Multiscreen Consumption and Polarisation on Twitter During Debates In Spain (2023)

Patricia Zamora-Martínez[1], Salomé Berrocal-Gonzalo[1], Ana González-Neira[2]
[1] University of Valladolid, Spain
[2] University of A Coruña, Spain

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Political Communication Electoral Debates Election campaigns Television Multi-Screen Twitter Polarization	Currently, the viewership of electoral debates extends to new distribution channels such as social media and on-demand streaming services. The research monitors the digital distribution channels of televised electoral debates during the 2023 elections in Spain, analysing uncivil comments from broadcasting accounts on Twitter (X). There is an uneven use of these new distribution channels among media groups, and a significant number of uncivil comments on X during televised events, although informative and neutral messages generate higher engagement.

1. Introduction

The general elections in Spain, which took place on 23 July 2023, are the focus of this study, which examines the two electoral debates that were held. On the one hand, the one organised by the Atresmedia group, with the presence of the two leaders of the main political parties, Pedro Sánchez of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and Alberto Núñez Feijóo of the Popular Party (PP). On the other hand, the one conducted by Radio Televisión Española (RTVE), which pitted Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), Santiago Abascal (VOX) and Yolanda Díaz (Sumar) against each other.

The context in which the 2023 election debates took place in Spain was one of early elections. The general election, which took place on 23 July, was brought forward to take place before 10 December. This advance was justified by the Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, in the light of the results of the municipal and regional elections held on 28 May 2023, which had positioned the Popular Party (PP) and VOX as the winning parties in a large part of Spanish territory. Faced with this situation, the head of the Executive pointed out that although the votes were municipal and regional, "the meaning of the vote [of 28 May] conveys a message that goes beyond that" (*El Mundo*, 29 May 2023), suggesting a desire for a change in the country's political course.

The results of the 28 May municipal and autonomous elections showed a polarised country, with the political options of the two-party system becoming increasingly distant and confrontational. This climate of spiralling polarisation manifested itself once again in the pre-election and election campaign for the 23 July general elections, through various slogans that served as examples and appealed to the affective sphere of citizens: "The abolition of *Sanchismo*" and "Choose between Sánchez and Spain" (*El País*, 20 June 2023), coined by the right-wing positions, and "PP and VOX are the same" (*El Confidencial*, 11 July 2023), devised by the left.

2. Theoretical Framework

Electoral debates are one of the highlights of contemporary electoral campaigns (García, 2015; Fontenla-Pedreira et al., 2020a; Morales and Gordillo, 2023). These meetings become the key stage where candidates present and defend their proposals, while trying to counter those of their opponents. In recent decades, the influence of debates has been analysed in various studies, highlighting their importance in electoral choices of vote and in shaping the campaign agenda (McKinney and Carlin, 2004; Benoit and Hansen, 2004). In this sense, the emergence of a particular issue in a debate can led to it becoming central to the campaign, forcing other candidates and the media itself to address the issue more frequently (Sheafer, 2007).

Moreover, these political events provide voters with the opportunity to evaluate aspects such as the candidates' "dialectical skills, enthusiasm, assertiveness and mastery of different issues" (Navarro, 2019, p. 77) in a competitive context (Lagares et al., 2020). Some studies show that after watching a debate, voters may experience changes in their perceptions of the candidates, which can directly influence their voting decision (Diez et al., 2020). These perceptions are not only based on the content of the message but are also influenced by non-verbal factors such as the candidate's charisma, appearance and behaviour (Fontecoba et al., 2020; Hernández-Herrarte and Zamora-Martínez, 2020).

Other previous research has focused on the study of the political debates themselves, addressing aspects such as content, discursive strategies, linguistic analysis and the evolution of the television format (Téllez et al., 2010; Quintas-Froufe and Quintas-Froufe, 2010; Luengo, 2013; Fernández García, 2017; Marín, 2019; Casado et al., 2020). Work has also been published on political and institutional communication (Gallego and Martínez, 2013; López-García et al., 2018) and the impact of debate events on social networks (Elmer, 2013; Kalsnes et al., 2014; Márquez Martínez, 2017; Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo, 2020; Fontenla-Pedreira et al., 2020b; Vázquez and Campos, 2020).

However, this research adopts a perspective that has been little explored in previous studies. On the one hand, following the logic of multi-format campaigns, it looks at the multiscreen viewing of the debates in the 2023 Spanish elections, with the aim of identifying the broadcasting windows of each encounter. On the other hand, the comments on Twitter (or X now) during the television broadcasts are monitored in order to identify the uncivil reactions of prosumers and the messages that generate the most engagement on this social network. The interest in studying this type of message lies in its ability to show signs of social polarisation and extremist positions, which create an ideal breeding ground for the emergence of hate speech. In this sense, direct calls to violence in comments can trigger random acts

of terrorism (Amman and Meloy, 2021), influence public opinion (Guo and McCombs, 2011) or contribute to the normalization of messages that limit the rights of certain individuals or specific groups (Zamora-Martínez et al., 2024).

The transformation of television broadcasting, accelerated by the digitization of audiovisual content and the spread of multiplatform consumption, makes it necessary to study how such unique content as debates have been adapted (Rozados Lorenzo, 2022). The multivisioned has transformed journalistic consumption in recent years, especially regarding the televising of electoral debates, by changing the way viewers interact with the media. This trend offers opportunities but also unprecedented challenges in the field of political communication and civic participation (Stroud et al., 2015). In the current context, the broadcasting of political debates has undergone significant changes due to the emergence of new broadcasting agents, such as OTT platforms and applications, and devices such as smartphones and tablets, which have changed the dynamics of viewing and broadcasting (Pedro, 2022; Quintas-Froufe et al., 2020). Moreover, there has been a process of media convergence in which it is difficult to establish a precise boundary between the web and television (Carlón and Scolari, 2009). In this sense, viewers no longer rely exclusively on traditional television to follow debates, as they have other complementary tools at their disposal that provide access to live broadcasts, real-time reactions and additional content (Chadwick, 2013). This multiplicity of platforms thus extends the potential reach of electoral debates beyond the traditional boundaries of television audiences.

On the other hand, the progressive increase in digital video consumption has changed the strategies for offering and producing television content, as well as the search for audiences that are increasingly volatile and distant from linear consumption (EBU, 2023; Hoover 2023). The freedom of consumption, in terms of where, when and from which device, opens infinite possibilities for audiences of audiovisual content in liquid television. We are facing a multiscreen consumer, so generalist channels must strengthen their digital strategy and follow the new consumption scenarios (González-Neira et al., 2020; Apablaza-Campos, 2022; Martín-Neira et al., 2023; Gallardo-Camacho et al., 2023). In this context, it should be remembered that 85% of internet users in Spain use social networks, which corresponds to around thirty million Spaniards (IAB, 2023). The same study also shows that 38% follow media accounts, so their importance for TV channel managers and political leaders is not negligible. However, despite all these changes, television still plays a leading role and remains the preferred medium for Spaniards to receive information, followed by the press and radio (CIS, 2023).

Given this unstable panorama, with the growing presence of new players and notable technological advances, it is necessary to evaluate the use made of them by linear television channels, as well as the response obtained from the audience. Previous research has looked at the initiatives developed by TV channels to maintain and increase their audience (Rodríguez-Breijo, 2020; Mendieta Bartolomé, 2023; Barré, 2023; Eguzkitza-Mestraitua et al., 2023).

Moreover, social networks serve as platforms for immediate and unmediated interaction. In the case of Twitter (X), it has become an important tool for participating in real-time discussions on the points raised in the debate (Kreiss, 2014). This dynamic not only allows for greater citizen participation but can also influence the perception and discussion of the most relevant issues on the agenda of public authorities, as a result of Twitter's role as an agenda-setter (Diez-García and Sánchez-García, 2022). However, although multi viewing has many advantages, there is also a risk of fragmentation of viewers' attention. The constant interaction with multiple devices may limit the viewer's ability to focus on the main content of the debate, affecting the absorption and comprehension of the content (Couldry, 2012).

In this context of technological capabilities that empower audiences (Piller et al., 2011), it is important to consider the engagement generated by the publication of tweets around the broadcast of televised debates in these spaces. Dhanesh (2017) argues that networks provoke communicative interaction in the form of clicks, likes, shares, comments, tweets, recommendations and other user-generated content. That is, the utilities offered by social networks allow users to participate symbolically (Ballesteros, 2019) in events and experiences that go beyond the mere passive consumption of content (Medina et al., 2023).This results in different forms of participation, such as the expression of opinions, content addiction and the value of original content, among others (García-Avilés, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2013; Saavedra-Llamas et al., 2020).

3. Objectives and Methodology

The general objective (GO) of this study is to understand the strategy used to broaden the viewing of the electoral debates of the Spanish general elections, held on 23 July 2023, and to analyse the comments generated on Twitter (X) by the two debates, by monitoring the official accounts of the channels responsible for broadcasting them. This GO is complemented by the following secondary objectives (SO):

- OS1. Analyse the distribution/dissemination windows of the audiovisual content of the debates.
- OS2. To identify the uncivic reactions of prosumers through their publications on the Twitter accounts of the channels/broadcasters during the broadcasting of the debates, as well as to identify the comments that generate the most engagement.

Under these premises, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

- H1. Following the logic of multi-format campaigns, it is expected that the broadcast of the televised debates on the main Spanish channels will be transferred to other media channels.
- H2. The social conversation on Twitter is expected to tend towards polarisation and uncivil discourse on salient campaign themes or issues present in the channels/broadcasters posts. Furthermore, in the current post-truth context in which political communication activities take place, the comments that generate the most engagement in the selected samples are expected to focus on stimuli, emotions and sensations (Saavedra-Llamas et al., 2015), moving away from the rational concepts discussed in the events.

The research is divided into two phases. In the first, a review of the case study: election debates and multiscreen viewing. In the second, we used the technique of content analysis to examine in a systematic, objective and quantitative way (Wimmer and Dominick, 1996; Matthes and Kohring, 2008) the social conversation generated around the election debates. Comments were downloaded using the premium version of ExportComments.com, a tool that allows comments from Twitter (or X now) posts to be exported to spreadsheets, including those nested within other comments.

The sample of comments on the Atresmedia debate is 2,588, while that of Radio Televisión Española (RTVE) is 819. These samples correspond to the publications of the corporate accounts of the media that broadcast the debate (Table 1).

Table 1. Composition of the downloaded *corpus* by Twitter profile

Debate	Profiles	No. of entries published	No. of comments received
Atresmedia (10 July)	@laSextaTV	33	1.015
	@antena3com	4	945
	@antena3int	1	8
	@OndaCero_es	15	604
	@atresplayer	1	14
	@AtresplayerInt	1	2
Total	-	65	2.588
RTVE (19 July)[1]	@rtvenoticias	24	604
	@La1_tve	1	170

---

[1] On 19 July, Radio Exterior and TVE Internacional did not make any postings on Twitter. On the other hand, Canal 24 horas does not have a profile on this platform, while RTVE play and Radio 5 only made retweets instead of their own tweets.

	@rne	24	45
Total	-	49	819

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

From this sample, a filter was applied to select only those comments that received at least two interactions, either in the form of comments, retweets, likes, or a combination of these. The filtered comments were then subjected to simple random sampling (95% confidence level and 5% margin of error). A final analysis sample of 401 comments was obtained, 274 from the 10 July debate and 127 from the 19 July debate. On the other hand, in order to calculate the degree of reliability, a pre-test was carried out with the researchers of the study on a random sample of the selected comments. The agreement index was between 0.90 and 0.96 according to Holsti's method (1969). Disagreements were resolved by checking the differences between the three coders.

An analysis template based on the proposal of Zamora-Martínez et al. 2024 (Table 2) was used to study the social conversation of prosumers. This template was adapted for the present research and consists of two blocks. The first focuses on the basic attributes of the comment: post number, string/sender, user and date of publication. The second block is developed around the following categories: presence or absence of incivility, level of incivility observed, direction of incivility, characteristics of uncivil discourse, and insult and/or derogatory word used.

Table 2. Coding template for comment analysis

A. Basic attributes of the commentary	
Number of posts	
Channel/broadcaster to which the comment belongs	
User	
Date of publication	
B. Manifestation of uncivil discourse	
The comment contains uncivil characteristics	1. No 2. Yes
Level of incivility	1. No incivility: neutral discourse 2. Extreme incivility 3. Offensive incivism 4. Upstander or alternative discourse
Addressing incivility	1. No appreciation / does not exist 2. Individual 3. Collective-ascription: political party or political class 4. Other groups 5. Individual and collective 6. Individual and other groups
Features of uncivil discourse	1. No appreciation / does not exist 2. Use of humour and/or irony 3. Presence of reinforcers or moderators
Insults and/or derogatory words	1. No Term _____ 2. Yes

Source: Own elaboration based on Zamora-Martínez *et al.*, 2024.

To facilitate understanding of the results, it is important to explain some of the variables included in this template. In terms of levels of incivility, "extreme incivility" is used to refer to language that is directly and clearly offensive. "Offensive incivism" is used when allusions are made to personal or collective issues, discrimination is encouraged or stereotypes and untruths are reproduced. The variable "upstander" describes a type of alternative discourse that breaks with stereotypes or takes a stance in favour of the offended groups. In contrast, "neutral discourse" is identified when there is a complete absence of incivility.

In the direction of incivility, the variable "individual" refers exclusively to the candidate(s), while the variable "individual and collective" refers to both the candidate(s) and the political party or political

class. On the other hand, "other groups" refers to protagonists of the electoral scene (talk show hosts, presenters, journalists, etc.) who are not linked to either the candidates or the political parties or the political class.

Finally, with regard to the characteristics of uncivil discourse, the variable "use of humour and/or irony" is used when the presence of a humorous or ironic tone in the comments is detected. The variable "presence of reinforcers or moderators" is used when linguistic registers are used to amplify or attenuate the message, such as 'very big' or 'very small', while the variable "no appreciation/does not exist" is used when neither of the above two elements is observed.

4. Results

The following are the results of the research carried out according to the objectives initially set (OS1 and OS2): the dissemination windows and the analysis of the Twitter conversation.

4.1. Atresmedia Debate Broadcasting Windows: 10 July 2023

In terms of linear viewing, the debate broadcast by the Atresmedia group, which pitted the candidate of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Pedro Sánchez, against the candidate of the Popular Party (PP), Alberto Núñez Feijóo, achieved a 46.5% share of the screen, corresponding to an average audience of 5.9 million people. These figures are the sum of the audiences reached by Antena 3 (3.2 million and 25.1% share) and La Sexta (2.8 million and 21.4% share), with the former having a greater weight than the latter. A breakdown of the Atresmedia group's data by age group shows that the over-64s were the most interested in the programme (48.7%), closely followed by the young profile of 13-24 year olds (48%), a striking fact as this is not the group that usually watches the Atresmedia group's television content.

It is also important to note that the behaviour of the channels broadcasting the debate was not linear. Antena 3 initially led in audience share, but halfway through the debate La Sexta overtook Antena 3 (Figure 1). The golden minute came at 22:45 with 3,771,000 and a 28.4% share for Antena 3. Taking both channels together, this figure rises to 6.4 million average viewers and 47.8% of the screen.

Figure 1. Audience curve of the Atresmedia debate.

Source: Barlovento Comunicación (2023c).

In terms of viewing windows, the debate organised by Atresmedia was broadcast on Antena 3, La Sexta, Onda Cero, Atresplayer and Antena 3 Internacional. However, it was not broadcast on any of the group's social networks or video platforms such as YouTube or Twitch. The offer was concentrated on the corporate websites themselves. The only exception to this corporate strategy was that some external media broadcast the Atresplayer signal on their websites, such as the newspapers *El Español* and *El País*.

Image 1: Footage from the newspapers *El Español* and *El País*, which broadcast the face-to-face debate.
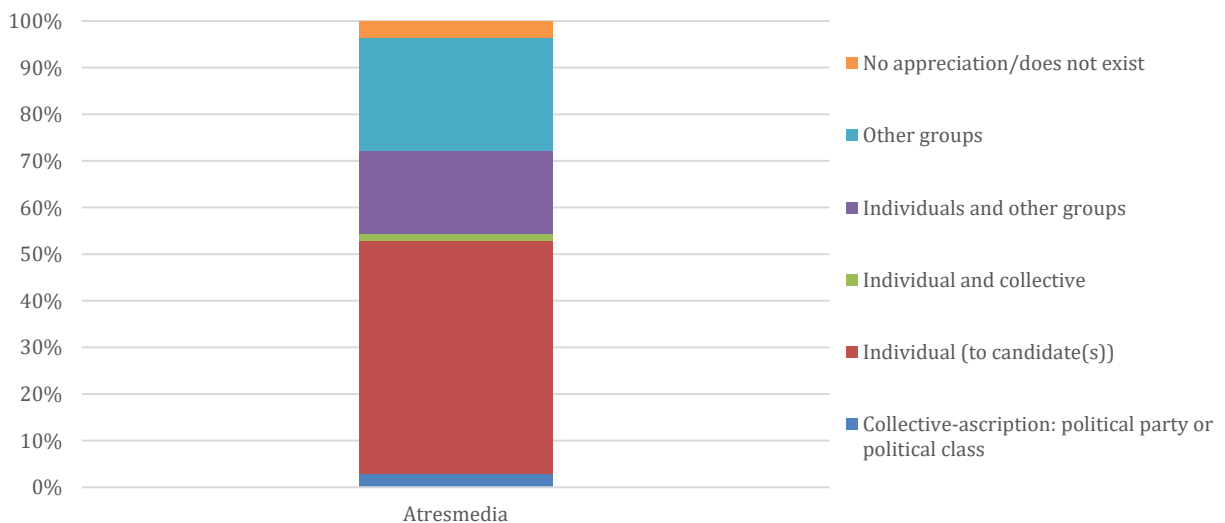

Source: *El Español* and *El País*.

On Twitter (X), the election debate was the most talked about programme of the day, generating 634,400 tweets from 118,600 prosumers and more than 60 million impressions. Over the following three days, the conversation reached one million tweets with 82,800 unique authors and over 82 million impressions.

4.2. Social Conversation Among Users on Twitter During the Atresmedia Debate

In the context of the debate organised by Atresmedia, it was found that there was evidence of incivility in 99% of the messages, and this was significantly distributed towards the candidates, accounting for half of the comments analysed (Figure 2). Some of the comments referring to the candidates are: "@antena3com has to make the turn respected and that the lying clown Sánchez lets Feijóo speak! You are mediocre and incompetent" or "If it bothers you so much @sanchezcastejon #QueTeVoteTxapote #filoetarra you pass by the victims of #eta pact with them and now you bring out the sister of #ordoñez? You have no shame #SanchezTraidor". There is also a smaller but significant percentage directed at 'other groups' (24%) and at the combination "individual and other groups" (17.8%).

**Figure 2.** Distribution of the direction of incivism in Atresmedia.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In terms of the level of incivility, "offensive incivism" are observed in more than 64% of the comments. The next most important discourse is that of the "upstander" alternative (30.2%) and, although it is a minority, the presence of "extreme incivility" also stands out in 2.1% of the messages, indicating a very high degree of polarisation, as can be seen in the following examples: "Sánchez, his speech was terrible. He was nervous from the start. COMPULSIVE LIARS CAN'T DEFEND THEMSELVES. AND HE IS LYING AGAIN TODAY. HE WAS TIED UP BY PODEMOS, HE WAS NOT FREE. WHAT A JOY NOT TO SEE HIM AS PRESIDENT. He will go down in history as ETARRA ETC" or "You are mercenaries". Feijoo lies in every speech and you do his dirty work for him".

Within this analysis, the intensity of the "offensive incivism" is significant in the accounts of @A3Noticias (22.6%), @laSextaTV (19.7%) and @antena3com (18.2%). However, in @antena3com (10.2%) and to a lesser extent in @laSextaTV and @A3Noticias (Figure 3), "upstander" discourse dominates. In contrast, the account @OndaCero_es stands out for its low level of incivility. In this account, the levels of intensity do not exceed 5% in any of the variables. This could be related to the positioning of television as the preferred information medium, ahead of the press and radio (CIS, 2023), which leads Twitter users (X) to choose to participate in the debate and interact in multiscreen mode, mainly through the official accounts of the television channels.

Figure 3. Distribution of the level of incivility in Atresmedia.
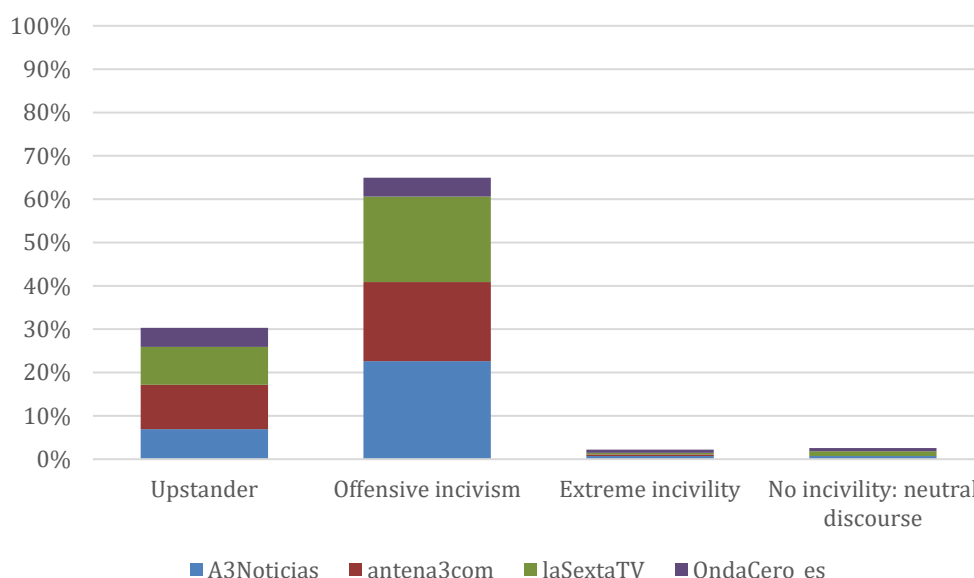
Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In the Atresmedia debate, users emphasise the low intellectual capacity of the two participants in the political event. Among the most common expressions found in the analysis are terms such as "rude", "shameless" and "liar", as seen in these comments: "Sánchez portrays himself, in 3 minutes you know him: rude, liar, cynical and also very nervous. I removed him because he doesn't let anyone speak or listen, NO EDUCATION, nothing new under the sun. 🤮" or "What a scoundrel when he let people die in Galicia because he didn't give them medicine because it was expensive. He reduced the number of beds, did not renew the staff, did not hire any more, but that 300 retired and he hired 200. Other words such as "pathetic", "unpresentable" or "psychopath" are also frequently observed (Image 2), reflecting the negative and aggressive tone that the online conversation takes in relation to the television debate.

Image 2. Word cloud with the most used insults in the Atresmedia debate.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In addition, the comments that generated the most prosumer engagement (more than 30) are found in four messages. The first two are categorised as "offensive incivism" and the other two as "upstander" alternative discourse (Image 3). In general, however, the level of engagement in the comments remains low, with the range from 0 to 5 (81.3%) dominating the entire Atresmedia sample examined.

Image 3. Comments with the most engagement in the Atresmedia sample.

Source: Twitter.

Finally, in relation to the manifestation of the characteristics of uncivil discourse in the comments on the Atresmedia debate, the percentage obtained in the variable "no appreciation/does not exist" is significant. It is present in more than 86.8% of the comments. In the cases where a variable is identified, the use of "humour and/or irony" (6.9%) and the presence of "reinforcers or moderators" (6.2%) are similarly observed.

Figure 4. Distribution of the features of uncivil discourse in Atresmedia.
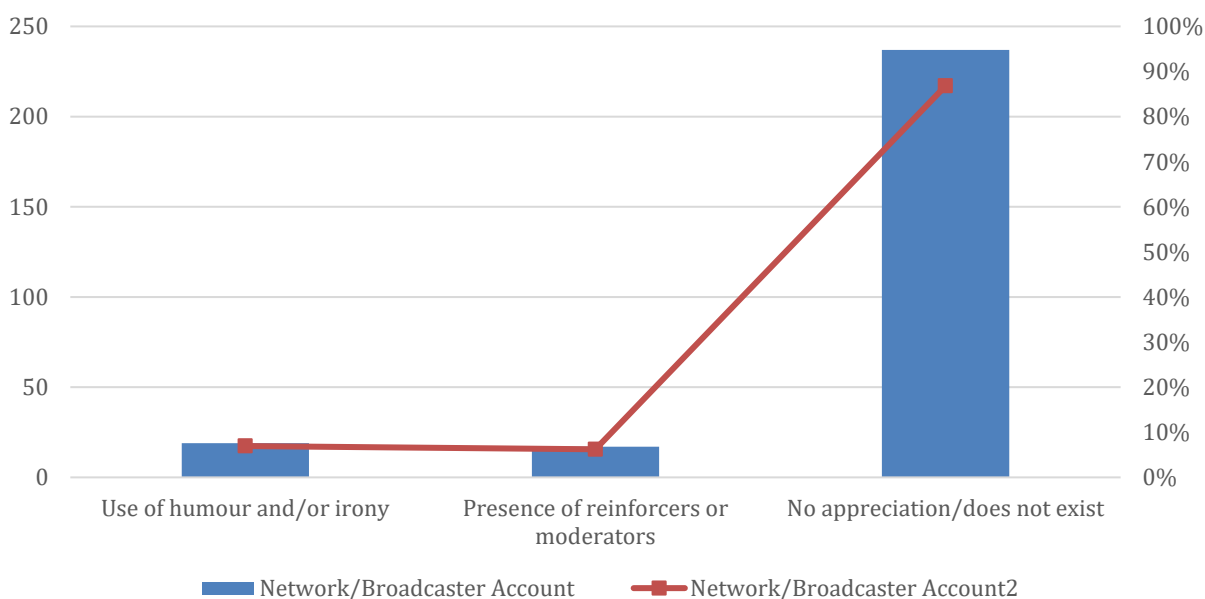

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

3.3. Radio Televisión Española Debate Broadcasting Windows: 19 July 2023

In terms of linear viewing, the debate broadcast by RTVE between Pedro Sánchez, the PSOE candidate, Santiago Abascal, the VOX candidate, and Yolanda Díaz, the Sumar candidate, had a 34.6% share of the screen, with an average of 4,155,000 viewers. These figures are the sum of the audience of La 1 (28.8% and 3.4 million) and the 24-hour channel (5.8% and 696,000). In addition, a total of 7,806,000 viewers watched this linear broadcast. La 1 led the way with a 13.4% audience share.

In terms of audience profile, there was a difference with the broadcast of the Atresmedia debate. On this occasion, the age groups with the highest audience share were 25-44 (37%) and 64+ (35%), closely followed by the 13-24 and 45-64 age groups, both with 34.3%. The golden minute of the day came on La 1 at 22:55, with 3,878,000 viewers and a 31% share (Barlovento Comunicación, 2023b). This minute was also the most watched minute of the whole month on linear television in Spain. Taking both public channels into account, the same golden minute was watched by 4.6 million people, representing 36.8% of screen time (Barlovento Comunicación, 2023e).

On the other hand, in terms of time slots, the public broadcaster broadcast the debate on 19 July on La 1, Canal 24 Horas, TVE Internacional, RNE, Radio 5 and Radio Exterior. In terms of digital broadcasting, it was shown on the RTVE play channels and the RTVE noticias account on YouTube (which gathered 16,737 internet users at 22:15, while at 23:15 this figure had increased to 22,391 internet users, a figure higher than that achieved for the debate on 22 April 2019). The main novelty compared to the broadcast of the 2019 election debate was the broadcast on TikTok through the RTVE Noticias account, which reached 314,570 live views. For its part, the @rtvenoticias account on Instagram linked to the institutional website. In addition, the company's Twitter (X) profiles (@rtvenoticias, @La1_tve, @rne) did not broadcast live. This joint viewing was reinforced by the sharing of the signal with various media from the radio or written press, such as *El País, ABC, La Vanguardia, La Voz de Galicia* and *Cadena Ser*. In fact, this digital audience reached 207,500 unique visitors who followed the live debate on RTVE play.

Image 4: Captures from the newspapers *El País*, *ABC*, *La Vanguardia*, *La Voz de Galicia* and *Cadena Ser.*
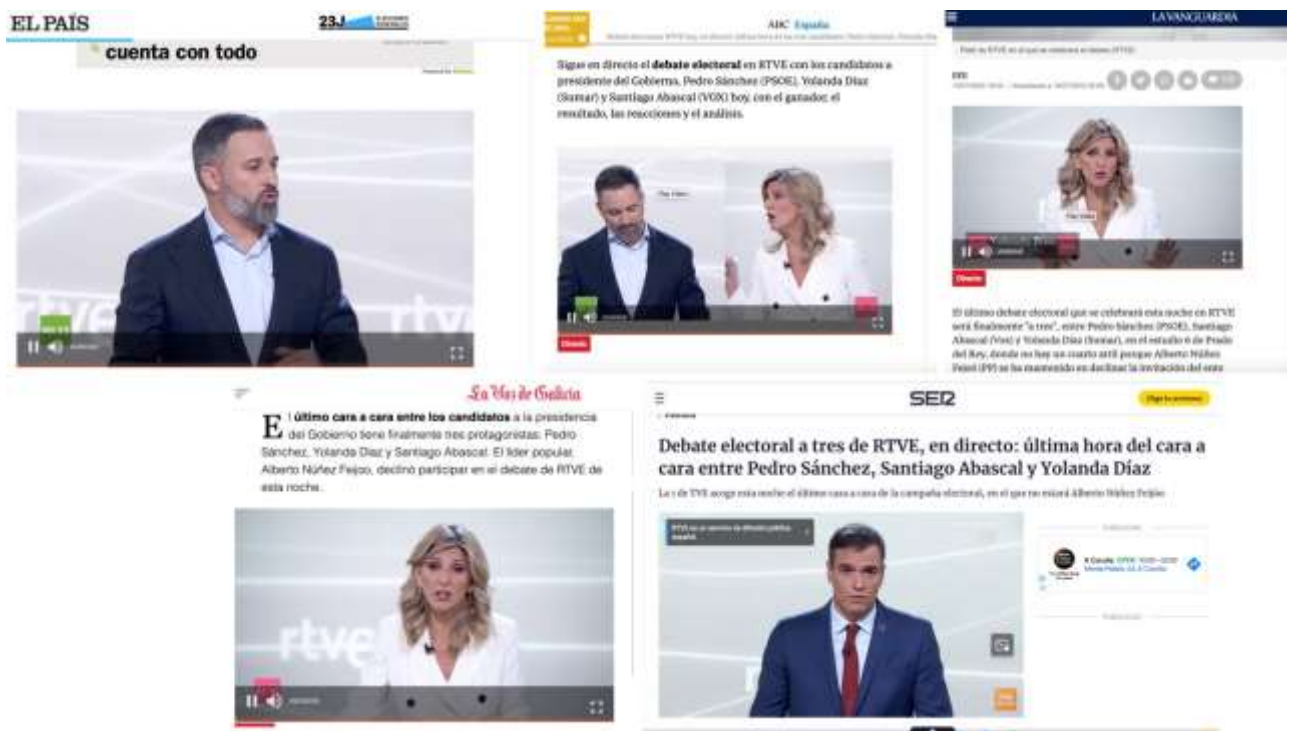
Source: *El País, ABC, La Vanguardia*, *La Voz de Galicia* and *Cadena Ser.*

Although Twitter (X) was not the central social network in the public broadcaster's strategy, the impact of the debate on it is undeniable, as it was the most commented on programme of the day. It received 308,600 tweets from 75,500 unique authors, representing almost 34 million impressions. It is worth noting that the social audience reached by the Atresmedia debate is double that of the public broadcaster.

3.4. Social Conversation Among Twitter Users During the RTVE Debate

The analysis of responses generated during the RTVE debate also shows the presence of uncivil comments. Specifically, this manifestation is present in 98% of the comments analysed. As can be seen in Figure 5, the incivility is mainly directed towards the candidate (72.4%). Some of the examples found in the sample of attacks on candidates are "I wonder where they got Yolanda from. It seems to me an extraordinary merit that a useless woman like her has made it this far"; "The communist Yoli and the psychopathic liar always think the same thing about sex, rape, euthanasia, abortion, the pill, etc. etc." or "In my village we say: two against one... for each of them. I think Yoli and Pinocchio will end up cuddling each other".

The study also reveals negative comments directed at political parties and/or the political class (7.8%) and at the combination of candidates and political parties (3.9%). On the other hand, incivility directed at "other groups" accounts for 13.3%, and is often directed at RTVE's final debate moderators, who are criticised for their lack of impartiality.

**Figure 5.** Distribution of the direction of incivism in RTVE.
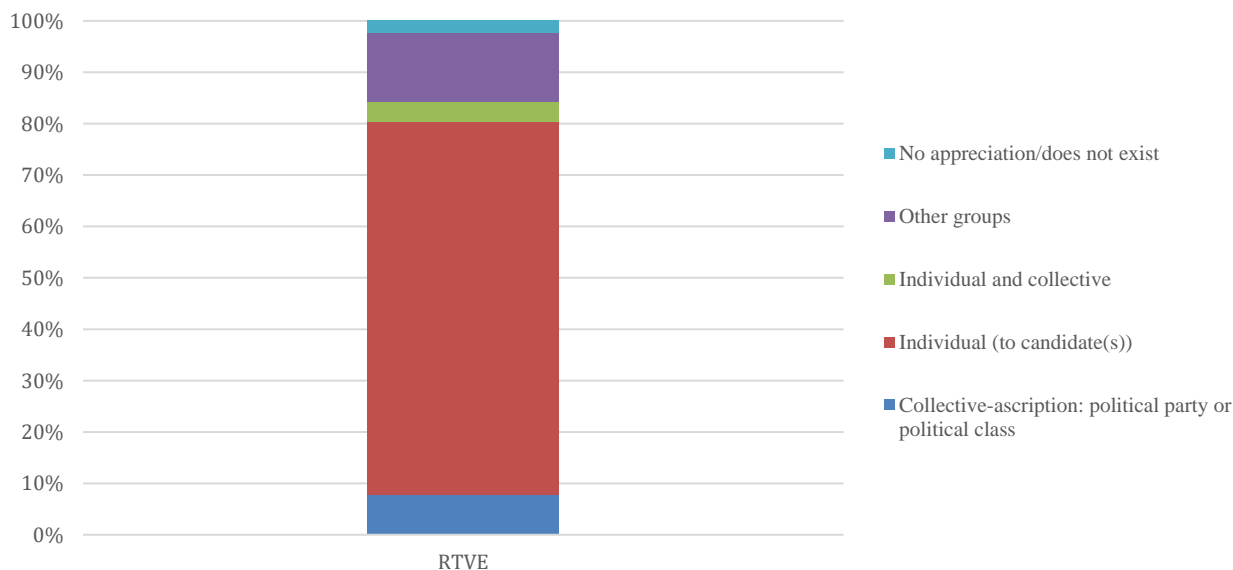
Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Similarly, in the social conversation of the prosumers of the RTVE debate, there was a high prevalence of "offensive incivism" (70%), above the "upstander" discourse (26.7%), and no response to "extreme incivility" comments. The following are examples of comments classified as "offensive incivism": "@sanchezcastejon Hopefully on the 24th you'll fuck off and leave us in peace." or "Summary: 2 vs 1. Yolanda and Pedro Sánchez sucking each other's 🍑 I can imagine the lying Sánchez in front of Abascal and Feijoó..."

On the other hand, it should be noted that "offensive incivism" are more frequent (Figure 6) in the accounts of @rtvenoticias (51.1%) and @La1_tve (14.9%). On the other hand, alternative "upstander" discourse is found in similar proportions in the accounts of @rtvenoticias (16.5%) and @La1_tve (10.2%).
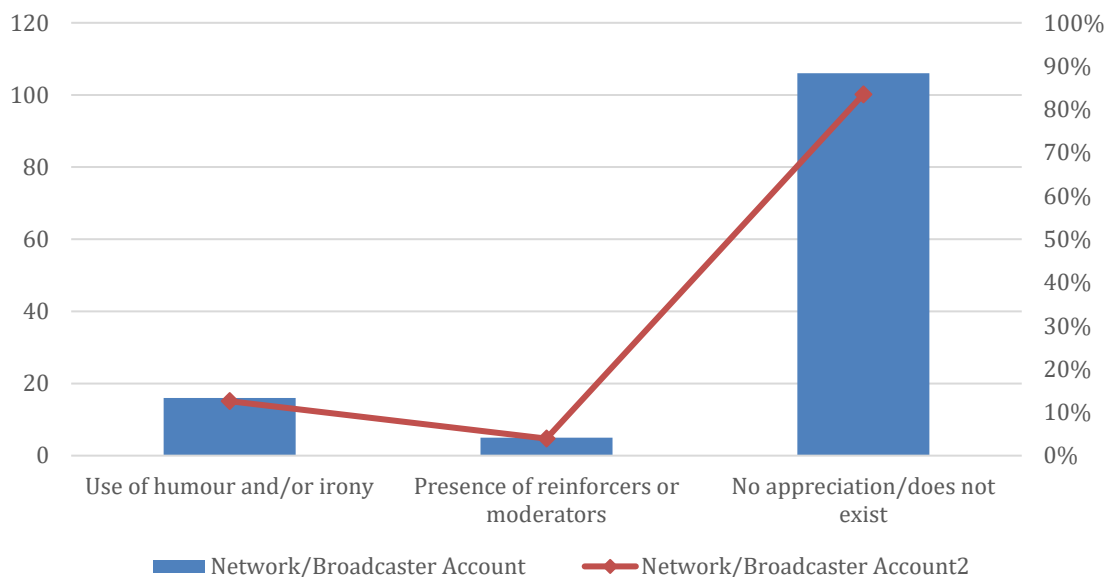
Figure 6. Distribution of the level of incivility in RTVE
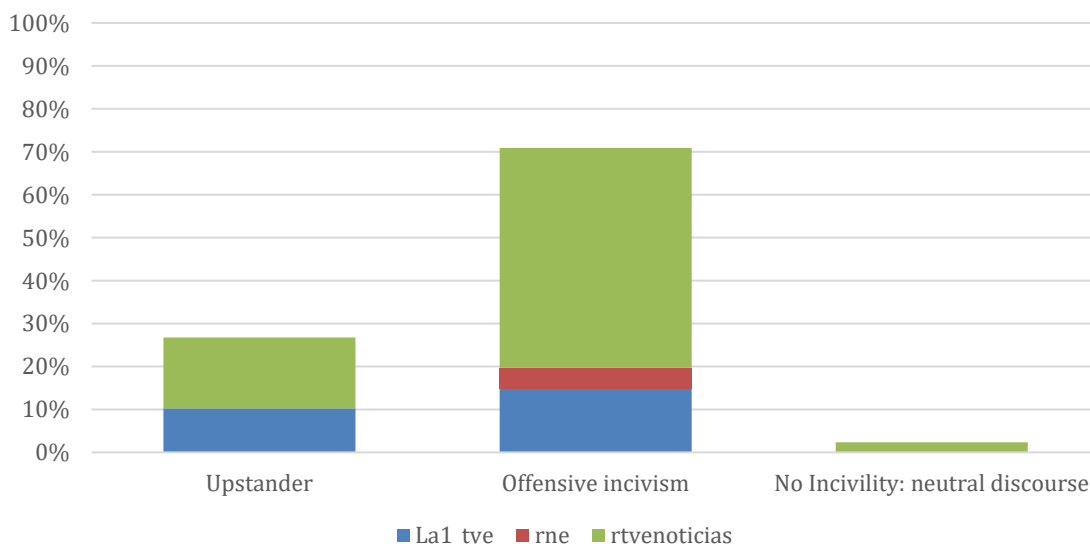
Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

There is also a generalised use of insults and pejoratives in the comments on the RTVE debate, mainly directed at the candidates. The aim is to highlight the "liar" quality (Image 5) of Pedro Sánchez, Santiago Abascal and Yolanda Díaz, as can be seen in the following comments: "Personally, I will remove my vote when the compulsive liar and bust communist speaks"; "She knows him by heart... with a mouth and a nice face, the false liar" or "Abascal, populist and liar". Similarly, prosumers use other qualifying terms

to refer to candidates, such as "*corqui*", "communist", "useless", "clown", "*Pinocchio*" or "idiot", with the intention of negatively highlighting their individual abilities or ideological affiliation.

Image 5. Word cloud of the most used insults in the RTVE debate.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

On the other hand, the highest level of engagement is not related to the presence of insults or pejorative words. The comments that generate more engagement in the debate organised by RTVE, that is, more comments, retweets and likes within the sample analysed, respond to alternative "upstander" discourse or "offensive incivism" (Image 6). However, the level of engagement recorded in the comments is low, with the range from 0 to 5 (78.7%) dominating the entire sample analysed.

Image 6. Comments with more engagement within the RTVE sample.

Source: Twitter.

Regarding the presence of uncivil discourse features in the comments, the percentage obtained in the variable "no appreciation/does not exist" is 83.4%. In the cases where a variable is identified in this section, the predominant category is the use of "humour and/or irony" (12.60%), as in the following example: "Feijoo has just appeared...", alluding to his absence from the tripartite debate organised by the public broadcaster.

Figure 7. Distribution of the features of uncivil discourse in RTVE.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

5. Conclusions

This research highlights the limited use made by the television channels of digital broadcasting windows for the retransmission of the debates, a strategy that could significantly increase the following of this format and which partially confirms the first hypothesis (H1). The Atresmedia group maintained a limited and closed broadcasting strategy, as it hardly gave the signal to third parties and did not use its spaces on social networks or YouTube. Its incursions into the digital sphere were limited to its corporate websites. In this way, Atresmedia continues with the same line as in 2019 in terms of the broadcasting windows of the electoral debates (González-Neira et al., 2020), avoiding synergies between its viewing windows.

Radio Televisión Española, on the other hand, shows a more innovative character, opting for a multiplatform offer that includes several screens. The possibility of using Twitch is on hold, as this platform is dominated by user-generated content rather than that of the TV channels. However, compared to the 2019 strategy, RTVE has incorporated its presence on TikTok and has stopped using Periscope due to the closure of this platform. These data from the public corporation reflect the strengthening of its digital commitment, a trend it has been promoting for several years and which positions it as the most innovative state channel in this area. Although we do not have standardised data on digital audiences to give us a global view of consumption, it is clear that these figures support the idea of television increasingly linked to live content.

Furthermore, the research partially confirms the second hypothesis (H2) by showing that the broadcasts of the 23J debates generated a high prevalence of uncivil comments on Twitter (X), mostly abusive, and often laced with insults and pejoratives. These messages deal with events from the televised political debate or have caused social alarm within the campaign and are mainly directed at the candidates. The results also show signs of social polarisation that could trigger hate speech. In contrast, the comments that generate the most engagement in both samples are not particularly emotional and sensational. On the contrary, insults are avoided and although humorous and/or ironic constructions are found, the user's intention to be rational is perceived (Images 3 and 6). Thus, prosumers' participation in the form of likes, comments or retweets supports the coherent and logical online discourse produced during the broadcast of the debate, rather than the negative, denigrating, insulting and unconstructive comments.

Finally, it should be noted that the results of this research were limited by the eagerness of the broadcasters to publish their own audience figures and the follow-up to these election debates in the digital sphere. Thus, this article could have gone deeper into the segmentation of the digital audience

profile to provide a more accurate picture of the identity of this audience. In addition, the constant changes to Twitter's API (X) made it difficult to extract information.

For future research, the study could be extended with analysis on other platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to explore similarities and differences in terms of active audience following, especially among younger audiences. In addition, the findings on the content of the messages posted by the audiences themselves and their degree of polarisation and incivility could serve as a comparative element for future research on election debates.

6. Acknowledgements

References

Amman, M. & Meloy, J. R. (2021). Stochastic terrorism: A linguistic and psychological analysis. Perspectives on Terrorism, 15(5), 2-13. https://bit.ly/3zcXRIn

Apablaza-Campos, A. (2022). Social Media Live Television (SMLTV): experiencias televisivas en directo a través de las redes sociales. *Documentación de las Ciencias de la Información*, 45(1), 45-51. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4407-1145

Ballesteros, C. (2019). La representación digital del *engagement*: hacia una percepción del compromiso a través de acciones simbólicas. *Revista de Comunicación*, 18(1), 215-233. https://doi.org/10.26441/RC18.1-2019-A11

Barré, K. (2023). Twitch como alternativa a la televisión. *Signum: Revista Internacional de Investigación en Eventos, Protocolo y Relaciones Institucionales*, 2(1), 16-38. https://cutly.vercel.app/W8e8U

Benoit, W. L. & Hansen, G. J. (2004). Presidential debate watching, issue knowledge, character evaluation, and vote choice. *Human Communication Research*, 30(1), 121-144. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2004.tb00727.x

Carlón, M. & Scolari, C. (2009). *El fin de los medios. El comienzo de un debate*. La Crujía.

Casado Ruiz, A., Vaca Berdayes, R. & Legorburu Hortelano, J.M. (2020). La transformación de los grandes debates electorales televisivos de abril de 2019. Innovación, similitudes y diferencias entre RTVE y Atresmedia. In I. Puentes-Rivera, A. B. Fernández-Souto & M. Vázquez Gestal, M. (Coords.), *Debate sobre los debates electorales y nuevas formas de comunicación política* (pp. 27-48). Cuadernos Artesanos de Comunicación.

Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.

CIS (2023). *Estudio 3421. Estudio sobre audiencias de medios de comunicación social*. https://cutly.vercel.app/Uqp2Y

Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*. Polity.

Dhanesh, G. (2017). Putting engagement in its Proper place: State of the field, definition and model of engagement. *Public Relations Review*, 43(5), 925–933. https://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.04.0

Diez, N. L., Gulías, E. J., & Martínez, P. C. (2020). La percepción de los debates como factor de decisión en el comportamiento electoral en las Elecciones Generales de abril de 2019. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, (76), 39-58. https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1436

Diez-Gracia, A. & Sánchez-García, P. (2022). Brecha informativa en la 'triple agenda digital'. Intereses dispares entre medio, audiencia y redes. Communication & Society, 35(1), 63-80. https://cutly.vercel.app/WsLHS

EBU (2023). *Audience trends media intelligence service july 2023 television*. https://cutly.vercel.app/gPTKO

Eguzkitza-Mestraitua, G., Casado-del-Río, M.Á. & Guimerá-i-Orts, J.À. (2023). Comunidades de personas usuarias de Instagram y Twitter de las plataformas audiovisuales online destinadas a la juventud: Playz, MTMAD y Flooxer. *Revista Mediterránea De Comunicación*, 14(1), 51–67. https://doi.org/10.14198/MEDCOM.23165

El Confidencial (2023, 17 july). Las 10 mejores frases de Pedro Sánchez en el cara a cara del debate de las elecciones en Atresmedia. *El Confidencial*. https://cutly.vercel.app/-LejG

El Mundo (2023, 29 de may). Fecha de las elecciones en España 2023: cuándo son las elecciones generales. *El Mundo*. https://cutly.vercel.app/kXptC

El País (2023, 20 de june). Anatomía de una estrategia de polarización: objetivo, "derogar el sanchismo". *El País*, Recuperado de: https://cutly.vercel.app/g-ylh

Elmer, G. (2013). Live research: Twittering an election debate. *New media & society*, 15(1), 18-30. https://www.doi.org/10.1177/1461444812457328

Fernández García, F. (2017). *La descortesía en el debate electoral cara a cara*. Editorial Universidad de Sevilla.

Fontecoba, N., Fernández-Souto, A. & Puentes-Rivera, I. (2020). Los programas de infoentretenimiento como sustituto de los debates electorales: el caso de Miguel Ángel Revilla. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, (76), 59-80. https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1437

Fontenla-Pedreira, J., Rúas-Araújo, J. & Conde-Vázquez, E. (2020a). Audiencia en redes sociales de los debates televisados en las elecciones generales de abril de 2019. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 76, 1- 16. https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1434

Fontenla-Pedreira, J., Rúas-Araújo, J. & Puentes-Rivera, I. (2020b). El debate electoral de las elecciones generales del 10N de 2019 en las redes sociales de RTVE. *El profesional de la información*, 29(6), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.nov.03

Gallardo-Camacho, J., Melendo Rodríguez-Carmona, L. & Presol Herrero, Á. (2023). Divulgación y representación de contenidos audiovisuales científicos en la red social TikTok. *Fotocinema: revista científica de cine y fotografía*, (27), 9-32. https://cutly.vercel.app/u1TAA

Gallego, M. & Martínez, I. (2013). Comunicación institucional en los debates electorales entre candidatos a la presidencia del Gobierno en España en las elecciones generales (2008 y 2011). *Orbis. Revista Científica Ciencias Humanas*, 9(26), 143-160. https://cutly.vercel.app/t26eM

García, J. (2015). La cobertura mediática de los debates electorales en España. *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*, (38), 135-161. https://cutly.vercel.app/ivAUS

García-Avilés, J.A. (2012). Roles of audience participation in multiplatform television: From fans and consumers to collaborators and activists, Participations. *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 9(2),429-447. http://dspace.umh.es/handle/11000/4574

González-Neira, A., Berrocal-Gonzalo, S. & Zamora-Martínez, P. (2020). Fórmulas de emisión y consumo de los debates televisivos en España en las elecciones legislativas de 2019. *El profesional de la información*, 29(2), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.mar.21

Guo, L. & McCombs, M. (2011). *Network agenda setting: A third level of media effects* [Conference Session]. ICA Annual Conference, Boston, Estados Unidos.

Herrarte Hernández, M. & Zamora-Martínez, P. (2020). La comunicación no verbal en las elecciones andaluzas 2018. Susana Díaz versus Teresa Rodríguez en el debate de RTVE. *Ámbitos. Revista Internacional de Comunicación* 49, pp. 158-176. https://doi.org/10.12795/Ambitos.2020.i49.10

IAB (2023). *Estudio de redes sociales 2023*. https://cutly.vercel.app/CWdMk

Jenkins, H., Ford, S. & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York University Press.

Kalsnes, B., Krumsvik, A. H. & Storsul, T. (2014). Social media as a political backchannel: Twitter use during televised election debates in Norway. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 66(3), 313-328. https://www.doi.org/10.1108/AJIM-09-2013-0093

Kreiss, D. (2014). Seizing the moment: The presidential campaigns' use of Twitter during the 2012 electoral cycle. *New Media & Society*, 18(8), 1473-1490. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814562445

Lagares Diez, N., Jaráiz Gulías, E. & Castro Martínez, P. (2020). La percepción de los debates como factor de decisión en el comportamiento electoral en las Elecciones Generales de abril de 2019. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 76,39-58. https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1436

López-García, G., Llorca-Abad, G., Valera-Ordaz, L. & Peris-Blanes, A. (2018). Los debates electorales, ¿el último reducto frente a la mediatización? Un estudio de caso de las elecciones generales españolas de 2015. *Palabra Clave*, 21(3), 772-797. http://www.doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2018.21.3.6

Luengo, Ó. G. (2013). *Medios y elecciones en España: La cobertura televisiva de la campaña de 2008*. Editorial Universidad de Granada.

Marín, B. (2019). El debate electoral cara a cara (1993-2019): nacimiento, desarrollo y retos de un formato de televisión consolidado en España con audiencias millonarias. *Razón y Palabra*, 23(105), 152-322. https://cutly.vercel.app/aLG67

Márquez Martínez, L. (2017). ¿Son los debates electorales la nueva Eurovisión? Análisis del seguimiento de dos eventos masivos a través de Twitter. *Revista Dígitos, 1*(3), 137-162. http://www.doi.org/10.7203/rd.v1i3.96

Martín-Neira, J. I., Trillo-Domínguez, M. & Olvera-Lobo, M.D. (2023). De la televisión a TikTok: Nuevos formatos audiovisuales para comunicar ciencia. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 1-27. https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2023.8441

Matthes, J. & Kohring, M. (2008). The content analysis of media frames: Toward improving reliability and validity. *Journal of Communication*, 58(2), 258-279. https://bit.ly/3H9ngY0

McKinney, M. S. & Carlin, D. B. (2004). Political campaign debates. In L. Lee Kaid (Ed.), *Handbook of political communication research* (pp. 203-234). LEA.

Medina, M., Portilla, I. & Pereira, T. (2023). Estudio exploratorio sobre qué significa 'engagement' en las empresas de comunicación. *Revista De Comunicación*, *22*(2), 339–352. https://doi.org/10.26441/RC22.2-2023-3159

Mendieta Bartolomé, A. (2023). Las estrategias multiplataforma de Euskal Irrati Telebista para las nuevas audiencias: los retos de una televisión pública en lengua minoritaria. *Anàlisi*, 68, 157-175. https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3503

Morales, R. & García Gordillo, M. del M. (2023). Entre el «cara a cara» y la multiplicidad de candidatos: el debate electoral televisado en Europa (2019-2022). *Ámbitos. Revista Internacional De Comunicación*, (59), 127–146. https://doi.org/10.12795/Ambitos.2023.i59.09

Navarro, V. J. (2019). Los debates electorales en la televisión: una necesaria revisión de su regulación. *Revista Española de Derecho Constitucional*, 116, 75-110. https://doi.org/10.18042/cepc/redc.116.03

Pedro, J. (2022). Glocalización cultural en la era del vídeo bajo demanda. Diversidad de contenido en Netflix, HBO y Prime Video. *Visual Review. International Visual Culture Review*, 9, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.37467/revvisual.v9.3699.

Pérez-Curiel, C. & García-Gordillo, M. (2020). Indicadores de influencia de los políticos españoles en Twitter. Un análisis en el marco de las elecciones en Cataluña. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 26(3), 1133-1144. https://doi.org/10.5209/esmp.64880

Piller, F., Ihl, C. & Vossen, A. (2011). A typology of customer co-creation in the innovation process. En H. Heidemarie y Volker, W. (Eds.). *New forms of collaborative production and innovation: Economic, social, legal and technical characteristics and conditions* (pp. 1-26). Universität Göttingen. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1732127

Quintas-Froufe, N. & Quintas-Froufe, E. (2010). Cara a cara electoral televisado. Análisis audiovisual de los debates entre los candidatos a la presidencia española. *Miguel Hernández Communication Journal*, *2*, 20-39. https://cutly.vercel.app/8mJbY

Quintas-Froufe, N., González-Neira, A. & Conde-Vázquez, E. (2020). El interés de la audiencia española en la política televisada: de los debates electorales al politainment. *Communication & Society*, 33(3), 85-100. https://doi.org/10.15581/003.33.3.85-100

Rodríguez-Breijo, V., & Gallardo-Camacho, J. (2020). Audiencia en diferido de debates electorales: una excepción del género informativo. *El profesional de la información*, 29(2), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.mar.18

Rozados Lorenzo, A. J. (2022). New Audiovisual Trends with the One-person Consumme as the New Reality: From group experience to personalized individual consumption. *VISUAL REVIEW. International Visual Culture Review / Revista Internacional De Cultura Visual*, 10(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.37467/revvisual.v9.3610

Saavedra-Llamas M., Papí-Gálvez, N. & Perlado-Lamo-de-Espinosa, M. (2020). Televisión y redes sociales: las audiencias sociales en la estrategia publicitaria. *El profesional de la información*, 29(2), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.mar.06

Saavedra-Llamas, M., Rodríguez Fernández, L. & Barón Dulce, G. (2015): Audiencia social en España: Estrategias de éxito en la televisión nacional, *ICONO14. Revista Científica de Comunicación y Tecnologías Emergentes*, 13, 215-237. https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v13i2.822

Sheafer, T. (2007). How to evaluate it: The role of story-evaluative tone in agenda setting and priming. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 21-39. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00327.x

Stroud, N. J., Scacco, J. M., Muddiman, A. & Curry, L. E. (2015). Changing Deliberative Norms on News Organizations' Facebook Sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 20(2), 188-203. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12104

Téllez, N., Muñiz, C. & Ramírez, J. (2010). Función discursiva en los debates televisados. Un estudio transcultural de los debates políticos en México, España y Estados Unidos. *Palabra clave*, *13*(2), 251-270. http://www.doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2010.13.2.2

Vázquez Barrio, T. & Campos Zabala, M. V. (2020). El contra debate de Vox en Twitter: boicot, ninguneo y mensajes antisistema. *Sphera Publica*, 2(20), 51-72. https://cutly.vercel.app/1-P8r

Wimmer, R.D. & Dominick, J.R. (1996). *La investigación científica de los medios de comunicación. Una introducción a sus métodos*. Bosch Comunicación.

Zamora-Martínez, P. Gascón-Vera, P. & Gómez-García, S. (2024). El discurso de odio hacia las candidatas a la Comunidad de Madrid 2023, sesgo de género y virulencia. *ICONO14. Revista Científica de Comunicación y Tecnologías Emergentes*, 22(1). 1-23. https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v22i1.2079

Zamora-Martínez, P., Gascón-Vera, P. & Antona Jimeno, T. (In Prensa/2024). El juicio de la Monarquía en Twitter. Análisis de los comentarios sobre la retransmisión del mensaje de Navidad del Rey en 2022. In A. Moreno, E. Said-Hung y M. Römer (Eds.), *Expresiones de odio en entornos digitales españoles* (pp. 153-171). Tirant Lo Blanch.