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Trust Categories for Television News and Indicators for its Measurement: Perceptions of Stakeholders in Germany, Spain and Italy

Categorías de confianza para los informativos televisivos e indicadores para su medición: percepciones de grupos de interés en Alemania, España e Italia

Abstract

In an age marked by a plethora of disinformation, adherence by the media to professional standards is one of the most important ways of restoring public trust in the news. This article seeks to critically evaluate the method used to develop a Seal of Quality to distinguish the media by the trust they generate in their audiences. The methodology used is as follows: firstly, an exhaustive literature review was carried out to identify the dimensions and indicators that lead to a television news programme being perceived as being of quality. Next, the Delphi method was applied to evaluate perceptions around the categories and indicators of the proposed model. In addition, more than 200 experts from the industry and the academic world in Spain, Italy and Germany, belonging to different stakeholders, were consulted (academics, advertisers, audience representatives, regulators, journalists, NGOs and media executives). Among the results, from the three major categories associated with the quality of information products (related to the media company, the professionals and the content production), the interviewees considered the existence of adequate procedures for preparing information content and professionals having the necessary resources to be the most important. Consequently, although there are some differences in perceptions of news quality among stakeholders and according to nationality, the need for external accreditation that recognises appropriate journalistic work and ensures that the news product meets the quality standards of accurate professional practice remains a requirement for media in the service of a democratic society.

Resumen

En una época marcada por la desinformación, el cumplimiento de los estándares profesionales por parte de los medios de comunicación es una de las vías para recuperar la confianza del público en las noticias. El objetivo de este artículo es evaluar críticamente el método empleado para elaborar un Sello de Calidad que permita distinguir los medios por la confianza que generan en sus audiencias. Tras una revisión de la literatura, se han identificado las dimensiones e indicadores que hacen que un informativo de televisión pueda ser percibido como de calidad. Para confirmar que las categorías e indicadores eran pertinentes para la industria europea, se aplicó el método Delphi y se consultó a más de 200 expertos en España, Italia y Alemania, pertenecientes a diferentes grupos de interés del sector (académicos, anunciantes, representantes de la audiencia, reguladores, periodistas, ONGs y ejecutivos de medios). De las tres categorías asociadas a la calidad de los productos informativos (relativos a los editores, a los profesionales y a la elaboración de los contenidos), los entrevistados consideran que la existencia de procedimientos adecuados para elaborar las noticias, profesionales cualificados y con recursos son los más importantes. Aunque existen algunas diferencias en las percepciones sobre la calidad informativa entre los diversos 'stakeholders' y según su nacionalidad, la necesidad de una acreditación externa que reconozca el buen trabajo periodístico y asegure que el producto informativo reúne los cánones de calidad exigibles de las buenas prácticas profesionales permanece como un requisito para unos medios de comunicación al servicio de la sociedad democrática.

1. Introduction

The raison d'être of journalism lies in the fundamental right to information, i.e., all citizens have the right to be informed. Therefore, the most important duty of journalists is to respect the truth (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). The commitment to the search for the truth should lead journalists to report only on the facts of which they know their origin, without falsifying documents or omitting essential information, as well as not publishing false or misleading informative material.

We are witnessing a situation in which the proliferation of hoaxes, the loss of transparency, and the confusion between entertainment and information have generated a climate of mistrust among the public, which considers that bad journalistic practices are widespread throughout the sector (Park et al., 2020; Kiousis, 2001). This fact causes serious damage to both the audience and the media that function appropriately. The first has difficulties in distinguishing the media according to their informative quality, and the second cannot differentiate themselves from those media with improper behaviours (Terán, 2019).

Under these circumstances, it is necessary to guarantee the proper performance of journalists. However, measuring the results of journalistic activity is not an easy task, because many factors come into play. Some factors have an intangible nature that makes measurement difficult, such as the trust that the media inspire as social institutions (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Prochazka & Schweiger, 2019), and others depend on the subjective perception of the public and other contextual aspects (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019; Strömback et al., 2020; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). At the same time, certifying the quality of informative content can be seen by professionals as a way to discredit professional standards (Bowler, 2019) or as a form of censorship. Hence, many authors prefer to focus on concepts such as transparency or responsibility, rather than quality or trust (Martín Cavanna, Herrero-Beaumont & Morales, 2017; Bertrand, 2000; Johnson & St John III, 2020; Suing, Herrero & Ordoñez, 2022).

However, they are not separate concepts. Quality is an attribute of the information product and implies transparency as a necessary element. For its part, trust is the effect generated in the audience as a result of the quality of the information product (Coleman, 2012; Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2016). In this way, trust in the news media depends on the information having been prepared with the appropriate procedures to verify that the news and its interpretations respond to the reality of the events that actually occurred (Fawzi et al., 2021).

To guarantee the trust of the audience, it is necessary to ensure that the information product meets the quality standards that information demands (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen & Steindl, 2018). The quality of the information is related to professional standards (Deuze, 2005), which should be known by the professionals who practice journalism, the businessmen who risk their capitals, the politicians who make up the media system of a country, and the audiences that need to be informed. In short, if there is no climate of freedom, independence and honesty, it is difficult for the public to trust the media (Müller, 2013).

The interpretation of the concept of quality has evolved over time; however, it has not been the same in different geographical areas. Thus, in the United States, the standards of journalistic practice conceived the quality of information on television in the manner set forth in the Fairness Doctrine, which obliged broadcasters to report news from all points of view and protagonists (Simmons, 1978). Although that law was repealed in 1987, the professional practice continued to function according to those criteria. In Europe, on the contrary, it was considered that this quality would be guaranteed by the public television service, although what quality consisted of was not defined (Freedman, 2019). However, many of the current practices do not show that public televisions are guarantors of such quality. On the other hand, quality is a requirement that not only affects television channels directed and managed by public administrations. The shortage of quality journalism is a serious problem that harms society by undermining the role of the news media as a pillar of democratic society (McNair, 2012).

The goal of the present study was to test which indicators were recognised by the different interest groups that allow us to distinguish the media that generated trust. An exhaustive bibliographic review of the previous literature that had addressed how to measure quality in the media was performed in order to determine the dimensions and indicators that make television news programmes be perceived as quality products. Thus, Romero-Rodríguez, De-Casas-Moreno & Torres-Toukoumidis (2016) focused on the social and labour conditions, on the necessary procedures to guarantee quality information, and the final product offered to the public. De-Pablos and Mateo (2004) also prepared a quality index based on journalistic, labour and business indicators. For their part, Palau and Gómez-Mompart (2015) limited the analysis of journalistic quality to the company, the product, and the journalist. Along the same lines, Fernández del Moral (2007) and Pujadas (2017) have also provided valuable indicators for measuring television quality.

The synthesis and integration of these previous studies allowed us to classify the variables associated with the quality of information products in three areas, namely: (a) those related to the publishing company; (b) those related to the professionals; and (c) those that refer to the information content prepared by professionals and its distribution to the public. Below we will discuss the indicators that can be applied to these three dimensions.

1.1. The media company

Aspects related to the publishing company can increase the trust of the audience (Vara-Miguel, 2017), although perhaps in a less direct way than aspects of the elements directly related to the content. The consumption of informative content is related to the behaviour of experience goods. Until they are consumed, it is not possible to know the satisfaction of the audience. Therefore, consumption is based on prior trust and the perceived value of the journalistic brand contributes to generating that trust (Mas & Lacasa, 2018).

In this sense, the internal culture of the media contributes to reinforcing the responsibility of journalists (Kenyon, Svensson & Edström, 2019) and closeness to the public. Therefore, it is important that companies are transparent and offer public information on issues such as ownership, corporate governance model, sources of income, codes of conduct, and editorial principles. Their position on issues such as freedom of expression, truthfulness, the right to personal honour and privacy, independence or the handling of sensitive content should be known (Sarikakis & Winter, 2021). Internal regulations, such as the editorial statutes, help facilitate the professional relations of journalists and other workers with the management processes and the publishing companies (Cobo, 2008). Other mechanisms such as information councils, the figure of the ombudsman, channels for information leaks or departments for verifying information are also signs of commitment to quality journalism (Medina & Ojer, 2009).

1.2. The professionals

Quality requires that media entrepreneurs assume the responsibility of providing journalists with the necessary time, authority and resources to perform their professional work. If these aspects are missing, social welfare and peaceful coexistence are in danger (Couldry, Madianou & Pinchevski, 2013). For this reason, adequate social and labour conditions of media workers should be guaranteed. It should be mentioned that, in contrast, job insecurity has a negative impact on information quality (Ufarte Ruiz, 2012).

Specifically, professionals should enjoy their job and contract security, respect for professional criteria and freedom of action (Deuze, 2005). The minimum rest of the employees should be respected in the working day, and the salary should be appropriate to their category and seniority. For Marcos Recio, Edo and Parra (2018), the size of the newsrooms is also a guarantor of information quality. The greater the number of journalists, the greater the chances of covering all issues and acting quickly when the situation requires it. In turn, the companies should provide their professionals with the necessary training to adapt their knowledge and skills to the changing demands of the sector.

1.3. The informative content

An important aspect of informative quality lies in the selection, development and treatment of the news. Some authors, such as Pellegrini et al. (2011), Pérez Curiel and Luque Ortiz (2014) and Gómez-Domínguez et al. (2016), consider that the quality of a news programme can be evaluated taking only the content broadcast into account.

Professional criteria lead to selecting relevant facts, worthy of being told; however, as Dominick (2011) pointed out, determining newsworthiness is not an exact science. Journalistic value is the result of tradition, shared and historically accepted values, availability and access to information, organisational policies of the journalistic companies, and available resources. Journalistic value is related to how journalists value events based on their political importance, their social effect, seriousness or public interest (Herbert, 2000). In addition, it also has to do with topicality, proximity, prominence, human interest or novelty (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Dominick, 2011; Rich, 2015; Caple, 2018), dramatic events (Lippmann, 1922), the potential impact on society (Kepplinger & Ehmig, 2006) or the audience interest (Golding & Elliott, 1979; Strömbäck, Karlsson & Hopmann, 2012). In turn, the choice of events according to these newsworthiness criteria should be done without losing sight of the journalistic product as a whole, so that there is a balanced composition between hard and soft news with a variety of topics (Reinemann et al., 2011).

Once the news events are selected, rigor and precision are a *sine qua non* condition of journalistic information (Porlezza, 2019). Therefore, checking whether the facts presented are true or not and verifying the relevance of the sources used are part of the responsible task of the information professionals. Detecting errors, hoaxes, fake news and unfounded rumours has become a priority task

in the current context of the proliferation of what Wardley and Derakhshan (2017) call "information disorders". Along with rigor, impartiality leads to taking into account the different perspectives, opinions, interests or individuals involved in news events, with sufficient measure and distance so as not to lose the sense of the reality of what actually happened (Sambrook, 2012). According to the BBC Trust (2007: 5), "impartiality involves a mixture of precision, balance, context, distance, objectivity, open-mindedness, rigour, self-awareness, transparency and truth". Diversity is also a fundamental component of good journalism to ensure the presentation of different points of view on important public issues (Urban & Schweiger, 2013). As Wilson and Gutiérrez (1985) pointed out, diversity in news coverage requires including topics, events, communities, and individuals that have historically been excluded from the news. This requirement aims to resort to diverse sources, both experts and ordinary individuals, and to the experiences of individuals of different races, sensitivities and social classes (Usher, 2021).

With regard to the preparation of the news, traceability constitutes a reliability feature for the audience, since it provides details about the informative process that the journalists have followed to write the news (Público, 2018). Elements such as the authorship of the informative piece and the sources consulted, the use of clear and contextualised support materials or transparency around the investigative methods used by journalists are some indicators of trust (The Trust Project, 2020).

In this section we are not only referring to the search and capture of information, but also to the preparation, presentation and dissemination of news to the public. With regard to the dissemination of news content, a key element of reliability and, therefore, quality, is that basic writing standards are met (Hall, 1971; McKane, 2014), thus making the news understandable and clear. Furthermore, and considering the specificities of audiovisual media, the inclusion of infographics, augmented reality or images that help clarify the facts has become an essential complement to television information, adding visual appeal. There are also formal aspects related to elements such as production, scenery, lighting, graphics, sound or the appearance of presenters, collaborators or guests, which favour the understanding and satisfaction of the audience with the information consumed (Pujadas, 2017).

On the other hand, establishing mechanisms that allow vulnerable audiences to be protected from the broadcast of news with sensitive or risky content is part of good journalistic practices (Núñez-Ladeveze, Irisarri & Morales, 2015). This is one of the lines of action in which the strategies of the Corporate Social Responsibility that are being developed by audiovisual companies, both public and private, are framed (Fernández Lombao, 2015; Díaz Campo & Berzosa, 2020). Along the same lines, an indicator of transparency in broadcasts is the existence of sponsored content labelling, so that the audience can clearly identify it as such (Boerman & van Reijmersdal, 2016).

Finally, Burguera and Vara-Miguel (2018) pointed out that, without neglecting the elaboration of informative content, a strategic management of the journalistic brand should foster a consistent relationship with the audience with its identity and open to its participation and collaboration in the brand creation. In this sense, deploying actions that allow viewers to comment, share, add information or find useful information (through the superimposition of a QR code on the screen, for example) will allow a dialogue with them that can build trust and increase their satisfaction. In this regard, Schifrr, Santa-Wood and De-Martino (2017) indicated that, for many entrepreneurs, the credibility of the media depended on readers' engagement. What seems clear is that the actions in which the public can participate should derive from the news events and not simply be emotional claims unconnected with what actually happened (Essex & Oelofse, 2015). In short, participation implies the willingness to incur costs in time or money, in order to interact with communication media. This loyalty, which can take different forms (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016), is a demonstration of the quality perceived by the audience.

2. Objectives, research questions and method

Although instruments such as The Trust Project or verification by The International Fact-Checking Network have been developed in the field of the press to ensure the quality of information, these practices have hardly been extended to the case of the television. Taking into account the aforementioned indicators, our proposal consists of promoting the creation of an audiovisual trust seal with a double function; on the one hand, used to determine that the quality standards that all information products require are met and, on the other, to teach the audience to have a critical behaviour towards the information they receive. Given that television is the medium with the greatest penetration and impact in Western countries, it is proposed to choose it as a pilot medium to implement a seal of quality that allows the development of effective action for the protection of the audience and, ultimately, society.

The goal of the present study was to propose a quality seal that allows distinguishing the media that generate trust due to quality standards, and to test it with the professional sector to verify the relevance of including the proposed indicators. In order to determine the dimensions and indicators that make a television news programme be perceived as being of high quality, the conceptual framework was first developed through an exploratory review of the scientific and professional literature. After this

theoretical framework, the most relevant categories and indicators that generate trust in the public were determined.

Specifically, the present study aimed at answering the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What weight does each of the factors determined have on the reliability of a television news programme according to the different stakeholders of a television company? Knowing the weight that experts involved in the industry give to the indicators will serve to assess the value of each indicator as a guarantor of the seal.

RQ2: Are there differences in the perception of stakeholders depending on the country assessed? Having an international consensus on the indicators and their weight in the journalistic tasks will give the seal validity and credibility within the professional sector.

In order to answer the two research questions, experts of different sectors and nationalities were consulted. In order to guarantee that the selected indicators included the most important aspects, the Delphi method was applied (García Valdés & Suárez Marín, 2013) and a wide sample of experts from the industry and the academic field in Spain, Italy and Germany was consulted. The sample of experts included the interest groups of the sector (journalists, users, directors of television networks, advertisers, academics, regulators). To validate the survey, twenty individuals from each country were consulted and forty-eight responses were obtained. The final consultation was performed in two stages, the first in June 2020 and the second in October of the same year. More than 200 experts were invited by email to complete an online survey. As a result, 234 experts were contacted in stage one and 141 in stage two.

Different stakeholders were included (academy, advertisers, audience representatives, regulators, journalists, NGOs, media executives) to assess whether the items that made up the concept of quality of the news product were different depending on the point of view from which they were viewed and the type of relationships occurring with them. In the second stage, 30 researchers, 10 advertisers, 21 audience associations, 11 regulators, 35 journalists, 2 NGOs, and 32 executives were reached. Regarding the countries, 49 came from Spain, 45 from Italy, and 47 from Germany.

The consultations were performed in three different countries to determine whether the concept was transnational or, on the contrary, there were different perspectives depending on the conditions of each country. The chosen countries were Germany, Italy and Spain. The European perspective was prioritised, since the context was different from other countries due to the nature of public service that television still had. The consideration of television as a public service offers a field for debate on how to guarantee this service. The debate has been fuelled in recent years by the growing misinformation on the continent as a result of the erratic policies of some countries and technology workers that have produced noise into the system. With this premise, it makes sense to discuss how to guarantee reliable companies. On the other hand, the countries assessed have a long tradition of public television and where these television stations that played an important role, even though there are great cultural, social and political differences between them. The response system consisted of rating the different items from 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree).

3. Results

Before analysing the importance attributed to the different factors for determining the quality of the information product, the experts were questioned about the relevance and impact. Table 1 includes various statements in this regard. The statement in which there was greater agreement among those consulted was the one indicating that it was the responsibility of the media to contribute to the development of an informed audience thus facilitating free and informed decision-making (3.71 on a 1-4 scale). With a similar level of agreement was the opinion that television news programmes had an impact on society (3.6) and that the production of quality news programmes contributed to attracting and retaining better professionals (3.59). There was less agreement on the fact that the production of quality news programmes resulted in better outcomes for the companies that broadcasted them (3.3). What the interviewees least agreed with was that quality news programmes provided more effective campaigns for advertisers (3.02). These patterns hardly indicated any differences between the three countries participating in the study, so that the ranking indicated above was generally obtained in Germany, Italy and Spain.

Table 1: Perceived relevance and impact of the quality news production and distribution

T	Ac	Ad	Au	R	J	N	E	G	I	S

The news media have an impact in society because of the influence of the contents they broadcast.

T	Ac	Ad	Au	R	J	N	E	G	I	S
3,60	3,53	3,20	3,77	3,88	3,62	3,50	3,71	3,76	3,52	3,53

It is the media's responsibility to contribute to the development of an informed audience, aiding the public in making free and informed decisions.

| 3,71 | 3,79 | 3,40 | 3,69 | 3,88 | 3,71 | 3,00 | 3,76 | 3,85 | 3,48 | 3,80 |

The production of high quality news and its responsible distribution mean better results in the long run for the media companies.

| 3,30 | 2,95 | 3,80 | 3,38 | 3,25 | 3,29 | 4,00 | 3,48 | 3,30 | 3,21 | 3,40 |

The creation of high quality news and its responsible distribution mean more efficient campaigns for advertisers in the long run.

| 3,02 | 2,95 | 3,40 | 3,15 | 3,00 | 2,86 | 3,50 | 3,14 | 2,85 | 3,03 | 3,20 |

High quality news production and distribution contribute to attract and retain better professionals in media companies.

| 3,59 | 3,63 | 3,40 | 3,69 | 3,38 | 3,81 | 4,00 | 3,52 | 3,55 | 3,58 | 3,67 |

T: Total; AC: Academia; Ad: Advertisers; Au: Audience; R: Regulators; J: Journalists;
N: NGOs; E: Media Executives; G: Germany; I: Italy; S: Spain

Source: Own elaboration

However, the same did not occur for the different profiles of professionals interviewed. While audience representatives, regulators, journalists and media executives largely agreed with the average opinion, advertisers made different assessments. More specifically, of all the effects proposed for quality news, they thought that the most beneficial was for the broadcasting companies. However, contrary to the general opinion, they believed that the least impact was produced on society.

Table 2: Perceived importance of the four large groups of factors on the quality of the news

		T	Ac	Ad	Au	R	J	N	E	G	I	S
Media company	Existence of procedures and codes that guarantee financial transparency and journalist's freedom of expression and independence as a guarantee for quality of information.											
		3,67	3,37	3,75	3,91	3,63	3,68	3,50	3,89	3,86	3,61	3,55
Journalists	Existence of qualified professionals with available resources and ability to generate independent quality information contents.											
		3,80	3,79	3,75	3,91	4,00	3,74	4,00	3,74	3,62	3,84	3,93
News content production procedures	Existence of work procedures that guarantee the selection of relevant news, with a meticulous, precise and comprehensible focus, including source verification and cross-checking.											
		3,82	3,74	4,00	3,82	3,88	3,89	4,00	3,79	3,72	3,84	3,90
Process for the dissemination of news contents	Existence of mechanisms that bring closer information to users in a comprehensible, visual manner and taking into consideration vulnerable audiences.											
		3,54	3,37	3,75	3,45	3,25	3,79	3,50	3,68	3,48	3,52	3,62

T: Total; AC: Academia; Ad: Advertisers; Au: Audience; R: Regulators; J: Journalists;
N: NGOs; E: Media Executives; G: Germany; I: Italy; S: Spain

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the importance of the four large groups of factors considered (company, professionals, content production, and dissemination) (Table 2), the interviewees considered that the existence of adequate procedures for the preparation of informative content (3.82) and qualified professionals who had the necessary resources (3.80) were more important for the quality of news than procedures and codes that guaranteed financial transparency and independence (3.67), and disclosure mechanisms of informative content (3.53).

In this case, differences were observed between the countries assessed. Although the answers offered by the interviewees in Spain and Italy were similar, those from Germany were different. Specifically, the German interviewees believed that the most important factor for the quality of the news was the existence of procedures and codes that guaranteed financial transparency and freedom of expression, as well as the independence of journalists as a guarantee of this fact.

These differences were also evident when addressing the role of the interviewees. While the majority of groups had an opinion that broadly coincided with the average explained above, the audience and media executives made different assessments. They specifically coincided with what was indicated above for Germany, i.e., the procedures at the level of the companies as a whole were the most important when determining the quality of the news broadcasted by the media.

Table 3. Perceived importance of company-related factors on the quality of the news

	T	Ac	Ad	Au	R	J	N	E	G	I	S
Transparency in ownership and governance model	Public information on corporation website about ownership and corporate government model.										
	3,64	3,47	3,50	3,70	4,00	3,61	3,50	3,72	3,64	3,77	3,48
Revenues sources	Public information on corporation website about main sources of revenue, particularly from advertisers.										
	3,53	3,42	3,25	3,40	3,50	3,67	3,50	3,67	3,54	3,52	3,56
Policies	Code of conduct, policies or editorial guidelines that explain the corporation's stand on key aspects such as: freedom of expression, veracity, right to personal honor and to privacy, independence or sensitive content.										
	3,65	3,58	3,25	3,50	3,50	3,78	3,00	3,89	3,61	3,58	3,78
Compliance	Organization model that guarantees legal compliance in audiovisual and media regulation matters, as well as compliance with all commitments acquired voluntarily by the corporation.										
	3,65	3,53	3,75	3,50	3,63	3,72	4,00	3,72	3,50	3,68	3,78

T: Total; AC: Academia; Ad: Advertisers; Au: Audience; R: Regulators; J: Journalists;
N: NGOs; E: Media Executives; G: Germany; I: Italy; S: Spain

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding more specific aspects of each indicator, Table 3 lists the policies of companies in areas such as: (a) transparency regarding ownership and the corporate governance model; (b) transparency regarding sources of income; (c) the existence of guidelines regarding the position of the media on key issues such as truthfulness and freedom of expression; and (d) the application of mechanisms that guarantee independence in the production of news. The participants in the study gave these four aspects a high and very similar importance concerning information quality, with the averages ranging between 3.53 and 3.65.

However, somewhat larger differences were observed when the responses were assessed country by country. For example, Italian interviewees clearly gave greater importance to transparency about ownership and business model through publications on the websites. On the contrary, the Spanish counterparts considered that this factor was clearly less relevant than policies, control and monitoring systems of the companies.

Noteworthy differences were also observed between interest groups. Thus, regulators and audience representatives attached greater importance to transparency about company ownership and governance. However, journalists considered that the existence of policies and compliance with control

systems were the most determining factors of information quality, whereas executives highlighted the value of policies for freedom of expression, truthfulness, respect for honour and intimacy, and independence or treatment of risk content as vital aspects in the performance of the journalistic activity.

Table 4. Perceived importance of factors related to professionals on the quality of the news

		T	Ac	Ad	Au	R	J	N	E	G	I	S
Work conditions	Type of contract, salaries, freedom of association, security guarantees (for instance, correspondents in conflict areas or in countries with no guarantee for freedom of expression), stability and independence to assure commitment and work quality of professionals.											
		3,74	3,63	3,75	3,80	3,88	3,78	4,00	3,67	3,64	3,77	3,81
Training	Los profesionales reciben una formación adecuada orientada a asegurar la calidad informativa y la adaptación a los cambios del sector. Professionals receive training aimed at assuring quality of information.											
		3,62	3,68	3,50	3,40	3,75	3,67	3,50	3,56	3,39	3,71	3,74
Staff	Volume, diversity and geographical distribution of staff that assures covering of news following quality information standards (veracity, accuracy, impartiality, comprehensibility).											
		3,43	3,32	3,75	3,50	3,50	3,39	3,00	3,44	3,54	3,35	3,41

T: Total; AC: Academia; Ad: Advertisers; Au: Audience; R: Regulators; J: Journalists;
N: NGOs; E: Media Executives; G: Germany; I: Italy; S: Spain

Source: Own elaboration

The following group of questions refers to three dimensions of the management of individuals in the media, namely: their working conditions (type of contract, remuneration, etc.); the training provided by the companies; and the composition of the workforce in terms of volume, diversity and geographical distribution. The results of Table 3 indicate that the first of the three factors was considered most important to achieve higher quality of the information product (3.74), followed by training (3.62), being the type of workforce the least valued factor (3.43).

This ranking was reproduced identically between the interviewees from Italy and Spain. On the other hand, the position of the German experts interviewed was somewhat different. Although they agreed in giving the greatest importance to working conditions, they considered that the structure of the workforce played a more important role than the training provided to professionals for the sake of higher quality of the news.

The heterogeneity of opinions was also manifested in the analysis of the responses of the different interest groups. Journalists, regulators, executives, and NGOs agreed on the average assessment of all those interviewed. However, advertisers and audience representatives placed more value on the composition of the workforce than on training. For their part, academics considered training first, above working conditions and the structure of the workforces.

Table 5. Perceived importance of factors related to the production of the quality of the news

	T	Ac	Ad	Au	R	J	N	E	G	I	S
News selection	Process that assures diversity and balance of point of views.										
	3,62	3,63	3,50	3,60	3,63	3,83	2,50	3,50	3,64	3,61	3,59
Source selection and verification	Diversity and qualification of sources, cross-checking of sources.										
	3,92	3,95	3,75	3,90	4,00	3,89	4,00	3,89	3,89	3,90	3,96
Authorship	Use of experts and prestigious professionals										
	3,44	3,37	3,50	3,70	3,50	3,39	3,00	3,44	3,39	3,52	3,41
Evidence record	Clear, complete, impartial, relevant, documented, put into context material on which the piece of news is constructed.										
	3,63	3,63	4,00	3,40	3,63	3,72	3,50	3,67	3,46	3,58	3,85

T: Total; AC: Academia; Ad: Advertisers; Au: Audience; R: Regulators; J: Journalists;
N: NGOs; E: Media Executives; G: Germany; I: Italy; S: Spain

Source: Own elaboration

The third group of factors had a more direct relationship with information processing (Table 5). Specifically, five aspects were assessed, namely: (1) the selection of news oriented according to criteria of diversity and balance; (2) the selection and verification of sources; (3) the presentation of the news by recognised professionals using specialised experts when required; and (4) the recording of evidence through the use of suitable material.

The results obtained point to the selection and verification of sources as the most relevant factor (3.92), followed by the selection of news (3.63) and the recording of evidence (3.62), with the authorship being the least valued (3.44). Although this order remains unchanged when analysed by each country individually, differences were detected in the emphasis placed on each factor. Particularly, the Spanish interviewees exhibited greater inclination to reinforce the role played by the record of evidence. There was also considerable homogeneity between the different interest groups in this regard. The only group that diverged from the general opinion was the audience, which gave greater importance to the authorship of the information in comparison to the record of evidence.

Table 6. Perceived importance of factors related to dissemination on the quality of the news

	T	Ac	Ad	Au	R	J	N	E	G	I	S
Comprehensibility	Clarity and comprehension, emotional tone, adequate language.										
	3,64	3,74	4,00	3,50	3,75	3,61	3,50	3,56	3,57	3,55	3,81
Attractiveness	Resources to increase news attractiveness and comprehensibility: images, sound, studio design, expert or protagonist presence, etc.										
	3,08	3,05	3,00	2,60	3,38	3,17	2,00	3,33	2,93	2,94	3,41
Protection of vulnerable audiences	Mechanisms that allow to protect vulnerable audiences before the emission of pieces of news that hold sensitive contents (terrorism, racism, violence, sex, drugs and alcohol).										
	3,36	3,42	3,75	3,10	3,38	3,33	2,50	3,39	3,32	3,32	3,44
Relationship with audiences	Procedures to establish relationships with audiences, in particular rectification of errors mechanisms.										
	3,34	3,42	3,00	3,10	3,25	3,44	3,50	3,39	3,21	3,32	3,48
Flagging sponsored content	The audience can clearly identify the sponsored content.										
	3,69	3,58	3,50	3,90	3,63	3,89	3,50	3,67	3,86	3,55	3,67

T: Total; AC: Academia; Ad: Advertisers; Au: Audience; R: Regulators; J: Journalists;
N: NGOs; E: Media Executives; G: Germany; I: Italy; S: Spain

Source: Own elaboration

Finally, the participants were asked to evaluate five crucial aspects for the dissemination of the informative product, such as: comprehensibility (clarity, adequate language, etc.); attractiveness of the presentation (images, sound, set, etc.); protection of vulnerable audiences regarding the consumption of some news; listening and paying attention to the audience; and clearly signalling sponsored content. Table 6 shows the responses provided, which point to a clear ordering of the importance of these factors. Comprehensibility (3.64) and signage of sponsorships (3.69) were in the first place. These factors were followed by the protection of vulnerable audiences (3.36) and audience participation (3.34). The least valued factor was attractiveness of news presentations (3.08).

Although the ordering of these five aspects hardly differed between the three participating countries, it is worth highlighting some particularities. The German interviewees especially emphasised the importance of clearly noticing sponsored content. It is common practice in this country to clearly indicate those contents that include commercial messages. For its part, in Spain, significantly greater importance was given to the attractiveness of the news as a key aspect that provided quality to the information.

Slight noteworthy differences were observed between the opinions of various interest groups and the average of the general sample. For example, both media executives and regulators gave news attractiveness a higher link to quality than other groups. In turn, for the audience, the adequate signalling of sponsored content was very relevant, whereas, for the regulators, the relationship with the audience was less important as a sign of quality.

Table 7. Perception of need for an audiovisual seal of trust for news

T	Ac	Ad	Au	R	J	N	E	G	I	S
3,51	3,26	3,25	3,40	3,50	3,78	3,00	3,61	3,61	3,39	3,56

T: Total; AC: Academia; Ad: Advertisers; Au: Audience; R: Regulators; J: Journalists;
N: NGOs; E: Media Executives; G: Germany; I: Italy; S: Spain

Source: Own elaboration

To conclude, the interviewees were asked about the relevance of developing an audiovisual trust seal for news. Specifically, the question formulated was: In your opinion, is it pertinent and necessary to prepare an audiovisual trust seal for news, granted by an independent entity, including the categories and aspects mentioned above? The results are shown in Table 7. The mean score was 3.51 on a scale of 1 to 4. The Italian interviewees were more sceptical than their Spanish and German counterparts about the initiative. The interest groups most favourable to the creation of the label were journalists and media executives, whereas the least inclined were NGOs and academics.

4. Discussion

The goal of the present study was to determine the essential indicators that can identify and distinguish the audiovisual media that build trust in the public due to their quality standards. To that end, after an extensive review of the existing literature and a consultation with experts from different sectors and countries, an evaluative and practical proposal was developed including the categories and indicators that make a television news programme be perceived as being of high quality. The aim was to create a tool that would be valid for diverse national contexts within the European Union. Following previous research (De-Pablos & Mateo, 2004; Fernández del Moral, 2007; Palau & Gómez-Mompart, 2015; Romero-Rodríguez, De-Casas-Moreno & Torres-Toukoumidis, 2016; Pujadas, 2017), the indicators were grouped into three areas, namely: those belonging to the publishing company; the professionals who made it up; and the procedures for preparing and disseminating the news.

In response to the first research question (RQ1), the results indicated that information processing-specifically, the selection and verification of sources-was the most relevant aspect in the opinion of all the interest groups with which the media was related. Likewise, the existence of qualified professionals with available resources and the ability to generate independent and quality informative content was also considered relevant, i.e., the existence of work procedures that guarantee a relevant selection of news, with a rigorous, precise and understandable approach, and the diversity, qualification and contrast of the sources.

On the other hand, the factors that had less weight in the certification of quality were: (1) the use of visual elements, such as images, sound, structure of the sets, presence of experts or protagonists, that make the news more attractive and understandable; (2) mechanisms for protecting vulnerable audiences from risky content, such as terrorism, racism, violence, sex, drugs and alcohol; and (3) the channels that

allow the audience to participate, make complaints and give their opinions on the content. Although the Spanish law (Law 13/2022, art. 88) includes the need for protection of users and minors, it does not seem to have permeated the opinion of the experts to consider it an element that determines the quality of the information.
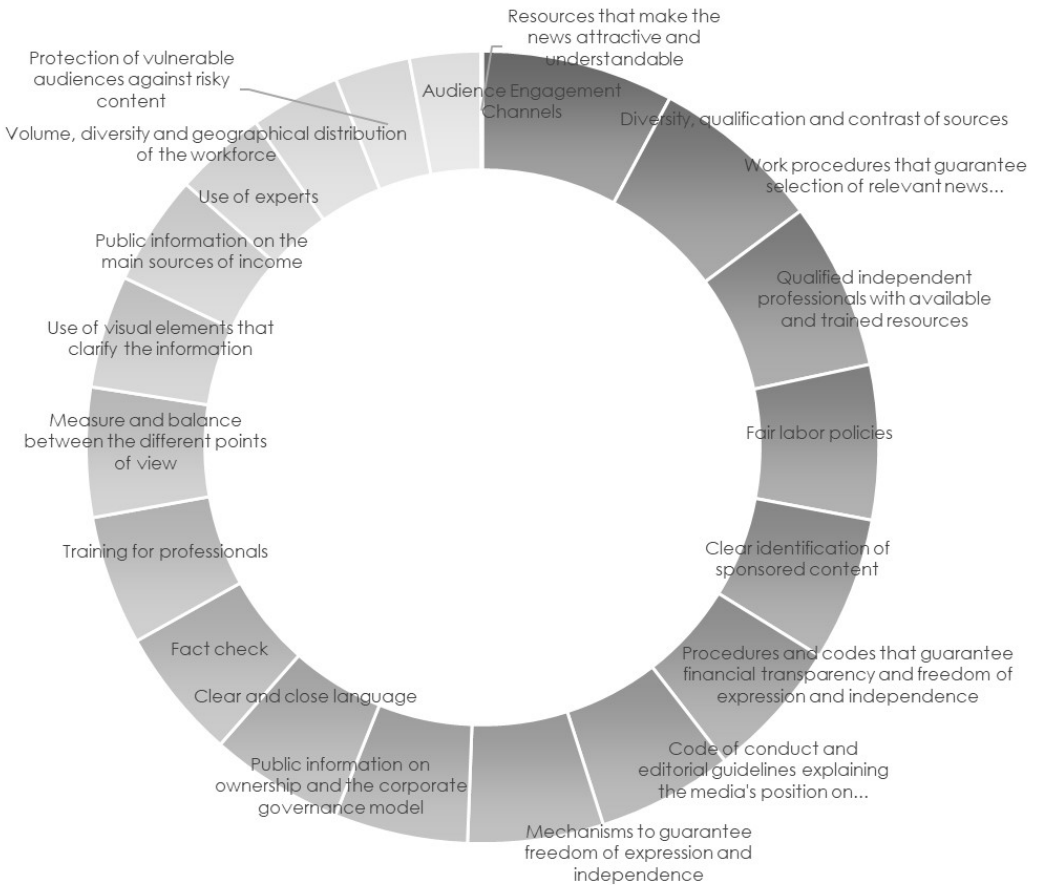
The comparison of the responses of the experts from the three countries assessed (RQ2) indicated some significant differences. For example, issues related to the working conditions and training of journalists had more weight in Spain than in Germany and Italy. According to our partners, Petra Pansegrau and Tobías Tönsfeuerborn from Bielefeld University, in Germany, there was a more traditional vision of journalism than in Spain, where the adaptation of new media trends was a more important factor (Fröhlich & Holt-Baza, 2009). According to Jorge Milan, from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, in Italy, on the contrary, labour agreements and workers' rights were more developed and structured than in other European countries, and not only in public companies. The unions play a very important role, and strikes are frequent, not always asking for a salary increase, but also greater job security, since deaths on the job are a recurring theme in the news of that country. On the other hand, the university training of journalists did not begin until the 1990s of the last century. Therefore, the vast majority of professionals are so due to years worked and news published; however, it is common to observe the lack of specialised training in the field of journalism and a more global vision of the problems in Italian professionals (Dematte & Perretti, 1997; Agostini, 2009). Knowing the working conditions, the previous training and the professional practice of journalists in these countries will allow contextualising these answers in the socio-labour and political reality. This aspect exceeded the object of study of the present work; however, without a doubt, it will be an object of study of utmost necessity in further research.

The same fact was observed in the items associated with the understandability and attractiveness of the news. In Spain, it was given more importance to these items than in other countries. On the other hand, for those interviewed in Germany, the most important factor for the quality of the news was the publishing companies that, specifically, should have procedures and codes that guaranteed financial transparency, freedom of expression and the independence of journalists. In the German context, the freedom and independence of professionals were understood as fundamental social values. Although other aspects could also be considered important, in a hierarchical assessment, they would be subordinated to this basic value. It would be necessary to assess the motivations of interviewees in further studies.

In Italy, transparency about the ownership of companies and the corporate governance model had more weight than in other countries. This fact has a conjunctural explanation, i.e., the Italian television market responds to a duopoly scheme, on the one hand, public television RAI has three channels and each of them is controlled by one of the major majority parties. Therefore, the selection of news was related to the interests of the parties and subject to strict parliamentary control. The other television channels belonged to Berlusconi's Fininvest group-which continued to play an active role in the political life of the country-and to other communication groups, related to the previous tycoon, which in 2020, the year the survey was conducted, went through serious financial problems.

All the indicators obtained a rating of more than three, which is why we consider that all of them should be included in the process of accreditation of the quality of television news. In this way, we conclude that the following indicators should be part of this guarantee of information quality, weighing their value according to the assessments of the experts (Graph 1). It remains for further studies to determine how to proceed with the assessments and applications, and test the relevance of the methods.

Graph 1: Indicators of the Trust Seal of television news.

Resources that make the news attractive and understandable

Protection of vulnerable audiences against risky content

Audience Engagement Channels

Diversity, qualification and contrast of sources

Volume, diversity and geographical distribution of the workforce

Work procedures that guarantee selection of relevant news...

Use of experts

Qualified independent professionals with available and trained resources

Public information on the main sources of income

Use of visual elements that clarify the information

Fair labor policies

Measure and balance between the different points of view

Clear identification of sponsored content

Training for professionals

Procedures and codes that guarantee financial transparency and freedom of expression and independence

Fact check

Code of conduct and editorial guidelines explaining the media's position on...

Clear and close language

Public information on ownership and the corporate governance model

Mechanisms to guarantee freedom of expression and independence

Source: Own elaboration

Finally, the stakeholders surveyed from the three countries demonstrated consensus on the need to:

- transnationalise this tool and involve the different countries of the European Union in this process of creating effective tools for generating audiovisual trust, both for the viewers and for the European industry.

- develop an audiovisual trust seal focused on informative audiovisual content, in order to combat the phenomenon of disinformation through the generation and dissemination of truthful quality content.

- contribute to raising the quality standards of higher education in Journalism and Communication, through the development of tools that facilitate and clarify the standards to be followed by both researchers and professionals, as well as by future information professionals.

5. Conclusions

The present study developed and tested a tool for measuring information quality with experts from the industry, academia and society. Likewise, it can be considered a valid instrument to use as a media literacy guide in formal and non-formal educational sectors, and a guide to good practices for professionals, if we assume that it is a seal of trust applicable to television companies that freely want to submit to this process.

It can be concluded that, in this era marked by disinformation, compliance with professional standards is one of the most important ways to restore public trust in the news. The theoretical proposal of dimensions and indicators of quality television journalism can help build the reputation that media companies should have to be competitive in the new media scenario, as stated by Chan-Olmsted (2011), Ots and Hartmann (2015) and Burguera and Vara-Miguel (2018).

So that it is not seen as a mere marketing campaign, it seems necessary to obtain an external accreditation that recognises good journalistic work and ensures that the information product meets the required quality standards (KPMG, 2019; Terán, 2019; Mauri-Ríos, Ramon-Vegas & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2020). This fact could encourage the convergence of the media towards responsible journalistic activities, since failure to obtain accreditation constitutes a sign of inadequate practices, with the consequent damage to the reputation of the affected media. On the other hand, creating a reliable information accreditation system can be a useful instrument to help audiences acquire criteria to access truthful, complete and reliable information. For a seal to have value, the audit task of an independent institution is needed to certify the extent to which the quality standards recognised by all the sectors involved are met, in line with the proposals of Bertrand (2000), Martín Cavanna, Herrero-Beaumont and Morales (2017), Johnson and St John III (2020) and Suing, Herrero and Ordoñez (2022). In order to fulfil the function of the seal-i.e., promoting and improving the professional practices-it is necessary to obtain the acceptance from journalistic companies and professionals, as well as the non-interference of the governments in its implementation.

6. Specific contributions of each author

Contribution	Author
Research design	Author 1, Author 2, Author 3
Documentary search	Author 1 & Author 3
Data collection	Company associated to the project
Critical data analysis and interpretation	Author 2
Review and approval of versions	Author 1, Author 2, Author 3

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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