A conceptual model for the analysis of electoral debates on TV. Mediatization and television ceremonies

Un modelo conceptual para analizar los debates electorales en TV. Mediatización y ceremonias televisivas

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RESUMEN

ABSTRACT
Introduction: Political debates on television were usually designed to provide viewers trustful information about the political candidates and their manifestos. Unfortunately, the political situation and the communication media have undergone such a change that those manifestos have become mere mediatic representations. In this article, we will analyze how the speech and the actantial position of the candidates get adjusted according to the mediatic show to become the winners, or in the best scenario, as television heroes, or maybe just the opposite. **Method**: Our main objective is not empirical but theoretical and methodological. We do not wish to describe the electoral debates in Spain. We are trying to highlight a model of analysis, which can be applied to different contexts, so we can contribute to fix a series of operative concepts, in a new framework. **Results**: To apply the suggested model will allow, among other things, to identify not only the political mediatization effects but also the marked tendency to create ceremonial *gestalt* in front of planned mediatic events. At the same, time it will allow to identify the aggressiveness and conflictive graduation of the different presidential candidates on the televised debates. **Conclusions**: From our point of view, it is a clear correlation with the polarization index that public opinion has experienced as well as a tendency to a conflictual spectacularization that television genres have developed in the last decades as a new way of doing politics and journalism.

KEYWORDS: debate; television; presidential election; Spain; discourse analysis.

RESUMEN
Introducción: Los debates electorales de televisión estaban concebidos para proporcionar a los espectadores información contrastada sobre programas políticos y candidatos, pero en los últimos

tiempos el escenario político y el de los medios de comunicación han cambiado tanto que estos programas han pasado a convertirse en puros acontecimientos mediáticos. En este artículo se analiza cómo el discurso y la posición actancial de los candidatos de los debates electorales presidenciales de televisión se acomodan en función del *show* mediático para consagrarlos como ganadores y, en el mejor de los casos, como héroes televisivos; o también todo lo contrario. **Metodología**: Nuestro principal objetivo no es de carácter empírico sino teórico y metodológico. No queremos describir el funcionamiento de los debates electorales en España. Tratamos de poner en pie y de probar un modelo de análisis aplicable a diversos contextos y, de esta manera, contribuir a fijar una serie de conceptos operativos en un nuevo marco conceptual. **Resultados:** La aplicación del modelo propuesto permite, entre otras cosas, identificar tanto los efectos de la mediatización política como la marcada tendencia a crear *Gestalt* ceremoniales ante acontecimientos mediáticos planificados. Asimismo, en el marco de esa *Gestalt,* permite reconocer el valor de la gradación de la agresividad y la conflictividad por parte de los diferentes candidatos presidenciales en el debate televisado. **Conclusiones:** En función del punto de vista utilizado, observamos una clara correlación entre la citada gradación de la agresividad y el índice de polarización que se ha experimentado en la opinión pública en las últimas décadas, así como en la tendencia a la espectacularización conflictiva que se ha vivido en los géneros televisivos a partir de nueva forma de hacer política y periodismo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: debates; televisión; elecciones generales; España; análisis del discurso.

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Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello,Venezuela).

1. Introduction and theoretical framework

Any political process of an electoral nature consists essentially of competition between parties, programs, and candidates who try to obtain the electors' vote. Hence, during the campaigns, the television debates between candidates are presented- before public opinion, but also in the framework of political and communication sciences- as forums for deliberation and confrontation, closely linked to concepts such as *deliberative democracy* (Dahl, 1991), *public sphere* (Habermas, 1983), etc. In this sense, there is a lot of consensus- political and academic- in contemplating them as an element of "health in the democratic system" (Quintas, 2010), of "formation of the critical spirit" (Proaño, 2002), and of "political information" (Blacksmith and Benoit, 2009).

Now, this is valid only in theory. Both the political and media scenarios have recently undergone such decisive changes that the status of television debates has changed substantially. If they were elements that were intended to provide proven information on political programs and candidates (Soengas, 2009; Galindo, 1998) they have become pure media events, as Elihu Katz (1980) defined them in his day. That is, events built from the media, whose main characteristics are: 1) Being broadcasted live; 2) Respond to prior planning; 3) Be well located in space and time; 4) Emphasize protagonists presented as heroes; 5) Enhance a highly dramatic and ritual sense. 6) Present itself as a quasi-mandatory viewing program. Hence, they tend to acquire a marked spectacular character (Padilla, 2014) and are generally governed more by media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979) than by institutionalized politics (Chadwick, 2013). This phenomenon is closely connected with what many authors have called mediation of life (Livingstone, 2009; Hepp, 2011; Hjarvard, 2013), and more

specifically, mediatization of politics (Bennett, 1995; Meyen, Thieroff, and Strenger, 2014), a process that is changing not only political communication (Cook, 1988; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) but politics itself (Sunstein, 2002; Allern and Blach Orsten, 2011).

The practical consequences of these changes have not taken long to be noticed. The televised debates - in most countries where they are practiced - tend to be reduced to a competition between leaders that is very focused on the charismatic leadership aspect that Max Weber defined as opposed to customary and legal policy, and therefore, quite related to what has been called "media populism" (Postill, 2018; Krämer, 2014). At the same time, they are systematically integrated into parallel discursive flows- especially in social networks - that usually reinforce the emotional and aggressive aspects of the speech (Thompson, 2016). But these changes also require profound modifications in the view of academic research.

1.1. Political mediatization

Mediatization of communication (Livingstone, 2009; Livingstone and Lunt, 2014) and political communication, in particular, is described by many authors as the recent intervention of media institutions in traditional political institutions (Bennett and Entman, 2001; Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1995). Sometimes it has even been talked about the *colonization* of politics by the media (Berardi, 2017; Hepp, 2011).

Mediatization is an observable phenomenon (Meyen, Thieroff, and Strenger, 2014) when - especially since the 1990s - the mass media were gradually mutating their usual function of informing about politics from *outside politics*, by a different one: to be *active participants* from *within politics* (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1994; Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 1999). But, with the processes of globalization of television, digitalization of communications, the emergence of the internet and the web, and, above all, of the popularization of social networks, the phenomenon has only advanced and consolidated (Homemade -Ripollés, 2009; Strömbäc, 2008; Strömbäc and Esser, 2014).

We are now, therefore, at a time when the mediatization of politics seems to be a fully realized process. Political action depends decisively on the media, and the traditional political institutions - parties, parliaments, governments, etc.- are already almost a kind of *province* of the new media empires (Berardi, 2017). We can find many examples of the indicated processes. Governments configure their public image through their spokespersons- press conferences and their communication offices- rather than their decisions and actions (Canel and Sanders, 2012). Parliamentary deliberations are usually the occasion to stage a kind of spectacular media representation, rather than authentic forums for deliberation, negotiation, and decision-making. Meanwhile, political leaders act more as media stars than as strategists and directors of political action (Adam and Maier, 2010; Enli and Skogerbo, 2013). And, on the other hand, citizens seem to be mere spectators who attend - between entertained and disenchanted - the spectacle of politics, rather than being active participants in decision making in public affairs (Bennet and Entman, 2001; Bucy and Gregson, 2001).

We can establish, then, through the cross-sectional analysis of the indicated examples, some major lines that frame the current mediation process of politics and that bring us closer to the change in theoretical approach that we need:
1. Media institutions already act as authentic agents and political actors. They go far beyond the informative, guiding and vigilant role of the power they previously occupied (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Casero-Ripollés, 2008). At present, many media have acquired, by themselves, the status of a first magnitude political agent: they feel they are representatives of

public opinion, they have their political action program and a strategy comparable to that of the parties themselves- up to point that the action of these, oftentimes, becomes a subsidiary of the media system.

2. Media visibility (Heinich, 2012) is becoming the main asset to act in politics, which is translating into a continuous and constant irruption of media *stars*- actors, journalists, reality television programs participants, singers, media intellectuals, etc. - in the field of active politics. In fact, many media act, consciously and systematically, as platforms for launching and promoting politicians, and/ or political strategies. Their sets- in the case of televisions- try to protect the emerging stars of politics and, at the same time, offer a permanently open forum to already established leaders, but always trying to design their own "team of political leaders", trying to make these inextricably relate to the image of the media. Besides, many of its programs and productions do not respond to a strategy of journalistic information *stricto sensu*, but a strategy of authentic political action.

3. Leaders and various political agents have reconfigured themselves into media actors (Balmas, Sheafer, 2013; Enli and Skogerbo, 2013). This is seen, in part, in that, generally, they spend more time and devote more attention to the media than to strictly political work. They have thus taken, consciously or unconsciously, a decisive step towards charismatic politics, and the *vedetization* of political leadership, which is consistent with the phenomenon of progressive mediatization that occurs in society. This explains that their presence in the media does not usually distinguish between political fields and other types of fields (family, social, etc.), and therefore, is not reserved for the former. On the contrary, it is becoming more common for politicians to visit spaces of mundane and social information, without any reservation or restriction. In the same way, it is increasingly common for politicians to lend themselves, very often, to posing before the cameras as models or as film and television actors, thus far removed from their political spheres. Also, it is more and more frequent that they tend to make visible the private side of their existence- homes, friendships, family, etc.-, which has led, on some occasions, that some candidates even seek, in certain electoral contests "convenience marriages" with movie, music or television stars.

4. Experts and specialized work in political communication- advisors, designers, propagandists, experts in surveys and social networks, etc.- have come to impose a new model of political management dominated by communication management (Dahlgren, 2005), which has come to influence decisively in political decision making. Many decisions, formerly strictly political, depend- in a context of intensive mediation like the one we live in- more on the experts and communication advisors than on the traditionally institutionalized agents and procedures of parties, governments, and parliaments.

5. Citizens tend to perceive, more and more, politics as a spectacle (show) and as a space for representation, which is generating distancing, electoral abstentionism, and skepticism about the possibilities of democracy. In this sense, the disenchantment that spreads in public opinion tends to create the discredit of political institutions until reaching unsuspected quotas. And with this- and in parallel- there is a progressive discrediting of the function that would correspond to the media, especially regarding its journalistic function.

So far, the transformations that are related to the change in political communication. But, along with them, there is a change that also affects the very conformation of political institutions and their operation, regulation, and normativity.

This change is also the product of intensive mediatization and affects the conception and practice of democracy in two of its key components: a) the structuring of political action; and, another, b) to the modality in which politics contribute to the conformation of the general public sphere.

As regards the structuring of political action, what is changing is the organization of the canonical political cycle of the democratic system. A democratic political system was understood as a process, in the form of a cycle, structured in four phases or moments, which are chained successively, and which are closely related to each other (Tavoillot, 2019). Thus, the following phases were distinguished:

- A deliberative moment that coincides with both parliamentary deliberation and open deliberation in public forums.
- A moment of resolution and decision-making that corresponds to the elections and the parliamentary voting.
- A moment of action and execution that is carried out by governments and by the administration.
- A moment of accountability that is an exercise of information, explanation, and transparency.

Well, for each of these moments, there were specific institutions -parties, parliaments, governments, elections, representatives, authorities, etc.- with precise rules and protocols. However, the mediatization experienced by society in recent decades has profoundly altered this structuring model (Castells, 2009; Beck, 1996).

The areas in which politics are practiced, previously *reserved* for traditional political agents and *closed* to the rest, now tend to be *public* and *open*. And many times, they are in real-time. This is the case, for example, with party meetings, parliamentary debates, rallies, political ceremonies, etc. Politics become, increasingly, more *participatory*, more *inclusive* of the quasi totality of citizens, more *visible,* and more *simultaneous* (almost lived in real-time).

But all this is done through the media, and the fact has consequences: political action seems to require less and less face-to-face and begins to become more virtual; and, as a consequence, many of the basic concepts of the traditional political system are weakened or transformed.

The concepts of *representativeness* and *participation* are modified since the functioning of the institutions no longer requires the *presence* or *physical action* of the agents. The concepts of accountability or transparency also change. In the same measure, it tends to provide a state of *constant visibility* in the field of political action and that specific acts of information lose meaning.

And, finally, the *times* and *rhythms* of political action also change. All the actions tend- in this context- to simultaneity and, therefore, to reduce the duration of the processes, with which there are few possibilities of strategic action left in which the control of the times always counts.

The mediation process has therefore tended to place politics under a kind of *panoptic* that ensures a state of *extreme visibility*, has *compressed all times*, and as a consequence, has altered power relations.

The new mediatic panoptic has established the figure of a permanent observer, a global audience, with the gift of omniscience that always acts as the recipient of political action and has become the great sanctioner- an actant in the position of the recipient- of each of the actions and gestures of politicians. Thus, for example, a parliamentary debate in which the different groups traditionally addressed only the rest of the representatives does not make the same sense that a debate that is being broadcast on television and that everyone will contemplate. In the latter case, the addressee and the final sanctioner agree on a single actor: the television audience.

On the other hand, the continuous mediatization that we have experienced in recent decades has compressed political cycles. It has accelerated the processes and generated a phenomenon of temporary implosion. Everything happens in a kind of Aleph point- which Borges already described in a story of the same name-, in which all the events and objects of the world meet simultaneously. Any political action, from now on, will tend to be configured in this new time horizon of implosion.

And, as a result of all this, it has been a profound transformation in power relations. There is not the same action freedom margin for the agents who participate in a closed-door meeting than the one that exists when that meeting is held in full view of the world and is recorded - and kept forever, by electronic means. Quasi-universal mediation (or mediatization) has thus disrupted the margin of freedom of politicians and has introduced general visibility that has given rise to a new power structure. Currently, in all political relations a decisive actor/actant intervenes, the media audience, that is, a group of spectators -susceptible to constantly expand- who becomes a universal judge, who sanctions and qualifies politicians' actions. The significant fact is that this new actor/actant is the result of a conscious and systematic construction of the same media that have already ceased to be mediators and have become participants.

The described phenomena- especially that of the creation of the universal public- have removed the centrality, distance, and even solemnity from classical political institutions. Today's politics seem to be resolved in a fairly informal and transversal way- a little everywhere, and everywhere at once- dispersing the moments of deliberation, negotiation, and exercise of power. More than a constituted and stable institutional power, what exists today is a complex and dispersed network of power micro-spaces. It is precisely in this context that televised electoral debates acquire a new status, a new function, and a new meaning, which requires a significant conceptual and theoretical change.

2. Methodology

Always taking as an object of study the televised electoral debates in the new context of intensive mediatization, we propose in this text the following objectives:

1. Design the foundations of a conceptual model that effectively describes and analyzes current political debates within the framework of, on the one hand, a) the intensive mediation of politics and, on the other, b) of the televisions' (audiovisual media, in general) trend to build media events that, in the context of an increasing spectacularization, tend to adopt ceremonial functions.
2. Describe with precision the various narrative courses and declarative strategies present in the audiovisual political debates, in the new ceremonial framework, with special attention to those that constitute the core of the competition between candidates, what we will call, following the semiotics narrative proposal: the qualifying test.
3. Offer a first approximation of the application of this model to a course of concrete political debates, which will allow us to initiate the validation of the proposed conceptual method - as a pilot experience. We are referring to a limited corpus of debates - intentionally selected, which include the main political debates held in the democratic history of Spain in the general elections and with the participation of the main candidates for the Presidency of the Government.

Our main objective, then, is not empirical but theoretical and methodological. We do not want to describe the functioning of the electoral debates in Spain. We try to set up and apply and test an analysis model- a new conceptual framework - applicable to various contexts that correspond to the context of intensive mediation and ceremonial dramatization of the political life we are living today. To meet these objectives, we will use the contributions of the frame theories (Frame analysis) developed, among others, by (Goffman, 1974); subsequently, by cognitive psychology, semantics,

and political discourse analysis (Lakoff, 2017). We will also use the point of view developed by anthropology and communication sociology, especially the ceremonial television theory (Dayan and Katz, 1994), as well as the proposed analysis of media rituals (Couldry, 2003).

Concerning the study of the new narratives involved in the current television debates, we will apply the semiotic-narrative analysis (Greimas, A., Courtés, J. *et al.,* 1982), on the one hand, and the studies of the functional analysis applied to political discourse (Benoit, 1995) for what it does to the contributions of the analysis of the story. This theory- from the narrative functions (Greimas, A., Courtés, J. *et al.,* 1982) of the characters' functions in the stories until reaching the narrative semiotics theorized by the School of Paris and A. Greimas- provides us with a formal model to explain the role that actants play in any narrative structure. We will use the definitions of these functions to analyze the self-positioning that each candidate shows in the debates, and how it evolves throughout it.

2.1. Conceptual model

From our point of view, an electoral debate on TV is 1) a media event (Katz, 1980), with the nature of 2) television ceremony, within the genre of confrontation (Dayan and Katz, 1994), organized in a political framework prior to an electoral process that is governed by 3) a system of variable regulation but agreed by a heterogeneous set of instances and agents - the legislative branch, the judiciary, the previous tradition of debates, the agreements between political forces, candidates, the media, the professional body of journalists, etc. This media event takes place in 4) a constellation of media and non-media events- which is subdivided into a) central media environment-technologically, spatially, and temporarily configured-, usually a television channel or chains-, accompanied by various others; b) peripheral media areas- ranging from previous and subsequent programs; social networks; other mass media, etc.- (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela, 2012). All these media areas are complemented by c) non-media events- meetings, events, rallies, etc.-.

The relations between the different media and non-media areas, we will call 5) architecture of the media event. And the informational flows that occur within the set of fields, we will call 6) discursive courses of the event. Within the discursive courses of a media event- in this case, an electoral debate- we will identify several specific narrative courses, depending on the different areas that we deal with- central media field or one of its peripheral areas. It is also possible, taking into account the possibilities of media convergence and possible intertextuality, to identify transmedia narrative courses, in which various fields of media event architecture are mixed.

To identify a media event -in this case, televised electoral debates- and to be able to analyze it systematically, we will identify the following components:
   a) The **general framework of the event**, which we will analyze in three dimensions: a) pragmatic or performative (Austin, 2016; Searle, 1969), b) ritual or ceremonial (Dayan and Katz, 1994), and theatrical or playful (*play*) (Goffman, 1974).
   b) The **type of story** that occurs in different narrative courses, either in the context of the specific debate or in some other complementary areas. In all these cases, we will deal with: 1) The framework or genre in which it is registered, that is, the form it adopts. 2) The actantial and acting analysis of the different participating figures- in this case, the candidates and journalists- of the candidate-actors, and their actantial and narrative position. 3) Semiotic-narrative development.

We will take into account how the narrative course - especially in the debate itself - modifies the actantial position of the candidates as each of them acts and enunciatively relates to the rest. We will

pay special attention to the sequence of the *test*; in which a subject demonstrates their competencies and they are finally recognized or *sanctioned*. In our case, the candidates are the *actors* who try to pass the test, while the audience is the target subject that carries out the sanction. To do this, they launch a series of discursive actions that we will define with the terms used by Benoit: a) Cheers, B) Attacks. And C) Defenses. The set of discursive actions of each of the candidates comes to configure, for each of them, a discursive strategy that contributes to complete the acting profile of each candidate.

3. Analysis

3.1. Mediatic event

The two televised presidential electoral debates, held on the occasion of the general elections in Spain on April 28, 2019, can be described consistently from the terms used in our conceptual model. Here are the central nuclei of meaning identified and that correspond, point by point, with the concepts included in the model:

A) They were produced - during maximum audience hours and in a similar format- by a public national network and one of the most relevant private audiovisual groups in the country: April 22nd on *Televisión Española* (TVE) and the next day, April 23rd, in *Atresmedia* (*Antena 3 Televisión* and *La Sexta*). For the Deputy Director of News of *Antena 3 Televisión*, Óscar Vázquez, "the issuance of the electoral debates and the previous and subsequent programs has reinforced us as a communication group in the role of public service. Becoming an informative reference in such relevant matters reinforces our image and the credibility of our products. Betting on the information is a statement of intent that makes sense when we propose issuing programs of this court in the prime time of our programming"[1].

B) In the two debates analyzed, it can be seen that they have served, in the first place, 1) to build an authentic media event, both in the context of the political system (political logic) and in that of the media themselves (media logic). Like any event, the debates have had their- media and non-media-prolegomena that have served to create expectations and to semantically invest the central act of the debates - in this case, two chained in a very short time. And, secondly, 2) as a confrontation ceremony between the candidates.

In our case, in the last debate, the media event has been built from the holding of two successive debates- the ones already mentioned - that have allowed the candidates to establish - as in a two-game elimination game- a strategy defined in function of their interests. For their part, journalists and the media have contributed with their information, in parallel and previous and consequent, to focus public attention around the event, create suspense, present themselves to citizens as the neutral arbitrators of the confrontation and convene a large amount of audience, both in the debates and in the rest of the areas that constituted the media event.

C) The nature of media event of the debates was ensured, on the other hand, through various flows of information, controversies and promotional events that preceded and succeeded. Also, the promotion of the debate always included values related to its importance, its political significance and its decisive character- the second debate was promoted precisely as a "decisive debate"- which made its viewing something almost mandatory.

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[1] In an interview conducted on *Antena 3 Televisión*, in Madrid, on July 1st, 2019.

The audience data of the two debates, which we recognize as the central media area, achieved memorable audience ratings. The first debate reached 43.8% of screen share and an audience of 8,886,000 viewers. Meanwhile, the second one obtained a higher share, 48.8%, and almost 9 million and a half viewers.

On the other hand, the volume of audience achieved by the debates, as well as its transversal media repercussion, managed to generate a peripheral media scope of considerable size. Many social media participated, the newspapers that previously and later echoed, the audiovisual by-products of the debate that spread through social networks, and countless discussion forums on the final meaning of the debate and its resolution.

With all this, the aspect of media event that the debate assumes is identified.

3.2. Conflictive regulation

On the other hand, the regulation dimension that must be present in every ceremonial media event can also be easily identified. Its regulation has been the result of a constant conflict-negotiation and consensus between the parties: A) After innumerable tug-of-war of many of the parties involved, there was a novel event: for the first time in the democratic history of Spain there would be two debates on two consecutive days, one on public TV and one on two private televisions of the same communication group. All this surrounded by much uncertainty that accentuated the media suspense: only three hours before the debate, the electoral board rejected the appeal of the *Partido Popular* against the ordering of the 4 candidates' shifts and that ends up reinforcing the role of the media logic above politics -as one of the parties understands it-: "To dismiss the claim because the organization of the debate falls within the scope of autonomy of the media and, above all, because in the present case how it has been exercised is not arbitrarily or globally contrary to the principle of proportionality" (Electoral Board). B) In the case of the analyzed debates, it is verified that the operating rules - but also their possibility and their schedules - gave rise to a confrontation between various regulatory bodies, some of them judicial, other political, and other mediatic. All this served to make the debates a special event, decisive in the political logic - since it helped, in theory, to decide the vote - but also decisive in the media logic because beyond its importance, it fulfilled a dramatic function: it aroused expectations, created tension and suspense, and presented itself as a decisive test.

3.3. General framework of the event

From the functional or pragmatic framework, we can identify in the analyzed debate its confrontational nature. It is evident, from many points of view, that the media event of the debates is presented as a confrontational media challenge (Dayan and Katz, 1995) that gives rise to the proclamation- consecration- of the winner and in its celebration as a kind of hero.

In terms of the anthropological approach to communication, and more specifically, from the ceremonial television theory (Dayan and Katz, 1994), the event can be summarized as an episode of confrontation.

Undoubtedly, it meets all the requirements that such events require: a) **Cyclical periodicity**: they are part of the tradition of electoral debates in Spain; b) **Negotiated rules**: all participants and even legal and media bodies; c) **Equality of departure**: assured, among other things, for the equal time enjoyed by all candidates; d) **Dramatic tension**: who will be the winning candidate?; e) **Actor's role**: candidates have to respect the agreed rules and even have a second chance (the second debate); f) **Neutral role of moderators**: journalists present themselves as independent and do not intervene

either in favor or against any of the candidates; g) **Role of the public**: spectators and final sanctions of the performance of the test; h) **Central message**: the rules must be respected, it was a constant appeal inside and outside the programs; i) **Invoked rationality**: in all debates, the rationality and logic of democracy were appealed; j) **Conflict relationship**: it is developed in the accepted set of rules and, through the interventions of the candidates; k) **Temporary orientation**: present, with the immediate reference of the next elections.

Furthermore, from the semiotic-narrative point of view, the two analyzed debates are configured as a **qualifying competitive test** among the candidates. This is seen in the fact that much information and comments create suspense about the outcome and that many studies seek to show who will end up being proclaimed winner.

From the semantic dimension, both the characters and the confrontational situation -the test- are presented, through various strategies of semic investiture, as a theatrical game -representation and competition at the same time-. *Theatricality* is marked by the reception, at street level, to all the candidates, for their passage through the dressing rooms to be made-up - all of which are isomorphic with the role of the theater actors. On the other hand, the competition-test relies on connotations typical of *sports competitions*. Candidates present themselves as athletes who: a) have consultants-trainers and *massage therapists-assistants*, who take care of them during breaks; b) Perform *heating* and *rest* phases for *repair* and *provisioning*; d) they are regulated and *arbitrated* - at least as far as time is concerned - by a team of basketball referees; while journalists resemble the *table judges* of a basketball team. In short, all this ensures that the framework of interpretation of television to viewers is that of a theatrical representation of a kind of sports-political game.

3.4. Narrative sequence of the pilot test

As a more identified feature in our conceptual framework, in these debates, it is manifestly visible that it is a qualifying confrontation test that the candidates have to overcome. Both the actantial position of the candidates and the outcome of the process influence it.

All the candidates start from an actantial position of equality, that is, they are subjects of the action that seek the achievement of the object of desire- the electoral victory- for which they have to overcome in the test of the debate the rest of the candidates who are also heroes who aspire to the same object of desire.

An analysis of the positions of the various candidates shows that Rivera equally distributes attacks to almost every candidate; that Casado tends to defend himself from Rivera, and attacks him shyly, while concentrating his attacks on Sánchez and, secondarily, on Iglesias. That Sanchez equally attacks Casado and Rivera, while rarely attacking Iglesias. The latter does this too, he concentrates his attacks on Casado and Rivera. Sanchez tends to unify Casado and Rivera in the same act, while Iglesias does the same.

All candidates are almost always shown as actants-subjects. The only one that changes position from time to time, trying to become actant-recipient is Iglesias. With this, what he seeks is to establish conversation rules that he wants to impose on his peers and place himself in a position of sanctioner of those with whom in principle are equal contenders. For this, sometimes, he ostentatiously uses the oral and visual use of the Constitution as a fundamental rule. Thus, he is invested in the authority conferred by the constitution. Meanwhile, the other candidates do not dare to summon other assistant actants- photographs, graphics, etc.-. And, oddly enough, none of them stand up to the actantial change that Iglesias tries to operate.

3.5 Actions of the main actors

Within the framework of the ritual confrontation already mentioned, it is possible, however, to assume some approaches and concepts of more functional analysis, such as that proposed by Benoit (1995). The actions that these hero-candidates can perform are defined by said author: acclamation, attack, and defense.

Indeed, all actors move in these positions. A) *Cheers* (Schlenker, 1980), phrases that tend to benefit the candidate's reputation (Benoit, 1995). B) *Attacks* (Pfau and Kenski, 1990; Jamieson, 1992). C) *Defenses* (Brinson and Benoit, 1996) in which a candidate tries to repair the damage inflicted by an attack by another candidate or a journalist. For our part, we have distinguished in the analysis between: a) acclamations, attacks and defenses directed at the programs, actions or policies of the candidates, and b) those directed at the candidates themselves as actors endowed with certain qualities and attributes; and, within these, ones oriented to value 1) the enunciative dimension of each candidate -veracity-; and 2) their specific attributes as subjects, their *being*. These distinctions allow us to establish a graduation of the aggressiveness level of the candidates' interventions, which, after all, ends up measuring the level of trust (cooperation) - distrust (conflict) between some candidates and others. Thus, the more attacks -and defenses- are directed towards the subject's being or its enunciative dimension, the more discursive aggressiveness and greater distrust (conflict). On the other hand, the more attacks- and defenses- are directed at the program, the less distrust and greater negotiation degree.

In the debates analyzed, the most aggressive interventions range from Sánchez-Iglesias to Casado-Rivera. Sanchez especially accentuates his attacks from the enunciative truth of his opponents - truth/ lie - to attributes as subjects - liars. Attacks-defenses between Sánchez and Iglesias barely exist and are limited to the level of confrontation between policies. Casado is not very aggressive with Rivera, while the latter is with everyone.

3.6. Illustrative strategies

The set of discursive actions and the search for actantial positions- as well as the semantic structure of the candidates- ends up defining their discursive strategy. Sánchez tries to present himself as a cooperative hero with the left, and aggressive with the candidates of the right. Iglesias seeks closeness with Sánchez and, at the same time, superiority in relation to him -and the rest of the candidates- self-presenting himself as the recipient who sets the rules of the game and distributes the duties to the rest. Casado tries to play a symmetrical role and contrary to that of Sánchez, while Rivera plays against everyone, proclaiming himself the only one deserving of the object of desire. Aggressiveness marks the style of all, except that of Iglesias, who is presented as the most moderate and moderating. All leave as equals, but Iglesias seeks to present himself as the most mature and responsible.

In all of them, there are specific features of mediatization: personalization; acceptance of the audience as the final *recipient*; assumption by candidates of all established media rules; reformatting of messages in media terms; etc.

4. Results and conclusions

From the analysis, still provisional -in terms of results-, and waiting to continue advancing in other specific cases, it can be deduced that the proposed model is perfectly functional and demonstrates coherence and ability to gather contributions from different conceptual frameworks.

There is clear compatibility between all the concepts used, once they have been applied to a specific study. This model has allowed us to: a) A holistic and systemic vision of the media event; b) The distinction between various levels of analysis; and c) The identification of the regulation and structuring function of information flows.

The application of the proposed model allows, therefore, to identify both the effects of political mediatization and the marked tendency to create *gestalt* -perceptive frameworks - ceremonials before planned media events.

It allows, consequently, to study in an integrated way the pragmatic, narrative and enunciative dimensions. And it also allows the recognition of strategies based on the assumption of different actantial positions -by some candidate- and the value of the gradation of aggressiveness and conflict.

At the same time, we have seen that, as an effect of the intensive mediatization that has occurred in recent decades, it has been possible to highlight: a) the calculated construction, in terms of media logic, of the event; and b) the isomorphism between sports competition - one of the most prominent genres of current media logic- and political confrontation- proper of the democratically regulated political-institutional system.

Finally, we have seen that the proposed model brings together sufficient explanatory power and the necessary flexibility to allow us to analyze with advantage its ability to sufficiently study and describe the discursive strategies; specifically, what we have called: the qualifying test.

For future research, it will be useful, in any case: a) Expand the analysis corpus, making it more diverse and contrasted, to verify the validity of some of the general notions; b) Focus the analysis on some of the most significant aspects of the model - ceremonial character, discursive strategies, characterization of the test, etc.- to be able to offer more empirical results and develop the applicability and practicality of the model. c) Frame the analysis of discursive strategies -or some of its aspects- in the general analysis of political discourse and mediatization as a general social phenomenon. This would allow us to reinforce the conceptual and theoretical aspects.

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