the media and, in particular, the PSB: to contribute to the integral construction of citizenship and to ensure its conditions and rights. Consequently, it was not the particular utility of the content that was disputed, but the underlying social contract, which SP-5 called the 'pact':

In sum, those the guarantee-based position considered that PSB protected them from an unspecified risk that was associated with the commercial management of communication. Therefore, in light of the hypothetical disappearance of PSB, the answer was apparently unanimous: '[If TVE were to disappear] it would be devastating, because they'd be depriving you of the possibility of having a public media outlet that idealistically you could have, and they'd leave you in the hands of companies.'

**Practitioner.** They assumed that the media built reality and contended that it was essential for the public to become involved in that task: ‘As a member of society, I have to be involved in that construction’. In this discursive position, there were expressions that revealed a desire to explore how to reformulate the public sphere, in line with the re-foundation mentioned by De Sousa Santos (2004). According to A-S3, ‘public, but under the direct control of the citizenry’. That grammatical construction with a contrasting conjunction (but) pointed to the need to overcome an obstacle. He held that PSN (1) should be public, but not in its current form, and (2) should eliminate the mediating agent currently separating it from the citizenry.

The idea that the media sphere (the media space and the relationships that it generates between people) is a social heritage and that this ownership is essential and even prior to the legal identity (private or public) bestowed on the media can be observed in the following statement made by one of the members of another focus group:

SP-1: ‘I believe so on public television and on public radio news programmes because it’s our public service. Others can pursue the line of business they want, but those that are ours should be public.’

SP-1 was not claiming that public television had become ‘ours’ thanks to its state ownership. Nor was she saying that the public should have the determination to appropriate something that the state recognised, or should recognise, as the heritage of all. On the contrary, she was referring to something more essential and quite the opposite: (1) a right prior to the legal statute and, therefore, (2) the political obligation to abstain from expropriating something from society that already belonged to it (by birth right, it should be assumed). Its expression means that there is something that was ours ‘before and regardless’ of whether or not it is recognised as public: ‘[...] those that are ours should be...’ She was referring to television stations that ‘belong to us’ and that ‘should be’ something they are not currently: public. Her statement implied a condemnation of a robbery of sorts, a certain expropriation of a natural or essential asset.

This discursive position thus referred to the structure of things, the order of the system, the linking of PSB to the rest of the social institutions. And the demands of the subjects had to do with the idea of putting things in order. There were different opinions on how that restitution might be brought about: some defended the expansion of the public sector, while others advocated for innovation in management models, reformulated as self-management.

The most remarkable aspect of this position was that PSB made a quantum leap as regards the turn to practice, i.e. the subjects themselves being responsible for

its construction. It should be noted that the subjects often referred to PSB using the first person plural: 'ours'. It was described as a tool that enabled citizens to exercise the responsibility that they had in the media system:

T-S1: 'To my mind we cannot wait for that public service to drop out of the sky and suddenly offer us something positive, instead I think that we all have to contribute a bit to build it.'

A-S5: 'If we want truly independent media that [...] are at our service, it is we who have to sustain them.'

This discursive position revolved around a deliberative democratic imperative: PSN was not consumed, it had to be made, and not for personal interests, but for social utility, ensuring the participatory character of society. The demand referring to PSB went beyond content to broach the subject of how public media should function, procedural transparency and guarantees, and news programmes and management, plus the rigorous selection of professionals and senior management. They even spoke of institutional re-foundations, which for A-S2 was an 'organisational issue':

A-S2: 'In the end, why do journalists have their hands tied?' They're tied because they have bosses. The bosses are the ones who prevent them from talking [...] about something. So, in the end it's that ... the way in which we've organised the ... the world [laughter].'

This discursive position was mainly present in the activist focus group, whose members put forward proposals that would allow the citizenry to take the helm of the flagship media system. They even went so far as to talk about 'occupying' the public sphere, which indicated that, as things stood, they did not feel included in PSB.

In their mind, the problem did not now lie in the content produced by PSB, but in the links that the public managed to forge with the structure producing that content. For them, the value of the product depended on the quality of that relationship. The public sphere could restore community links provided that it managed to wrest PSB from the hands of the country's governments, whom they accused of usurping it in their own interests.

They thus stressed the paradox that, despite the fact that state ownership should guarantee its public role, the truth was that this had allowed each government to deprive the public of their right: to participate in the structure producing content, plus a sense of belonging.

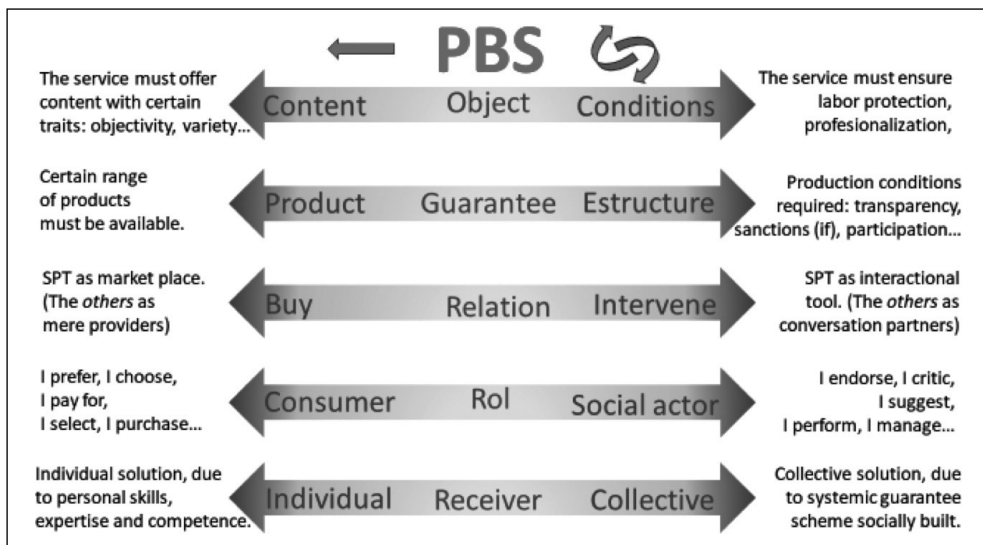
In addition, it can be observed that objectivity was an issue present in all of the positions. From the total identification between that represented and the representation of the anti-isolationist position, to the express awareness of the practitioners that objectivity was impossible. SP-1 claimed, ‘So, I believe that we’re not going to talk about objectivity because it doesn’t exist, because we’re subjects and we’re always going to be subjective.’ While A-S2 concluded that everything was shaped by education and the media.

*Polarising elements: from the product to production and from the individual to the community*

The following questions were frequently raised in all of the focus groups:

1. What is the aim of PSB?
2. What should it guarantee?
3. What relationship is there or could there be with PSB?
4. And, consequently, what role do viewers play?
5. Who does PSB serve or who should it serve?

The answers to these questions, related to aim, guarantee, relation, rol, and receiver were polarised on one or the other side of the core issues, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Source: own elaboration.

FIGURE 1  
Division of opinions related to the five central issues raised in the debates



### *Discursive positions polarization*

The first three—object, guarantee, and relationship—can be summarised in a single core issue encompassing two concepts: PSB as a product (demand for content, market logic) versus PSB as a space for producing meaning (demand for organisational aspects of the service, social dynamics logic).

And, in turn, the last two core issues can also be summarised in one: a service for individuals or a service for society.

### *The Narratives of the System of Discourse: Principal Rationalities*

There are different rationalities in the observed system discourse:

R1. The awareness of the myth of objectivity is accompanied by a demand for a more qualified PSB.

The more the discourse adhered to the belief of objectivity, the lesser was the demand for a market logic. And the more the myth of objectivity was questioned, the more strongly the demand was linked to the guarantees of the system: diversity and pluralism. Only when there was an awareness that objectivity was impossible ('all reality is shaped', as A-S2 was the essential demand for pluralism and diversity made. In other words, the ideology of objectivity contributed to ease the demand for participation and pluralism, whereas the mercantile conception of PSB helped to curb the demand for participation in its management.

R2. The legitimacy of PSB was linked to operational and managerial mechanisms.

PSB would be legitimised if it allowed for guarantee mechanisms in its functioning. For instance, the information provided would be considered valid if it were produced under certain conditions, such as 'the ability to contrast news', 'the design of the news', and 'the inner workings'. The subjects also called for mechanisms to control professional access to PSB. This rationality functioned best from positions further away from the myth of objectivity, which were more aware of the fact that PSB and the media system required an organisational structure.

R3. The type of conception of PSB was related to how well the demand was voiced.

Some of the subjects were practically unable to express what they expected from PSB, while others elaborated on this issue in some detail.

For example, activists, public employees, and, to a lesser extent, technophiles even went so far as to specify the requirements (an ‘accreditation system’) to select PSB professionals with assurances. They pointed to a correlation between journalistic training and content quality and that, in contrast, arbitrary appointments were unreliable. Although the debate on these issues did not emerge in all focus groups, when it did, it revealed that there were subjects who noted the direct relationship between the inner workings of PSB and the social satisfaction that deriving from its practice. Therefore, a more precise discourse was an indication of the awareness or level of maturity of some of the subjects about the role of PSB.

The most mature discursive positions were closest to PSB as a structure (selective, guarantee-based, and practitioner). When the media ecosystem was perceived as an information market in which there were different subscription or payment options (anti-isolation, glance-catalogue, and, with nuances, selective), the express demand that PSB should possess a number of features regarded as essential was less exhaustive, without offering details, and mostly boiled down to objective information (this issue will be elaborated on below). The closer it was to the concept of PSB as a structure (guarantee-based, practitioner), the more descriptions there were of the traits of the institution, its procedures, or guiding principles.

Discourses on PSB as a structure not only called for a professionalised service, but also for another hybrid and mixed institutional system that articulated the public sphere, the community and self-management, combining the presence of the state with the service’s independence from the incumbent government. The way of understanding institutionality was also discussed.

## 4. Conclusions

### EVOLUTION OF THE SPECIFICITY OF THE DEMANDS AS A WHOLE

The results of the second phase of the research show that after the ‘utopian moment’ derived from the protest cycle between 2011 and 2013, the discourses of the citizens began to include more qualified, diverse and elaborate demands regarding the characteristics of the PSB and the role it should play in relation to information services. This change is clearly visible if compared to the previous situation as described in the first phase results: there was no perceptible concept of PSB, references to the roles played by TV channels were only about content (product), and no differentiated discursive positions could be observed. These results allow us to confirm that there was a tendency towards more conscious and mature civic demands following the ‘utopian moment’.

The discourses of the subjects included an increasingly greater number of reasons for maintaining PSB as part of the state structure, in which it is possible to ob-

serve a wide range of positions in favor of a regulated design, striking the right balance between the public and private media in the media ecosystem, as a way to ensure democracy.

## A SERVICE FOR INDIVIDUALS/FOR SOCIETY

The apperception of the members of the different focus groups as social subjects in relation to PSB as a structure was expressed in two lines of argument with their respective poles.

1. Arguments about who was the subject to whom PSB catered: the individual subject (private needs) or the social subject (societal needs).
2. Arguments about what was the object that should be guaranteed: a product/commodity for which payment is made or an organisational structure of resources, understood as a condition of possibility of participation.

The more the role of PSB was seen as a way of meeting social demands, the more its description focused on structural aspects. Thus, two concepts or rationalities of PSB were defined:

1. PSB as a product. A concept focusing on individual subjects demanding a product, versus an institution supplying such a product, which the subjects sustained economically and with which they maintained a commercial relationship as consumers. We consider that this discursive position represents the traditional concept not influenced by the 'turn to practice', because it appeared in both phases of the research: it was present in the subjects' discourses at the turn of the decade and was still present six years later.
2. PSB as a structure. The concept defended by the subjects who formulated their communication needs as those of a social body for whom the structure of the media system had to meet certain requirements in order that they should enjoy full democratic guarantees, given that they were completely aware of the socially structuring role of such media. In this rationale, it is indeed possible to observe the influence of the main characteristics of the 'turn to practice' as a presence of the relational logic that, according to Bourriaud, governs the contemporary field of the arts: PSB was not only required to guarantee the supply of content, but also to elicit a form of relationship between citizens and their surroundings and other people via the media. Those subjects defending this concept of PSB anticipated or demanded a relationship with the service that was not limited to the mere presence of the citizenry in that which was represented (a presence in the symbolic product, content, or internal pluralism), but aspired to enable people to play an active role by handling the mechanism of representa-

tion itself and the apparatus of symbolic production embodied by PSB. Although it did not involve developing the need to rebuild community links in an explicit fashion, this concept did point to the formulation of a new institutionality, following the logic of De Sousa Santos.

Furthermore, the ‘selective position’ can even be understood as the evolution of its ‘glance-catalogue’ counterpart, in which viewers saw themselves as selectors, namely, with a certain amount of agency. At the same time, the practitioner position can be regarded as an evolution of the guarantee-based one. As both were conceived in relation to the democratic structure, the guarantee-based position would have more to do with an organised representative democracy like the welfare state, while the demand for greater participation in the practitioner position aligns it with what would be appropriate to call a deliberative democracy. Therefore, the level and quality of participation is a key element in the classification of the available discursive positions.

#### THE EFFECT OF THE MYTH OF OBJECTIVITY OR ITS SURMOUNTING

The traditional concept of PSB as a product tends to focus on the mythical characteristics of news content (objectivity, impartiality, and quality), while that of PSB as a structure on management- and control-related demands.

For its part, the myth of objectivity still prevails and constitutes the logical ceiling of the demands formulated from the PSB-as-a-product position. It is interesting to observe the correlation between the myth of objectivity and the anti-isolationist position, which was present in all focus groups as a threshold of recognition that the media ‘connect us’ to our social system. Although this concept is necessarily based on a certain awareness of the structuring premise of the media, the presence of the myth of objectivity seems to impede thinking about the aforementioned power in society (guarantee-based position) or, even beyond that, about the strategic character of the structure of the media themselves (practitioner position). Thus, it is possible to observe a sort of magical thinking that presents the products (without regard for the structure that produces or distributes them) as connecting nodes of the social system (which apparently was not perceived as a structure either).

On the other hand, the myth of objectivity lost relevance as the demands of the subjects shifted towards the concept of PSB as a structure that guarantees a form of coexistence. The conditions of content production were of greater concern for those who had the least faith in objectivity, for which reason they formulated a more specific and detailed demand relating to the characteristics of that service in a more coherent discourse on the mediating and connecting role of the media system in society.

This allows us to confirm that the awareness that reality is a symbolic (in this case, media) construction corresponds to a greater concern and sensitivity as regards the type of institution producing content.

## **Final conclusion: the Re-founding of Institutionality**

When the subjects problematised the institutionality of PSB, two scenarios emerged.

One revolved around reforms: allowing the citizenry to participate in programming; decentralising production with social criteria; incorporating social sources in news production; broadening guarantees of pluralism and contrasting the news; ensuring independence; creating mechanisms to control the professional access to PSB and to sanction; ensuring the effective application of those mechanisms; and finally, increasing the number of local media outlets and the third sector.

The other posited a conceptual crisis of the public sphere and offered suggestions for its redefinition that would not now be reforming but instituent: implementing new institutional forms of organisation interlocking the state with self-management. The subjects even went so far as to speak of non-state public media and crowdfunding mechanisms outside the state, which connects directly with De Sousa Santos' conceptual framework of 'a non-governmental public space of which the state is just one more, albeit relevant, component'; for the common communication space is not only effect but the very source of law.

## **Specific contribution and order of authorship in the article**

Concha Mateos is the coordinator of the research area on receivers in Spain of the project «Relationship dynamics in the face of social change: contexts, contents, producers, audiences and users in TVE and YLE news» (CSO2013-45470-R), and therefore coordinates the report analysing the discourses of the discussion groups. In the report, she collaborated with María Lamuedra and Manuel Broullón. She organised the discussion group with public service workers in Madrid, moderated the groups of Activists organised in Seville and the group of Technophiles organised in La Laguna. He wrote the first draft of the article and led the second and third drafts.

María Lamuedra is Principal Researcher of the project «Relationship dynamics in the face of social change: contexts, contents, producers, audience and users in TVE and YLE news» (CSO2013-45470-R). Within the research area of TVE receivers, she organised the Activists discussion group, co-organised the Conservatives

and No Higher Education discussion groups, and moderated the Conservatives, No Higher Education and Public Service Workers discussion groups. She also participated in the analytical report of the focus groups. She collaborated in the second and third drafts of the article, and also carried out the final editing and revision processes.

Manuel A. Broullón is in charge of the research on users within the project «Relationship dynamics in the face of social change: contexts, contents, producers, audience and users in TVE and YLE news» (CSO2013-45470-R). He participated in the management of the discussion groups of Activists, Conservatives and People without Higher Education, as well as in the analytical report resulting from the research groups. She participated in the theoretical and methodological discussions concerning the text and reviewed its various drafts.

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