News production on television

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This article presents the key findings from research analysing the production of news on television from an economic and financial perspective. The aim of this research was to analyse what kind of information is offered and for what target on the most widely consumed television channels in Catalonia – TVC, TVE, Telecinco and Antena 3 TV, and how this news content is produced. To this end, a study was carried out of the companies, the news content supplied and the quantity and profile of the demand generated. The news production factors and costs were also analysed, as well as how the news is marketed, in order to assess the economic and financial factors that condition the kind of information we can receive via television.

Keywords

TV news economy, TV news production, TV news costs and revenue, TV news market.

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Informing has been and continues to be one of the main functions of the media, such as television. The right to information is, in fact, one of the bases of democratic societies because it lays the foundations for public debate and participation in decision-making. And in modern capitalist societies this right is guaranteed by the existence of corporations, both public and private, that are responsible for news. This is the case of television stations, which traditionally have taken on the functions of information, entertainment, dissemination and, according to some writers, training.

In spite of the differences between public and private television stations, all believe that the news they offer is a public service and, albeit less explicitly, a way of creating opinion and of increasing their influence on society and political power. They therefore see their news programmes as an important part in reinforcing their corporate image and, as a whole, to define and develop their marketing policies.

If, from the point of view of supply, information appears as one of the fundamental contents of the different television models, then television information also occupies a leading place from the point of view of demand. Television is the medium most widely used among all groups in society and the main source of information for broad segments of the population, older in age and with less buying power. The size and characteristics of the audience for news programmes is also of interest for TV companies in their commercial strategies. Audience ratings are the main commercial argument for all TV channels (in addition to elements of image, credibility and quality associated also with information), insofar as they are the key factors in setting the price of advertising and therefore of revenue for TV companies.

TV news is therefore many things at the same time: public service, a space to create public opinion, a popular source of information, part of a broader supply of programmes with commercial objectives. Information forms part of corporate communication tools, it helps to create a corporate image and generates advertising revenue according to the size and quality of the audience achieved. But how is information made? What kind of information is offered and for what public, on the most widely consumed TV channels in our homes? What are the economic and financial conditioning factors affecting the information that is offered and that we can receive through our TV sets?

This is the challenge taken on by the research we are presenting in this article: analysing, from an economic perspective, the production of news on television. This has entailed an analysis of the position occupied by news in television companies as a whole, in their organisational structure. Analysing the market conditions affecting how TV channels operate, the news offered by their rivals and how the demand is shared out. Analysing how information is produced on television, what production factors are used to make information and at what cost. And analysing the economic results obtained by television channels from their news activity, what revenue they achieve by selling news programmes to the audience.

To study these four aspects, we have selected the most widely consumed TV stations in Catalonia: Televisió de Catalunya (TVC), Antena 3 TV, Telecinco and Televisión Española (TVE), which represent four kinds of television. Two are public but with different coverage and administrations, namely TVC (Catalonia) and TVE (Spain); and two are private: one, Antena 3 TV, with in-house production and another, Telecinco, with outsourced production.

In addition to the novelty of the questions being asked, the research has also presented a challenge in terms of the sources of information required. On the one hand, the annual accounts of the television stations studied give consolidated figures, so that it's practically impossible to obtain disaggregated data to analyse the economic and financial performance of the news programmes. Hence, without ignoring these and other secondary sources, we have also had to resort to qualitative methodological instruments, which are also quantitative due to the information content, such as a questionnaire and interviews with those in charge of news programmes or other related areas from the four firms analysed. There have been difficulties in obtaining information via this channel, particularly in the case of Telecinco-Atlas, and in carrying out the comparative economic and financial analysis due to differences in how these television companies manage their accounts, using different methods when attributing costs and revenue from news production. However, the work carried out has allowed us to draw significant conclusions regarding the aforementioned aspects. This article presents some considerations on how the different points contained in the research have been dealt with, as well as providing the most noteworthy conclusions.

1. Information and news within the structure of a television company

Information and news production delimits an area of business management within the broader activity of television that includes various tasks and content also with diverse production requirements and marketing possibilities. To see the position occupied by the news within each company and how it is organised, the research has taken into account three levels of analysis: the structure of the whole company, the organisational structure of the television station and the organisation of the news services.

Analysing these three levels, we can see how the news, due to production needs, occupies its own area in all television stations but with significant differences between public and private firms. Public corporations have a simpler structure at the higher level (business structure) and a more complex structure at the lower level (news services), while private broadcasters have a more complex group structure but a simpler organisation chart for television and news services.

At the higher level, public corporations have separate companies for television and radio and centralise the corporate management and some other aspects of human and material resource management and economic and financial management. However, it is the company in charge of television (TVC and TVE) that takes on the management of production and marketing aspects related to the channel. The information and news services constitute an area within television, differentiated from other types of content, and are organised by criteria of frequency, topic and geographic location of the news programmes in order to coordinate the territorial network. This structure meets the need of some public television companies with a greater supply of information and news and a more extensive territorial coverage using their own resources.

Unlike public corporations, the private groups of Gestevisión-Telecinco and Antena 3 TV have a more complex group structure. The television business groups per se form part of larger business groups that also own local press, radio and television and have an international dimension. For example, Vocento and Mediaset form part of Telecinco, while we can find PlanetadeAgostini and RTL with Antena 3 TV. Moving downwards, in Gestevisión-Telecinco and Antena 3 TV we can find subsidiary companies that centralise the sale of advertising for the different supports for the group, such as television, and various subsidiaries for the production of different content (series, films, entertainment). For its part, the dominant company is in charge of managing the television channels and centralises the management functions, such as production and financial resource planning or defining corporate strategy.

This greater complexity in group structure is followed by a simpler organisation within the broadcaster and the information and news services, in line with programming that, in the case of private television, dedicates less time to information genres. There are, however, big differences between the two private stations. The information and news services of Antena 3 TV go to make up an area within the television department and have quite a simple organisation charge according to thematic specialisation (editorial areas) and the different editions of the news programmes. On the other hand, at Telecinco information and news production is carried out by a group company, Atlas, which is organised into two broad areas: information and news production for Telecinco and the marketing of this content, once transformed, to other clients. Production services are also sold to ensure a return on the investment in the equipment required to produce news programmes. Moreover, Atlas also has subsidiaries, Salta and Aprok, to produce other programmes and content for the agency, particularly specialising in "gossip news".

In spite of the differences between the public and private broadcasters, the analysis highlights some common elements that correspond to the characteristics of TV production and broadcasting, and of information and news in particular. Within television, the different types of content (according to function, frequency and genre) have sufficiently different production requirements to delimit different business areas, and in the case of the private firms even specific companies and operations. On the other hand, from a commercial point of view TV news principally generates revenue only as yet more content within programming where advertising can be placed and, in this respect, the marketing of advertising space in information and news programmes is no different from the sale of advertising in other spaces and supports. This can also be seen in the organisational structure of the companies where the management of advertising sales and marketing is centralised, especially in private firms, that have sales head offices for all the group's media. But there is a trend to look for new sources of revenue to sell information and news content and market services that increase the yield of the work, equipment and investment in technological innovation. Telecinco, together with Atlas, is the key exponent of this trend, but we can also see it at Antena 3 TV, with the New Business division that explores new markets to take advantage of technological applications within the context of digitalisation. TVC has also joined these new forms of distribution of news content via CCRTV Interactiva, but more for social profitability than, at least at present, for economic profitability.

The organisational changes produced by digitalisation are less significant in production, where it is supposed they have yet to arrive. Digitalisation has only meant organisational changes at TVC, where an indexing area has been created within the editorial area to exploit the new possibilities of storing and recovering information and images. However, no significant changes have yet occurred in important areas such as the convergence of functions and/or messages of the different media in each group to which the broadcasters analysed belong, although some steps are being taken in this respect.

2. The TV information and news market: supply and demand

In a saturated market such as that of television, characterised by an oligopoly and by the appearance of new distribution channels that take audience share from their rival broadcasters, television companies must consider how to tackle strategies to continue maintaining economic profitability. If previously the question was “what can a TV company do?”, now the question is “what can a TV company afford to do?”, as the revenue will not increase exponentially: if there are fewer resources, TV companies will try to optimise their audience and reduce costs by adjusting their supply in order to maintain and increase profitability .

Supply and demand, or in this case news supply and demand, are the two aspects tackled in the analysis of the news market, which reveals the conditions of competition in which broadcasters move. From a methodological point of view, the main difficulty in this section has been deciding what to include as *news programmes*. The secondary sources available to analyse the television supplied (GECA, OEA) include different types of programmes in the category of news and provide disparate and not very conclusive findings, so that we have also carried out our own analysis, limiting the concept to a classic definition that excludes gossip news and society magazine programmes, which we have considered as entertainment, and also excludes informative programmes. This analysis reveals clear differences between public broadcasters, with more supply, and private broadcasters (table 1).

In addition to general news programmes, with four daily editions on the three first broadcasters analysed and three daily editions on Telecinco, TVE and TVC, various non-daily news programmes are offered, broadcast by the second channels and some of the first channels (table 2). The public channels also offer geographical news when they split into their local channels, as well as more diversity in content, format and genre, with a notable proportion of sports news programmes. They also have 24-hour news channels and international channels where news plays an important part, especially on TVE’s international channels. The two private broadcasters, on the other hand, almost include no daily news programmes on their grids. The two private broadcasters base their news principally on information on society, sport and “gossip”, Telecinco being the channel that dedicates most time to domestic stories and daily situations that aim to get an emotional response from the audience, justifying comments made by critics of news items who believe that, currently, for a news item to have an impact on the audience it needs to show someone crying. On Telecinco, the supply of programmes on “matters of the heart” even exceeds that of news.

Regarding the demand for news content on television, the news programmes on the four channels analysed total a maximum rating of 29.8% in the evening edition, the one with the highest audience figures. At lunchtime, the rating of the four news programmes totals 21.4%, while at night and in the morning they total a rating of 2.5% and 2.4%, respectively. So following the news on television attracts the attention of between a fifth and a third of the population aged 4 and over in the two main editions at lunchtime and in the evening.

The non-daily news programmes, which are mostly broadcast on the second public channels, have lower audience figures. As an exception, we should point out the good results achieved by documentary or report type programmes, while those of debates, interviews or specialist news broadcast on the second channels at prime time or at night, competing with entertainment and fiction pro-

Table 1. News supply by television channel. 2007

	TVC	TVE	Antena 3 TV	Telecinco
Daily news programmes	3.163	2.431	1.846	1.621
24-hour channel	8.506	5.443		
Non-daily news programmes	256	687	0	±20*

Source: In-house.

* The non-daily programmes on Telecinco are not weekly but broadcast irregularly.

Table 2. News programmes on the programming grid

	TVC (TV3 and 33)	TVE (TVE-1 and La 2)	Antena 3 TV	Telecinco
Morning	3/24 (2 hrs) Magazine (5:15)	Euronews (1 hr) Morning news (2 hrs) Magazine (1:15) Weekly programmes: News for the deaf (0:30) Parliamentary news (1 hr)	Morning news (2 hrs) Magazine (2:15)	Morning news (2:40) Magazine (1:35)
Lunchtime access	Local channels (0:20) Environment (0:10) Immigration (0:15 CS) Lunchtime news (1 hr)	Local channels (0:30)		Lunchtime news (1 hr)
Lunchtime	Final Lunchtime news	Lunchtime news (1 hr)	Lunchtime news (1 hr)	Final Lunchtime news
Afternoon	Children's news (0:30)			
Prime time access	Parliamentary information (0:25 CS)	Local channels (0:30) Weekly programmes: Reports (0:35)		
Prime time	Evening news (0:40) Weekly programmes*: Reports (1:30) Debate (1:30) Economy (0:30) Feature (0:30)	Evening news (1 hr) La 2 News (0:30) Weekly programmes*: Reports (6 hrs) Debate (1 hr) Interview (0:35) Feature (0:30)	Evening news (1 hr)	Evening news (0:25)
Night	Late news (1:35)	Late news (0:30) Weekly programmes: Culture (0:30)	Late news (0:15)	
Early morning		Euronews (3 hrs)		

Source: In-house.

* Some of these programmes go on into the night time band.

grammes, have very low audiences, with ratings below 2%.

In the first quarter of 2007, in the Catalan market, TV3 was the channel that achieved the largest audience taking into account all daily news programmes, thanks to more regular results than Antena 3 TV, although the latter leads in evening news with over 500,000 viewers. These two channels achieve a share for news programmes in line with the channel's total results, while Telecinco, which leads the ranking for all broadcasts, is only third and fourth with regard to news audience figures. On the other hand, TVE-1 had better audience figures for news than for all its programming in total. In general, public TV news programmes seem to perform better, particularly so on TV3, although Antena 3 TV also considers news to be an important element in their fight for audience figures. Telecinco, for its part, can't manage to increase its market share for its news programmes and therefore, in competing for most audience for the channel as a whole, it tends to prefer entertainment programmes.

One of the fundamental elements when negotiating the insertion of advertising is the audience profile. TVE is the broadcaster with the least commercial profile in Spain and in Catalonia, with an older audience with less buying power. In Catalonia, TVE-1 is the channel most affected by competition from TV3, which achieves a middle to high class audience for its news programmes (even beating the private broadcasters), with a younger audience from smaller municipalities. The news programmes on Antena 3 TV and Telecinco have a middle class audience and, to a lesser extent, a middle to high class audience, adult and urban, although the audience for the former is younger and, with regard to habitat, Telecinco is more present in small and me-dium-sized municipalities. The social class is the variable that seems to be most dependent on the channel when broadcasting a news programme, as can be seen in the ca-se of TV3, where the programme *La nit al dia* even achieves a 40% audience share among the middle to high class group. We should also note the little incidence of people under 24 in the audience for daily TV news programmes, except in the case of Antena 3 TV, which takes advantages of strategies to transfer audiences from one programme to another to get a younger audience profile.

3. News production for television: production resources and costs

With regard to production, the research analysed aspects of location and decentralisation of production, revealing the criteria of news coverage and production resources (personnel, equipment and purchases) involved in news production, with the corresponding costs.

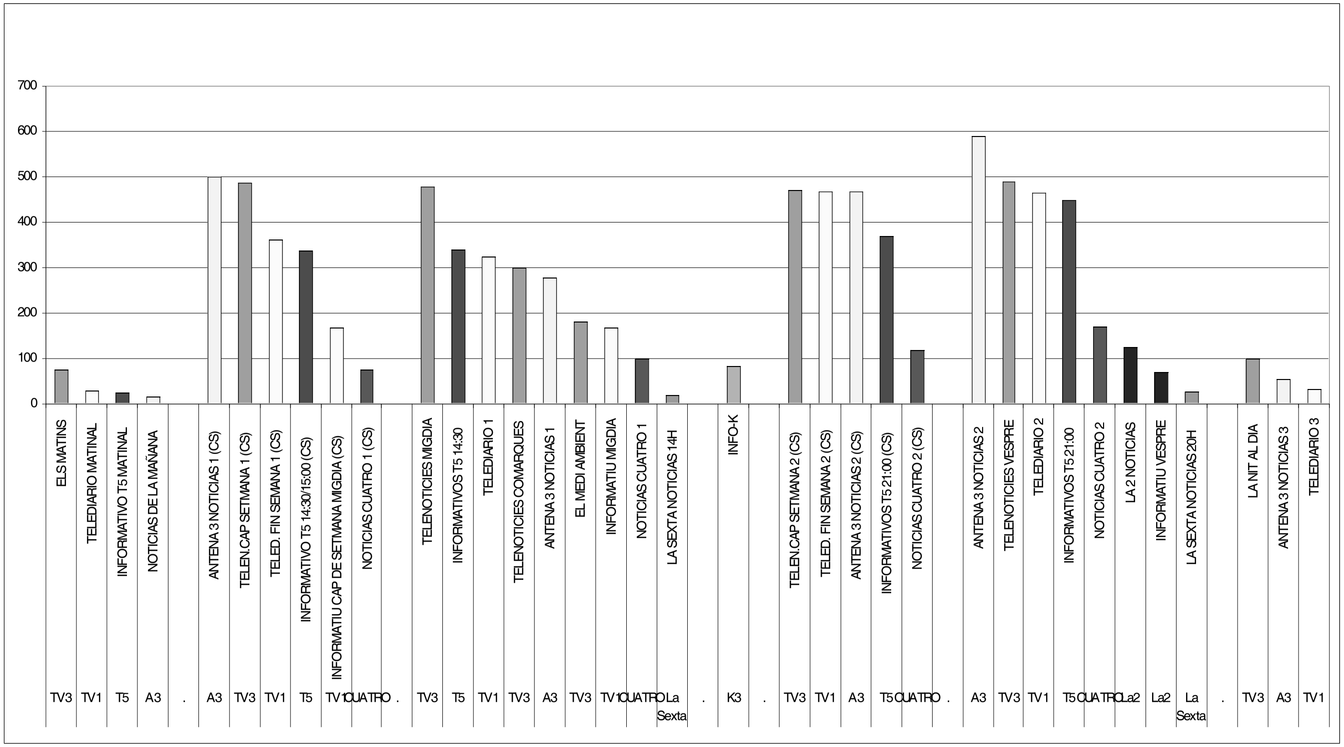
The public broadcasters, more TVE than TV3, maintain a more extensive geographical network than the private broadcasters Antena 3 TV and Telecinco at the level of Spain, Catalonia and internationally. Moreover, the first two broadcasters have opted to provide this coverage with their own resources, something that is more costly in terms of equipment and personnel, in this case aggravated by the need to distribute personnel for tasks and topics required in news production. The private broadcasters coincide in concentrating their production resources in Madrid and outsourcing personnel and equipment to cover Spain and abroad. Antena 3 TV has gradually eliminated its geographical branches in Spain and now has only one delegate in each autonomous community, hiring personnel and equipment from Mediapro. Neither does it have permanent international correspondents. At Telecinco, Atlas has eliminated its delegations in Spain and neither does it have permanent correspondents, as well as dissolving its branches in Catalonia and the Basque Country and has therefore opted to hire freelancers and independent production houses.

Table 3 shows the differences in provisions of personnel at the broadcasters analysed and the distribution of journalists by news area. The areas where the three channels coincide in providing most personnel are *society* and *sports*. After *society* and *sports*, by number of workers, comes *politics*, while in other areas there are more personnel at public broadcasters than private.

The outsourcing of the private broadcasters, Antena 3 TV and Telecinco-Atlas, reduces the need and cost of permanent staff and investment in equipment, and increases the profitability of TV companies in two ways: on the one hand, they can better adjust their investment in equipment as no resources are under-used and, on the other hand, it turns investment decisions into purchase decisions, the company saves expenditure on maintenance and repairs, as well as on investment, avoids problems of obsolescence, reduces the need for control and ensures that its production capacity responds more flexibly to its production needs and variations in demand. On the other hand, the choice of the public broadcasters, TVE and TVC, to produce in-house supposes more personnel and investment costs but is justified by criteria of social profitability associated with criteria of quality in news coverage, as well as making them less dependent on external suppliers and betting fitting their own requirements for quality regarding: the selection of information, use of own sources and treatment of information. Moreover, the increase in investment in equipment increases their production capacity, which is reflected in a more extensive and varied supply of news programmes.

Be it a model with more in-house production or with a model of outsourced production, all broadcasters must acquire some goods and services from outside. Here we include the purchase of news items and images from agencies, the hiring of signal transmission services, both for production

Graph 1. Audience for daily news programmes in Catalonia by time band. 2006 (Ind. +4)



Source: In-house, with data from Sofres.

Table 3. Workers from the news services and sections by area. 2006

	TVC*	TVE	Antena 3 TV	Atlas
Total news	403	1.564	189	182**
Journalists (with ENG)	108 +ENG	1.100	105	s.d.
By section				
Politics	13	20	15	s.d.
International	9	18	7	s.d.
Society	59	22	18	s.d.
Culture	9	10	1	s.d.
Economy	9	13	7	s.d.
Sports	-	24	22	s.d.
Other	9	6	-	s.d.

Source: In-house with data from the companies.

* TVC includes, within *society*, the journalists from the different local delegations and has a sports area separated from the news
** Data for 2005.

(receiving news items and images, live connections) and also for broadcasting, as well as the purchase of production and broadcast technologies. The information provided by the TV companies regarding these purchases (quantity and costs) is limited, as their supplier contracts are subject to individual negotiation and are confidential among audio-visual service providers.

With regard to the type of technological applications used to produce news, of note is the predominance of systems developed by AVID, the most widely used systems by all broadcasters to produce their news programmes. In some cases in-house systems are also used, such as TVC's image management and recovery program (Digition), or the editorial applications developed by Antena 3 TV.

With regard to news and image agencies, all broadcasters use the same suppliers: EFE, Europa Press, Reuters and APTN for images, and these same agencies plus France Press and Servimedia for text. The public broadcasters also have the agency services provided by the different networks they belong to. TVC has information and images provided by other autonomous community broadcasters via FORTA and TVE has the public television network services of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and Euronews.

With regard to transmission networks, the broadcasters can use their own, shared or external networks. After the privatisation of Retevisión (RTVE network) and of Tradia (network of the Catalan government), the public broad-casters no longer had their own broadcasting networks but, unlike the private broadcasters, they do not totally depend on external resources. TVE has its own network that links the different local channels of the public broadcaster and uses the resources of the FINE network from UER for inter-national connections. In the case of TVC, the broadcasting services are included under a contract with the Telecommu-nications Centres of the Catalan government and it is this centre, the owner of the audiovisual transmission network of Tradia before it was privatised, that negotiates with Abertis (current owner of the network) in accordance with the con-ditions established during privatisation. Moreover, TVC also has shared contracts for transmission services with FORTA.

The private broadcasters have always hired external firms, both for receiving transmissions and for broadcasting. The fact that Telefónica holds shares in Antena 3 TV resulted in some low-cost contracts with the same company, which continue to the present day.

Beyond these differences, the providers of external transmission services (entry and exit) are the same in the four chains analysed. Abertis is the main supplier for all the broadcasters, especially when broadcasting to Spain, both in analogue and digital. The broadcasters also use TSA's services (Telefónica), in this case more for transmissions between local centres or connections for production. For satellite transmissions they use the services of Astra, Hispasat and Eutelsat.

In the four broadcasters analysed, the daily news programmes are those that generate most costs, as they require more personnel, more purchases from agencies, they intensively use signal transmission services for broadcasting and production, they include live connections, both national and international, and require frequent travel, with the corresponding cost for transport and expenses. TVE clearly stands out as the broadcaster with the highest costs (table 4), caused by its larger staff and more extensive network. For example, its local centres in Spain cost 57 million euros, more than that spent by the other three broadcasters analysed on all their news services.

All the channels reduce the unit cost of daily news programmes thanks to the broadcasting of morning programmes of 3-5 hours, while if we only take into account the TV news, this unit cost rises considerably. The unit cost falls even more in the two public broadcasters and compensates their expenditure on personnel and investments with a more extensive supply of news programmes and the policy of repeated broadcasts via the different group channels, news and international channels, something which means TVC can reduce its total unit cost to 3,995 euros and TVE to 7,229 euros. Notwithstanding this, repeated broadcasts have not brought additional revenue to the public corporations, as these news channels do not include advertising.

4. Commercial exploitation of news programmes: revenue and economic results

News programmes also generate significant revenue for TV companies, principally by selling advertising. Other sources of income such as the sale of content and provision of services are residual, except in the case of Telecinco-Atlas, which precisely opted to produce the channel's news through a subsidiary in order to take advantage of these secondary markets.

At the four channels under consideration, an analysis of the costs and revenue generated by news programmes shows that these programmes should not be considered merely as a service of public interest that reinforces the channel's image but also as a source of income. The profit margin of the two private channels is higher than that of the public channels, as the news offered is adjusted to the most profitable programmes (general daily news programmes) and they are exploited more thoroughly for advertising.

Table 4. News production costs. 2006

	TVC	TVE	Antena 3 TV	Telecinco*
Total	43 million euros	166 million euros	42 million euros	55.4 million euros
Cost/hour	€3,995	€7,229	€22,752	n.d.
Cost/hour daily news without repeated broadcasts	€13,000	€29,000	€22,752	n.d.

Source: In-house with data from the companies.

* Data from 2005

At Antena 3 TV, profit from news programmes corresponds to practically half the advertising revenue generated by these programmes, this being 38.4 million euros. In spite of the lack of official data on revenue and profits at Telecinco-Atlas, the secondary sources analysed, such as the annual accounts of both companies, also indicate a high profit margin. For their part, the two public broadcasters, TVE and TVC, also achieve profit margins, as their revenue for advertising in news programmes, 137.4 million euros and 48 million euros, respectively, exceeds their costs. Notwith-standing this, their profit is lower than that for the private broadcasters, as they produce more news programmes, many of them operating at a loss. Moreover, in the case of TVE, although it has a profit margin of 28 million euros for central news, its news services as a whole make a loss, as it has clearly loss-making local centres associated with this area.

5. Conclusions: information, news, public service, commercial service and quality

The four broadcasters included in this analysis, two public (TVC and TVE) and two private (Antena 3 TV and Telecinco) appear as cases with significant differences both with regard to business objectives and also how they are organised, their coverage, production systems and sale strategies. These differences correspond principally to the criterion of ownership, as in the first case we can talk of two different models, for public broadcasters and for private. Although both sets claim to provide a public service with their news programming, we can clearly differentiate between public broadcasters, where criteria we might call *social profitability of public service* have more weight, and the private broad-casters, where the main objective is the company's profit.

The public broadcasters invest more heavily in producing news, including more supply that is also more diverse, aimed at an extensive audience but also to meet more specific demands. In order to achieve this they use their own resources, leading to very high expenditure. While the daily programmes make a profit in terms of the audience and the advertising they attract, the non-daily programmes, all news and international channels and local networks for news production make a loss. In the case of the private broadcasters, news contributes positively to the channels' results. In this case, supply is reduced to the most profitable news (generalist information with a lot of *society* and *sport*), with a more commercial audience profile and an external production model that allows them to reduce personnel costs and fixed assets. These differences in supply and production are closely related to the quality of the TV news service, in terms of the diversity of the information offered, the criteria used to select topics, geographical coverage, resources to interpret information and the diversity of information sources.

Table 5. Revenue attributed to news programmes

	TVC	TVE	Antena 3 TV
Revenue	48 million euros	137.4 million euros	80.4 million euros
Income/hour (not including repeated broadcasts)	3,713.73	16,055.15	43,553.63
Income/hour (TV3/33 and TVE -1 La 2)	14,002.33	44,094.99	-

Source: In-house based on data from the companies.

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