

Television and pro-Independence Sentiment in Catalonia. Selective Exposure of Catalan Television Viewers during the Independence-Seeking Process in Catalonia (2015-2020)

Televisión e independentismo en Cataluña. Exposición selectiva de los televidentes catalanes durante el proceso independentista (2015-2020)

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Palabras clave

Cataluña

- Exposición selectiva
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- Polarización
- Televisión
- TV3

Key words

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- Selective Exposure
- Pro-independence Movement
- Polarisation
- Television
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Resumen

La teoría de la exposición selectiva sostiene que los individuos tienden a informarse a través de aquellos medios que coinciden con sus convicciones. La presente investigación examina la exposición selectiva cuando el debate público se sitúa en el campo de la tensión entre identidades nacionales y, en este caso concreto, en el debate entre los partidarios de la independencia de Cataluña y los contrarios a ella. Los resultados muestran que en Cataluña existe una fuerte correlación entre la postura sobre la independencia y la elección de canal televisivo. Otro factor determinante es la lengua. Asimismo, se apunta que el grado de exposición selectiva se intensificó levemente en aquellos momentos de mayor polarización social a lo largo del periodo estudiado (2015-2020).

Abstract

The theory of selective exposure maintains that individuals tend to choose news media outlets that are consistent with their beliefs. This paper examines selective exposure when there is public debate on the tensions between national identities, specifically, the debate between supporters of the independence of Catalonia and those opposed to it. The results showed that there was a strong correlation between position on independence and choice of television channel in Catalonia. Another determining factor was language. It was also noted that the degree of selective exposure intensified slightly at specific times when social polarisation increased throughout the period studied (2015-2020).

Citation

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INTRODUCTION

The gradual proliferation of all kinds of publicly-available news media has led to an increase in studying the mechanisms involved in how these sources of information are selected. There has been a commensurate increase in interest in the theory of selective exposure, according to which members of the public tend to choose those media that are consistent with their beliefs.

The choice of the news media used by the public is strongly related to political issues. At the same time, selective exposure (which can be considered to have existed since the dawn of journalism) has been associated with political polarisation, a relationship that has two-way effects.

A case study of Catalonia was undertaken where political life operates on a double axis. On the one hand is the traditional left-right axis. On the other hand is another axis that runs from Catalan nationalism to Spanish nationalism, which is closely related to the positions for or against the pro-independence movement in Catalonia. National identity is relevant to these positions in Catalonia and influences the public's exposure to the media (Masip, Suau and Ruiz-Caballero, 2020; Valera-Ordaz, 2018).

The year 2010 is often deemed to be the starting point of the current rise of the Catalan pro-independence movement. This was marked by a ruling from the Spanish Constitutional Court which annulled several articles of the then new Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, a Statute that had been approved by the Catalan and Spanish parliaments and endorsed by Catalan citizens through a referendum. Furthermore, even before 2010, several surveys had reported a progressive increase in the proportion of cit-

izens of Catalonia who were in favour of independence from Spain.

The pro-independence movement has a long history in Catalonia but had never been as strong as it has been since 2010, both in its political/electoral and its civil dimensions. The so-called "pro-independence process" led to the instigation of a referendum on the independence of Catalonia that eventually took place on 1 October 2017. Although this referendum had been prohibited by the Spanish Constitutional Court, it was held and more than two million people cast their vote. The Spanish police forces used force at different polling stations against citizens who wanted to participate in the referendum, in an attempt to prevent them from voting. The independence of Catalonia was declared on 27 October 2017 but went unimplemented. The main political and civil pro-independence leaders either were imprisoned or took refuge abroad. The Spanish government took power, suspended Catalan autonomy and called a regional election in Catalonia, which was held on 21 December 2017. This resulted in the formation of a new government comprising the two main pro-independence forces, Junts per Catalunya (Together for Catalonia) and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia).

The tension experienced on the dates close to the referendum held on 1 October 2017 peaked again in October 2019, when the sentences against the independence-supporting leaders who did not take refuge abroad were made public. Most of them had been former members of the government of Catalonia, including former vice-president Oriol Junqueras. The former president of the Catalan Parliament, Carme Forcadell, was also sentenced. The prison sentences led to protest demonstrations with serious incidents on the streets of Barcelona. Another im-

portant step in the process had taken place a few years earlier, on 9 November 2014, when the government of Catalonia and civil society organised a so-called “participatory process” on independence. On that occasion there was no involvement of the police forces.

There has been much speculation about whether the media contributed to exacerbating the political and social tension in Catalonia from 2010 to the present day. The political conflict remains unresolved. Both the pro-independence movement and the unionist sectors have accused the media that are aligned with the views of the opposing party of fuelling hostility between independence supporters and opponents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What is selective exposure

Selective exposure theory originated in the monograph entitled *The People’s Choice: How the Voter Makes Up his Mind in a Presidential Election* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948). The authors analysed the 1940 US presidential campaign and concluded that the public tends to consume media that confirms their pre-existing perceptions. This was at the core of what would later be known as selective exposure theory. Klappler (1960) remarked that an individual’s existing beliefs are reinforced when they consume contents that they have previously selected.

The theory was strongly criticised during the 1960s and was practically forgotten in the 1970s and 1980s. Among the most prominent critics were Freedman and Sears, who noted that it is not the public who makes the selection, but the media. As the media provide more like-

minded than counter-attitudinal information, opinions tend to be aligned. This was called “*de facto* selectivity” (Freedman and Sears, 1965; Sears and Freedman, 1967).

The proliferation of television choices in the United States in the 1980s due to the spread of cable television led to a renewed interest in the mechanisms and conditioning factors involved in the selection of the media by the public.

The appearance of the Internet and social media has exponentially multiplied the public’s options and greatly fragmented the offerings (Sunstein, 2001) in the Broadband Society (Fondevila-Gascón, 2013). The fragmentation of the media options, together with the emergence of niche and highly ideologically biased media, has contributed to fuelling interest in selective exposure and its consequences for public attitudes. Some tools have also become widely available that enable people to specify the content they want to consume, whereas other tools make it possible for the media, platforms and social networks to accurately segment and adapt (customise) any contents to be received by the user through data collection and analysis. The risks involved have been conceptualised through two metaphors that have become very popular. The first refers to the fact that users can receive content that is simply aligned with their beliefs. This is called the “echo chamber effect” (Sunstein, 2001). The second warns about the danger of isolation from other existing information and arguments, described by the metaphor of the “filter bubble” (Pariser, 2011). Different authors have stressed that both the *echo chamber* effect and the “filter bubble” promote social polarisation.

The new impetus for the study of selective exposure has even led to the question of whether a new era of “min-

imal effects” has dawned in communication theory and research (Bennett and Inyengar, 2008).

There have been many authors who, especially since 2000, have conducted research into the theory of media selection, including many studies and the development of new methodologies (Hart *et al.*, 2009; Iyengar and Kahn, 2009; Mutz, 2006; Mutz and Martin, 2001; Mutz and Young, 2011; Stroud, 2008, 2010). Numerous experts have also objected to the theory and have qualified the extent of its effects (Kinder, 2003; D’Alessio and Allen, 2002; Zaller, 1992; Klappler, 1960).

Stroud (2011) identified cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) as the primary cause of selective exposure. According to Festinger’s theory, individuals act to reduce the dissonance (or inconsistency) caused by those elements that contradict their pre-existing views. They also avoid situations and information that can increase dissonance, as this results in discomfort. One of the strategies to avoid dissonance and the ensuing discomfort is to select the news to which someone is exposed.

In addition to dissonance, Stroud (2011) listed other explanations for selective exposure. One of these explanations is based on theories about so-called “lay epistemics” (Kruglanski, 1989, 2004) and “motivated reasoning” (Kunda, 1990). Both hold that the individual directs the search and the subsequent processing of messages towards specific objectives. People seek to find the conclusions that they really want to reach. Stroud holds that both theories emphasise that the public can seek like-minded information even in the absence of dissonance. “Some motivations, such as directional goals or the need for specific closure, should prompt selective exposure” (Stroud, 2011: 19).

Another explanation relies on the assumption that the processing of congenial information requires less cognitive effort than the processing of uncongenial information. Consequently, guided by cognitive economy, in an attempt to minimise cognitive effort, the public tends to gravitate towards like-minded messages, as they require less time and energy.

The last explanation points to the fact that people may select the information based on the quality of that information. High-quality information may be preferred to low-quality information. However, there may be a bias, which would consist in believing that congenial information is of higher quality or deserves more credibility than uncongenial information (Metzger, Haartsell and Flanagin, 2015).

There are many conditions that may influence media selection. Stroud (2014) suggested that they could be classified into two large groups, conditioning factors or moderators (those linked to individual characteristics) and contextual or environmental factors.

Selective exposure and polarisation

There are different definitions of polarisation, a tendency towards which human psychology leans, according to Neuman (2016). However, this study is based on the characterisation formulated by Jamieson and Cappella, for whom

polarization refers to sharp differences in the views of groups or persons about some other person or group. If my views about gay civil unions become more extreme and yours don’t change, then our views are more different than before; they have become more polarized (2008: 214).

There is an open debate on whether partisan exposure leads to further polari-

sation (Mudz, 2006; Stroud, 2010). While some studies have found evidence of such an association (Taber and Lodge, 2006; Holbert, Garret and Gleason, 2010; Jamieson and Cappella, 2008), others have not. Some researchers have questioned or even rejected that exposure to like-minded media results in increased polarisation.

How does it work in the reverse? In other words, does polarisation lead to greater selective exposure? Stroud (2010) and Humanes (2014) argued that this may be the case. Two concepts close to polarisation, namely, certainty and confidence in one's positions, have been considered causes of selective exposure. Stroud holds that, despite there being reasons to predict a relationship between the selection of congenial media and polarised attitudes, "the empirical evidence to date is inconclusive" (2010: 558).

Frey (1986) mentioned different factors that influence the selection of information. He cited the commitment to information seeking, selection and refutation of arguments, the benefits of refuting such arguments, the amount and usefulness of the information, the advantages of reversing a decision, as well as the intensity of dissonance.

The media context

The Spanish media system was identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as one of those that make up the so-called "Mediterranean or Polarised Pluralist Model". This classification has been widely supported and is used by a large number of scholars.

The characteristics of this model include low newspaper circulation rates, strong state intervention in the sector and a high level of "political parallelism", which the authors define as the degree to which the contents of the different media correlate with the different political

and party options. Consequently, this is reflected in the relationship between the public's ideology and the news media they consume.

The comparative study carried out by Dalen, Vreese and Albæk (2012) in four European countries noted that Spanish political journalists see their role as more sacerdotal (understood as being respectful of political institutions, which are considered newsworthy by definition) and more partisan than their Danish, German and UK colleagues. This perception was confirmed by the content analysis conducted by the same authors. In turn, Mazzoleni pointed out that there are highly politicised news traditions in which many publishing corporations "do politics". He also recalled that the political position of a media outlet may be guided by a business interest in obtaining legislative favours (2010: 99, 102). In the same sense, Baumgartner and Chaqués-Bonafont (2015) underlined the strong parallelism that exists in Spain between newspapers and political parties, while Cardenal *et al.* (2019) confirmed selective exposure in Spain in online news consumption.

As for the media system in the different Spanish Autonomous Regions, the Spain-wide media, based in Madrid or its surroundings, overlap, interrelate and compete with the Catalan media, many of which use the Catalan language. While in terms of audience the television sector is dominated by Spanish television channels, in the case of the press and radio, the hegemony is held by those who broadcast in Catalan (for a detailed analysis of the evolution of media audiences in Catalonia, see Martínez-Amat, 2020). They all compete to make their points of view hegemonic (Zallo, 2013: 273). In Catalonia, these points of view run along two axes: the ideological (left-right) axis and the national identification axis (Cat-

alan-Spanish), the latter being closely related to positions for or against independence. Both axes not only overlap but are also interrelated and influence each other.

Various Catalan scholars have theorised the concept of a “Catalan communication space” (Gifreu, 2013). Their research have generally revolved around the question of what policies should be followed to strengthen such a space, something that they see as inextricably linked to the preservation of language, culture and identity. The Catalan communication space aspires to establish interrelations between those territories where the Catalan language is used, which includes the Valencian Community and the Balearic Islands (Gifreu, 2014; Gifreu, 2013; Gifreu and Corominas, 1991; Zallo, 2013).

Zallo (2013: 273) emphasised that, in order to ensure the perservation of stateless nations within Spain, they must build their own powerful communication system in order to compensate for the predominance of state-wide media, which extend “a hegemonic point of view of the State and the nation”.

Research into selective exposure for the Spanish and Catalan cases is scarce. However, some studies exist whose findings have confirmed the theory of selective exposure. In addition to the one by Humanes (2014), these include the research by Fraile and Melián (2012), who focused on the 2009 European election campaign, and the study by Valera-Ordaz (2018), which specifically covered the area of Catalonia.

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

This paper has the following objectives:

- a) To examine whether the differential consumption of Catalan television viewers is related to their position for or against the independence of Catalonia.
- b) To observe whether the selective exposure of viewers has varied significantly over the years and whether there have been significant changes at times of great polarisation in the pro-independence process. It therefore seeks to establish whether there is a correlation between greater or lesser selective exposure and greater or lesser polarisation in society.
- c) To determine what factors (position on independence, national identification, family origins, language, position on the left-right axis, etc.) and to what extent they allow the television media selection of the Catalan public to be predicted.

The hypotheses to be used are:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Pro-independence viewers prefer the channels of the Catalan Audiovisual Media Corporation (TV3, among others) to a greater extent, while anti-independence viewers concentrate on Spain-wide television.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). The intensity of selective exposure has fluctuated slightly throughout the period studied, coinciding with a greater polarisation in Catalan society (referendum held on 1 October 2017 and protests in October 2018).

Hypothesis 3 (H3). Position on independence and language are the factors that have the greatest correlation with the choice of a certain television channel.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a comparative methodology within a longitudinal follow-up design over a six-year period. Quantitative analysis techniques were applied based on primary sources, namely, macro surveys of the Centre for Opinion Studies (CEO) of the Government of Catalonia. The probability samples drawn by the CEO were: 4287 in 2015; 3142 in 2016; 3028 in 2017; 1026 in 2018; 1014 in 2019; and 1288 in 2020.

Two types of statistical analysis were carried out. One was correlational, to see the degree of association between television channels and independence, and a data modelling analysis through logistic regressions was also conducted. The logistic regressions present information for three predictive models, one about watching news contents on the regional channel TV3, another about news consumption via the Spain-wide public channels TV1 and La 2 and a third one about watching news contents on private Spain-wide channels Antena 3 and Telecinco. The predictive variables extracted from the CEO macro surveys that were used to carry out the three regressions include the 2015 to 2020 period.

The channels analysed were all generalist channels. For example, the specialised sports channel Esports 3 within the Catalan Media Corporation was excluded from the study. However, the study included the news channel information 3/24, which is also part of the Catalan Media Corporation, and the private Catalan channel 8TV.

The predictive variables (Table 1) used in the regression models were the following: sex, age, degree of Spanish nationalism/Catalan nationalism, degree of Spanish versus Catalan identification, degree of trust in Spanish politics, degree of trust in the Parliament of Catalonia, left/right ideological position, educational level,

language chosen to answer the questionnaire, family's place of origin.

TABLE 1. *Predictive variables used in the regression models*

Pro-independence views (0 = no, 1 = yes)
Sex (1 = female, 0 = male)
Age (current, in years)
Birth (0 = outside of Catalonia, 1 = in Catalonia)
Define_SP_CAT (0-10, from Spanish only to Catalan only)
Trust_POL_SPN (0-10, in ascending order)
Trust Catalan Parliament (0-10, in ascending order)
LEFT_RIGHT (0-10, from furthest left to furthest right)
Educational level (1-11)
Language (0 = Spanish, 1 = Catalan)
Family_Background (0 = All born outside Catalonia. 1 = No parents born outside Catalonia, some grandparents born outside Catalonia. 2 = Father or mother, or some grandparents born outside Catalonia. 3 = Father or mother and some grandparents born in Catalonia. 4 = Parents and grandparents born in Catalonia).

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the CEO.

The CEO is a body within the Government of Catalonia responsible for carrying out various surveys and studies. Created by decree on 11 January 2005 and by law as an autonomous body on 6 July 2007, it is the Catalan equivalent of the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (CIS). The CEO conducts the Political Opinion Barometer (known as BOP), among others. The data for this study were obtained from the BOP, using a large sample and a robust methodology.

Limitations

The endogeneity factor, that is, the establishment of causal links between factors that influence each other, is one of the

main limitations of the study. The type of survey and data make it impossible to propose predictive models of cause and effect, since it cannot be determined which variable (such as support for independence) preceded the viewing of the channels shown. For this reason, the question of whether a channel is chosen because it supports a certain political position or whether following the channel is what gives rise to or strengthens that position is an ongoing debate. However, the initial perception is that those citizens who have a defined ideology or identity are the ones who most often engage in selective exposure.

There is also a great difficulty in isolating the effect that media-related effects have on individuals, as they are exposed to multiple stimuli, relationships and experiences. The same applies in terms of distinguishing the effects of specific media or differentiating between conventional media and online content.

RESULTS

Whereas the majority of the audience of Catalan television channels declared themselves to be in favour of independence, the audience of Spain-wide channels stated that they were opposed to Catalonia becoming independent.

In the period studied here (2015-2020), TV3 attracted an average of 75.7 % of viewers who stated that they supported independence, and who accounted for 82.1 % of the channel's audience. C33 gathered 0.2 % of pro-independence supporters, who represented 78.3 % of the channel's audience, while C3/24 attracted 6.9 % pro-independence supporters, who represented 73 % of its audience. The private Catalan channel 8TV attracted 2.9 % of pro-independence viewers, while the proportion of pro-independence supporters in its audience amounted to 67.6 %.

Among both the private and public state channels, La Sexta was the one that obtained the highest proportion of the total number of pro-independence viewers (5.1 %). Among the audience of La Sexta, 26.2 % declared that they supported independence. The channel with the fewest pro-independence viewers among its audience and the lowest proportion of pro-independence viewers was TVE1, with 9.1 %, which represents 1.8 % of the total number of pro-independence viewers (see Table 2).

Supporters of independence preferred the channels within the Catalan Audiovisual Media Corporation (TV3, among others) to a greater extent, while viewers who opposed independence concentrated on Spain-wide television.

The data in Table 2 shows the breakdown of the percentages of each channel out of the overall pro-independence audience and indicates that the channels with the most viewers in favour of independence were, by far, TV3 and C33, followed by C3/24 and the Catalan private channel 8TV. Members of the public who did not support independence predominated in the rest of the Spain-wide channels. Those who were not independence supporters predominated among viewers of TV1, followed by viewers of A3 and Telecinco. The results and relationship described correspond to the 2015 to 2020 period. An annual breakdown of data has not been provided because the trend was continuous and very similar in the years analysed ($X^2 = 5851.56$; $p < 0.0001$).

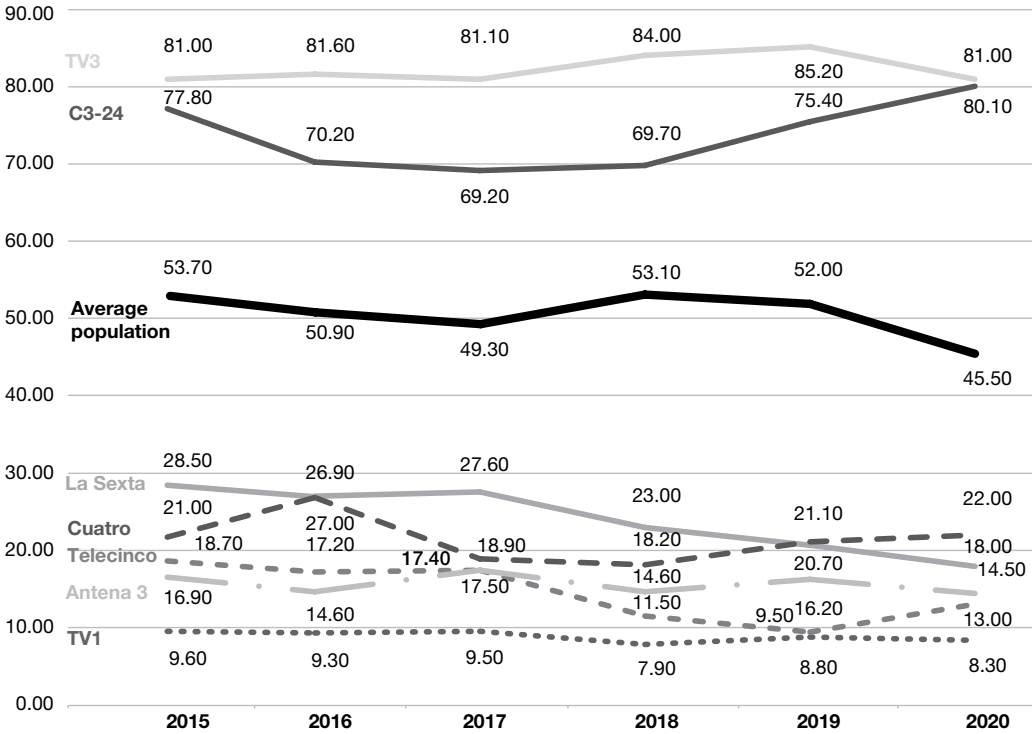
Thus, during the monitoring period, except for some fluctuation that may be associated with some events that occurred in Catalan and Spanish politics, it can be observed that the channels with a higher proportion of pro-independence viewers were clearly TV3 and C33. The turning point was 2017. As of 2017, there was an increase in the general percentage of citizens in fa-

TABLE 2. *Relationship between television channels and the pro-independence movement (2015-2020)*

CANAL TV	Statistics	Opposed to independence	In favour of independence
TV3	n	1,251	5,738
	Expected count	3,295.7	3,693.3
	% out of the channel	17.9	82.1
	% out of the total	18.5	75.7
C3/24	n	192	520
	Expected count	335.8	376.2
	% out of the channel	27.0	73.0
	% out of the total	2.8	6.9
C33	n	5	18
	Expected count	10.8	12.2
	% out of the channel	21.7	78.3
	% out of the total	0.1	0.2
8TV	n	105	219
	Expected count	152.8	171.2
	% out of the channel	32.4	67.6
	% out of the total	1.6	2.9
TV2	n	18	10
	Expected count	13.2	14.8
	% out of the channel	64.3	35.7
	% out of the total	0.3	0.1
TV1	n	1,374	138
	Expected count	713.0	799.0
	% out of the channel	90.9	9.1
	% out of the total	20.3	1.8
La Sexta	n	1,097	390
	Expected count	701.2	785.8
	% out of the channel	73.8	26.2
	% out of the total	16.2	5.1
Cuatro	n	219.7	246.3
	Expected count	219.7	246.3
	% out of the channel	78.8	21.2
	% out of the total	5.4	1.3
Telecinco	n	1,207	232
	Expected count	678.6	760.4
	% out of the channel	83.9	16.1
	% out of the total	17.8	3.1
Antena 3	n	1,130	215
	Expected count	634.2	710.8
	% out of the channel	84.0	16.0
	% out of the total	16.7	2.8

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the CEO.

FIGURE 1. Pro-independence viewers by channel and average number of pro-independence citizens out of the total population (2015-2020)



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the CEO.

TABLE 3. Pro-independence viewers by channel (main channels) and average number of pro-independence citizens out of the total population (2015-2020)

	TV3	C3-24	C33	8TV	TV2	TV1	La Sexta	Cuatro	Telecinco	Antena 3	Average number of pro-independence citizens out of the total population
2015	81.00	77.80	76.90	67.70	66.70	9.60	28.50	21.00	18.70	16.90	53.70
2016	81.60	70.20		66.70	33.30	9.30	27.00	26.90	17.20	14.60	50.90
2017	81.10	69.20	69.20	75.00	50.00	9.50	27.60	18.90	17.40	17.50	49.30
2018	84.00	69.70	66.70	52.00		7.90	23.00	18.20	11.50	14.60	53.10
2019	85.20	75.40				8.80	20.70	21.10	9.50	16.20	52.00
2020	81.00	80.10			35.00	8.30	18.00	22.00	13.00	14.50	45.50
Average	82.32	73.73	70.93	65.35	46.25	8.90	24.13	21.35	14.55	15.72	

Note: Empty cells indicate insufficient representativeness. The latest data collection dates from July 2020.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the CEO.

your of independence and the percentage of pro-independent viewers who consumed news contents through TV3-C33 (Table 3 and Figure 1). It can be clearly identified which channels were used by pro-independence viewers for news consumption (TV3 and C33 accumulating the highest percentages), and which channels were consumed by non-independence supporters.

In general terms, the pro-independence movement had three peaks, which were reflected both among viewers and among the Catalan population as a whole (Figure 1): in 2015 (probably as a result of the participatory process held on 14 November 2014), in 2018 (possibly as a consequence of the referendum held in 1 October 2017) and to a lesser extent, in 2019 (possibly associated with the demonstrations and altercations of October 2019 after the Supreme Court issued rulings against the pro-independence political leaders).

As the desire for Catalonia to become an independent State evolved over time among the Catalan population, the CEO's

surveys reflected slight ups and downs. In 2015, 53.65% were supporters of independence. The figure dropped to 50.89% in 2016. A turning point was 2017, when the number of pro-independence people was below the symbolic half: 49.32%, in contrast to 50.68% of the population who wanted Catalonia to remain within Spain. In 2018, the number of supporters of independence was again above 50.00% (53.10%). In 2019 it fell slightly (52.00%) and in 2020 the citizens who supported secession were 47.10%.

Therefore, H2 was confirmed. The intensity of selective exposure fluctuated slightly throughout the period studied, coinciding with the points of greatest polarisation in Catalan society.

Table 4 below shows the data from the three logistic regression models carried out to explain citizens' news consumption: public channel TV3 (model 1); Spain-wide public channels TV1 and La 2 (model 2); and private Spain-wide channels Antena 3 and Telecinco (model 3), respectively.

TABLE 4. *Logistic regression models on determining factors to choose a television channel*

Variables in the equation	Model 1 (y = TV3)		Model 2 (y = TV1, TV2)		Model 3 (y = A3, Tele 5)	
	$R^2 = 0.53$		$R^2 = 0.26$		$R^2 = 0.28$	
	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)
In favour of independence	0.000	3.27	0.000	0.39	0.000	0.38
Sex			0.000	1.79		
Age	0.000	1.02	0.000	0.98	0.002	1.01
Birth	0.017	1.13	0.004	1.41	0.000	0.56
Define_SP_CAT	0.000	1.13	0.000	0.91	0.000	0.88
Trust_POL_SPN	0.000	.93			0.000	1.12
Trust Catalan Parliament	0.000	1.16			0.001	0.91
Ideology_LEFT_RIGHT			0.001	1.08	0.002	1.11
Educational level	0.007	1.05	0.000	0.83		
Language	0.000	3.09	0.000	0.31	0.004	0.61
Family_place of birth	0.000	1.20	0.016	0.90		
Constant	0.000	0.015	0.024	1.923	0.000	0.18

Note: Variables in bold: with presence in the three logistic regression models.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the CEO.

As shown in Table 4, the most important elements in predicting that an individual used TV3 for news consumption were, mainly, declaring themselves in favour of independence and having chosen Catalan to conduct the interview with the CEO. They were followed by the self-identification variable related to feeling more Catalan than Spanish, trusting the Catalan Parliament, Catalan family background and mistrusting Spanish politics. And, to a lesser degree, older age, having been born in Catalonia and having a higher level of education.

H3 was therefore validated: Position on independence and language were the factors that had a greater correlation with the choice of a certain television channel.

The meaning of the coefficients (Exp b) for model 1 ($y = TV3$) are detailed below:

In favour of independence: Exp b = 3.27. Being in favour of the independence of Catalonia increased the probability of watching TV3: this was multiplied by 3.3.

- Language requested to do the survey: Exp b = 3.089. Having requested Catalan to do the survey increased the probability of watching TV3: this was multiplied by 3.1.
- Trust in the Parliament of Catalonia: Exp b = 1.162. For each point of trust, the probability of watching TV3 increased: this was multiplied by 1.16.
- Self-identification as Spanish or Catalan: Exp b = 1.128. For each point further towards identifying as being more Catalan than Spanish, the probability of watching TV3 was multiplied by 1.1.
- Place of birth of family members: Exp b = 1.20. For each degree more in the family link with Catalonia, the probability of watching TV3 increased: this was multiplied by 1.2. It was moderately significant.

- Educational level: Exp b = 1.051. For each increase in the educational level, the probability of watching TV3 increased, this was multiplied by 1.1. It was also moderately significant.
- Age: Exp b = 1.017. For each point of increase in age, the probability of watching TV3 was multiplied by 1.02, a significant figure.
- Trust in Spanish politicians: Exp b = 0.933. For each additional point of trust, the probability of watching TV3 decreased, since it was multiplied by 0.93. As the value was below 1, it decreased.

The most important elements in predicting that an individual would consume news contents through TV1 or La 2 (the public state channels with the highest audience levels) were, mainly, having chosen the Spanish language to do the interview with the CEO and stating that they did not support independence. These were followed by being a woman, having a lower level of education, having been born outside of Catalonia, defining themselves as more Spanish than Catalan, and having a non-Catalan family origin. To a lesser degree, having a more right-wing ideology and older age.

Likewise, the most important elements in terms of predicting that an individual used Antena 3 or Telecinco (private state channels) for news consumption were mainly declaring that they were not independence supporters and had been born outside of Catalonia. This was followed by having chosen Spanish to do the interview with the CEO, defining themselves as feeling more Spanish than Catalan, trusting Spanish politics and having a more right-wing ideology. And, to a lesser extent, mistrust in the Parliament of Catalonia and older age.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen in the Results section, TV3 attracted 75.7 % of the pro-independence audience during the 2015 to 2020 period. In contrast, the state-wide channel that managed to attract the highest percentage of pro-independence viewers was La Sexta (5.1 %), as can be seen in Table 2. In this way, it has been confirmed that none of the channels reliably reflects the actual composition of the positions of Catalan society on independence (Table 3 and Figure 1). Great polarisation can be seen in the channels between those who have an overwhelmingly pro-independence audience and those whose audience are non-independence supporters. There is a stark contrast between channel audiences and reality.

The fact of using one TV channel or another for news consumption is associated with a set of variables that have a different impact depending on the channel. The probability of using TV3 for news consumption purposes increased among those individuals who stated that they supported independence and chose to carry out the survey in Catalan. This was also the case (albeit to a lesser extent) for those who identified themselves as feeling more Catalan than Spanish, had Catalan family roots and declared they had more trust in the Parliament of Catalonia.

Support for or opposition to independence is one of the factors that is most associated with the choice of the analysed channels, as well as Spanish/Catalan language and identification. In this sense, the present study is consistent with Valera-Ordaz (2017), as it shows that there is a strong selective exposure in Catalonia in relation to what the author calls the “centre-periphery division”, beyond the traditional left/right axis. According to Valera-Ordaz (2017), this type

of selective exposure is more important in the case of radio and television than in the written press.

Selective exposure is a determining element to analyse the media coverage of Catalan society, at least as far as television is concerned. While the first channel of Spanish public television (TV1) has the highest proportion of viewers opposed to independence in its audience, the opposite occurs with the first channel of Catalan public television (TV3), as can be seen in Table 3 and Figure 1.

We can also affirm that the left/right ideological variable is not decisive in the choice of TV3. However, there is a certain inclination to the right found among audiences of the private state channels and less so in audiences of TV1 and La 2.

The endogeneity factor, that is, the establishment of causal links between factors that influence each other, is one of the main limitations of the study. The type of survey and data make it impossible to propose predictive models of cause and effect, since it cannot be determined which variable (such as support for independence) preceded the viewing of the channels shown. For this reason, there is an ongoing debate as to whether a channel is chosen because it supports a certain political position or whether using a certain channel for news consumption is what gives rise to or strengthens that position. However, the initial perception is that those citizens who have a defined ideology or identity are the ones who most often engage in selective exposure.

The chosen indicators generally cover the spectrum of influencing factors, although there may be some unforeseen variables that may emerge in future research and complete the analysis. The time factor is covered to a certain extent, as data have been analysed from a clearly determined period.

Future research should further the exploration into the (slight) correlation which can be observed between selective exposure and those points of greatest tension or social polarisation (included in H2), in order to determine the degree and nature of that relationship.

Some suggested avenues of research could be conducting this type of analysis in settings similar to that of Catalonia, in classic cases such as the Belgium or Canada, and in others less politically intense ones or where pro-independence movements have less support among the public. Another way forward could be using methodologies that are not based on surveys or laboratory tests, but instead try to capture the “real” behaviour of citizens in their daily lives, either using a qualitative approach or triangulation.

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