The credibility of newscasts in public service media in Spain

La credibilidad de los informativos de la televisión pública en España

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ABSTRACT

The audiences of generalist television's newscasts reflect that the viewers' interests and loyalties are constantly changing. Research shows that several elements influence the success of programs and formats, but in this paper, we draw attention to the factors that determine the credibility of newscasts. We also want to know how pluralism is safeguarded in newscasts, as we consider that credibility and pluralism are two intertwined values that influence one another. As credibility is a subjective value, it is required to find new information criteria that is suitable and of the utmost rigor. The main aim is to delve into whether there is a consensus on the basic parameters for the definition, identification, and assessment of credibility of nationwide public service media in Spain. Moreover, we are also interested in whether audience figures can be used to determine the degree of trust of newscasts. The analysis brings forward the observations of researchers, scholars and media professionals that offer a vision on the different approaches that integrate the multiple aspects affecting news consumption and interpretation. We conclude that credibility is a concept composed of multidimensional components, resulting from a process where different filters condition fact perception. That is why a story can have different meanings, related to the different point of views of citizens.

RESUMEN

Las audiencias de los informativos de las televisiones generalistas reflejan que el interés y la fidelidad de los espectadores cambian constantemente. Numerosas investigaciones demuestran que existen elementos que intervienen en el éxito de programas y formatos, pero aquí analizamos qué factores determinan la credibilidad de los informativos. Y también queremos conocer cómo se garantiza el pluralismo en los telediarios, porque la credibilidad y el pluralismo son valores que están relacionados entre sí y se condicionan mutuamente. Como la credibilidad es un valor subjetivo, es necesario buscar criterios informativos que permitan analizarla con rigor. El objetivo principal es averiguar si existe un consenso sobre los parámetros que sirven para definir, identificar y valorar la credibilidad en la televisión pública estatal en España. Además, interesa saber si los índices de audiencia sirven para determinar el grado de confianza en los informativos. Aquí aportamos las observaciones de investigadores, expertos académicos y profesionales, que ofrecen una visión de las diferentes perspectivas que integran los múltiples aspectos que condicionan la lectura y la interpretación de las noticias. Una conclusión transversal que se extrae de esta investigación es que la credibilidad es un concepto con componentes multidimensionales, fruto de un proceso en el que intervienen varios filtros que condicionan la percepción de los hechos. Por eso un relato puede tener múltiples significados, que se corresponden con los diferentes puntos de vista de los ciudadanos.

1. Introduction and the state of the issue

The convergence of factors that define the current media ecosystem has increased mistrust towards the media and created distance between media outlets and the public (Edelman, 2022; Newman et al., 2022). The crisis of trust in, and credibility of, Western media systems have all been exacerbated by the proliferation of digital media (Samuel-Azran & Hayat, 2019), changes in information consumption habits, including incidental news exposure (Goyanes, 2020) and news avoidance (Edgerly, 2022), as well as the intensification of social polarization (Hameleers & Brosius, 2022; Masip et al., 2020; Suiter & Fletcher, 2020) and the rise of populist movements that question democratic institutions and accuse the media of spreading fake news (Holtz-Bacha, 2021).

Despite the findings of recent studies that indicate that the evolution of mistrust in the media is not a universal trend (Hanitzsch et al., 2018), the increase in citizen disaffection towards the media system is cause for concern as credibility is essential for the proper functioning of modern democracies. These societies are based on informed participation in civil life and trust in the institutions and activities that structure the public sphere (Arlt, 2019).

Research on the credibility of news media has long been conducted. This originated with the emergence of the mass media and has been approached from different fields. According to Calvo-Porral et al. (2014), from a social psychology perspective, credibility is understood as a subjective variable linked to the circumstances of the recipient of the information. However, from a communication sciences perspective, credibility is defined by the seeking of objective criteria that measure and assess the degree of accuracy of the information transmitted. As early as 1953, studies from Yale University also addressed credibility as one of the variables that influence the efficiency of communication (Hovland et al., 1953). Furthermore, through the economic lens of the information company, credibility is a coveted asset of an organization since it defines its reputation and influences economic outcomes (Vanacker & Belmas, 2009).

Nonetheless, though the study of credibility is nothing new (Lee, 2010; Jakobsson & Stiernstedt, 2023), there is a lack of consensus over the definition of credibility. This is similar to the debate on quality (Camacho-Ordóñez, 2005). One of the main problems comes from the multidimensional nature of the idea of media credibility. Appelman and Sundar (2016) distinguish between trust in information sources, trust in the message, and trust in the media. Stromback et al. (2020) go further and develop a conceptualization of media confidence that spans from the general to the specific and includes the following dimensions: news media in general, types of media, individual media brands, journalists, and media content.

Among the multiple interpretations of the meaning of media credibility, the tendency to define the concept based on its characteristics or subcomponents is apparent. Appelman and Sundar (2016) view this as problematic because it generates difficulties when one tries to differentiate whether the term used for the definition is a synonym or a component. Even so, in scientific literature the credibility of media is often associated with concepts such as reliability and honesty (Engelke et al., 2019), objectivity and the clear separation between information and opinion (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986), as well as with fairness, comprehensive event coverage, accuracy, and balance (Thorson et al., 2010).

In addition to the efforts to define the concept of credibility, investigations carried out on this topic have also analyzed the factors that gauge the strength of the media's credibility. First of all, one must consider which aspects of credibility should be analyzed. Studies such as that of Daniller et al. (2017) confirm that surveys asking about the public's trust in news media in general indicate much lower levels of trust than those in which the questions relate to specific media outlets. On the other hand, the relationship between media consumption and media credibility has also been questioned. While some research (Arlt, 2019; Roses & Farias-Batlle, 2012) suggests that trust in the media is linked to the consumption habits of citizens, –meaning the more time they dedicate to a media source, the more credible they view it–, others consider it necessary to distinguish between following, loyalty and credibility (Callejo-Gallego, 2015; Picone & Donders, 2020).

The credibility of the media can also be affected by the sources used in the configuration of the information. Miller and Kurpius (2010) show that official sources are more credible than citizen sources, and that hard news stories grant media outlets with greater credibility than soft news stories. In contrast,

Calvo-Porral et al. (2014) affirm that the construction of an attractive and solid image is something that can boost media credibility. In any case, the use of plural and diverse sources is essential to build the credibility of news media (Moran & Nechushtai, 2022).

Public media are the information sources that European citizens trust the most (European Parliament, 2022). This means greater social expectations (Mateos-Martín et al., 2021; Mateos, 2021) and thus the increased importance of perceived credibility. In addition, credibility is directly linked to many core values of public service broadcasting, such as impartiality, independence, quality, diversity, integrity or accuracy (Biltereyst, 2004). For this reason, a change in the evaluation and accountability methods of public broadcasters is currently needed, moving the focus from audience data to credibility levels (Picone & Donders, 2020). As Picone and Donders (2020) argue, given the particularities of public media, a priori independent of political and economic interests, they have an advantage in achieving a balance between quality information, reach, and trust. On the other hand, having credible public media outlets that citizens trust is important not only for these corporations, but for the entire media and democratic ecosystem (Campos-Rueda & Goyanes, 2022). Indeed, research such as that of Arlt (2019), focused on the Swiss context, argue that the consumption of news from public service media is associated with higher levels of trust in journalistic quality.

2. Material and methods

The main objective of this research is to verify whether there is a consensus among researchers, academics, and communication professionals on the basic parameters that serve to define, identify, measure, and assess information credibility. The specific objectives entail identifying the elements and factors that determine credibility and pluralism in public television news.

The hypothesis is that credibility, for experts and professionals, is a subjective factor that is linked to an external perception of the media outlet over and above the perception of the actual contents. For this reason, credibility does not always coincide with journalistic rigor or with the truth of the facts. We are aware of the difficulties involved in measuring and assessing something as apparently intangible and subjective as credibility. It also must be recognized that it is difficult to analyze pluralism, one of the elements that determines credibility (Suárez-Villegas et al., 2020), because quantitative and qualitative factors are at play here.

The nature of the object of study makes this a complex project. Nonetheless, a methodology is employed that is designed to guarantee the rigor of the results. Firstly, as a result of the demand for qualitative research on media credibility (Garusi & Splendore, 2023; Jakobsson & Stiernstedt, 2023), a focus group was formed (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Krueger & Casey, 2014) at the University of Santiago de Compostela. It was made up of 17 Communication Sciences researchers from eight different universities who were members of an R&D project on the values of public audiovisual media. All the participants are experts in public broadcasting and therefore are highly qualified to comment on credibility and pluralism in the news. To investigate the extent to which consensus exists regarding the object of study, the interventions of the participants were developed in three rounds in which there were a series of questions derived from the scientific literature on credibility. The session was recorded, transcribed and analyzed with Atlas.TI.

In the first round, the experts were asked what credibility means to them as a means to evaluate the value of information presented by public service broadcasters. They were also asked for a definition of credibility and what characteristics and conditions it entails. In the second round the participants were asked if the audience data can be used to determine the degree of credibility of the information. In the third round, they are asked about the relationship between credibility and pluralism and what factors favor or undermine each concept. The responses of the participants are coded as G1, G2, G3, etc. G2 acted as moderator.

To broaden the perspective of the focus group and to obtain the most qualified opinions, 20 academics were interviewed online. They were all professors of Audiovisual Communication and Journalism and all experts in public television, audiovisual information and audience analysis. Academic experts were asked the following: what parameters determine credibility? how is it achieved? how is it maintained? why is it

lost? what elements guarantee it? and what procedures favor it? Their responses are coded as A1, A2, A3, etc.

Lastly, these same questions were put, also online, to five RTVE editors who have worked in the national, international, political, economic and society news departments (these five sectors are the ones that provide a structure for the information services of public television) in order to find their opinions on credibility from the professional field. The responses are coded as P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5. RTVE was selected as it has state coverage. Furthermore, we argue that it is representative of all public channels because the structure and production routines of news services are very similar to those of regional television.

The questions put to the members of the focus group, the academics, and editors are consistent with the lines of work developed in the R&D project on the values of the public audiovisual media mentioned above. We believe that this investigation is necessary and is justified by the ongoing changes that are apparent within the news broadcasting leadership. An emblematic example of this is the TVE newscasts, which went from being audience leaders until 2014 to occupying third place in 2022.

3. Analysis and results

3.1. Focus group

In the first round of the focus group, the G10 expert states that credibility is something subjective that helps to shape attitudes towards and opinions regarding facts or media. For this reason, a news outlet or a piece of news can have different evaluations according to the perception of each citizen. On the other hand, for G1, credibility is multidimensional, meaning that trust, independence, veracity and transparency are all involved.

For G4, credibility is also something multidimensional, but with many nuances. For this reason, a piece of news is credible or not depending on the characteristics of each person. Factors such as emotion, format and the news outlet itself must be taken into account when attempting to define such a complex concept. G7 and G16 agree on the importance of G4's point as they contend that trust (G7) and legitimacy (G16) are also necessary elements. G17 argues that the credibility of a media outlet or a journalist does not depend only on the approach or the informative treatment of the facts, stating that external conditioning factors inherent to each viewer can also be influential. Thus, G4 contends it is very important to think about the value chain when trying to define credibility, something that includes the different phases of the information process (sources, writing, editing and consumption). G4 further states that a series of values must be present in each stage of the process (including independence, quality, diversity of sources, verification, veracity, credibility, pluralism, transparency, general interest, objectivity and innovation).

Most of the experts (G1, G3, G4, G5, G7, G9, G11, G12, G13, G14, G15, G16, G17) associate credibility with trust. Nonetheless, taking a closer look at the finer details reveals the lack of consensus about the object of study. For G3 and G9, credibility depends on the trust generated by the source, but for G9 and G15 the number of sources is very important. On the other hand, G5, G12 and G14 do not mention the trust in the source, but do refer to the trust generated by the media outlet, something that transcends the news as it affects all the contents. Furthermore, G14 says that conversations about credibility are really conversations about content, and that when we talk about trust, we are talking about the medium. And this expert gives an example: if we trust TVE, we believe the news on its news programs. G6 agrees with this assessment and raises the possibility that the audience links a brand, in this case TVE, with news credibility. Thus, there would be two levels of credibility that can coexist and are not exclusive: on the one hand, the credibility that the personal signatures of the editors bring to each piece of news, and, on the other, the credibility that the medium generates at a global level, a quality that also affects the news.

The expert G13 introduces a new concept, objectivity, arguing that it influences credibility in the same way as transparency, and thus must be taken into account in the definition. However, G9 and G11 believe that it is more accurate to speak of veracity than objectivity. G5, G11, G12 and G17 also agree on the issue of transparency.

In the second round, all focus group participants agree that audience ratings are not always linked to credibility. G1 and G14 state that credibility cannot be measured solely by audience metrics because there

are many subjective factors of influence that are not taken into account by people meters. For G14, in order to measure beyond perceptions, ideology must be taken into account as consumers often gravitate towards, and trust, media outlets and informative stories that complement their pre-existing views. For this reason, people will sometimes believe stories that aren't true.

From the audience's point of view, G10 says that it is necessary to differentiate between the official/public discourse and what each citizen really thinks. According to this expert, societal norms dictate the ways that we think and act, so much so that some people would rather not express certain views in public for fear of social rejection. He further states that veracity and credibility must be differentiated, as veracity can be objectified by establishing criteria that certify whether something is true or not, while credibility is a subjective factor that cannot be measured (G10). Instead, G4 prefers to differentiate between objective and perceived credibility, because for him credibility is not the main factor that determines whether information is consumed. G14 and G17 also agree that watching a newscast does not necessarily imply lending it credibility as it has not been proven that the most watched newscasts are the most credible (G4).

For G14, reputation should be gauged using informative criteria. From there, it will be possible to assess credibility with more rigor and precision. G9 maintains that it is very difficult to establish uniform criteria with universal value if the reference values used by the audience to grant credibility to a piece of news or a media outlet are not known. Conversely, G1, G6 and G12 suggest analyzing the segmentation of the audiences to verify if the credibility ratings are consistent across all sectors.

All the experts who participated in the third round of the focus group agreed that credibility and pluralism are two values that condition each other and that there is a tendency to focus observations of pluralism on issues of a political nature.

For all 17 researchers, the relationship between credibility and pluralism is permanent and direct as both principles are contingent on the number of sources and, to an even greater extent, on the quality of the sources. Nonetheless, they also believe that it is necessary to differentiate between quantitative and qualitative aspects, the latter of which are those that make up the essence of pluralism. The following example is provided: in a piece of news, all the protagonists can have the same involvement, yet the contents of the arguments that represent each point of view, if they are not determined with rigorous criteria, can sway the focus of the facts towards a positive or a negative reading. For G1, G2, G3, G5, G9 and G11, the differences between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of a fact are what allows for the manipulation and politicization of information, and this harms credibility. In addition, according to G4 and G8, a lot of attention is paid to formal pluralism on public television where parties are assigned a length of time proportional to their parliamentary representation. Of course, this formula favors the larger parties and undermines the diversity of experiences that form our daily reality. G1, G6, G7, G8, G13 and G16 state that the credibility of information on public television is determined by politicization and, more specifically, by dependence on the ruling party. For this reason, G4 argues that public television is governmentalized, with G10 contending that this dependency is strengthened by the current model that exists in Spain.

According to this expert, citizens think that news media are controlled by the Government to favor certain political options, and thus lack credibility. G1 shares this statement and recalls that the indicators show that electoral periods are the time in which the public views the media as least credible due to the treatment of information being overtly biased from the qualitative point of view. However, television is not only subject to a political dependency. G1 and G11 mention the economic dependencies that affect the treatment of and approach to content. In fact, G9 links the loss of credibility to weaknesses in government, as well as poor reputation management and corporate communication, all of which are key elements in transparency, accountability and participation.

G11 and G17 argue that since credibility is a subjective value, the political ideology of each person becomes a filter and the news will be more or less credible depending on the overlap between the viewer and the direction of the news. G4 also believes that credibility depends a lot on political sympathy and says that people like approaches that coincide with their own ideas because they reinforce individual positions. Thus, without taking into account other more appropriate factors such as pluralism or the quality of the

sources, the extent to which a consumer views a story as credible or not may be based on their affinity with the dominant political philosophies of the medium. G11 relates quality to credibility, as if they were two associated concepts, and G17 highlights consistency, arguing that credibility is something longitudinal that is measured and valued by its permanence over time. Instead, G1 points out the independence of government and the autonomy of the media as two necessary factors for credibility, as do G5, G6 and G11. G5 and G6 also believe that it is necessary to maintain good management, set independent criteria that guarantee quality throughout the information process, and transmit it to the audience through transparency. G11 also holds this opinion and mentions reputation as a necessary factor for credibility. The results are visible in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Experts' opinions on credibility and pluralism
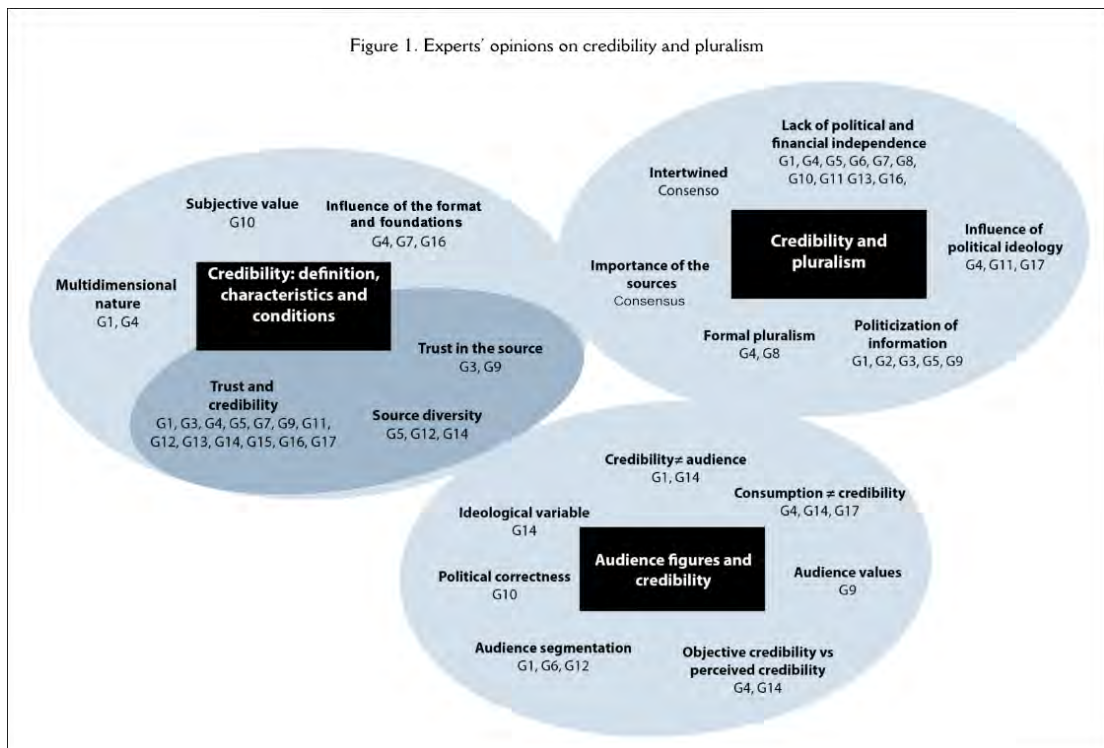
Regarding the causes that affect pluralism, all the participants agree that the current model favors the control of the news because formal pluralism does not always equate to an adequate approach to the facts and timely news treatment. G6 says that the European Pluralism Monitor reflects how citizens link the lack of independence in the management of public television in Spain with the low credibility ratings of its news, as does G1. G3 also believes that it is necessary to differentiate between political pluralism and social pluralism, which is what guarantees diversity in the news.

3.2. The academic experts and the professionals
3.2.1. The parameters that determine credibility

Amongst both academics and television professionals interviewed, there is a lack of consensus regarding the concept of credibility. However, despite the disagreements, several are in agreement regarding certain values and parameters. For A1, A2, A3, A4, A6, A9, A11, A13, A14, A15, A16 and A19, and for P1, P2, P3 and P5, credibility is a principle related to the confidence that the audience in general, a sector or a particular person, entrusts in a news outlet, format or journalist, granting veracity to a piece of information or a news story. A5, A8, A14, A15, A19, A20, P1, P3 and P5 believe that veracity is necessary for credibility to exist. For A7, this implicit veracity means that the viewer does not need to check the information as they assume that the facts have been verified and that the opinions have been selected from among the most reliable sources possible. A9 and A18 also agree with this. At the same time, A1, A3, A5, A9, A10, A14,

A16, A19, A20, P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5 indicate the importance of the reputation of the media outlet, its trajectory, experience and authority.

For A10, A11, A13, P1, P2 and P5, while career path is important, the attitude of the informants is also crucial. Conversely, A17 believes that the credibility granted by the audience, in addition to experience, is also based on contrast and comparison with the competition, further adding that credibility is cumulative, subjective, dynamic and volatile. A11 concurs with this, stating that credibility can be temporary or long-lasting, as the media outlet or the professional must possess qualities to earn and maintain it. The ability to promptly rectify mistakes is an example of this. For experts like A1 and A14 there are different levels of trust, which translate into different levels of credibility. A1 and A2 also link credibility to the image of the news outlet, something that goes beyond the quality of the content. For A1, A7, A13, A16, A18, P1 and P3, it is important that the informative stories are rigorous and clear, that they are well explained, contextualized with effective data and that there is a separation between information, opinion and analysis. A8, A9 and A19 include transparency and A11, A13 and A18 believe that accountability is important.

3.2.2. Achieving credibility

For A12 and A13, the basis of credibility is good audiovisual regulation, with the existence of external oversight and control bodies (Citizenship Councils) and a rigorous and plural Audiovisual Council, made up of reputable experts and professionals. This regulation guarantees the independence of the media outlets, directors and editors. According to A13, in the latter case, the Informative Councils play a very important role. A1, A2, A4, A7, A8, A9, A11, A12, A13, A14, A16, A18, A20, P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5 also include the independence of political and economic powers as a crucial factor in establishing credibility, stating that it has a significant impact on professional autonomy and the quality of information provided. P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5 also assert that, in order to establish credibility, the information provided must be truthful, reliable and verified. They maintain that the pursuit of truth with tools or procedures that allow certifying and proving all the facts that make up a story is paramount. In this sense, for A4, A5, A11, A12, A13 and A16, the quality of the sources is very important. This includes the source's characteristics, full identification, reputation, evidence that the information has been contrasted, that they have travelled to the relevant sites to explore the environment where the events took place and, if possible, broadcasted live from there. A11 and A13 mention transparency in the management and accountability of internal and external procedures as ways for media outlets to bolster their reliability and credibility. For A5, A8 and A10, public television should not gatekeep its information based on the pursuit of higher audience ratings. According to them, credibility is achieved simply by offering citizens useful information, without catering to the demands of the audience. Nonetheless, experts like A9 believe that audiences give credibility to the public service media and legitimize them.

3.2.3. Maintaining credibility

There is consensus among most of experts regarding the elements, parameters and actions that contribute to preserving credibility. A1, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8, A11, A13, A16, P1, P2, P3 and P4 all state that professional criteria and quality protocols must be applied and reinforced with strict professional routines that guarantee the rigor of the content. For A1, A5, A6, A8, A12, A18, P1, P2 and P5 it is also important to take care of the institutional image of the media outlet so that it conveys impartiality. A

3 and A12 believe that it is necessary to be in tune with the audience. This should always be done from a critical and respectful perspective and, above all, taking into account audience expectations. In addition, A15 believes that it is necessary for the audience to verify that the sources are reliable and verified. This guarantees truthful information and allows the audience to perceive it as such. In contrast, in the section referring to the parameters, A7 maintains that when information is given credibility, one already trusts that the sources are reliable and have been verified. A17 states that it is necessary for the reality portrayed to match the reality experienced by viewers, and A13 adds that the audience must perceive news programs as a public service. Thus, A3 and A4 stress the significance of the background of the media and the journalists as they believe that credibility stems from establishing legitimacy with the audience and having the professional resources to maintain it.

3.2.4. Why credibility is lost

Credibility is lost, little by little, when the news ceases to be a benchmark for the audience due to a gradual and continuous loss of quality (A10). Conversely, as A4 points out, credibility can be lost rapidly or even instantaneously regardless of a media outlet's long-standing reputation, especially when poor news coverage is provided, and even more so during significant events (A3). When the audience perceives that changes to the organization chart are made based on political interests rather than professional criteria, it has the same effect in undermining credibility (A10). A12, A14, A16 and A17 argue that credibility is lost when the 'trust contract' with the audience is breached, violating the deontological codes of a public service, which are those that safeguard independence and impartiality (A1). A8 attributes the loss of credibility to the neglection of production routines. This oversight is sometimes due to political or economic interests and other times because media are too standardized and do not promote quality content.

A3, A5, A9, A12, A13, A17, A18, A20, P1, P2, P3 and P4 agree that one of the factors that most undermines credibility is when the audience detects the media's desire to manipulate public opinion through the politicization of information, and news stories are treated differently (thematic selection, informative approach, order and duration) depending on the social agent or the political party that features in the events. According to A10, this makes a portion of the audience feel left out and unrepresented as, according to A12 and A13, they view the news outlet as at the behest of the Government or a party. A4 also attributes the loss of credibility to the use of sources that are not very reliable and to when they are even intentionally sought to build a story that does not correspond to reality.

3.2.5. The elements that guarantee credibility

A1, A2, A6, A7, A9, A10, A12, A18, P1, P4 and P5 all point out two elements that guarantee credibility: the first is that the profile of management positions and the organizational structure of the newsroom must both respond to professional criteria; the second is the existence of adequate mechanisms so that the news management does not intervene in the work of the editors beyond what is necessary. In addition, A12 and A13 state that the self-control mechanisms, the Information Councils (or Editorial Councils), the Audiovisual Councils and the Citizenship Councils, to which they already assigned an important role to achieve credibility, are responsible for making a follow-up, for making a control of journalistic work and for the quality of the information. This is all so that newsrooms do not become politicized and trust is maintained. For this reason, these mechanisms must be made up of independent people with accomplished backgrounds.

On the other hand, A3 argues that the accumulated social capital of the media outlet provides a form of social authority, lending legitimacy to the credibility of the contents. According to A4, A5, A6, A7, A9, A12, P1, P3 and P4, this must be complemented with the capability and reputation of the editors' professional career. For A10, another key strategy is to maintain the idea of public service at all times, outside of political changes. A2 suggests combining the topics that are of interest to the majority with those that are relevant for minorities, which A12 refers to as social responsibility.

3.2.6. The procedures that favor credibility

A1, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8, A9, A12, A13, P1, P2 and P4 consider it necessary to have procedures that make it possible to assess pluralism and rigor of contents with methods that are as objective as possible, as well as productive routines based on professional criteria that guarantee the quality of the information. For A1, A4, A5, A6, A7, A11 and P5, the selection of editors is important, a process that must be based exclusively on merit and ability. A10 extends this requirement to the appointment of directors. A12 and A19 mention working and professional conditions as a determining factor, and A7, A8, A10, A11, A19, P1, P4 and P5 highlight that the independence of political and economic organizations must be maintained so that there is no interference in the selection, approach or treatment of the news, or in the access to the sources. A9 and A12 recommend prioritizing investigative journalism, while A19 emphasizes the importance of accountability. On the other hand, A6, A7, A8, A12, A16 and A17 recommend the existence of style books that contemplate the application of ethical codes, a viewer ombudsman with full capacities and periodic external audits. A18 even proposes a specific law to guarantee that television

remains a public service. Compliance with this law would be monitored by professionals unrelated to political institutions and economic sectors.

4. Conclusions

The theoretical arguments made by the different authors regarding credibility and pluralism make it possible to identify and analyze both concepts at a basic level. However, these same arguments also expose a lack of consensus in regard to establishing universal parameters to carry out an accurate assessment. This is because both concepts have an inherently subjective dimension. There is also no consensus on the determining factors, neither among academic experts nor among the professionals interviewed.

Most of the principles associated with credibility are not objective, or even verifiable for the audience since they often lack resources to verify them. The same difficulties arise when analyzing pluralism, which is one of the elements that determines credibility. Quantitative and qualitative factors related to the news approach and informative treatment are involved, making it challenging for the audience to evaluate. The experts agree that in many cases there is no correspondence between the formal treatment of the points of view and the informative approach of the news.

The results of the focus group and the interviews show that there is a tendency to link pluralism with content of a political nature, despite the fact that pluralism affects all areas of society. On public television, much attention is paid to formal pluralism and this practise favors the control of the news because it makes it possible to manipulate the facts and politicize the information. As such, it is necessary to differentiate between the quantitative and the qualitative features, those that constitute the foundation of pluralism. It is also important to differentiate between political pluralism and social pluralism.

Most experts agree that credibility, in addition to being a subjective value, is a multidimensional phenomenon involving trust, independence, veracity and transparency, and that the role of personal perception is complex and affected by many different factors. For this reason, it is not an absolute or definitive value. Rather, it is a temporary value, and there are many factors that come into play in the achievement, maintenance, and loss of credibility. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that there are different degrees of credibility and different levels of trust. In addition, credibility can be attributed to the news outlet, the program, the editor, and the content of the news.

Credibility does not depend only on the approach or the informative treatment of the facts. A media outlet or a piece of news can have different evaluations according to the characteristics of each person because the perception process is influenced by external factors and conditions inherent to each viewer. These factors include a person's training (it is necessary to differentiate between a passive audience and a critical audience) and ideology, and even context, which also conditions perceptions and opinions. It is important to take into account the ideological variant because experts recognize that there is a tendency to gravitate towards like-minded approaches. This is why viewers often believe informative stories that are not true, but do agree with their constructions of reality.

Another of the conclusions drawn from this research is that, for experts, audience ratings are not always linked to the degree of credibility. A particularly relevant idea was proposed underlining the importance of differentiating between official/public discourse and private discourse. This reality makes it difficult to gauge the degree of credibility that many viewers give to the news as their social behavior falls in line with the norms established in their social or professional environment. Hence, many are not willing to publicly express their opinion on controversial issues for fear of being ostracized or criticized by others. It is true that there are no conclusive investigations that show that being a regular viewer of a program (in this case a news program) guarantees that that person grants credibility, whether total or partial, to its contents. In addition, the experts also agree that credibility cannot be measured by audience numbers alone because there are many subjective factors at play that are not taken into consideration by people meters.

The great challenge of public television is to find a mechanism that reveals the extent to which its news programs are viewed as credible by different sectors of society, and to detect the causes that determine credibility, based on proposals such as that of Medina et al. (2023). This information would be very useful for making sound decisions in the Editorial Boards. In this way, an adequate response could be given to the information needs of society and the obligation of public service fulfilled with greater rigor

and more guarantees. In this sense, it would be interesting to take advantage of the possibilities offered by the algorithms and public value assessments that are becoming popular among the European public media in order to develop new formulas that could make it possible to measure aspects of the audience that cannot be accurately assessed using the current metrics, including credibility. It would also be necessary to establish control mechanisms so that the TVE organization chart, which, from a theoretical point of view, has the necessary elements and resources to guarantee the quality and plurality of information, performs its functions with strictly informative criteria.

Authors' Contribution

Idea, X.S; Literature review (state of the art), M.R; Methodology, F.C., M.R; Data analysis, X.S., M.R; Results, X.S; Discussion and conclusions, X.S., F.C., M.R; First draft, X.S., M.R; Final revisions, X.S., M.R., F.C; Project design and sponsorships, F.C.

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