Invitations to audience participation through television in Spain: analysis of general interest channel prime time in 2010 and 2014

Ignacio Bergillos

*Lecturer at the Centro de Enseñanza Superior Alberta Giménez
– Universidad Pontificia Comillas ICAI-ICADE*

ibergillos@cesag.org
ORCID Code: orcid.irg/0000-0002-9333-8056

Abstract

This article presents the results of comparative research into the participation invitations that the main general interest television channels in Spain made to their audiences in 2010 and in 2014 during prime time and at night. It is content analysis which approaches the subject matter of study based on recognition of the complexity of its conceptualisation and with the aim of describing the relationship between the ownership of the channel and the television genre of the programme and the nature of the participation broadcast.

Keywords

Participation, audience, television, convergence, public service.

Resum

Aquest article presenta els resultats d'una recerca comparativa sobre les invitacions a la participació que les principals televisions generalistes a Espanya van oferir a l'audiència el 2010 i el 2014 durant la seva franja de màxima audiència i nit. Es tracta d'una anàlisi de contingut que s'aproxima a l'objecte d'estudi des del reconeixement de la complexitat que comporta conceptualitzar-lo i amb la finalitat de descriure la relació que existeix entre la titularitat del canal o el gènere televisiu del programa i la naturalesa de la participació emesa.

Paraules clau

Participació, audiència, televisió, convergència, servei públic.

1. Introduction: audience participation as the core concept of contemporary television

In the digital and online ecosystem the media in general and television in particular are turning towards a still to be defined model in which participation processes play a relevant role (for example Jenkins 1992; Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Jenkins 2006; Andrejevic 2008; Enli 2008; Ross 2008; Debrett 2009; Bennett and Strange 2011; García Avilés 2012; Fish 2013; Livingstone 2013; Lotz 2014; Azurmendi *et al.* 2015; Vanhaeght, Lunt and Donders 2016). Enli (2008) argues that there are several reasons for this. Some are economic (looking for new sources of revenue), others are industrial (expanding content distribution and coverage and reaching new audiences) and most are strategic (responding to the challenges posed by convergence, the business model crisis, new consumer habits and the fragmentation of audiences in what Webster in 2014 called the *attention market)*. Trine Syvertsen (2001, 319) does not seem to have been far wrong when she argued, more than fifteen years ago, that analysis of participation is "crucial in a

situation where the media increasingly is becoming 'something to do' rather than just something to watch". The presence and prominence of ordinary people in television settings are manifested in many traditional and new formats through their direct or mediated participation. In her study the Norwegian researcher did not look at the interactive offerings made possible by the Internet but rather at the television formats that increasingly generated possibilities for the involvement of ordinary people (Livingstone and Lunt 1994). Her approach is shared by this paper: when discussing participation we need to look at the relationship established between producers and audiences and not only at the features of the technology which enables such communication.

Johnson (2007, 63) argues that this participatory shift might be a significant change in the media landscape bearing in mind that the audience "are not just cultivated as fans, but also invited in, asked to participate in both the world of the television text and the processes of its production". Recent examples of this in Spanish television include how the producers of *Mar de Plástico* (Atresmedia 2015-2016) invited its fans to vote between two

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endings for the second season of the series and how IB3, the regional TV station in the Balearic Islands, held an online vote in December 2016 so the audience could choose when a sitcom should be scheduled from three options. They are not in essence innovative proposals given that in 2009 Cuatro decided when to schedule repeats of *House* (David Shore 2004-2012) based on surveys it ran on its website and that *Kinoautomat - One Man and his House* (Radúz Činčera 1967) might well be the first broadcasting experiment in which a storyline was changed as a result of audience votes (Carpentier 2011, 271). However, we might wonder whether there has been an increase in these participatory methods (Herrera 2003b) and in the repertoire of invitations to take part in TV scheduling given that in the digital age, producers and TV channels can broaden their means of communication with "the people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2006).

It is no coincidence that participation, interactivity and engagement are again receiving attention:[1] new consumption and communication practices call for concepts to describe them. And although terms have emerged that are intended to define these forms of active reception and multitasking (second screens, social television), they are concepts adopted by the industry which are still seeking to become academically established (Quintas Froufe and González Neira 2015).

If we start from the hypothesis that audience participation is no longer incidental and given that commercial and academic research devoted to this subject has grown in recent years, a frame of reference should be put in place that recognises the complexity of defining what participation is and enables us to move towards contextualised examination of how it takes shape in contemporary television (Livingstone 2013). By doing this we firstly avoid Dahlgren's (2013) fear that we will take participation for granted. Secondly it advocates participation by its supporters by adopting an appropriately delimited and nuanced approach. Following Reifová and Svelch (2013, 264), "rather than celebrating or dismissing the concept of participation, we need to invest it with meaning – to identify, examine, question, and critique it in its specific contexts".

Hence this paper has three main aims:

- To advocate an approach to the subject matter of study that recognises its complexity and seeks to integrate the critical perspective and the proposals developed within the framework of cultural studies.
- To demarcate the analysis of television and draw up an operational definition to identify the audience participation invitations made by networks in the digital and convergent context.
- To examine the participation invitations on Spanish general interest television in 2010 and 2014 using an analysis tool that includes the mediation of participation, its relevance in the broadcast, the participant's prominence and the features of the programmes in which it takes place.

2. Theoretical framework: a nuanced and contextualised conceptualisation of audience participation through television

In recent years the main academic forums concerning communication have reflected the interest of researchers around the world in exploring this issue in greater depth (Pasquali, Noguera Vivo and Bourdaa 2013).[2] And although research in this area has hardly been cumulative (except, perhaps, in the field of journalism), it all has in common an interest in finding out the importance and meaning of public participation in a digital and convergent media context. The copious scientific literature on media participation includes a vast array of interpretations that make it difficult to set the limits of a single framework for analysis. As Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) warn, we are faced with:

"Conflicting and perhaps contradictory pulls – between a corporate conception of participation (which includes within it a promise of making companies more responsive to the needs and desires of their 'consumers') and a political conception of participation (which focuses on the desire for us all to exercise greater power over the decisions which impact the quality of our everyday lives as citizens). We will not be able to resolve these tensions here – the uneasy relationship between capitalism and expanded communication capacity remains a vexing one, which theorists of all stripes are confronting through their work" (Jenkins *et al.* 2013, 156).

Firstly, the roots of a critical and normative conception of participation can be placed in political science and specifically in democratic theory. An inescapable point of reference in this field is the work of Nico Carpentier (2011) who has written the most complete book on participation and media from this standpoint. With the concepts of power and control at the centre of his discussion, Carpentier produces a framework that distinguishes between minimalist and maximalist processes. In minimalist forms of participation, media professionals maintain strong control over the production process and its output. Participation is restricted and exploited in the interests of media corporations. By contrast, maximalist processes recognise the diversity and heterogeneity of the audience and the political nature of participation and foster a balanced relationship between professional control and popular participation. At the core of his book is the warning that participation has to do with imbalances of power and that in the media, where the analysis becomes more complex, the issue has to be treated with particular care. In his proposal he draws a distinction between participation *in* the media, i.e. the public's ability to make decisions about media content and its production or about the strategic and structural decisions of a media outlet, and participation *through* the media, where this means the sum of opportunities for mediated participation in public debate and self-representation in a variety of public spaces, including the

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media sphere, where the public can contribute their opinion and interact with other voices.

In lockstep, proposals arising from research in areas such as communication, television studies, cultural studies and audience and reception studies add to the debate, propound conceptual solutions and encourage empirical studies which collate evidence on the ground. The work of Henry Jenkins (1992, 2006), firstly on fandom and subsequently on convergence culture, has underpinned one of these approaches to the subject matter. Jenkins focuses on the relationships between producers and audiences governed by affective economics through which a framework of respect and loyalty is created by fans who want to participate meaningfully in the profile of content to which they bring value through their engagement (Jenkins *et al.* 2013). Meanwhile, corporations endeavour to control such initiatives as they suspect that they might also include fan practices which could be illegal or harm the works, their brands or their franchises.

These perspectives have come up in the discussion in recent years with the aim of reviewing the theoretical foundations underlying the study of these complex phenomena at a time when the media ecosystem is changing.[3] A constructive way of enriching the debate is, as Jenkins points out in his conversation with Couldry, finding "new forms of theorization to be able to describe what we are participating in, forms that stress advocacy as much as critique, forms that are sceptical without being cynical" (Couldry and Jenkins 2014, 1109). Jenkins and Carpentier (2013) also conclude that participation will always be surrounded by forces in tension that seek to maintain their status and that a more participatory culture is only achieved through constant struggle in a number of fields. In their view the discussion about the features of technology, which empower and constrain at the same time, should shun extreme positions because their participatory potential will remain dependent on the way in which they are used.

These two approaches to participation are in constant tension, but they do not cancel each other out. The subject matter of study is complex and changing and it is advisable to avoid absolute interpretations in order to grasp its nuances. Dahlgren (2013, 29) points out that "participation should not be understood in either-or terms, as present or absent, but rather as a question of degree, a continuum". Kelty *et al.* (2014, 12) summarise it very similarly: "Participation is not a simple either/or parameter, (…) it is not its presence or absence that is important, but the configuration of dimensions which render it participatory".

3. Towards an operational definition for analysing audience participation

Identifying specific areas of analysis will help with gaining a specific understanding of the actors involved in participatory processes and the power relations that enable and shape them (Carpentier 2016). By confining our analysis to general

interest television we assume that it is an industry with vertical structures in which participation *in* the medium is practically non-existent (Carpentier 2011). Hence this paper restricts its analysis to participation *through* television in Spain based on a wide-ranging and multidimensional view of participation (Hamilton 2003; Enli 2008; Ytreberg, Syvertsen, Karlsen and Sundet 2008; Karlsen, Sundet, Syvertsen and Ytreberg 2009; Ytreberg 2009).

In order to make participatory processes identifiable, Herrera (2003a) proposes in his paper on radio a formal approach to participatory formulas. Herrera, like Fish (2013), delimits the concept through the relationship between producers and audiences or between professionals and amateurs. This identifies the role of the professional as a mediator and facilitator of participation. The importance of the *invitational* nature of participatory processes (Carpentier 2011, 27; Johnson 2007) is therefore important. Other scholars have also argued that the invitation is a key factor when identifying participation or collaboration processes (Gulbrandsen and Just 2011). Hille and Bakker (2013, 4) assert that "the audience needs to be stimulated and invited by the media before they will provide (meaningful) contributions. This suggests that participation is not the mere result of offering opportunities but is also dependent on active 'participation' from the medium itself". Gaventa (2007) sets three possible spatial categories of participation, one of which is invited spaces. Unlike closed spaces or created spaces, the guests are those in which there is an explicit invitation to different actors for decision making. In relation to television, Ross (2008) categorises three types of invitation: overt, organic or obscured.

Other authors have linked audience participation analysis to the technological possibilities of the medium (Enli 2008, Ross 2008, García Avilés 2012, Macek 2013) while also recognising the complexity of participatory practices. This complexity gives rise to hybrid social, political or commercial processes that result in imbalances which at the same time open up expanded opportunities for participation (Fish and Srinivasan 2012).

To identify and analyse participation components in Spanish general interest television we have looked for a consensus among all the perspectives seen so far. In our view participation components are ones in the broadcast, digital platforms or a combination of the two (López 2007, Entre 2008, Ytreberg 2009) which are made possible by media professionals (Herrera 2003b, Fish 2013) and invite the audience to conduct practices (Johnson 2007, Ross 2008, Carpentier 2011, Hille and Bakker 2013) that can potentially translate into an influence on the distribution or consumption of content or the production decision-making process (Domingo *et al.* 2008; Jenkins *et al.* 2013). The objective of these participation components will depend on the format in which they are framed (Ytreberg 2004), but in our view they seek to build closer relations between narrative, production and consumption spaces, i.e. between text, industry and audience (Jenkins 2006). Contemporary television invites and will continue to invite people to participate

in its programmes. What is still not known is what makes these invitations different from each other.

4. Methodological proposal for analysing audience participation through television

This paper provides concrete data about the Spanish case in an empirical and comparative study based on content analysis. It is an appropriate method for examining how particular contexts and production processes are reflected (Hartley 2002). Following Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2008, 25), content analysis helps to draw conclusions from evidence collated if it is supplemented by a robust theoretical framework and thorough application of the analysis method. The analysis tool used comes from the literature review we conducted. The definition of participation specified above has set the limits of our analysis unit.

In order to obtain data to support our research, we set parameters that defined our sample. Our analysis covers channels broadcasting throughout Spain: La 1, La 2, Antena 3 TV, Cuatro, Telecinco and la Sexta. We chose 2010 and 2014 as our timeframe and took samples of all the programmes broadcast by these channels from 8 pm to 1 am in May in these years as two standard weeks with a normal and well-established range of programmes for the time of year. The recording was made in the Research Group on Image, Sound and Synthesis (GRISS) laboratory at the Autonomous University of Barcelona using equipment to capture and store the original signal of the television networks. The tool was applied to the samples and their coding resulted in a database which was managed using Microsoft Excel.

The analysis sheet has two separate sections. The first looks at the general information about the programme: channel, public or private ownership, type of production, date, day and time of broadcast, length, timeslot and macro-genre. We used the EUROMONITOR classification to codify the macro-genre and the timeslot (Prado and Delgado 2010). The second part of the chart consists of the variables summarised in Table 1.

In addition to the references listed, the work in the journalistic field of Domingo *et al.* (2008), the user-generated content (UGC) classification drawn up by Wardle and Williams (2008) and the interactivity categories of Chung and Robinette (2008) have all been useful in drawing up this typology. In terms of Spanish scientific production, the participation dimensions proposed by García Avilés (2011) set out in Table 2 and the categorisation by Herrera (2002) in his doctoral thesis on audience participation on radio have been used.

Given that operators do not create or generate participation but rather design the conditions for participatory processes to take place, this methodological proposal is an attempt to describe these participation habitats. Below is some research data that help to provide this description in the Spanish case.

5. Results: audience participation invitations in prime time on the main general interest channels in Spain

5.1. General data about participation through television

Our results confirm that participation is a characteristic feature of contemporary television and that participatory processes *through* the medium have significantly increased in recent years. In total, there were 224 invitations to participate in the 2010 sample and more than double, 456, in 2014. Growth in the percentage of programmes that include participation is also evident. In 2010, 59.7% of broadcasts included some; four years later the percentage was up to 76.8% (on Telecinco, 93.8%, on la Sexta, 92.3%, on Cuatro, 87.9%, on Antena 3 TV, 78.4%, and on La 1, 65%; La 2 is the only channel which broadcast more programmes without participation than with). The distribution of the invitations in the various programmes indicates that there is a relationship between the macro-genre and the participation offered. As other research has concluded, the programmes broadcast in the timeslots observed are mainly current affairs, info-shows and fiction programmes (Prado and Delgado 2010, Delgado, Monclús and Guerrero 2016). The first two are the genres to offer most participation invitations. We found, however, that while participation in current affairs programmes and info-shows is largely in terms of invitations related to the broadcast, in fiction programmes where we identified many fewer invitations the strategy is extended beyond the broadcast and seeks more extensive collaboration through other platforms.

Table 3 presents a general description of the participation invitations identified in both samples. It shows how private channels had the greatest total number of invitations and also a higher rate of participatory processes per programme. In addition it indicates that in 2010 and 2014 the bulk of the invitations to participation did not lead to direct revenue for the channels. An exception is Telecinco, where 27% of its participation invitations provided direct revenue in 2010, falling to 23% in 2014.

As for broadcasts, there is a tendency to offer participation in live programmes. Most invitations generate asynchronous participation although there is a slight increase in synchronous participatory processes. At all events it seems that the channels' participation invitation strategy continues to view broadcasts and the other platforms as two separate arenas and in spite of the growth in participation offers in terms of total numbers there have been hardly any significant multiplatform or cross-media synergies in the broadcasts.

Two major changes stand out in the comparison between 2010 and 2014. Firstly, mediated participation, which accounted for 23.6% in 2010, had become the majority by 2014. Secondly, and in relation to this change, there is significant growth in participatory processes that do not have any prominence or significance in the television broadcast. One possible explanation for this change is one that has

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Table 1. Summary of the analysis tool used

Classification criteria		Variables	References
Participation action	Purpose	34 different purposes (see Table 2).	García Avilés (2011)
Participation components	Presence or mediation	**In-person**: the participant is present in the broadcast or recording of the programme. **Mediation** by internet, mediation by phone, other.	Domingo et al. (2008), Franquet et al. (2008), Livingstone and Lunt (1994), López et al. (2005; 2009), Prado et al. (2006)
	Synchrony or asynchrony	Participation in **synchrony** with the broadcast or participation in **asynchrony** with the broadcast.	Cortés (1999), Gripsud (1998), Levine (2008), Ytreberg (2009)
	Live or pre-recorded	Programme broadcast **live** or as a recording.	
	Prominence of the process	**Individual** presentation of the participant, **mass** presentation of the participants (as an indeterminate group) or processes **without any** prominence or presentation of the participant.	Dahlgren (2011), Karlsen et al. (2009), Livingstone and Lunt (1994)
	Relevance in the broadcast	**Central**: the participation is the core of the programme. **Marginal**: the participation plays a secondary and dispensable role in the programme. **None**: the participation does not influence and is not visible in the broadcast.	Sánchez-González and Alonso (2012), Selva and Ramos (2005)
	Length of the participation	**Total**: the participation lasts the entire programme. Temporary: the participation is only fleeting (in a section or during a brief appearance of the participant) in the programme. **None**: the participation is not included in the programme or has no defined length during the broadcast.	
	Revenue	**Yes**: the channel receives a direct financial benefit from the payment made by the audience to participate. **No**: participatory processes that are not tied to direct payment by the audience.	Andrejevic (2004), Huang and Chitty (2009)

Source: compiled by author.

Table 2. Equivalence between García Avilés's participation dimensions and the purpose of the processes observed in the samples analysed

Dimensions of participation activities in public television (García Avilés 2011)	Purpose of the participatory processes identified in the sample (compiled by author)
	Advertise
	Join
Boycott	
Search for people	
	Hidden camera
	Cameo
	Casting
	Live chat
Collaboration	Collaboration
Commentary	Comment
Shopping	
Community	
Competition	Compete
	Win gift or prize
	Consult
	Contact
Co-production	
Studio debate	
Speaking to camera	Speaking to microphone
	Download ringtone
	Donate
Audience meeting	
Survey	Survey
Sending stories	
Sending images/videos	
Sending messages	Send content
Sending suggestions	
Sending questions	
Facilitation	
Financing	
	Website image (YouTube)
Narrative interaction	Situational interactivity
Game	Play
	Phone call
	Most viewed
Mobilisation	
	Offer work
	Present
Question on set	Ask the guest
Presence on set	Audience

Source: García Avilés (2011) and personal observation during the research.

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Table 2. Equivalence between García Avilés's participation dimensions and the purpose of the processes observed in the samples analysed (Continuation)

Promotion	Promote
	Suggest
	Play leading role in section
Charity	
Draw	Draw
	Auction
Video on demand	
	Testimony
	Home video
Visit to facilities	
Voting	Vote

Source: García Avilés (2011) and personal observation during the research.

already been mentioned: the consolidation of social media as intermediary platforms for participation in television. In addition the penetration of mobile devices has accelerated the appearance of participation invitations based on what are called second screens. In this respect new participation platforms, such as specific applications for mobile devices and smart TV which were not available in 2010 but do seem to be a budding strategy for some channels and programmes, have gained greater prominence. Channels and producers have developed specific applications linked to content to enrich the experience in synchrony with the broadcast. However, these applications have little interest in participation and instead focus on offering complementary content or data related to the production and the conversation and debate about the content is conducted on social media.

5.2. Purpose of participation in television macro-genres

The adoption and consolidation of social media also influences the disaggregated data about the purposes of audience participation and its inclusion in the various television macro-genres (Table 4). The type of participation offered in these years remained practically the same, although it diversified to a certain extent. Whereas in 2010 speaking to microphones and attending programmes as part of the audience together accounted for 66% of the total participation offer in Spanish prime time, by 2014 this percentage had halved. The most common purpose is still speaking to microphones, an option mainly used in current affairs programmes about all kinds of subjects, largely soft news. It includes a number of types: comments, testimonies, eyewitness statements, assessments, opinions, complaints, signs of enthusiasm, demands, etc.

The growth in invitations to contact (from 4% to 20% of invitations) or comment (from 1% to 19%) diversified the offer

in 2014. The explanation again lies in social media which are used to handle the bulk of these invitations to get in touch (on channel or professional profiles) and comment (chats, hashtags or forums provided by social media). Social media are also key venues for obtaining user-generated content either because news events take place there (in the week of the sample there were at least two current issues connected with Twitter controversies) or because material is sent via their platforms.

Table 4 also shows the relationship between the invitations to participate and the macro-genre of which they form part. One characteristic of participation in television broadcasts is its close dependence on the genre in which it is included. The days and times when participation options decline or pick up are those when the genres that include less or more participation are broadcast. Some macro-genres broadcast a greater range of participation types and participation is mostly of central relevance in their programmes. Info-shows broadcast up to 14 different types of participation in 2014 while current affairs programmes used 12. Game shows only had five different types but they all lasted the full programme and/or had central relevance. In other cases the genre's features make broadcasting participation difficult. Fiction, one of the genres most scheduled in prime time, gave only three invitations to participate in its broadcasts in 2014. However, that does not mean that participation by audiences in this type of programmes in other environments (website, mobile apps, social media, etc.) is not of obvious importance, as has been demonstrated in recent years by fandom studies.

5.3. Snapshot of participation in Spanish TV channels

A brief description of the operators' strategy based on their ownership reveals a number of points. The basic premise in public channels is to treat participation as a process or a service,

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Table 3. General description of invitations to participation through television in Spain in 2010 and 2014

	2010			2014		
	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total
Participation invitations	52	172	224	118	338	456
Invitations per programme	0.56	1.33	1.01	1.57	2.40	2.1
Technological mediation						
- In-person participation	76.4%			37.3%		
- Mediated participation	23.6%			62.7%		
- Participation in synchrony	33.9%			44.7%		
- Participation in asynchrony	66.1%			55.3%		
Broadcasting						
- In live programmes	61.0%			65.2%		
- In pre-recorded programmes	39.0%			34.8%		
Prominence - Individual	50.0%			32.3%		
- Mass	37.4%			23.6%		
- None	12.6%			44.1%		
Relevance						
- Marginal	31.4%			10.9%		
- Central	60.1%			46.5%		
- None	7.6%			42.6%		
Length						
- Total	31.7%			16.7%		
- Temporary	67.9%			63.1%		
- None	0.4%			20.2%		
Revenue						
- Yes	6.8%			7.7%		
- No	93.2%			92.3%		

Source: compiled by author.

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Table 4. Distribution of the purpose of participation by macro-genres in 2010 and 2014

	Total		Current affairs		Info-show		Game show		Other	
	2010	**2014**	2010	2014	2010	2014	2010	2014	2010	2014
Speaking to microphone	**100** (100%)	**111** (100%)	92 (92%)	102 (91.9%)	7 (7%)	9 (0.9%)			1 (1%)	
Contact	**10** (100%)	**91** (100%)	10 (100%)	60 (65.9%)		29 (31.9%)		2 (2.2%)		
Comment	**3** (100%)	**90** (100%)		44 (48.9%)	3 (100%)	32 (35.6%)				14 (15.5%)
Audience	**49** (100%)	**43** (100%)	1 (2.0%)	2 (4.6%)	22 (44.9%)	26 (60.5%)	12 (24.5%)	10 (23.3%)	14 (28.6%)	5 (11.6%)
Website/social media image	**13** (100%)	**31** (100%)	6 (46.2%)	25 (80.6%)	7 (53.8%)	6 (19.4%)				
Send content	**7** (100%)	**23** (100%)	4 (57.1%)	20 (87%)	3 (42.9%)	2 (8.7%)				1 (4.3%)
Compete	**14** (100%)	**17** (100%)				7 (41.2%)	12 (85.7%)	10 (58.8%)	2 (14.3%)	
Draw	**4** (100%)	**14** (100%)		8 (57.1%)	4 (100%)	6 (42.9%)				
Vote	**4** (100%)	**14** (100%)		4 (28.6%)	1 (25%)	9 (64.3%)			3 (75%)	1 (7.1%)
Survey	**5** (100%)		3 (60%)		2 (40%)					
Play		**5** (100%)						5 (100%)		
Other	**15** (100%)	**17** (100%)	1 (6.6%)	4 (23.5%)	10 (66.6%)	8 (47.1%)			4 (26.7%)	5 (29.4%)
TOTAL	**224** (100%)	**456** (100%)	117 (52.2%)	269 (59%)	59 (26.4%)	134 (29.4%)	24 (10.7%)	27 (5.9%)	24 (10.7%)	26 (5.7%)

Source: compiled by author using data collated in the sample.

not as a product. Neither La 1 nor La 2 had any participation process that involved any kind of direct financial compensation as a result of their audiences' participation. They are the only two channels in the sample in 2014 with this feature. Furthermore, Spain's public TV and radio corporation seeks to be present in the new platforms and drive technological innovation in communication. Central treatment of participation is a key value at La 1, which stands out from the other channels in terms of handling participation processes. Even though it does not have the most processes, it does broadcast the most with individual prominence and central relevance. The gap between this type of participation on La 1 and the other operators is even wider in current affairs programmes.

The private stations have been restructured following the conglomeration processes at Atresmedia and Mediaset. Telecinco is the channel with the most participation invitations per broadcast (2.8). The comparison between 2010 and 2014 shows a generalised increase in all participation invitations, especially for the purposes of commenting and contacting. The importance of speaking to microphones and attendance as a member of the audience has fallen. What is interesting in this case is the increasing presence of draws and voting, which helps to consolidate the perception that the Mediaset channel closely links participation to the commercialisation of audience activity. The change up to 2014 shows how Telecinco has broadcast more info-shows and has included 61.1% of its participation

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invitations in these programmes. Meanwhile Cuatro has tilted its invitations towards current affairs which account for 54.8% of its participation invitations.

For its part Atresmedia has also not unified its scheduling or participation management strategies on its two general interest channels and has diversified its participation options. Like Cuatro, laSexta has more participation in its current affairs programmes while Antena 3 TV has expanded its strategy in game shows and info-shows. As for the purpose of participation, Antena 3 TV has gone from participation highly focussed on testimonies, speaking to microphone and attendance as a member of the audience (together they accounted for 69% of the total in 2010) to a more diversified range with some prominence for contact (25% of total invitations in 2014) but also including comments, games, sending content, attendance as a member of the audience and invitations to play with shares of between 7% and 13% of the total participation options. In 2010 two-thirds of laSexta's participation options consisted of speaking to microphones (49%) and contact (15%), while in 2014 approximately the same proportion was divided between speaking to microphones (31%), contact (18%) and comments (21%). There were also more invitations to send content (up from 2% in 2010 to 9% in 2014).

6. Conclusions

This paper sets out a theoretical and methodological proposal that can be continued and supplemented by others that also address the issues raised by Livingstone (2013). Here an attempt is made to answer his first question: "what modes of participation are afforded to people by the particular media and communication infrastructures which mediate social, cultural or political spheres of life?" (Livingstone 2013, 28). Further research is needed to answer the second: "How do people engage with, accede to, negotiate or contest this as they explore and invent new ways of connecting with each other through and around media?" (Livingstone 2013, 28). Bourdaa and Lozano Delmar (2016) in fandom and Heise *et al.* (2013) in journalism have recently presented some evidence along these lines.

The Spanish case shows that most of the programmes broadcast include some type of participation process and that there is a growing presence of mediated participation. Observation of these four years and analysis of general interest channels in Spain indicate some similarities and differences, but in general there has been little consistency in putting in place a corporate strategy for participation. Other authors have come to similar conclusions (Miguel de Bustos and Casado 2012; Hille and Bakker 2013; Barra and Scaglioni 2014; Franquet and Villa-Montoya 2014).

Invitation strategies in the Spanish market are halfway between audience participation and promoting the television channels. In many cases the range of participation options has advanced on the back of new technological possibilities, but it has been built

by trial and error. Television professionals have been forced to adapt to a new ecosystem while competing under traditional industrial systems and need to meet the needs of their audience who in lockstep have adopted new consumption habits. Meanwhile a battle has broken out between firms like Twitter and Facebook to be the key venue where the conversation takes place about everything that is broadcast, repeated, premiered or produced on television and in other media. The data collated in this research show how participation options linked to social media have grown. The social tag of a significant amount of prime time content is intended to generate a conversation in parallel to the broadcast. In recent years these digital intermediaries have become essential places for managing social conversations linked to television scheduling. Recent studies have also identified this trend (González Conde and Salgado Santamaría 2015). It thus seems evident that television networks have given in to the power of social media and have missed out on the opportunity to enhance their position as mediators of the conversation around the contents they broadcast.

Comments in sync with the broadcast are perhaps the parameter that best reflects this issue and the change between the samples in 2010 and 2014. While in 2010 it was a process conducted using text message technology, usually paid for and used mainly by private networks in entertainment programmes or info-shows, by 2014 it had become a free invitation largely mediated by the website or apps using hashtags and applied to all television genres from current affairs to info-shows and including game shows and fiction. In addition, comments in sync have sustained television liveness in the era of audience, device and distribution channel fragmentation. Similar evidence has also been found in other parts of the world (Kroon 2017).

The issue of participation is too important for the competitive pace of television to push producers to make hasty and improvised decisions. The many theories, proposals and research presented here are an example of the intense discussion and debate about this subject. Contextualisation and an interdisciplinary approach are crucial to question and conceptualise participatory processes in the media and through them. We are at an extremely apt time to learn more in academia but also in communication with the industry, professionals, independent producers, institutions and policymakers about how to set up an appropriate means of communication between the media and audiences. Other authors (Van Dijck and Poell 2015) also point in this direction with special reference to public media.

At all events it is a subject matter of study that is constantly changing and future research will need to continue looking at processes driven by channels or built by users which seek to find better communication between producers and viewers, between journalists and citizens, between television and its audience. It will be reasoned, informed, calm and well-intentioned communication based on mutual recognition and respect which does not ignore the complex emotional implications that come into play in our mediated life. The benefits are well known: a knowing audience that partners the creation of news and scripts, more reasons to expand the content reception process

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and encourage fans to maintain more regular contact with the channel and, in short, an enhanced role for television in the social, cultural and political realms which it influences.

Notes

1. In the field of audience study *engagement* entails a number of nuances concerning motivation, enthusiasm and involvement. As a result *engagement* is one of the most used and discussed indicators when it comes to measuring the relationship between audiences and texts. In digital advertising and marketing, for example, this measure calculates the interactions of followers or fans and their intensity and recurrence so as to keep track of the most proactive users (Neira 2013). However, even though it has been linked to metrics or to the measurement of online activities, the term refers to the internalisation and emotion of the audience (Kozinets 2014).

2. For example, the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) framework has funded an action on Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies (COST Action ISO906). There is more information about the project here [last visited on 29 January 2017]. In addition the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), as part of Media, Communication, Participation & Community, has a section for research into Participatory Communication. The European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) section on audience and reception studies has supported a number of initiatives such as the Transforming Audiences conference at the University of Westminster which for years has focused on the close relationship between the media and audiences.

3. Two examples illustrating this approach are the eighth issue of the *International Journal of Communication* (2014) and the third issue of the nineteenth volume of *Convergence* (2013). In both of them researchers from a range of backgrounds discuss participation in the contemporary fields of culture, politics and communication.

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