

## **Beyond the Public/Commercial Broadcaster Dichotomy: Homogenization and Melodramatization of News Coverage in Chile**

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Television studies have traditionally highlighted the differences between public and commercial broadcasters' news coverage. Research also suggests that increases in commercial competition within oligopolistic television markets affects diversity, with public networks adopting features of commercial broadcasters. This article examines commercial news coverage in Chile based on the characteristics attributed to melodrama in the Latin American theoretical tradition. A content analysis of two constructed weeks of newscasts from four Chilean networks (one publicly owned, three commercial) suggests that changes in the competition context were related to a homogenization of the networks' coverage and a general increase of melodramatic features. These results support the hypothesis that news coverage analysis must consider contextual factors, such as changes in rating leadership, beyond networks' ownership structures.

*Keywords: television, news, journalism, melodrama, content analysis*

In August 2012, the Chilean Court of Appeals fined one of the country's commercial television networks for its news coverage of a jailhouse fire that resulted in the death of 81 inmates. The ruling said that the live coverage of the event was characterized by an unjustified overexposure of clearly identifiable victims and their wounds through close-ups, and that the grief and despair of their families was exacerbated by journalists' emotional comments.

Even though the court punished only one network, the other three national broadcasters were also publicly criticized in the midst of the tragedy. Indeed, Chile's National Television Council reprimanded all for four channels for similar reasons—public and commercial stations alike. This incident signals the similarities in journalistic coverage in the Chilean television system, beyond ownership structure.

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A long tradition of media studies compares public and private television's news coverage. Whereas the first kind of broadcasters are seen as prioritizing the relevant over the interesting, the public over the private, the official over the testimonial, and hard news over soft news, the second type is linked to infotainment and tabloidization.

Such a description of commercial broadcasters can be linked to the characteristics attributed to melodrama in the Latin American theoretical tradition (e.g., Martín-Barbero, 1987, 1995; Monsiváis, 2000), operationalized in this study as two dimensions: personalization (covering the private and personal over the public) and emotionalization (exacerbation of emotion through audiovisual means).

Recent cross-national studies, however, suggest that, outside of Europe, the mere difference in property structure—public or commercial—may not be enough to either explain the selection of news topics or account for superior or inferior coverage. Indeed, each national television system's features, like the amount of commercial competition allowed within each system or which broadcaster is the most successful, might be more relevant to characterizations of the news coverage and its quality (Porath & Mujica, 2012).

This study focuses on the interconnection within broadcasting systems of property and market characteristics in the characterization of news coverage.<sup>1</sup> Through a content analysis of 1,217 TV news stories, it examines the fluctuations in the presence of melodramatic traits in Chilean newscasts in a context of commercial change.

### **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

#### ***The distinction between public service and commercial broadcasting: A factor in journalistic coverage?***

A longstanding hypothesis in journalism studies is that privately-owned commercial media would be more prone to focus coverage on the personal attributes of news actors and exaggerate emotional content, while public service media would tend to follow more traditional newsworthiness standards by selecting stories about general political, economic, and social issues (Beam, 2003; Czepek & Klinger, 2010; Plasser, 2005; Thussu, 2008).

The most frequently made argument against coverage characterized by exacerbation of emotion is that it undermines the press's role of illuminating citizens in democratic societies (Franklin, 1997; McManus, 1994, quoted in Uribe & Gunter, 2007). Through sensationalist stories and sensational images,

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editing, and production elements, entertainment presents colorful news stories that are not necessarily informative (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995) and trivialize public discourse (Thussu, 2008).

Along these lines, both news spectacle and news agendas that omit socially relevant events neglect debate about public affairs and forgo a public sphere in which different social groups can express their viewpoints (García Avilés, 2007). Several scholars argue that this kind of coverage diminishes the public's capacity to retain information and comprehend complex issues (e.g., Grabe, Zhou, Lang, & Bolls, 2000; Milburn & McGrail, 1992; Prior, 2003).

Thus, while public broadcasters are described as promoters of democratic engagement, commercial television's goal to attract audiences through what we identify as melodrama arguably promotes a lack of public involvement and cynicism toward politics (Gripsrud, 2000; Holz-Bacha, 1990; Schulz, 1999), making one system seemingly better than the other.

In spite of this criticism, some voices have defended this type of infotainment coverage, arguing that it can contain contextual information about political processes. Audiences process such information in a different way than hard news, suggesting changes in attitudes over factual knowledge (Kim & Vishak, 2008; Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005; Young, 2004) given infotainment's appeal to emotion over intellect (Puente, 1997).

### ***Commercialization of Broadcasting Markets and Content Diversity***

The growth of infotainment and emotionalization in television news has been connected to the property structure of broadcasting companies—private or public. Underlying the interest to compare the journalistic coverage in both kinds of media is the assumption that, because of their mission or property structure, both models use different criteria for news selection (Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Schulz, 1999).

However, outside of Europe, property structure differences do not seem to either significantly predict news type—hard or soft news—or explain a seemingly superior or inferior quality of coverage. Indeed, a comparative study of news coverage in public and commercial newscasts from 15 countries showed that there are more similarities between the public and commercial channels of a given country than between them and public or commercial channels in other countries. This suggests that each national television system's inner characteristics might be more relevant to characterize news coverage and its quality (Porath & Mujica, 2012). Thus, factors like the amount of commercial competition allowed within each system, relative success (in terms of ratings or audience perception) of each competitor, and funding options should be taken into consideration, as well (ibid.).

The relationship between commercialization and television content diversity, in terms of the different political orientations, cultural traditions, and program formats (Van der Wurff, 2005; Van der Wurff & Van Cuilenburg, 2001), became an important issue in the context of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) loosening media control regulations in the United States (Alexander & Cunningham, 2004) and the authorization of commercial broadcasting in Europe (Czepek & Klinger, 2010; Leandros, 2010; Noam, 1991; Van der Wurff & Van Cuilenburg, 2001). Diversity is "a necessary condition

for consumer choice and for the exchange of different ideas, opinions and viewpoints in society" (Van der Wurff, 2005, p. 250), and the provision of diverse content is considered one of the central missions of media in democratic societies (Ishikawa, 1996).

There are mixed arguments and evidence about the impact—whether positive or negative—of competitive market conditions on program diversity.

Some authors suggest that competition encourages the production of diverse content (Dominick & Pearce, 1976; Katz, 2009; Wakshlag & Adams, 1985, as quoted by Li & Chiang, 2001), and the increase of content deemed beneficial, such as news (Powers, 2001; Yan & Napoli, 2006).

On the other hand, congruent with Hotelling's law—which states that, in competitive markets, it is rational to make products as similar as possible (Van Cuilenburg, 1999)—some scholars have found that deregulated media systems financed by advertisement favor programmatic homogeneity and simpler, more superficial content that appeals either to wider ranges of audiences (Godoy, 1997; Noam, 1991; Strömberg, 2004, Thussu, 2008) or groups especially valued by advertisers (Strömberg, 2004). Empirical evidence suggests that program diversity decreases even when the number of competitors within the market increases through the incorporation of commercial networks (Li & Chiang, 2001), and that this homogeneity can be linked to public broadcasters mimicking their commercial counterparts' shows (Tsourvakas, 2004). Van der Wurff and Van Cuilenburg (2001) argue that contexts of ruinous competition—when most companies pursue price-competitive strategies, rather than differentiation or cost leadership strategies—reduce the diversity of program types.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a study on New Zealand's television system showed that, even when diversity of news sources increases (in this case, a decrease in the reliance on official sources paired with an increase of non-elite sources), it is linked to a proliferation of softer news, to the detriment of stories about politics and economics (Comrie, 1999).

Along these lines, the commercialization of broadcasting systems leads to an increase in similarities between individual channels and the proliferation of the characteristics attributed to commercial television: spectacular news and sensational news (Lozano, 2004; Vettehen, Nuijten, & Beentjes, 2005), attractive visuals, and emotion being valued over social significance (Thussu, 2008).

Van Cuilenburg (1999, pp. 193–197) argued that, due to Hotelling's law, open media markets tend to increase reflective (proportional) diversity, defined as reflection of the distribution of preferences in society, and to discourage open diversity, understood as equal access provided to all preferences. This approach seems to bridge the seemingly contradictory findings listed before. Thus, the proliferation of media outlets is efficient in providing a broad array of different content, but the largest proportion of content available corresponds to "majority civic interest and consumer preferences" (*ibid.*, p. 196).

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<sup>2</sup> Van der Wurff and Van Cuilenburg (2001) use content analysis to measure the following categories of programming: (a) news, (b) current affairs, (c) "serious" information, (d) "light" information, (e) artistic information, (f) entertainment, (g) performances (music, comedy), (h) sports, (i) movies, and (j) TV series.

***Melodramatic Representations in Television Journalism:  
Personalization and Emotionalization***

Some of the traits used to characterize commercial broadcasters can be linked to the characterization of melodrama by Latin American authors like Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987, 1995) and Carlos Monsiváis (2000).

Using a theoretical umbrella often linked to the analysis of fiction in the study of journalism makes sense (see, for instance, the seminal approach of Gripsrud, 1992, and more recently, Mujica & Bachmann, 2013). Indeed, melodramatic representation can be found in a wide array of cultural manifestations, including literature (Brooks, 1995), religion, popular music (Herlinghaus, 2002), and documentary and feature films (Fuenzalida, Corro, & Mujica, 2009). Regarding broadcasting, the increasing presence of hybrid genres fusing informational content with the representation modes of entertainment, advertising, and fiction (Fuenzalida et al., 2009; Gordillo et al., 2011) makes the longstanding Latin American tradition of melodrama studies a useful approach for analyzing matters related to the commercialization, tabloidization, and spectacularization of news coverage.

Melodrama is a genre that first became widely produced in late 18th- and early 19th-century French theater.<sup>3</sup> Its main characteristic is the moral polarization represented through archetypical characters (the damsel in distress, the mother, the villain, the lover) whose personal and domestic romantic toils exemplify the triumph of good over evil (Brooks, 1995; Gripsrud, 1992; Martín-Barbero, 1987).

In terms of form, melodrama is characterized by exacerbation of emotion through hyperbole and rhetorical resources like the use of background music. This genre fuses a pathetic enunciation that seeks to produce emotion in the audience based on the pity caused by the main characters' suffering with that pain's detailed visual representation (Aprea & Soto, 1998; Gledhill, 1987). Martín-Barbero (1987, 1995; Martín-Barbero & Rey, 1999) makes that fusion evident in his analysis of television and telenovelas. He describes melodrama as a mediation strategy between the modern and pre-modern realities and expectations that coexist in Latin American society.

Considering this fluid definition of melodrama, and following Gripsrud (1992), we identified two central melodramatic traits that, according to the literature, are present in journalistic coverage: personalization (i.e., news focusing on the private/personal/concrete over the public/social/abstract; see

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<sup>3</sup> Even though some authors trace the origins of melodrama to the early 18th century, referencing the works of composers such as Metastasio (Fernández Valbuena, 1998; Garelli, 1977) or theatrical productions by Rousseau (Hoeveler, 2003), we choose to refer to its origins in the plays written by Pixérécourt, who wrote the bulk of his work in the early 1800s (Brooks, 1995; Howarth, 1980), as the point where the genre was first widely produced and distributed. Later in the 19th century, thanks to industrial production, the genre acquired such dissemination (Martín-Barbero, 1987) and influence as to configure a "melodramatic imagination" (Brooks, 1995). As such, it has escaped theatrical and musical production, and now permeates multiple cultural outlets, such as literature, religious representation, and popular music (Gripsrud, 1992; Herlinghaus, 2002; Monsiváis, 2000).

Macdonald, 2000; Schultz & Zeh, 2005) and emotionalization (i.e., information about emotions and their exacerbation through audiovisual rhetorical resources that appeal to the senses and emotional empathy over reason; see Grabe, Zhou, & Barnett, 2001; Grabe et al., 2000).

Personalizing news events through focusing on the accounts of individual characters allows audiences to feel closeness to those people and their stories (Puente, 1997). In the case of public issues coverage, scholars like Karvonen (2010), and Schulz and Zeh (2005) have found an increasing focus on the personal traits and domestic lives of public characters over parties, organizations, and political processes.

Personalization has been viewed as a way to attract the audience's attention toward complex and abstract issues (Macdonald, 2000), and as a trait of television's audiovisual language that appeals to the concrete and emotional (Rahat & Schaefer, 2007), which generates a sense of intimacy with the audience (Fuenzalida, 2002). However, personalization has been criticized as a fixation on simplified archetypes, many of which are linked to melodramatic character types (Alatorre, 1986; Real, 2001).

In addition, personalization has been operationalized in multiple ways. A review of the literature shows a variety of ways to tap into the concept, but always measuring only a few dimensions of a rather multi-layered phenomenon: (a) Information about private life issues (e.g., Van Zoonen, 2005); (b) human factor, measured as the centrality of personal stories over abstract issues or processes (Schulz, 1996); (c) amount of verifiable data about social processes and about people (Pellegrini, Puente, Porath, Mujica, & Grassau, 2011); and (d) type of news sources (e.g., Kovach & Rosentiel, 2001).

Emotionalization, in turn, has been conceptualized both as the provision of information about emotions (Van Zoonen, 2005), and as the appeal to emotional reactions from the audience through the use of audiovisual rhetorical techniques and sensationalism (Grabe et al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2001).

An additional consideration is how to define "emotion," and whether it should be differentiated with terms such as "affect," "mood," "feeling," and "emotionality" (e.g., Abelson, Kinder, Peters, & Fiske, 1982; Bachmann, 2011; Bucy & Grabe, 2008; Ekman, 1984; Neuman, Marcus, MacKuen, & Crigler, 2007; Scherer, 2005; White, 1999). Following Shields (2002) and in consideration to the social meaning of emotion, in this study, we use "emotion" to refer to a short-term adaptative response. Because it is not the outcome of deliberation or reflection, emotion does not necessarily have long-term advantages (Mesquita & Markus, 2004; Shields, 2002; Tomkins, 1984, 1991).

According to Wierzbicka (1999), emotions are expressed in many levels: grammar, tone, facial gestures (e.g., eyebrow and mouth movements), and body gestures (e.g., hand movements, laughter, stomping). Given the multilevel dimensions of emotional expression, measuring its presence in news stories should be multidimensional as well, and thus consider the emotions reported in the journalists' and sources' discourse, tone, and gestures.

The literature also shows that the most commonly identified rhetorical resources linked to exacerbation of emotions are: (a) Close-ups, which generate a sense of emotional attachment or rejection

to characters on screen because of its disruption of conventions of minimum acceptable interpersonal distance (Fiske, 1990); (b) dramatic music, understood as music not germane to the news event, added in post-production to connote the emotional state of characters or a dramatic situation (Fuenzalida et al., 2009); (c) video maneuvers that disrupt the audiovisual rules of realist representation, as well as such production techniques as slow or accelerated motion, color or contrast modification, and soft focus (Grabe et al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2001); (d) camera movements or focus shifts like zoom-in—changing the shot into a close-up without moving the camera—or, with an opposite effect, zoom-out, pans, and tilts (Aumont & Marie, 1990; Russo, 2003); and (e) adjectives and adverbs that qualify data through the introduction of value judgments (Pellegrini et al., 2011).

In this sense, the presence of melodramatic factors on the news and the homogeneity of television content have also been linked with the increasing commercialization of broadcasting systems (e.g., Mujica & Bachmann, 2013). In other words, higher levels of commercial competition result in the use of these resources in order to attract audiences.

### **The Chilean Context**

Chile's broadcasting system comprises four major networks with national coverage. While the Chilean broadcasting system has been funded through advertising since its origins in the late 1950s, television was originally assigned public service duties, and as such, licenses were only assigned to the state and higher education institutions (Godoy, 2000). In 1990, television licenses were opened to private hands, and Congress passed a new law granting financial autonomy to the state-owned network (*ibid.*).

Televisión Nacional (TVN) is this publicly owned network, managed autonomously from central government and funded through advertisement and without major state subsidies (Fuenzalida, 2000).<sup>4</sup> It is owned by the Chilean state, and its bylaws define its mission as threefold—to inform, to educate, and to entertain.

Until 2010, Canal 13 (C13) belonged to the Catholic University and, in that context, assumed public service functions (Godoy, 2000). In August 2010, the network went on to be controlled by a private holding. The other two networks, MEGA and Chilevisión (CHV), are commercial broadcasters. For more details, see Table 1.

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<sup>4</sup> TVN can compete with other networks for grants from the National Television Council to fund cultural or high-quality programming.

**Table 1. Networks Under Study at the Time of Study.**

		<b>Televisión Nacional (TVN)</b>	<b>MEGA</b>	<b>Chilevisión (CHV)</b>	<b>Canal 13 (C13)</b>
<b>First broadcast</b>		1969	1990	1960	1959
<b>Property structure</b>		Publicly owned	Privately owned	Privately owned	University-owned (until 2010)
<b>Parent company (at time of study)</b>		N/A	Claro Group	Bancard Group	Catholic University (until 2010) Luksic Group (2010-present)
<b>Size of news division (reporters and editors)</b>		75 people	80 people	70 people	65 people
<b>Overall ratings</b>	2009	7.7	7.4	6.6	6.9
	2011	6.4	6.6	7.4	6.4
<b>Main newscast ratings</b>	2009	15.9	10.8	14.2	13.9
	2011	15.3	11.3	14.5	10.9

Source: *Obitel Chile*.

While ratings of national broadcasters in Chile have declined consistently over the last decade, television remains as the main source of information, and newscasts are among the most-watched shows of each network (Consejo Nacional de Televisión [CNTV], 2012). Currently, 69% of the population watches television news 5 or more days a week (down from 79% in 2000), and 88% claims to be interested or very interested in following the news and being up to date (*ibid.*).

In terms of homogeneity, a 2008 content analysis of TVN (state-owned) and MEGA (commercial) showed that both channels were similar in terms of topic selection, levels of contextualization of foreign news, and sensationalism. Both shared characteristics similar to those used in the literature to describe commercial stations (e.g., high coverage of sports and crime, low coverage of internal politics and foreign news), yet there were some statistical differences between both networks (Porath, Mujica, & Maldonado, 2009). The public station's newscast favored harder news, had higher levels of relevance, and used relatively fewer testimonial sources.

Between 2009 and 2011, the industry went through several changes in terms of ownership and leadership positions within the news market. In 2009, TVN (the publicly-owned, but commercially financed network) was the leader in overall ratings, followed by CHV (commercial) and C13 (university-owned), whereas in 2011 leadership of TVN's main newscast was seriously threatened by CHV. C13 had been sold by then to a private corporation and ranked fourth in ratings.



Informed by the literature and the theoretical framework, we set out to examine whether the Chilean television system's transition into a more commercially competitive scenario affected the news coverage of its four broadcasters. The overarching research questions guiding this study are the following: Has the new context of competition resulted in a homogenizing force, and thus in newscasts resembling each other beyond the public/commercial dichotomy? And in the event of such homogeneity, is there and increase in melodramatization?

### Methodology

To explore the homogenization and melodramatization of news coverage in Chile within the new context of competition, we conducted a content analysis, a research technique where the characteristics and meaning of the message are examined systematically to extract inferences from it (Neuendorf, 2002). While the overall analysis included a qualitative component, here we report on a quantitative assessment of newscasts.

The sample included two constructed weeks, one from 2009 and the other from 2011, of the main newscast of each of the four major Chilean television networks. The unit of analysis was every single newscast story, defined as a unit of news content delimited by a change of format (e.g., a text introducing a new story) or a change of topic (e.g., a different news event, or the news anchor introducing another story). The sample included 1,217 stories, with 532 from 2009, and 685 from 2011.

In addition to identification variables (i.e., date, network, headline, and length) the coding scheme included several items aimed at tapping into the agenda and different dimensions of melodramatization (in this study, personalization and emotionalization). The agenda was coded as story topic (national politics, international politics, internal order, economy, transportation, social affairs, accidents, sports, lifestyle, and other). To measure personalization, the codebook asked about human factor (low or high) and the total of personal (human) sources per minute. Regarding emotionalization, the codebook included the following variables: tone of the narrator (passionate, informative, didactic, or anthropological), emotional details by the narrator (none, positive, or negative), emotional details by a source (none, positive, or negative), emotional gestures by a source (none, positive, or negative), the inclusion of dramatic music, shot speed changes, image repetition, soft focus, color changes, zoom-in, zoom-out, and panning/tilt (1=yes; 0=no).<sup>5</sup> Eventually, to simplify the analysis of emotionalization, we grouped these items into several distinct additive scales, as they tapped into different dimensions of emotionalization. These scales are *rhythm* (dramatic music and speed changes), *visual intervention* (image repetition, soft focus, and color changes), *shot changes* (zoom-in, zoom-out, and panning/tilt), *emotional narrator* (passionate note of the narrator, emotional details by the narrator), and *emotional sources* (sources with a passionate note, emotional details, and emotional gestures by the sources). Table 2 summarizes the main descriptives of all relevant variables.

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<sup>5</sup> The codebook included other variables, such as voice distortion, but since they were found in fewer than 10 of all coded stories, these variables were dropped from the analysis.

**Table 2. Variable Descriptives.**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Personalization</b>		
- Human factor	1.25	0.43
- Personal sources	3.33	2.94
<b>Emotionalization</b>		
- Rhythm	0.24	0.31
- Visual intervention	0.11	0.20
- Shot changes	0.39	0.18
- Emotional narrator	0.54	0.78
- Emotional sources	3.55	4.62

Five trained coders watched all the newscasts and coded the news stories. Preliminary inter-coder reliability tests—based on Cohen’s *kappa* for categorical variables, and on Pearson’s correlations for numerical items—led us to amend some of the codebook instructions. After that, reliabilities calculated on 10% of the sample showed substantial agreement between coders (see Viera & Garret, 2005) and ranged from 0.67 to 1.0.

After coding all the data, variables were dichotomized for ease of comparisons. Numerical variables like the number of shots and sources were re-calculated based on the extension of each news story, so these variables became per-minute measurements. Then we analyzed data by comparing means from each year and each network via t-tests and analyses of variance (ANOVA), as well as contingency tables.

## Results

On average, the news stories were 123 seconds long and included 3.3 personal sources. The most common topics were sports (29.3%) and internal order (19.1%). Most of the stories generated in sources’ initiatives (56.5%), covered consequences that affected either individuals or entire social groups (33.6% and 37.6%, respectively), and had no information about people’s private lives (79.0%). Testimonial sources, rather than government officials, comprised the bulk of the personal sources (53.4%). The use of audiovisual rhetorical elements linked to emotionalization, while common to all networks, was not pervasive. More than one-third of the stories included features such as shot speed changes (38.5%), and 21% used image repetition.

A breakdown by network shows that C13 was the one with the lower human factor scores, while TVN tended to include dramatic music and shot speed changes more often. CHV’s sources were more likely to deliver negatively emotional details, and C13’s scores on emotionalizing resources overall were significantly lower than those of TVN and CHV.

A comparison between 2009 and 2011 lends partial support to the notion of increasing homogenization and melodramatization. For instance, all newscasts were longer in 2011 (both in number of stories and duration of the entire show), which means that all networks extended their shows over the course of two years. More interestingly, an analysis of story topics shows that all networks have a similar agenda, with a somewhat even distribution of topics throughout the newscasts. Indeed, the median rank-order correlation (Spearman's rho) in 2009 was 0.80, with C13 and MEGA having the highest correlation (0.93). By 2011, all but one pair of correlations were higher, with a median correlation of all networks of 0.85. In other words, all broadcasters increasingly gave the same prominence to the same topics in their newscast agendas.

Nonetheless, the networks remained significantly different in terms of audiovisual resources for emotionalization, such as panning and zoom-in, though the gap in their use did narrow. That said, the newscasts tended toward homogeneity with regards to shot changes, human factor, and emotional resources, as breakdowns that were significantly different in 2009 became not significant in 2011 (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Chilean Newscast Changes Toward Homogeneity, 2009-2011.**

	Variable	TVN (n=117)	C13 (n=154)	MEGA (n=115)	CHV (n=132)	p value
	2009	<b>Personalization</b>				
- Human factor		1.29	1.16	1.21	1.26	< .05
- Personal sources		1.51	1.28	1.09	2.05	< .001
<b>Emotionalization</b>						
- Rhythm		0.33	0.19	0.15	0.27	< .001
- Visual intervention		0.12	0.04	0.90	0.18	< .001
- Shot changes		0.39	0.43	0.37	0.37	< .05
- Emotional narrator		0.51	0.39	0.51	0.40	n.s.
- Emotional sources	2.93	2.52	2.54	4.45	< .001	
	Variable	TVN (n=159)	C13 (n=182)	MEGA (n=156)	CHV (n=173)	p value
	2011	<b>Personalization</b>				
- Human factor		1.22	1.21	1.33	1.26	n.s.
- Personal sources		1.55	1.45	1.62	1.79	n.s.
<b>Emotionalization</b>						
- Rhythm		0.31	0.21	0.26	0.23	< .05
- Visual intervention		0.10	0.10	0.15	0.13	< .05
- Shot changes		0.39	0.39	0.37	0.38	n.s.
- Emotional narrator		0.59	0.60	0.65	0.62	n.s.
- Emotional sources	3.54	3.58	3.76	4.62	n.s.	

Note: Cell entries are means.

The newscasts tended more often to look alike than different between 2009 and 2011. Some changes, while not resulting necessarily on non-significant differences among networks, did reflect a consistent pattern toward homogeneity and uniformity. For instance, MEGA, a commercial network, was the broadcaster with the most changes, and usually ended up resembling the other channels more in 2011 than in 2009. In other words, MEGA's news treatment tended to be more like that of the other three networks, even when it meant *decreasing* the melodramatic component of the stories (e.g., a significant drop in visual intervention, but significantly more emotion-laden sources).

Some of this homogeneity is explained in part with the overall increase of certain melodramatic features. For instance, all networks increased their proportion of stories with an emotional narrator in such a way that all of them reached similar levels in 2011. Conversely, commercial broadcaster CHV decreased several of its melodramatic features (e.g., dramatic music), but in doing so, it reached a level similar to that of the other networks. Thus, the magnitude and direction of the changes from 2009 to 2011 were not uniform across all newscasts, but the outcome was, indeed, one of homogeneity, with all four networks getting closer to the same level. In some instances, while the networks' differences remained statistically significant, the tendency was toward homogeneity: As Table 3 shows, by 2011, all newscasts could still be differentiated in terms of rhythm and visual intervention, but the differences were getting closer to non-significant levels.

A look at the main changes in the melodramatic variables in each network shows an interesting breakdown. Although only approaching significance ( $p < 0.10$ ), at state-owned TVN, the narrator became more passionate over the course of the two years analyzed, and the emotional details provided by the sources were significantly more negative in 2011. The newscast stories from the other public service network, C13, included significantly more information about people's private lives in 2011. C13 also increased the visual intervention of the stories, and the tone of their narrators was significantly more passionate in 2011.

Regarding the commercial broadcasters, MEGA was the network with the most changes overall. For instance, the 2009 to 2011 comparison shows a significant increase of emotion-laden sources, as well as the number of personal sources—especially testimonials—and human factor. In addition, by 2011, the MEGA stories showed more rhythm alterations, but fewer cases of visual intervention. CHV, on the other hand, had fewer such changes, in many categories decreasing to reach levels similar to the other networks.

In sum, the evidence partially supports the notion that, in a context of increasing commercialization, Chilean broadcasters tended toward the homogenization of their coverage and news treatment. The homogenization and melodramatization is evident in the general length increase of all newscasts and stories, their increasingly similar news agendas (story topics), and the lessening of differences among the newscasts regarding personalization and emotionalization. Overall, there was more reporting of personal stories over public/abstract issues, there were changes in the type of sources used (more testimonials than official sources), and there was an increase in the delivery of information about emotions by both sources and journalists.

### Discussion

These results highlight the prevalence of melodramatic features in television news coverage in Chile, both as personalization and emotionalization, as shown by the significant increase in human factor and personal sources, and by a more widespread use of such rhetorical productions features as speed changes and soft focus.

The evidence also supports, to some extent, the homogenization in news treatment among Chilean broadcasters in a context of commercialization and competition. At the same time, it stresses the importance of taking into consideration the richness of Latin American theories on melodrama to expand the current literature and underlines the importance of analyzing TV news content beyond the public/private dichotomy.

The Latin American conception of melodrama is a useful framework for categories that allow for a richer, yet still systematic examination of news coverage. By analyzing variables like the use of testimonials or emotional narrators, we have shown that melodramatic features can consistently be traced in television news. As such, this study has served as an initial validation of variables that have been, to a large extent, ignored in the literature. Despite the telenovela focus of Latin American studies on melodrama, this study reinforces the cross-media character of this genre by identifying and measuring melodramatic features on a genre quite different, at least in theory, from the telenovela—non-fiction reporting and news coverage. The use of resources mostly linked to fictional works adds expressive richness to television news and shows this is a line of inquiry worth exploring.

This notion of melodrama and its features put on hold criticism that a priori dismisses melodrama and frowns upon its presence in the news by linking it to sensationalism and an oversimplification of socially relevant issues. We argue that such conceptions should give way to a new assessment of melodrama and the normative implications of these features in the news. For instance, our previous work has found that an exacerbation of emotion was more frequent on such hard-news topics as the economy than on traditionally soft-news stories (Mujica & Bachmann, 2013). Arguably, this might suggest an effort from the Chilean networks to attract the audience to topics they deem important by relying on a format favored by the public.<sup>6</sup>

That said, further research is needed to determine whether melodramatic features have positive or negative effects on individuals' comprehension and news recall. In any case, melodramatic features should not be dismissed without a more nuanced understanding of how melodrama works and what it actually means for the public. Future exploration of this phenomenon promises to enrich our understanding of journalistic coverage and consumption.

The findings show that the tendency toward homogenization in Chilean newscasts from 2009 to 2011 was, to a great extent, related to an increasingly uniform use of some melodramatic features by all

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the four networks analyzed here often program telenovelas right before and after their main newscasts.

networks. Given that this uniformity included the networks with a public service orientation, the findings also suggest that the context of commercialization in the Chilean broadcasting market has resulted in the adoption of a more melodramatic profile across all broadcasters. This process was particularly evident in the case of commercially-run MEGA. The data support the applicability of Hotelling's law, as understood by Van Cuilenburg (1999) in broadcasting markets. Increasing competition in oligopolistic markets promotes a decrease in content diversity. In this case, changes toward melodrama affected both commercial and public channels in an increasingly competitive context: The four newscasts struggle to get to ever-shrinking audiences and publicly owned TVN has lost its longstanding leadership in ratings.

This study's main contribution is the incorporation, operationalization, and validation of new variables—melodramatic features—to analyze journalistic pieces. In addition, the homogenization phenomenon observed in the sample stresses the not-so-obvious distinction between public service and commercial broadcasters in the Chilean context, where commercial competition and funding through advertising are key elements. This also underscores the need to move beyond traditional public/commercial dichotomies.

Moving forward, future research should tap into how these variables—especially those related to personalization and emotionalization—fare in other markets. Particularly interesting would be studies analyzing and comparing how different commercial contexts might frame the way networks operate and television news is presented, as these could influence how homogenous or heterogeneous different newscasts are. Similarly, researchers could try to identify the specific independent variables that result in these outcomes. This line of inquiry could also consider controlling the findings by several econometric variables, such as market size, number of broadcasters, licensing regulation, and production subsidies. As our study and most of the literature focuses on broadcasters, an examination of cable networks also begs for consideration.

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