

Looking for the audiences: The effect of using *partial* counterprogramming and a friendlier style of news presentation

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EN BUSCA DE LAS AUDIENCIAS: EL EFECTO DEL USO DE LA CONTRAPROGRAMACIÓN PARCIAL Y UN ESTILO MÁS AMIGABLE DE LOS NOTICARIOS

RESUMEN: En el contexto de un experimento natural, este estudio explora el efecto en las audiencias como resultado de un cambio en un noticiero en cuanto a su estilo (entrega más amigable de las noticias) y de su estrategia de programación (contraprogramación parcial), el cual no ha sido reportado previamente por la literatura. Se examinan en este artículo dos variables dependientes: tamaño y lealtad de la audiencia. Los resultados demuestran el rol significativo de la contraprogramación parcial que afecta tanto el tamaño total como la lealtad de la audiencia y en todos los segmentos socioeconómicos bajo estudio. Finalmente, la lealtad de la audiencia hacia el programa decrece cuando se usa un formato más amigable. Los resultados son discutidos en cuanto a sus implicancias para la teoría de administración de medios y la industria de la televisión abierta.

PALABRAS CLAVE: administración de medios, estrategias de programación, entrega de noticias, noticieros, televisión, marketing.

RECHERCHE D'AUDIENCE : L'EFFET DE L'UTILISATION DE LA CONTRE PROGRAMMATION PARTIELLE ET UN STYLE PLUS AGRÉABLE DE JOURNAUX TÉLÉVISÉS

RÉSUMÉ : Dans un contexte *expérimental* naturel, cette étude explore l'effet d'audience en tant que résultat d'un changement dans un journal télévisé concernant le style (annonce plus agréable des nouvelles) et la stratégie de programmation (contre programmation partielle), ceci n'ayant pas été rapporté au préalable dans les publications. Deux variables dépendantes sont examinées dans cet article : l'importance et la fidélité de l'audience. Les résultats démontrent le rôle significatif de la contre programmation partielle influençant autant la quantité totale que la fidélité de l'audience et ceci pour tous les segments socioéconomiques étudiés. Finalement, la fidélité de l'audience pour un programme décroît si le format utilisé est plus agréable. Les résultats sont discutés en rapport avec leur implication pour la théorie d'administration de médias et l'industrie de la télévision ouverte.

MOTS-CLEFS : administration des médias, stratégies de programmation, annonce des nouvelles, informations, télévision, marketing.

EM BUSCA DA AUDIÊNCIA: O EFEITO DO USO DA CONTRA-PROGRAMAÇÃO PARCIAL E UM ESTILO MAIS AMIGÁVEL DOS NOTICIÁRIOS

RESUMO: No contexto de um experimento natural, este estudo explora o efeito na audiência como resultado de uma mudança em um noticário quanto ao seu estilo (entrega mais amigável das notícias) e à sua estratégia de programação (contra-programação *parcial*), o qual não foi abordado previamente pela literatura. Examinam-se neste artigo duas variáveis dependentes: tamanho e lealdade da audiência. Os resultados demonstram o papel significativo da contra-programação parcial afetando tanto o tamanho total como a lealdade da audiência e em todos os segmentos socioeconômicos em estudo. Finalmente, a lealdade da audiência para com o programa decrece quando se usa um formato mais amigável. Os resultados são discutidos quanto às suas implicações para a teoria de administração de meios de comunicação e a indústria da televisão aberta.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: administração de meios de comunicação, estratégias de programação, entrega de notícias, noticiários, televisão, marketing.

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ABSTRACT: In the context of a *natural experiment*, this study explores the effect on audiences as a result of a change in the style of the newscasts (friendlier delivery) and in the scheduling strategy (*partial* counterprogramming), which have not been reported by the previous literature. Two dependent variables are examined in this paper: Audience size and loyalty. Findings demonstrate the significant role of *partial* counterprogramming in changing both the total size of the audience and loyalty in all of the socio-demographic segments studied. Finally, audience program loyalty decreases when friendlier format elements are used. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for media management theory and the broadcasting industry.

KEYWORDS: Media management, programming strategy, news delivery, newscasts, television, marketing.

Antecedents

Main television newscasts have been largely considered one of the most relevant programs for TV stations. On the one hand, they have the mission of informing citizens on the current issues (a crucial element of democratic life) and being the space in which the editorial line of media outlets is most clearly expressed (Robinson and Levy, 1986). On the other hand, they are part of the *prime time*, which is the daypart that attracts the most viewers and, as a result, they represent the most relevant proportion of advertising investment¹ (Napoli, 2003; Webster et al., 2006).

¹ Prime time refers to when the most audience is available in a particular market and, for that reason, this block varies across the countries. In the USA is the daypart from 8 pm to 11 pm on both coasts, and 7 pm to 10 pm in the Central and Mountain areas. In the UK from 6 pm to 10:30 pm; in Japan from 7 pm to 10 pm, and in Chile and across Latin America from 8 pm to 11 pm. Prime time concentrates about 40% of the TV consumption and 60% of the total TV advertising investment (Arnold, 2002; Triviño, 2007; Webster et al., 2006).

Since newscasts are currently operating in an increasingly competitive marketplace characterized by fragmented audiences, multi-channel platforms, 24-hour news stations, and the growing relevance of mixed genres such as *infotainment* (Graber, 2001), producers have been compelled to make significant marketing efforts in order to develop and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage over time (Buchman, 2000). In this vein, different marketing strategies have been developed to get better results in terms of amount, profile and loyalty of the audience (Webster, 2006). One line of work has been the promotional efforts, which has been explored by different studies examining the use of elements such as promos and teasers within the programs themselves and in different media (Buchman, 2000; Gregson, 2002; Ben-Po-rath, 2004; Mapaye et al., 2008). For example, a study developed by Chan-Olsted and Kim (2001) examined the perceptions of marketing practices among managers of commercial television stations and found that brand promotion was understood as a relevant tool primarily in the areas most related to news.

Other efforts have focused on the changes at the level of newscast product (i.e. the program itself). There is significant evidence of modifications in terms of news packaging based on increasing personalization, live reporting, sensationalistic agenda, and emotional narrative (Rosen and Taylor, 1992; Graber, 1994; Brant and Neijens, 1998). In addition, the use of younger, more physically attractive anchors and a more conversational style of presentation have been another usual improvement developed by media outlets to increase the marketability of news programs (Cupchik and Kemp, 2000; Nitz et al., 2007).

Changes in the delivery of news have been also employed by the industry. Since main newscasts usually are scheduled at the same time (a programming strategy usually labeled as *blunting* or *stripping*), *counterprogramming*² has been used as an alternative to increase the audience size (Batten and McDowell, 2005). In a study of 24-hour networks and traditional newscasts, Bae (1999) detected that although the main form of competition was the development of new program formats, counterprogramming was also a frequent tool of differentiation in the case of 24-hour news channels.

Chilean TV newscasts have not been outside of these increasing pressures to offer their audiences more attractive news programs. Although some modifications had been made in the past, the most significant effort along

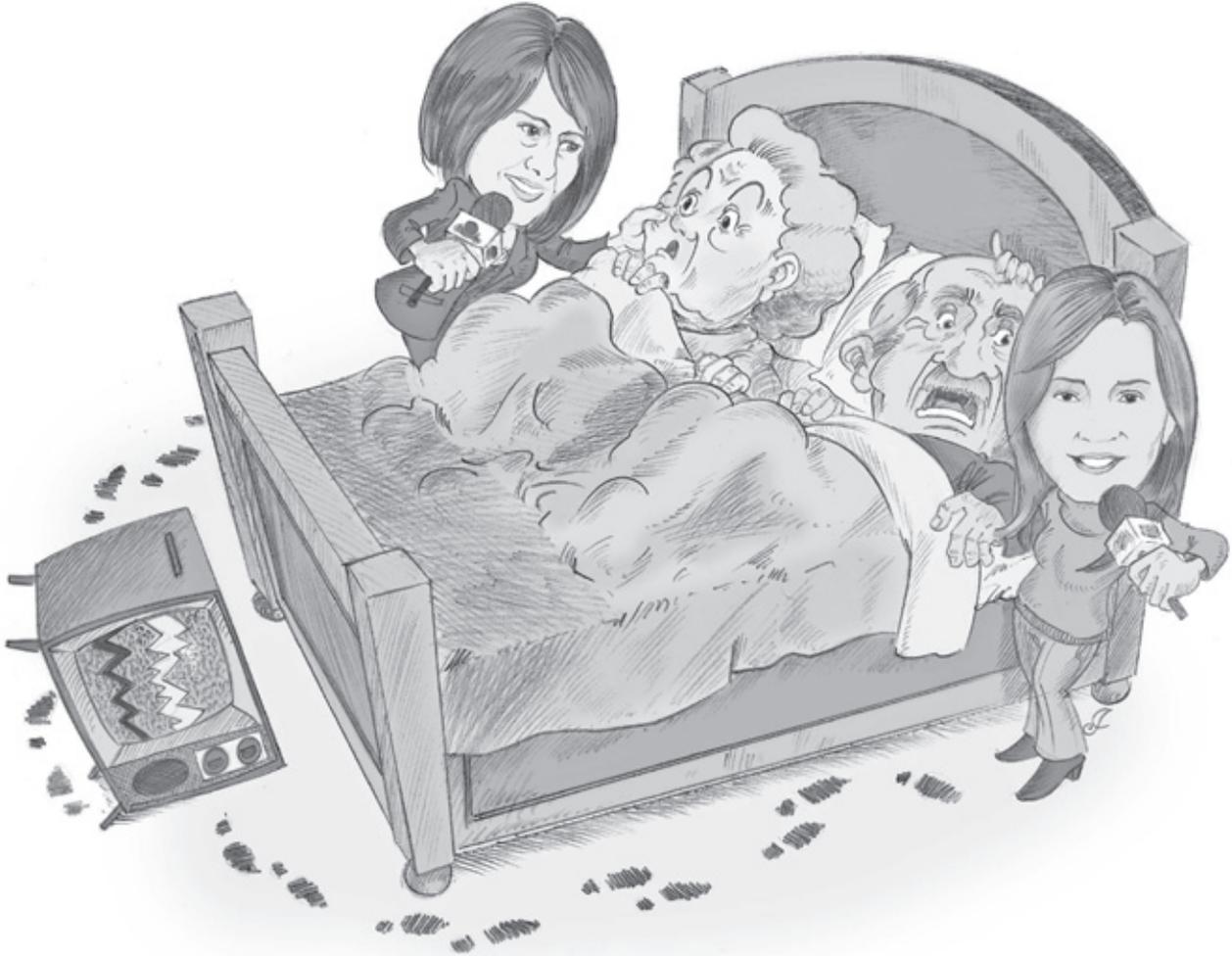
this line took place in Chile in 2009. In March of that year, Chile's oldest and most traditional newscast—*Teletrece*—aired by Channel 13 (a private station owned at that time by the Catholic University³) implemented a group of major changes in a short period of time.

On March 3, that station decided to change the scheduling of its newscast and starting the program at 9:13 pm rather than the usual 9:00 pm (the starting time of the all other major newscasts). That means that Channel 13 developed a new strategy, which previous literature has not reported before: A mix between proper *counterprogramming* (broadcasting a different program from 9:00 pm to 9:13 pm) and *stripping* (broadcasting competitor's same program since 9:13 pm). This decision was mainly due to the fact that *Teletrece* was facing a slow but ongoing decrease in the amount of viewers. Since the audience size of the preceding program (local *telenovela* or soap opera) was larger than the one of the newscast, the rationale of this decision was to finish the soap opera later and, thus, to force a lead-in or inheritance effect (in which people who was watching a program tend to stay tuned to the next) on the newscast *Teletrece* (Cooper, 1993; Webster, 2006). Two weeks later (March 16), the station introduced another major change, but in this case at the product level: New news anchors (two well-known and younger journalists) using a more conversational style of news presentation. The main objective of this change, according to one of the new anchors, was to produce a "more sympathetic and closer news delivery" (<http://www.canal13.cl>, 2009). Finally, on July 13, the station decided to reschedule the newscast and return to the traditional time schedule (9 pm) but maintained the new format and style of the program.

From a research perspective, that sequence of events offers a "natural experiment" (Dunning, 2008) that makes it possible to compare the effects of the change in the newscast product and delivery (scheduling) on the audience behavior. That is to say, this is an exceptional moment in the field of broadcasting management, and particularly in the specific area of program choice—a central theme in media studies (Webster, 2006)—to explore the separate and joint effects of changes in the production elements and a new form of programming strategy (what we label here as *partial-counterprogramming*) on three key variables of audience response: Amount of people watching TV, loyalty of them tuning the program, and socio-demographic profile of that people (Perebinosoff et al., 2005).

² Counterprogramming refers to when programmers offer something different from the rival's program (Head, 1985).

³ In August 6th, 2010, this station was bought by the Luksic Group, the largest economic conglomerate in Chile.



Consequently, this study examines how the changes of newscast format and style, and programming strategy affect audience size and profile, which have been frequently used as dependent variables in the pieces of research on broadcasting programming (Barwise, 1986; Schofield and Driscoll, 1991; Sherman, 1995; Webster, 2006). Moreover, this study includes another dependent variable: audience loyalty (as within-program loyalty), which has not been previously explored in audience studies. Studies traditionally have examined loyalty as repeat viewing (the proportion of viewers that watch consecutive episodes of a regular program or series), but not as the amount of time that people tune in to the same program (Goodhardt et al., 1987). This measure not only offers programming managers a complementary metric for evaluating the strength of the audience size, but also shows a key indicator of the brand equity of TV programs (Boemer, 1987; McDowell and Sutherland, 2000).

Previous research

The vast majority of the studies in the field of changes in newscast product and scheduling have been content analyses of the prominence and nature of such variations. These examinations have demonstrated that channels actually use competitive scheduling strategies as a tool to develop preference among the members of the audience (Ferguson, 1997). A case in point is the study of Lin (1995a; 1995b), who developed two comparisons between different all-news networks. He reported that these news outlets have chosen the counterprogramming strategy (offering a program that is different from any other network) more often than any other strategy.

Despite the evidence regarding the extensive use of different types of scheduling, there is scarce research examining the actual effect of these changes on audience size. From the perspective of media economics, Horen (1980)

analyzed the effect of program scheduling on audience share. He particularly measured the extent to which ratings can be modified by rescheduling programs and then tested commonly discussed scheduling strategies. He observed that *counterprogramming* was the only strategy used and justified by the model to increase the total audience size. Moreover, in a subsequent study, Goettler (1999) reported that *counterprogramming* could increase both the audience size particularly during hours in which the number of people watching TV is raising.

It is interesting nevertheless to note that no studies have examined the effect of *partial* counterprogramming (or partial stripping or blunting), which is to say, scheduling a program to start few minutes later (or earlier) than the competition as Channel 13 did in Chile. Moreover, as it was mentioned, no studies have reported the effect of full or partial counterprogramming on different segments of the audience and on program loyalty.

On the other hand, there is a group of studies describing several types of changes in program content, news themes, format, features, agenda, and presentation. Many of their findings have been tied, in theory or in fact, to a potential increase in the degree of attractiveness of the news on audiences at individual level (see Grabe et al., 2003; Lang et al., 2005; Miller, 2006). For example, Behnke and Miller (1992) examined viewer reactions to news content and format presentation and reported that news about accidents, violence, and drama, as well as commercials with strong visual and musical support received the highest interest ratings. In a more contemporary piece of research, Tuggle et al. (2007) measured the impact of live news coverage among 18-to-24 year old students. Although two thirds of them said that live coverage could be "meaningless" at times, they strongly appreciated the immediacy of live news stories and felt that they could help storytelling and convey news context. No evidence has been reported, however, on the actual effect of these features at an aggregate level in terms of total audience size or audience segments. Furthermore, the existing literature reports no results regarding the effect of these features on the amount of time spent watching the program (loyalty).

Research questions

This study addressed four main research questions by examining the effect of program scheduling and/or style on audiences in terms of audience size (total and by viewer socio-demographic segments) and loyalty (within program).

RQ1: *Do partial counterprogramming or newscast style modifications alter the program's total audience size or socio-demographic profile?*

RQ2: *Do partial counterprogramming and newscast style combination alter the program's total audience size or socio-demographic profile?*

RQ3: *Does the audience loyalty of the newscasts change using partial counterprogramming or modifying the style of newscasts?*

RQ4: *Does the audience loyalty of the newscasts change by the interactions produced using partial counterprogramming and modifying the style of newscasts?*

Method

This paper examines aggregate data from the on-line measure of Time-Ibope using the People Meter® system. This system is based on a panel sample recorded by an electronic device installed in all of the TV sets in the households participating in the study in order to record the level of viewership and the selected TV stations on a minute-by-minute basis. The sample of this panel covers 5.5 million urban residents of Chile's major cities.

This study included weekdays between February 9 and August 7, 2009. We selected only weekdays because *Teletrece* was aired during its traditional schedule on weekends. Additionally, data from the same days from 2008 were analyzed to control significant differences in the audience size over time.

The unit of analysis used in this study was the daily average of each dependent variable. This allowed the researchers to compare the audience size, profile, and level of loyalty over the period defined in this study. As Table 1 shows, a 2x2 factorial design was carried out to take advantage of the "natural experiment" produced by the successive variations in the newscast timing and style (Dunning, 2008).

TABLE 1. Study sample and design.

Programming	Style of newscast		Total
	Old	New	
Stripping/blunting	Period 1 (16 days)	Period 4 (20 days)	36 days
Partial counterprogramming	Period 2 (9 days)	Period 3 (82 days)	91 days
Total	25 days	102 days	127 days

The dependent variables measured were audience size (total audience size and across different socio-demographic segments) and audience loyalty. The first one was defined as the daily average of audience of the whole program as total and by sex (male-female), socioeconomic groups (SEL) of people (upper, mid-upper, mid-lower and lower), and age grouped as young (18-24 young), young adults (25-34), mid-adults (35-50), and older adults (50+). Finally,

audience loyalty was understood as the amount of time that a person tunes in to a particular station (within-program loyalty and not as audience duplication or between-program loyalty). An average of the daily program loyalty was used in this study (Webster et al., 2006).

Data analysis consisted, first, in an additive decomposition of the data in order to avoid the changes as a result of the time of the year. Second, ANOVA test was computed to determine potential differences between data from 2008 and 2009 (total newscasts audience) for the total period and for each sub-period examined. Third, data were analyzed by a *general linear model* to test the differences of the whole model and each component and their interaction. This model was carried out for the total audience, each socio-demographic variable (age, sex, and SEL), and program loyalty. Since some cells do not have many cases, significance levels were 0.01 (99%) or higher.

Results

The analysis of the data from 2008 and 2009 showed general stability in that the size of the total audience (market) of the year examined (2009) did not show an increase or decrease with respect to 2008 that could distort the results of this study. It is important to note, however, that significant differences (decreases) were detected in upper and mid-upper socioeconomic groups, and 50+ viewers. Loyalty, on the other hand, depicted a significant decrease over the years included in this study. Moreover, in almost all of the segments examined the same tendency was detected: The level of loyalty within newscasts significantly decreased in Chile in 2009 (see Table 2).

The research questions were then analyzed. The first (RQ1) aimed to examine the effect of the different scheduling

strategies and newscast style on audience size. As Table 3 shows, changing the scheduling from *stripping* to *partial counterprogramming* produced a significant increase in *Teletrece's* total audience size (from 4.97 to 6.2; $F=57.889$, $p<0.001$). The change in newscast style detected a small but not significant change from 5.67 to 5.89. There was also significant interaction between the two variables ($F=3.883$, $p<0.005$); the combination of the scheduling change and the new style of newscast were associated with a significant increase in the *Teletrece* audience size. In practice, that means that of this newscast's market share increased with the use of partial counterprogramming and that growth was higher when the change of scheduling was associated with the traditional style.

Examining Table 3 makes it possible to describe the exact trajectory of these changes. When the first change, partial counterprogramming, was implemented in Period 2 (P2), the total audience increased from 4.93 to 6.99 rating points ($F=21.212$, $p<0.001$). This variation was followed by a small but insignificant decrease in the level of audience in the P3, when the new style of newscast was introduced. Finally, a significant decrease was detected in the P4 ($F=4.890$, $p<0.01$), when the station decided to return to the traditional stripping style of programming (at 9:00 PM) and the audience returned to a level similar to that detected in P1.

Assuming that *Teletrece's* market share changed as the programming strategy varied and interacted with style of programming, the second research question (RQ2) asked about the influence of programming strategy and newscast style on the different socio-demographic segments of the audience. Results corroborated the influence of the programming strategy on audience size across all the groups examined as well as the influence of the interaction between this variable and the style of newscast

TABLE 2. Comparison of total audience size, profile, and loyalty of the all major Chilean newscasts in 2008 and 2009.

Variable	Segment	Audience size		Audience loyalty	
		2008	2009	2008	2009
SEX	Male	22.53	23.05	35.29	32.04*
	Female	28.49	27.10	40.81	36.02*
SEL	Upper	20.49	17.93*	32.19	29.38*
	Mid-upper	23.38	21.30*	36.82	32.5*
	Mid-lower	26.16	25.97	39.75	34.41*
	Lower	27.87	28.58	39.01	35.49*
AGE	18-24	13.65	14.41	31.27	30.87
	25-34	20.27	19.79	35.27	30.96*
	35-49	24.38	25.28	34.91	31.54*
	50+	36.54	33.99*	44.25	38.66*
Total		25.65	25.18	38.38	34.23*

* $p<0.001$

TABLE 3. *Teletrece* audience size over the four periods of this study (in rating points).

Programming	Style of newscast		Marginals
	Old	New	
Stripping/blunting	4.93 (P1)	5.00 (P4)	4.97
Partial counter	6.99 (P2)	6.11 (P3)	6.20*
Marginals	5.67	5.90	

Programming	Old	New
Stripping/blunting	4.93	5.00
Partial counter	6.99	6.11

(Table 4). By sex, significant main effects were detected for both men ($F=24.440$, $p<0.001$) and women ($F=61.399$, $p<0.001$). In the case of all SEL, a significant main effect was detected among upper ($F=25.251$, $p<0.001$), mid-upper ($F=19.862$, $p<0.001$), mid lower ($F= 56.240$, $p<0.001$), and lower viewers ($F= 16.205$, $p<0.001$). Finally, when considering age, a primary effect for the use of partial counterprogramming was observed across all segments: 18-24 ($F=10.726$, $p<0.002$), 25-34 ($F=23.609$ $p<0.001$), 35-49 ($F=55.613$, $p<0.001$), and 50+ ($F=30.346$, $p<0.001$). The figures for Period 2 show a particularly pronounced change among females, the mid-lower group, and the 25-34 and 50+ age segments in which the audience size depicted ratings above 8 points.

Main effects in the style of newscasts, however, were only detected in males ($F=14.963$, $p<0.001$) and the mid-lower ($F=10.219$, $p<0.002$) groups, demonstrating that the ability of this variable to significantly modify audi-

ence size is more limited than partial counterprogramming. Finally, interaction between the two variables was found in the case of the 18-24 ($F=8.821$, $p<0.004$) and 35-49 ($F=8.120$, $p<0.005$) age groups, the mid-lower SEL ($F=7.941$, $p<0.005$), and females ($F=13.164$, $p<0.001$).

This study also examined the influence of the programming strategy and/ or the style of newscast on audience loyalty (RQ3 and RQ4). Results showed a primary effect in the case of newscast style ($F=16.234$, $p<0.001$), which depicted a decrease in the level of loyalty from 35 minutes, 24 seconds to 32 minutes, 2 seconds when the new format was implemented. Nevertheless, programming strategy was not associated with a change in loyalty. In fact, the levels of loyalty in the periods 3 and 4 are approximately 32 minutes instead of the loyalty observed in the period 1 and 2, which was approximately 35 minutes (see Table 5).

An additional analysis by segments demonstrated that the general tendency toward a decrease in loyalty is verified in

TABLE 5. *Teletrece* audience loyalty over the four periods in this study (in % of the program).

Programming	Style of newscast		Marginals
	Old	New	
Stripping/blunting	35.30 (P1)	31.29 (P4)	33.15
Partial counter	35.01 (P2)	32.10 (P3)	32.29
Marginals	35.15	32.01*	

Programming	Old	New
Stripping/blunting	35.30	31.29
Partial counter	35.01	32.10

TABLE 4. Audience size across different *Teletrece* segments for the four periods of this study (in rating points).

Variable	Segment	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Stripping vs. counterprogramming	Traditional vs. New Style	Interaction effect
SEX	Male	5.05	5.87	5.25	4.21*	4.55-5.40*	5.34-5.04*	No
	Female	4.82	8.03*	6.94	5.71*	5.31-7.00*	5.97-6.65	Yes*
SEL	Upper	4.33	6.11*	5.35	4.61*	4.48-5.43*	4.97-5.21	No
	Mid-upper	4.89	6.82*	6.74	5.96*	5.46-6.74*	5.46-6.74	No
	Mid-lower	5.24	8.68*	6.72*	5.01*	5.12-6.91*	6.48-6.38	Yes*
	Lower	4.89	6.01*	5.55*	4.57*	4.72-5.71*	5.30-5.34	No
AGE	18-24	3.10	4.73*	4.09	4.01	3.90-5.02*	4.32-4.80	No
	25-34	4.82	8.02*	6.88*	5.71*	5.31-9.00*	5.97-6.65	No
	35-49	4.16	6.62*	5.58*	4.54*	4.35-6.01*	5.39-5.06	No
	50+	6.82	8.55*	7.80	6.11*	6.46-8.17*	7.68-6.95	No

* $p<0.001$

TABLE 6. *Teletrece* audience loyalty in each segment (in % of the program).

Variable	Segment	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Stripping vs. counterprogramming	Traditional vs. New Style	Interaction effect
SEX	Male	34.66	31.63	29.87	28.16	31.05-30.04	33.57 - 29.53*	Yes*
	Female	36.36	37.77	33.97*	34.13	35.12-34.34	36.86 - 34.00*	No
SEL	Upper	34.57	34.22	31.4*	30.97	32.57-31.68	34.44 - 31.32*	No
	Mid-upper	35.15	35.94	35.60	34.99	35.06-35.63	35.44 - 35.48	No
	Mid-lower	36.46	40.16	32.63*	30.80	33.32-33.37	37.79 - 32.27*	No
	Lower	34.95	30.94	29.98	29.68	32.02-30.08	33.51 - 29.92*	No
AGE	18-24	33.96	32.99	32.09	34.66	34.35-32.18	33.61 - 32.59	No
	25-34	32.12	31.74	28.82*	28.44	30.08-29.11	31.98 - 28.74*	No
	35-49	30.73	33.20	30.18*	27.81	29.11-30.48	31.62 - 29.71*	No
	50+	41.96	38.98	35.57*	35.44	38.34-35.91	40.89 - 35.54*	No

*p< 0.001

virtually all the groups. In fact, in Period 2 no significant changes were detected. Nevertheless, the females, upper, mid-lower, 25-34, 35-49 and 50+ groups decreased their level of loyalty in Period 3, which modified the style of newscasts. Finally, no changes were detected in the case of Period 4. This general tendency is corroborated in the comparison between traditional and new style of newscasts, where almost all the segments decreased their loyalty (see Table 6).

Discussion

In the context of a *natural experiment*, this study sought to explore the effect of the change in the programming strategy and the style of newscasts on TV audiences. Two dependent variables in particular were examined: Audience size (total and by segments) and program loyalty. The results of the first variable demonstrated the influence of scheduling (a structural factor of TV viewership largely described by the previous literature) as a predictor of the change in audience size (see Webster et al., 2006). In particular, this study examined a programming strategy never reported before: *partial* counterprogramming. The figures revealed an increase in the number of people watching a program when this strategy was used in comparison with traditional stripping, which was also corroborated across the different segments examined in this research.

The analysis of audience within-program loyalty showed that the style of newscast was related to a decrease in the amount of time spent watching that particular newscast and thus a corresponding decrease in loyalty. Again, this tendency was verified in all the segments examined. This result apparently contradicts the general perspective suggested in previous literature. Studies that have evaluated changes toward friendlier and more approachable news have asserted that this style of news delivery should stimu-

late greater loyalty (Graber, 2001). A potential explanation for this finding is that the style of news presentation—at least as it was done in this case—could result in friendlier but also less relevant stimuli. Then, this can produce a lower level of mental effort in the news processing (Lang, 2000) and a subsequent channel switching (Lang et al., 2005; Meyer and Muthlay, 2008). In addition, it is also possible to question whether these particular anchor persons, their style of presentation, and the formal features of news (all of them were not evaluated in this study) actually increased the level of people’s engagement (Lang et al., 1999). As prior research has demonstrated, when viewers are not mentally engaged with the program, and are experiencing negative affective reactions to the content, channel changing tend to increase (Perse, 1998; Lang et al., 2005).

All in all, this study allows the researchers to report three major findings. First, the use of a partial counterprogramming was successful in increasing the level of audience. Second, the use of this strategy also affects every sociodemographic segment. Third, changing the style of newscasts to friendlier formats decreased the level of within-program loyalty.

These findings could be especially helpful for media managers that are under pressure not only to increase the audience size, but also to attract audiences with particular profiles. In this regard, this study proposes the use of partial counterprogramming as a potential strategy to increase the number of viewers for outlets that cannot (for cultural, historical, or other reasons) use a proper counterprogramming strategy. The down side to this change, however, is that it could produce alterations in the audience profile, which could, in turn, affect the level of interest that current advertisers have in working with that station and the revenue of it. In this case, the effect of partial counterprogramming in a newscast was particularly noticeable in

the case of women, mid-lower income people and the 25-34 and 50+ age groups. This is a relevant issue because the price of advertising depends on the audience composition (i.e. the relative profitability of the different market segments), not simply on its magnitude (Roson, 2008).

Another implication of this study is related to the strong influence exerted by the programming strategy on the audience behavior. This paper provides new evidence arguing that the structural characteristics of the media environment (in this case, programming) play an important role in predicting audiences' choice and loyalty. This means that media managers should pay attention not only to the characteristics of the programs themselves, but the structural features of the media environment, which play an important, if less appreciated role, in determining audiences' program choice (Webster and Newton, 1988; Webster, 2009).

On the other hand, these results have also implications for the understanding of the media consumers' behavior in general. At his point it is important to differentiate between linear and non-linear media (meaning traditional and non-traditional media). In the case of the former, the consumer behavior is apparently highly predictive, and the use of different styles of delivery in a limited market can exert a relevant influence over consumer choices (Webster, 2008). Nevertheless, in the case of new media—in which there are not clear market boundaries—it is relevant to ask for the applicability of these results to a new digital environment. In a new scenario characterized by increasing media choices and audience fragmentation, it is theoretically arguable that the role of the scheduling should exert less influence. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence has shown that despite of countless media outlets, people tend to use a limited number of providers (Lee and Delli Caprini, 2010; Webster, 2011).

Thus, more research is certainly needed to determine whether the findings depicted by this paper can be generalized. First, this study used only one newscast in a given country. Second, one dependent variable (style of newscasts) depicted a group of changes, which indicates that the effect on loyalty could be related to one of these modifications or to their combination. Moreover, this study does not reject the relevance of this factor, which could be significant at a different level. Third, while in this case partial counterprogramming was used in association with a soap opera, another genre could obviously produce different alterations either in terms of total audience size or in determining the segments in which this strategy is more effective.

Further research should focus on the relationship between these findings and other marketing-related topics like

brand equity as the origin of media consumer behavior in terms of both the amount of consumption and the characteristics of consumer (McDowell and Sutherland, 2000). Moreover, it is essential to study the relevance of programming variables (i.e. scheduling) on audiences in the new media environment, which is characterized by an unlimited number of choices (Webster, 2011).

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