

WestminsterResearch

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

**The Reception of International News Channels in Hispanic Latin
America: a Study on Audience Response to the Soft Power
Endeavours of China, Russia and Iran**

Morales, P.S.

This is an electronic version of a PhD thesis awarded by the University of Westminster.
© Mr Pablo Morales, 2019.

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

Whilst further distribution of specific materials from within this archive is forbidden, you may freely distribute the URL of WestminsterResearch: (<http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/>).

In case of abuse or copyright appearing without permission e-mail repository@westminster.ac.uk

**THE RECEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS CHANNELS IN
HISPANIC LATIN AMERICA.
A STUDY ON AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO THE SOFT POWER
ENDEAVOURS OF CHINA, RUSSIA AND IRAN.**

By Pablo S Morales

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

London

May 2019

ABSTRACT

With the aim of expanding their soft power and countering Western-led narratives in the news, China, Russia and Iran have devised a communicational strategy with news channels at the heart of it. This global media expansion has entailed the creation of a series of multilingual media outlets targeting different regions of the world. With Latin America being one of them, Spanish has arisen as a key language. Nevertheless, as the region is targeted by many competitors from Western countries and beyond, the new players face serious challenges in both trying to convey their message and earning the approval and acceptance of audiences. By looking at how Latin American viewers perceive CCTV's Spanish language channel (now rebranded as CGTN), Russia's RT and Iran's HispanTV, this thesis seeks to evaluate what factors may be undermining the effectiveness of such a global media strategy targeting this particular region and how this affects these countries' soft power ambitions. This study is based on a series of focus groups conducted in Mexico and Argentina between September and October 2016, whereby participants were shown video excerpts from the above-mentioned broadcasters and encouraged to discuss an array of different aspects. This thesis shows that changes in news consumption patterns, scarce availability and accessibility across Latin America and issues of credibility and trust in the media are some of the main challenges facing these broadcasters, thus undermining their effectiveness in creating soft power.

[Keywords: soft power, CCTV, CGTN, RT, HispanTV, China, Russia, Iran, comparative]

LIST OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
LIST OF CONTENTS	III
LIST OF TABLES	VI
LIST OF FIGURES	VI
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VII
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1
1. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND SOFT POWER	6
1.1. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND THE MEDIA	6
1.2. MEDIA EXPANSION OVERSEAS AND MEDIA IMPERIALISM.....	8
1.3. SOFT POWER AND THE MEDIA.....	14
1.4. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AUDIENCE AND CULTURAL PROXIMITY.....	18
1.5. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON INTERNATIONAL CHANNELS AND AUDIENCES	18
1.6. CONCLUSION.....	26
2. METHODOLOGY	28
2.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	29
2.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	30
2.3. THE QUALITATIVE NATURE OF THIS STUDY.....	31
2.4. AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND FOCUS GROUPS	34
2.5. SELECTION OF COUNTRIES.....	35
2.6. SELECTION OF UNIVERSITIES AND RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS.....	38
2.6.1. <i>El Colegio de México (Colmex)</i>	40
2.6.2. <i>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)</i>	41
2.6.3. <i>Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM)</i>	42
2.6.4. <i>Universidad de Congreso (UC)</i>	43
2.6.5. <i>Universidad Torcuato di Tella (UTdT)</i>	43
2.6.6. <i>Universidad Belgrano (UB)</i>	44
2.6.7. <i>Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA)</i>	44
2.6.8. <i>Demographics of participants in Summary</i>	45
2.7. SESSIONS STRUCTURE	45
2.7.1. <i>Structure of questionnaire and supporting material</i>	46
2.7.2. <i>Selection of video excerpts and criteria</i>	48
2.7.3. <i>Analysis and discussion</i>	55
2.8. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION	57
2.9. DIFFICULTIES AND SHORTCOMINGS	58
2.9.1. <i>Universities and recruitment of participants</i>	58
2.9.2. <i>Questionnaire and supporting material</i>	59
2.9.3. <i>Video excerpts</i>	60
2.9.4. <i>Discussion and group dynamics</i>	61
2.9.5. <i>Data analysis</i>	61
2.10. CONCLUSION.....	62
3. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING ...	63
3.1. MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN HISPANIC LATIN AMERICA	64

3.1.1.	<i>Media concentration and television in Mexico</i>	67
3.1.2.	<i>Media polarisation and television in Argentina</i>	69
3.2.	INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING IN SPANISH AND LATIN AMERICA.....	71
3.2.1.	<i>Broadcasters from Europe</i>	71
3.2.2.	<i>Broadcasters from North America</i>	74
3.2.3.	<i>Broadcasters from East Asia</i>	75
3.2.4.	<i>Broadcasters from the Middle East</i>	76
3.3.	INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION CHANNELS AND LATIN AMERICA.....	77
3.3.1.	<i>News networks from the industrialised "West"</i>	78
3.3.2.	<i>Regional politics and broadcasting</i>	80
3.3.3.	<i>New millennium, new channels</i>	83
3.4.	CONCLUSION.....	87
4.	BUILDING TRUST	89
4.1.	RECOGNISABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS CHANNELS IN LATIN AMERICA.....	93
4.1.1.	<i>RT</i>	97
4.1.2.	<i>HispanTV</i>	97
4.1.3.	<i>CCTV-E</i>	98
4.2.	FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND TRUST.....	99
4.2.1.	<i>RT</i>	99
4.2.2.	<i>HispanTV</i>	102
4.2.3.	<i>CCTV-E</i>	103
4.3.	NATIONAL VS. INTERNATIONAL NEWS NETWORKS.....	105
4.3.1.	<i>Trust in international networks</i>	106
4.3.2.	<i>Trust in domestic news organisations</i>	110
4.3.3.	<i>Depending on specific circumstances</i>	112
4.4.	APPARENT OBJECTIVITY VS DISTINCT IDEOLOGY.....	116
4.4.1.	<i>Objectivity is ideal</i>	116
4.4.2.	<i>Only news is boring</i>	117
4.5.	TRUST IS EARNED.....	120
4.6.	CONCLUSION.....	123
5.	ADAPTING TO LOCAL TASTES	126
5.1.	CULTURAL PROXIMITY AND LANGUAGE.....	127
5.1.1.	<i>Attitudes towards varieties of Spanish</i>	128
5.1.2.	<i>Attitudes towards native speakers vs. non-native speakers</i>	133
5.1.3.	<i>translation techniques: subtitling and voice overs</i>	136
5.1.4.	<i>Tone</i>	141
5.2.	STYLE.....	141
5.2.1.	<i>Perception of visual elements</i>	142
5.2.2.	<i>Perception of style</i>	144
5.3.	PROFESSIONALISM.....	145
5.4.	IDENTIFICATION.....	147
5.5.	CONCLUSION.....	148
6.	BEYOND CONTROL - CULTURAL ISSUES JEOPARDISING ACCEPTANCE	151
6.1.	COUNTRY IMAGE.....	152
6.2.	RUSSIA AND THE WEST.....	156
6.3.	IRAN, WOMEN AND RELIGION.....	157
6.4.	CHINA: CENSORSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS.....	161
6.5.	(UN)CHANGING PERCEPTIONS.....	164
6.5.1.	<i>RT</i>	164
6.5.2.	<i>HispanTV</i>	165

6.5.3.	CCTV-E.....	166
6.6.	FUTURE IN LATIN AMERICA.....	166
6.6.1.	RT.....	168
6.6.2.	HispanTV.....	171
6.6.3.	CCTV.....	172
6.7.	CONCLUSION.....	173
7.	THE FUTURE IS SOCIAL MEDIA	176
7.1.	CHANGING HABITS AND NEWS CONSUMPTION	177
7.1.1.	<i>Newspapers</i>	178
7.1.2.	<i>Radio</i>	181
7.1.3.	<i>Television</i>	182
7.1.4.	<i>Shift to online and mobile</i>	184
7.2.	CHALLENGES FOR INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTERS	188
7.2.1.	<i>Accessibility to international media</i>	188
7.2.2.	<i>Internet access shaping new consumption patterns</i>	189
7.2.3.	<i>Social media as a mediation platform</i>	192
7.2.4.	<i>Communication strategies and social media</i>	194
7.2.5.	<i>Challenges and threats</i>	195
7.3.	CONCLUSION.....	196
8.	CONCLUSION.....	198
8.1.	INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND LATIN AMERICAN AUDIENCES	198
8.2.	THE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL PROXIMITY	201
8.3.	INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AS A TOOL FOR CREATING SOFT POWER	203
8.4.	LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY.....	205
8.5.	FUTURE RESEARCH	207
APPENDICES.....	I	
APPENDIX I: OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUPS SESSIONS	I	
APPENDIX II: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS BY PSEUDONYMS	II	
APPENDIX III (A): FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE (ORIGINAL VERSION IN SPANISH)	III	
APPENDIX III (B): FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE (TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH)	IV	
APPENDIX IV(A): SAMPLES OF SUPPORTING MATERIAL WITH ASSIGNMENTS TO ENCOURAGE DEBATE (ORIGINAL SPANISH).....	V	
APPENDIX IV(B): SUPPORTING MATERIAL WITH ASSIGNMENTS TO ENCOURAGE DEBATE (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	VI	
LIST OF REFERENCES	VII	

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Video compilation shown to participants.....	50
Table 2: Referencing and traceability of pseudonyms.....	57
Table 3: First impressions.....	105
Table 4: Factors generating trust and mistrust in national vs. international news channels.....	112
Table 5: Apparent objectivity vs. Distinct Ideology	120
Table 6: Trust checklist	123

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Apparent accent preference.....	136
Figure 2: Visual similarities between CCTV and CNN	143
Figure 3: Nationalism and CCTV's choice of colours.....	144
Figure 4: Country image dimensions.....	153
Figure 5: Isabel Pérez reporting for HispanTV from Gaza	160
Figure 6: Four profiles assessing the future of international TV channels	167

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to all the people who supported me throughout this long journey. I thank Karl McAlinden for his continuous encouragement for me to start this project in the first place. I thank the University of Westminster and especially the Communications and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) for granting me a studentship, without which I would not have been able to carry out this research. I thank my supervisors Peter Goodwin and Roza Tsagarousianou for their invaluable guidance at all stages of my project, particularly for helping me staying focused and not giving into the temptation of exploring even more new lines of enquiry.

I am extremely grateful to all the focus groups participants in Mexico and Argentina for sharing their views and opinions out of genuine interest and expecting nothing in return. I am equally grateful to those who helped me organise them: Élodie Brun (Colmex), Raul Parra, Edna Becerril (UNAM), Eric Figueroa (UAM), Florencia Molina (UC), Ana María Mustapic (UTdT), Patricio Degiorgis (UB), Rodrigo Hazaff (UB), Julio Aguirre, Leonardo Rodríguez Zoya (UBA) and Miguel Rossi (UBA). A special thanks goes to Analhi Aguirre, Laurinda Luz and Gisela Morales, who provided me with “a home away from home” during the crucial stage of conducting field research.

Lastly, I would also like to thank my family, friends, and peers for supporting, encouraging, and believing in me all throughout this experience.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, Pablo S. Morales, declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

INTRODUCTION

International broadcasting is increasingly being used as a tool to create soft power particularly by countries that wish to have their voice heard in the international political arena. They claim that their international reputation has been -and continues to be- damaged by the biased narrative spread worldwide by the mainstream media stemming from Western countries, in particular those from the anglophone world. To counter this narrative, China and other countries such as Russia and Iran, have been heavily investing in building their own international media outlets. At the heart of this strategy lies the need to convey a different vision of an emerging multipolar world, by breaking with a Western hegemonic narrative in international communications and politics. In order to advance this public-diplomacy agenda, they have set up news networks that broadcast in a series of foreign languages. By looking close at the choice of languages it is possible to understand how this strategy targets different regions of the world.

This project originates from my personal experience working as a journalist in Beijing (2010-2013) for the Spanish-language services at China Radio International and People's Daily Online, which are some of the media outlets that are actively engaged in advancing China's agenda of promoting its worldview to foreign audiences. As a first-hand witness of China's international communication strategy, I became curious to understand the profile of our audiences, i.e. to what extent my work was reaching listeners and readers in the Spanish-speaking world. Since most of the feedback received were emails written by people seemingly already interested in China (some of them even *sinophiles*), I started to ponder about the real impact of such media outlets, particularly in relation to their continuity and sustainability in the long term. Given the fierce competition they face from other international media and also from the domestic media in the targeted countries, this experiment may be short-lived without a clear vision by policy-makers of this as a long-term commitment.

Previous studies on the expansion of international news media have also almost entirely focused either on the media outlets themselves (e.g. programming, perceived agenda, ideology, etc.) or on the policies of the governments supporting the investment (e.g. soft power ambitions and geopolitical strategies, etc.). Studies devoted to understanding their potential and/or actual impact on audiences are relatively few.

The most comprehensive and ambitious attempt is perhaps *The Global News Challenge* (2013), where Anne Geniets not only analyses the market strategies of a series of international broadcasters, but also focuses on audiences in a number of developing countries in Asia and Africa. Her study starts by giving a detailed account of how both radio and television broadcasters such as BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera, CCTV, RT, DW, France 24, RFI, Voice of America and Alhurra are operating around the world. By conducting focus groups in Kenya, Egypt Senegal, India and Pakistan, Geniets explores the audiences' demands, perceptions and attitudes toward this type of media. Although Geniets' research provides an interesting insight into both how international broadcasters are targeting the developing world also how their operations are perceived by audiences, the markets covered in her work present a specific profile of developing nations in Asia and Africa. A major gap in Geniets' work is that it does not include Latin America, a region with realities somewhat different from those in other continents. This is related to another recurrent feature of the research linking soft-power ambitions and international media proliferation: a focus on anglophone media.

As a native speaker of Spanish, my interest is to unveil how the Spanish-speaking world has been targeted by international broadcasters, particularly those from geographically and culturally distant countries. Hence, this study will focus on the case of Hispanic Latin America and how it has been targeted by CCTV-E, HispanTV and RT, news channels broadcasting in Spanish respectively from China, Iran and Russia. This is not the first attempt to conduct such a comparison. In fact, a study focusing on the content output of these three channels is being carried out by Dani Madrid-Morales and Míriam Fernández¹. In a paper presented at the China's Media Go Global Conference in Beijing in 2014, they compared CCTV-E, RT and HispanTV's content with regards to three main aspects. First, they analysed the genres, reporting patterns and journalistic styles. Second, they identified the countries, topics and actors that these three channels seemed to focus on the most. Third, they looked into how the USA and Latin American countries were covered. The gap in their study is that the perception by audiences is not addressed.

In order to fill the gap in previous research, this study focuses on Latin American audiences by comparing their perception of RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E. By analysing media consumption attitudes across the region and specifically the audiences' interest

¹ The study has not been published yet.

in international broadcasters, this study seeks to understand whether transnational media backed by individual governments can be an effective strategy for creating and/or enhancing soft power or not. The first step to understand the implications of this phenomenon is to identify whether there is any interest in Latin America for such channels. Furthermore, it is also necessary to explore which factors play an active role in enhancing or hindering their viewership. This study argues that, in order to be successful, such soft-power strategies need to pay closer attention to audiences and their media consumption patterns. This does not only entail the choice of platforms and formats, or the way programmes are packaged and broadcast, but also factors that lie beyond the control of broadcasters and also affect their perception, such as pre-conceived images viewers hold of the countries of origin of these broadcasters.

This thesis is organised in eight chapters. Chapter 1 discusses a series of theoretical approaches at the intersection between media studies and international relations that provide a framework for the analysis of media proliferation and its instrumentalization in public diplomacy. It provides a general overview of the media expansion beyond borders and how the phenomenon has been analysed through the lens of cultural and media imperialism. After discussing Joseph Nye's theory of soft power and some of criticisms of that theory, it examines how the success of these strategies depend on the perception by audiences and the role played by different factors such as cultural proximity. Chapter 1 also gives details about previous studies on audiences of international channels.

Chapter 2 focuses on the methodology used to carry out this study. It explains in detail the research questions and objectives, as well as the rationale behind the decision of conducting qualitative research and why it made sense to carry out focus groups in Mexico and Argentina. Besides this, it also provides details about the structure of the focus groups sessions, the recruitment of the participants, the analysis of the data collected, and the difficulties encountered during every stage.

In order to discuss the findings and carry out an exhaustive analysis of the phenomenon, it is essential to understand the media environment in Latin America. Chapter 3 provides the necessary background, paying particular attention to phenomena such as media concentration in Mexico and media polarisation in Argentina. As international broadcasters target the region, it is important to understand how they fit into the overall media systems of these two countries, considering domestic, regional and other international media outlets. Therefore,

before providing details about the operations of RT, HispanTV and CCTV, Chapter 3 also describes how different international broadcasters have been targeting Latin America since the first half of the 20th century, both through radio and television.

Chapters 4 to 7 constitute the heart of this study and have been organised according to the main four thematic threads that emerged from the empirical findings. Each one of these chapters analyses a specific theme by contextualising the data collected and drawing links to the theoretical framework.

After examining the level of recognisability of international news channels in Mexico and Argentina, Chapter 4 discusses general issues of trust in the media, especially with regards to international media in comparison to domestic ones. It also analyses viewers expectations of international media with regards to objectivity and ideology.

As TV channels and media in general can be considered cultural products of specific countries, Chapter 5 explores how their perception is shaped by cultural factors. By analysing different aspects of these channels, this chapter focuses on the role played by cultural proximity and the extent of its influence upon viewers.

Chapter 6 looks at factors that lie beyond the control of broadcasters and focuses on the perception of international channels and how it is affected by pre-conceived images of the countries where these media are based. It examines the different dimensions of concepts such as country image and provides details about the specific cases of the images of Russia, Iran and China. Besides analysing the perceptions of the focus groups participants, it discusses their opinions with regards to the future of international broadcasters in Latin America and the likelihood of being accepted by audiences in Mexico and Argentina.

By examining how internet access is changing the way viewers consume news media, particularly social media among younger people, Chapter 7 looks at how the key for the future success of international broadcasters that pursue soft-power agendas may lie in their adaptability to new trends in communication technologies.

Finally, Chapter 8 consists of a final reflection and discussion of the phenomenon in light of the theoretical framework and attempts to draw some conclusions concerning the main research questions. Besides discussing likelihood of international broadcasters such as RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E (now CGTN) to become sources of news for Latin Americans, it recognises the limitations of this study and puts forward a few suggestions for future research.

Some of the findings of this research have been published on *Westminster Papers of Communication and Culture* (see Morales, 2018).

1. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND SOFT POWER

In order to understand how international news television channels are targeting audiences in Latin America and whether this is having any significant impact in the region or not, it is necessary to examine the theoretical framework that seeks to explain the emergence of these media outlets. The purpose of this chapter is to map out a series of theoretical approaches that help shed light on this particular phenomenon by linking media studies, politics and international relations, among other fields. First, I will address how the mass media -and in particular news media- have been instrumental to spreading ideologies and shaping audiences' worldview. Second, I will look at news networks expansion overseas, the way it has been linked to *media imperialism* and how it is currently regarded as part of a public diplomacy strategy to create soft power. I will address some of the criticisms and re-evaluations to both of these theories, as well as briefly elaborate on some ideas related to the debate, such as the approach on *media flows and contra-flows*, and to what extent using the media to exert soft power could be considered what some scholars understand as *propaganda*. Finally, I will focus on the audience, how it is regarded by the soft power theory and what sort of a role cultural proximity and other related concepts play in determining the degree of success of any soft power efforts.

1.1. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND THE MEDIA

As a means of spreading information and, as an extension, ideologies, the media have been politically instrumental for governments around the world, due to their perceived inherent power to influence people. This phenomenon has been an extensive subject of debate among scholars and the focus of numerous theories in media studies, including the Agenda-setting theory (Dearing and Rogers, 1996), and many other theories.

During the 19th and 20th centuries (and particularly during the Cold War), many countries invested in transnational media as a way of spreading their ideology (or ideal way of life), in an attempt to promote a specific political perspective to the rest of the world (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012: 131). A country's prosperity would portray a positive image that would in turn attract others to follow its steps (and ideology, be it *communism, socialism, capitalism, liberalism*, etc.). In this respect Latin America has been traditionally a region targeted by many of the actors involved in ideological wars (Silva-ferrer, 2012, p41-52) throughout the 20th century and beyond.

At an early stage, the main media used for this purpose were news agencies, newspapers, magazines and radio, not only through information content, but also entertainment programming. TV channels followed suit and thrived only at a later stage, thanks to the developments in satellite technology. However, since the start of the 21st century the above-mentioned media have experienced a process of convergence, particularly with the inception of the Internet and its capabilities of both carrying text and audio-visual content, as well as hardly being constrained to geographical boundaries. Whereas the media could be easily controlled and maintained within specific national boundaries at the early stages of their technological development, after decades of continuous advances that revolutionised the relationship between the technology and its users, it has become very difficult (if not impossible) to constrain them within geographical borders. At the same time, the decreasing costs of technology have enabled large segments of the population to gain access to the mass media. This, in turn, has allowed the media to enjoy “a larger popular base than ever before and, as a result, they have unprecedented impact on international politics” (Seib, 2008: xii). Some researchers even link this impact to how the press can help to shape public policy (Miller, 2007), so it is no surprise that they are perceived to be key in global politics and international relations.

According to Herbert Schiller, “the forces that influence consciousness are decisive determinants of a community’s outlook and the nature and direction of its goals” (1976: 1). In fact, one area where the media play a major role is in helping to shape our perception about the world. For instance, the way a country A is perceived by the inhabitants of country B –or in other words, country A’s *national image*, which not only can be positive or negative in different degrees, but that also includes its political and economic systems, social values and way of life, among other–, is nowadays closely related to how the domestic media in country B (or transnational media that not necessarily is based in country B) portrays country A. Hence, a specific portrayal is the result of a particular way in which messages –and therefore news– flow not just among nations, but also within them (Schiller, 1976). This particular understanding of the effects of communication flows takes us to one of the main theoretical approaches that have studied international communications: *media imperialism*.

1.2. MEDIA EXPANSION OVERSEAS AND MEDIA IMPERIALISM

Numerous research conducted in the field of international communications has analysed transnational media in the frame of media imperialism, briefly defined as the way in which “industrialized, wealthy, and, therefore, powerful nations have the potential to exert economic, cultural, and social control over less powerful countries through mass media” (Sullivan, 2009: 316). The main thesis argues that “world patterns of communication flow, both in density and in direction, mirror the system of domination in the economic and political order” (Sinclair et al., 1996: 6). Media imperialism can only be understood as a subset of cultural imperialism which, according to Herbert Schiller, “best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system” (Schiller, 1976: 9).

After old colonies became politically independent, in many cases their media continued to be dependent on the old metropolis, largely because the technology had been developed by the latter, who also had the upper hand in the supply chain by selling high-quality programming at low prices. Schiller argues that this economic pressure enabled cultural material produced in the developed world to be broadcast around the globe, and even though sometimes it would be adapted to local conditions, “the content and style of the programming [...] bear the ideological imprint of the main centres of the capitalist world economy” (*ibid.*: 10). A consequence of this was that local production would feel discouraged, as it was frowned upon by audiences accustomed to the foreign content, very often of higher quality (Sparks, 2007). The flow from industrialised countries to the developing world not only concerns the technology and the content of programming, Boyd-Barrett also identifies the organisation of the technology into particular kinds of state organisations (like the BBC in the case of the UK) and professional norms of media production.

Colin Sparks argues that the circulation of news is a “clear example of the ways in which the media of the developed world determined the content of what was available in the developing world” (*ibid.*: 101), mainly due to the high costs of producing original international news. This had two consequences: “First, they were much more likely to receive news about developed countries than about their neighbours or other

countries in a similar situation. Secondly, the news about other developing countries was filtered through the priorities of news agencies of the developed countries” (*ibid.*: 102). Thus, international news reporting in the developing world was overrepresented by news about the industrialised nations. This theory suggested, for instance, that the population in Latin America would probably know more about what was happening in the USA or in Europe, than what was happening in their own region and even their immediate neighbour countries. And when they did, the information would be filtered and presented from the dominant Western perspective –or at least it was argued to be so. Furthermore, according to the media imperialism thesis, “the prospects for development depended on breaking this control over what the population of the developing world knew about itself and the world in which it was obliged to operate” (*ibid.*: 103). The only way for real independence was by breaking this vicious cycle.

Although this theoretical approach has helped to raise awareness of how power relations also translate into the way media systems interconnect between developed countries and the developing world, media imperialism has been the focus of an intense debate that has extended from the 1970s until the present day. For the sake of clarity, I will only refer to some of the arguments that seem more relevant in this research. The first criticism relates to excessive and narrow focus on media imperialism as the main mode in which cultural imperialism is exerted. Colin Sparks believes that the latter also includes many other aspects, not just media, being one illuminating example language and linguistic imperialism. Since it is seen as being conducive to international success, English has become a lingua franca not just in business, but also in academia and many other domains (Sparks, 2007).

In the case of media imperialism in particular, Jeremy Tunstall considered that importing programmes from the developed world by developing countries, such as from the USA into Latin America, is rather a transitional stage, instead of a permanent condition as previously thought (Sinclair et al., 1996). Following this line of thought, part of the imports would eventually be replaced by local products once the industry grew and ripened in these countries. This pattern was not unique to the dynamics of the media flow between Latin America and the USA, but it was also to be found all around the world (*ibid.*).

Another criticism was that the theory was not backed by research on how this was affecting viewers. Sinclair et al. argue that “although this rationale established a theoretical connection between US television programmes and ‘consumerism’, it did

not address the question of just how such a mechanism of effect might work, nor how it could be observed in action upon actual audiences” (1996: 8). By looking at the audience, it was possible to identify different nuances as to how foreign programming was being perceived by different segments of the society.

This links directly to another aspect that was missing from the debate. Whereas many have focused on the power dynamics of information flows between developed and developing countries, “the cultural imperialism critique neglected the internal historical and social dynamics within the countries susceptible to their influence” (*ibid.*: 8–9). Within these dynamics are also included power relations within the societies where the media may be in control of wealthy elites often closely related to the leadership of the country. Besides this, the traditional perspective was that Western powers in Europe and North America were the ones that led the way in spreading ideology through the mass media –which during the 20th Century was countered mainly by the Soviet Union, and China to some extent. Nevertheless, although it sounds as a defence of the “Third World” against domination, “it is more inclined to reinforce Western cultural influence by taking it as given, when it should be challenging it” (*ibid.*: 9).

This discourse of domination became even more relevant with the fall of the Berlin wall, when Western media (arguably as an extension of the victorious Capitalism) appeared to become the only authoritative voice of the ‘Truth’. Nevertheless, a decade later and specially after the terror attacks of 9/11 in New York, other rising voices started to emerge in the international media arena (Nordenstreng and Thussu, 2015), many of them from non-Western countries. According to Phillip Seib, author of *The Aljazeera effect: how the new global media are reshaping world politics*, these new players “are wrestling influence away from CNN, the BBC, and other Western news organizations on which much of the world has relied for many years” (2008: X). As they grow economically, the governments in developing nations have realised the importance of making themselves heard in world politics in order to be acknowledged as a peer and also to improve the image of their own country. As their economic power increases, it is becoming increasingly more apparent that there is a race among them to have their say in what they see as an imminent multipolar world in the near future. Originating in the “periphery” this is a phenomenon that is making its way to gain authority by competing with the “mainstream”, which in turn entails significant geopolitical implications.

Without a doubt it could also be argued that there have been a number of other factors that have helped accelerate this process. Whereas one of the theses of media imperialism was traditionally related to the hardware of the media and the technological advantages of the advanced economies in Western Europe and North America, the situation has changed dramatically with the popularisation and increased access to the Internet. Now the capability to broadcast is practically open to anyone, which has enabled the information flows to be diversified and even change direction. Under these circumstances, how appropriate is it to continue talking about of Media Imperialism? Has the world change so much as to say that we are experiencing a post-imperialism stage? One hypothesis could be that the endeavours made by countries like China, Russia and others fall within the same line of imperialistic behaviour, because their economic power enables them to afford the production of high quality content and distribute it around the world, which, it could be argued, may also contribute to spread their ideology and therefore build up a new dynamics of power relations in regard to other nations. It is not clear whether they intend to challenge the dominating Western narrative, or they seek to become members of the club.

While media imperialism could be criticised of appearing over-simplistic by not taking into consideration an array of different factors as discussed above, or even out of date because the age of empires may be gone, some scholars believe it continues to be relevant. Nevertheless, they emphasise on the need to update how the concept has been approached. In a paper published on the Chinese Journal of Communication in 2012 Colin Sparks assessed that “the concept is likely to become more pertinent in the coming years” (2012: 282), because while most other studies focus on globalisation and “glocalisation”, they all missed and/or marginalised one element: the role of the state. In his view, imperialism comes into play when states align their interests with the struggles of private companies of large capitals, whose degree of competitiveness worldwide can affect the existing order (Sparks, 2012), to a certain extent both economically and politically.

Sparks suggests reframing this theory following three main ideas. First, letting go of the distinctions of centre and periphery, and instead focusing on the competition between states. Second, this competition between states in the developed world is the main concern of imperialism, and not the domination over the developing countries. Third, it is important to differentiate between simple economic transactions in international cultural exchanges and those where there is a clear presence of state

power, which may be proof of an unequivocal intent of imperialism (*ibid.*). In this respect, according to Sparks, the activities of VOA, BBC World Service and the British Council, among other, fit perfectly the definition of cultural imperialism, because these “are evidently organisations funded by imperialist states with the specific aim of promoting the ideas, beliefs and values of their home country” (*ibid.*: 292).

In 2015 Boyd-Barrett published *Media Imperialism. Redefining the field*, probably (to date) one of the latest pieces of academic work fully dedicated to the subject. There he argues that the concept cannot be understood as only one theory, but rather as an array of approaches that seek explanations about the relationship between media and empire, without forgetting to “address the exercise of forms of imperial power by media institutions themselves” (Boyd-Barrett, 2015: 14). He draws upon examples from contemporary issues to illustrate how some academic approaches fall short in their analysis. In his view, “repeated instances of uncritical media support to state propaganda in the contexts of such conflicts as those of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Iran have gravely discredited older scholarly discourses and narratives about the functioning of the press” (*ibid.*: 179). Therefore, he reckons that, contrary to many speculations, the “actual phenomenon of media imperialism, [...], has never disappeared or ceased to be important” (*ibid.*: 8), but instead it “has evolved, and has never been more relevant than in the current, so-called digital age” (*ibid.*).

Boyd-Barrett points out that within the debate on media imperialism, some have approached the discussion by focusing on how the media have been instruments of capital accumulation, but at the same time have benefited from it, whereas others “focus more on the ways in which forms of imperialism, their narratives, actors, conflicts and processes, are represented by and played out through informational and entertainment media” (*ibid.*: 180). One thesis suggested by Boyd-Barrett that can be linked directly to the proliferation of international channels from the developing world is the will to challenge the dominant discourse:

“As political processes become further and further removed from the material interests of the majorities of people, we will inevitably see more and more dependence on the media to create narratives and nurture ideologies whose purpose is to ‘normalize’ and ‘naturalize’ this state of affairs of inequality and oppression, and as equally we will also witness the formation by media of the counter-propagandas of those who are willing to contest the dominant power. At the very least, I do not believe that the age of empires or of Empire has passed” (*ibid.*: 181).

One approach closely related to the media imperialism debate pays close attention to the discourse of dominance and information flows. In *Media on the Move: Global flow*

and Contraflow (2006), Daya Kishan Thussu identifies the emergence of transnational media organisations in a context closely related to trade flows. He suggests that there are two main types of flows: dominant flows and contra- or subaltern flows (Thussu, 2006). On one hand, dominant flows, such as the US-led Western media, enjoy an already established global reach, therefore they also fall into the category of global, due to their widespread availability. This is possible not only through direct broadcasting from the source companies, but also due to their penetration and established programming presence within multiple media systems around the world through local adaptations of their audio-visual content. On the other hand, contra-flows emanate from “the erstwhile peripheries of global media industries—designated ‘subaltern flows’” (*ibid.*: 10). According to their target audience and geographical reach, these can be subdivided into two main categories: transnational and geo-cultural. The former aim primarily at foreign audiences and their regional presence is considerably strong, whereas the latter target diaspora communities with strong links to the culture where these media originate from. For instance, Al-Jazeera, RT or Telesur are among the transnational channels, whose main goal is to offer another perspective on world affairs, whereas geo-cultural channels like Phoenix, Zee TV or MBC, cater to specific audiences scattered around the world (*ibid.*).

While Thussu’s categorisation may seem enlightening, it may present some limitations. His typology follows a worldview of English being a dominating language, and therefore any media originating from countries where English is not the native language seems to be automatically ascribed to the counter-flow team. However, it may be argued that within language spheres there are also dominant and counter-dominant flows. For instance, Thussu places Radio France Internationale (RFI) within the counter-dominant flow group (*ibid.*: 12). However, looking carefully and in detail, this may be more complex. Surely RFI’s English service may be justly regarded as a counter-flow, since it originates from a place that from a linguistic point of view could be considered a periphery. However, France is politically located in the so-called Global North and RFI’s French language service would be better regarded as within the dominant narrative, when it broadcasts to the francophone world. A counter-flow in this case would be any French language broadcast that would try to compete with that narrative, as could be the case of China’s multiple platforms broadcasting in French such as China Radio International (CRI) or CCTV-F.

The emergence of counter-flow media based in the developing world has been followed closely by new developments among industrialised nations that are “reinforcing old colonial patterns (notably Britain’s BBC World Service and BBC World News, and France’s Radio France International, TV5 and France 24)” (Nordenstreng and Thusu, 2015: 11). While the fact that many developing countries around the globe are seeking their own voice in the international media arena could be regarded as either a counter-hegemonic endeavour or a desire to belong to the very same elite, the phenomenon can also be analysed from a different perspective by linking it directly to the soft power ambitions of emerging countries.

1.3. SOFT POWER AND THE MEDIA

First coined by Joseph Nye, soft power is a concept nowadays widely used among scholars and political commentators around the world. In order to grasp its meaning, it is important to consider how power can be exerted. Nye identifies the following three different aspects of power:

“FIRST FACE: A uses threats or rewards to change B’s behaviour against B’s initial preferences and strategies. B knows this and feels the effect of A’s power.

“SECOND FACE: A controls the agenda of actions in a way that limits B’s choices of strategy. B may or may not know this and be aware of A’s power.

“THIRD FACE: A helps to create and shape B’s basic beliefs, perceptions, and preferences. B is unlikely to be aware of this or to realize the effect of A’s power.” (Nye, 2011: 14)

Soft power is said to belong to the third kind and Nye defined it in 2004 as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye, 2004: X). The more attractive a country’s particular culture, its political ideals, and government policies are, the stronger is its soft power. In 2011, Nye further elaborated the concept as “the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes” (Nye, 2011: 20–21).

Although Nye appears to distinguish between soft power and hard power, which is essentially the use of the military, he also states that “even the behaviour of fighting on behalf of friends can engender soft power. [...] noncoercive and benign uses of military resources can be an important source of the soft power behaviour of framing of the agendas, persuasion, and attraction in world politics” (*ibid.*: 25). In the same way, also economic power, which entails the use of monetary incentives or rewards in exchange

for favours, can be a source of soft power as well as hard. Nye explains that “a successful economic model not only produces the latent military resources for exercise of hard power, but it can also attract others to emulate its example. The soft power of the European Union (EU) at the end of the Cold War and the soft power of China today are enhanced by the success of their economic models” (*ibid.*: 52).

Amongst the main factors that determine how seductive a country can be through soft power is the perceived legitimacy of its values, actions and policies. “When you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction. Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive” (*ibid.*).

The concept of soft power finds one of its main applications in foreign affairs and especially diplomacy, whereby public diplomacy constitutes a key channel to promote a country’s soft power. Whereas traditionally diplomacy was seen as the way governments would communicate with each other through official channels often hidden from –if not completely closed to– the general population, the focus of public diplomacy is to engage directly with foreign individuals, communities and governments, not only just to explain domestic and international policies, or express their opinion on international affairs, such as supporting or condemning other countries’ actions, but most importantly to portray an image of openness that would in turn help to increase trust and confidence (Melissen, 2013; Snow, 2009). This communication with foreign audiences is done through an array of channels, where international broadcasting plays a significant role (Gass and Seiter, 2009).

Even though Nye was the first to coin the term Soft Power towards the end of the last century and public diplomacy is a concept that has gained some attention in the last few years, the ideas are also to be found within the media imperialism debate. Herbert Schiller argued in 1976 that “public diplomacy is actually the utilization of communications research and related interdisciplinary fields for getting a grip on the minds of foreign audiences so that foreign policies of the United States or, for that matter, any nation utilizing such techniques are admired, or at least accepted and tolerated” (Schiller, 1976: 20).

As well as media imperialism, scholars have been quick to point out the many shortcomings surrounding soft power. Some question its effectiveness in achieving foreign policy objectives (McClory, 2013: 4), due to the difficulty of recognising any

effects, let alone measuring any, contrary to its hard counterpart. Janice Mattern, however, considers it an extension of hard power and not something in juxtaposition to it (Mattern, 2005), where both are to be seen as different components working together to achieve goals. Others criticise the perspective from where it has been defined. Shin-wah Lee, disapproves of Nye's excessive focus on the projection of soft power by the United States, and criticises him for failing to address how smaller nations are also able to exert soft power and set up strategies of their own (Lee and Melissen, 2011). This is in line with Sook Jong Lee and Jan Melissen's point that "an exclusively Western perspective does not do sufficient justice to our general understanding of public diplomacy as an emerging practice across the world" (*ibid.*: 2). Some even find difficulties to conceive soft power and economic power as two different sets of power. Lee and Melissen consider it to be an extension of economic influence, such as in the case of China and South Korea, whose burgeoning economies in the last few decades act themselves as a source of attraction, whereas "economies on the decline, such as Japan—and to some extent the United States—are paying more attention to soft power as compensation for their deficit of available resources" (*ibid.*: 4).

Even though Nye's definition and view on soft power has been criticised by many, it was quickly adopted by policy makers that were seeking better ways to improve their countries image worldwide. Since "the media, especially broadcasting, retains an important position as an instrument of soft power" (Thussu, 2013: 25–26), they soon realised that by expanding the reach of their media out to the international level, it could help spread their own understanding of world affairs. Nevertheless, the proliferation of state-backed international broadcasters can also be considered as part of a "direct rivalry between states in terms of their propaganda efforts" (Sparks, 2012: 294), which brings us to another concept which has played a significant role in the debate surrounding the expansion of soft power through the media: propaganda.

To use the media as a tool to spread soft power is a phenomenon that could be easily mistaken for propaganda. According to Boyd-Barrett, soft power:

"has much in common with what Jowett and O'Donnell (2011) identify as 'facilitative propaganda,' in reference to actions that are intended to be of value to others but also have as their fundamental purpose the creation of a generalized good feeling towards a country, institution or person. This good feeling becomes a resource that may be leveraged for specific purposes in the short- or long-term future" (Boyd-Barrett, 2015: 150).

Whether a country is making use of propaganda or trying to exert soft power may be unclear and difficult to differentiate with certainty. However, it appears to be that soft

power “presents an acceptable and diplomatic way of talking about international media relations without the negative labelling that is associated with the term ‘propaganda’” (*ibid.*). Indeed, the term propaganda has been tainted with a negative connotation, mainly due to its use by totalitarian regimes throughout history, especially during the 19th and 20th Century (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2012) and therefore governments around the world have been trying to distance themselves from this word. Such was the attempt of China where the ‘Propaganda Department’ (宣传部 *xuanchuanbu*) was rebranded in 2004 as the ‘Publicity Department’ (Rawnsley, 2015)², as if only changing the name would make the negative connotation disappear and render their activities somewhat more palatable to audiences overseas.

Criticism of being propagandistic is used to delegitimise as lacking credibility. One emblematic case is Al-Jazeera. For years it was criticised as propaganda by some Western governments, but it was precisely that criticism that, in the opinion of Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, “only served to increase its credibility with an audience that is used to censorship and biased coverage from official government outlets” (2012: 144). In turn, it has become one of the most prestigious international news channels (Seib, 2008). Another case is China, where the control over the media is centralised on the hands of the government, one of the main features of any propaganda machine (Ellul, 1973).

For Boyd-Barrett, for some nations “the exercise or threat of hard power is impractical or inadvisable” (Boyd-Barrett, 2015: 151), therefore it becomes even more essential to implement a strategy of soft power with the aim of building any kind of influence worldwide. Such may be the case of China, where “the development of Chinese media soft power, for example, is both about buffering the sovereignty of China from western media penetration and about exercising a cultural influence on the world that is commensurate with China's political and economic power” (*ibid.*: 139). However, many scholars wonder what kind of soft power Beijing hopes to disseminate, besides its culture and economic strength. China’s political system is seen as lacking democratic values, therefore hardly considered a model to be emulated. Besides, it can sometimes also become a liability, particularly because “its traditional methods of popular international communication, in which great emphasis is invested in slogans, do not

² The change was done only in the English translation, since the original Chinese lacks the same negative connotation.

appear to work well in other parts of the world” (*ibid*: 153). Besides, China’s efforts to cross any cultural boundaries and become appealing to audiences around the world may be crippled by a negative image as portrayed mainly by Western news media. The discourse has long been dominated by the USA, who arguably has had plenty of time to advance a certain perception of the China. Any good intentions to show China in good light may be thwarted by negative news surrounding pollution, human rights and corruption, among other issues (*ibid.*).

According to Nye, the fine line between soft power and propaganda is credibility, thus “when governments are perceived as manipulative and information is seen as propaganda, credibility is destroyed” (2011: 83). This is one of the key words to understand how the audience interacts with international news channels. If the viewers regard the content as lacking credibility, it will be discarded as propaganda. However, this is not the only factor to consider. The audience may deem it uninteresting because they may struggle to identify how relevant the content is in relation to their daily lives. Having the capability to broadcast internationally does not guarantee success and/or effectiveness. To have a real impact relates to how the messages are being received and perceived by the audience. Although, any study on international media and soft power that does not address the impact on the audience will fail at giving a complete account of the phenomenon, it is not an easy task to devise a perfect formula that would render a country’s soft power strategy successful. Even if it was, Boyd-Barrett points out that “some of the theory’s key concepts, such as that of international perception, are highly volatile and difficult to measure or can only be measured by fairly crude polling methodologies” (Boyd-Barrett, 2015: 151).

1.4. LATIN AMERICAN AUDIENCES AND CULTURAL PROXIMITY

The idea of soft power entails at least two players in this game. On one side there is A, the seducer who wants B to do something or behave a certain way. And on the other side there is B, the seduced who will be enticed to follow A. In order for soft power to be successful, B will not follow A just because it feels constrained to do so, but rather because it feels natural that one should follow A. The reasons for this could be multiple, being among them the similarity of values and aspirations between them. Perhaps A simply enjoys a positive reputation and hence it is a good example to emulate. Nevertheless, in order to be successful, it could be argued that B needs to be unaware of A’s intentions, who at the same time also needs to pay close attention at how its

messages are being interpreted. Nye believes that an understanding of the target audience (i.e. B in our analogy) is crucial. "By definition, soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want, and that requires understanding how they are hearing your messages, and fine-tuning it accordingly" (Nye, 2004: 111). Therefore, one of the ways to measure the effectiveness and degree of success of a country's soft power is by analysing the degree of acceptance by the audience and how it engages with the message received.

When seen from a pure political perspective, soft power will be effective when it has been translated into foreign policy by the country at the receiving end. However, no matter how important policy makers are, they constitute a small part of the audience. In fact, the concept of audience encompasses a variety of different groups in society, from government officials to the military, from academics to businessmen, and even from teens watching fashion and music channels to many other people hooked on the latest Turkish or Brazilian telenovela.

How soft power can be created through the media depends greatly on its relation and engagement with the audience, Nordenstreng and Thussu consider that, in this respect, "news networks have a relatively small impact on global media flows, most of which is centred on entertainment, which continues to be dominated by the US, though other players are increasingly visible" (Nordenstreng and Thussu, 2015: 13). In fact, this is in line with what Ithiel de Sola Pool had predicted in the late 1970s, i.e. suggesting that when the market would become saturated, "local producers would begin to compete with U.S. and European productions, and audiences would tend to prefer their own culture in media products when they were available" (Straubhaar, 1991: 41).

While placing the focus of this study on perception, it is necessary to understand Latin American audiences through the eyes of scholars from the region. According to Carlos Alberto Scolari (2015), there are two distinct moments in the Latin American tradition of media research: a first one characterised by theories flowing from the USA and Europe in the 1950s and 1960s; and a second one starting in the 1970s, when scholars in the region adopted a more critical approach and challenged these theories. Since then, José Carlos Lozano (2008) identifies three main strands of media and communication research in Latin America: a first focused on cultural imperialism and a perceived negative impact of media products imported from the USA; a second strand mainly analysing and warning against the imbalance between the predominance of media products from the USA, compared to considerably weak local productions; the

third strand of research focuses on content analysis and how hegemonic ideology is imbedded in media messages. In this context, Néstor García-Canclini and Jesús Martín-Barbero emerged as two of the main authors that challenged the perception of audiences as mere passive receivers at the end of the communication model and suggested they rather played a more active role, involving both processes of negotiation and re-signification of mediated messages. Their works became fundamental for the Latin American tradition of media research and are indeed relevant for the understanding of audiences in this study.

In *De los medios a las mediaciones. Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*, Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987) argues that media communication needs to be understood by examining how mediated messages are transformed by audiences, inasmuch they appropriate and re-elaborate messages by charging them with new meaning. His epistemological turn was to displace the focus of attention from the media themselves to the social processes and cultural practices, which Martín-Barbero calls mediations (Scolari, 2015). Mediations operate in a series of dimensions such as sociality, institutionality, technicity and rituality, that articulate the relations between communication, culture and politics (Martín-Barbero, 2006). Also placing the focus on culture, Néstor García-Canclini (1989) looks at Latin American audiences and the hybrid nature of their societies, whereby traits of modernity coexist with tradition. He challenges the notion of 'public' as a homogenous mass with a constant behaviour and suggests that diversity allows the coexistence of "various styles of reception and understanding, formed in unequal relations with goods deriving from cultured, popular and mass cultural traditions" (García Canclini, 1995: 100). These multiple styles of reception allow for audiences to produce their own interpretations, which may go beyond the original intension of the authors of these messages: "All writing and all messages are plagued with blank, silent, interstitial spaces in which the reader is expected to produce new meanings" (*ibid.*).

This process of re-signification seems to have become more self-evident thanks to the substantial changes in the media ecosystem with the advances of the internet and the popularisation of mobile communication technologies. In this new context, Carlos A. Scolari builds on Martín-Barbero's mediation theory and suggests that in the internet age it may be more accurate to speak of hyper-mediations, where "media languages converge, genres hybridize and new interactive textual networks emerge" (2015: 1100). Audiences are no longer regarded as just consumers but have rather become

prosumers thanks to the hypertextual structures of digital technology and the expanded capabilities of social media, which allow for the emergence of collaborative and participatory cultures (Scolari, 2015).

Since audiences engage actively in integrating creatively the media and mediated messages into their routines and daily lives, the influence of foreign media products would be rather limited. José Carlos Lozano (2008) argues that the concept of cultural proximity can help understand a phenomenon not thoroughly explained by culturalists: why audiences would prefer local content over foreign. This can provide a more complex level of analysis of appropriation and negotiation of ideological meaning (*ibid.*). According to Ksiazek and Webster, cultural proximity is “the intuitively appealing notion that people will gravitate toward media from their own culture” (2008: 485). The concept was first articulated by Joseph Straubhaar following Pool’s line of inquiry (Straubhaar, 2007). Behind this idea lies a strong criticism that to a certain extent shakes the foundations of cultural imperialism. If audiences prefer media content generated within their own culture, then surely there is no real threat coming from the “imperialist centre” and both the emergence and growth of regional media production seems to support the idea that cultural proximity is a factor that needs to be considered seriously (Ksiazek and Webster, 2008).

Many of the studies focusing on cultural proximity have analysed how people in Latin America engage with media content. The main thesis would suggest that a TV viewer from the region would show preference for content produced in any other country within the same region, instead of diverting his or her attention to any US blockbuster production. While there may be some instances where this is the case, it might sound as a far-fetched conclusion. It could be argued this is without a doubt a generalisation that would need to be treated as such. Cultural proximity is not a rule that can be applied uniformly to the whole society. In fact, different sectors and even individual within specific audiences may and very often do react differently. Differences in age, gender and economic situation are important, but there are many other variables that also play a decisive role in their preferences and decisions, such as their own personal or family history, the education received or even lack thereof. Ksiazek and Webster recognise this complexity of the notion and its many dimensions, which in turn correspond to the multiple layers that constitute the identity of any individual in an audience (*ibid.*: 487).

When analysing what sort of a role cultural proximity plays in the preferences of audiences in Latin America, Joseph Straubhaar reaches further and identifies “a greater traditionalism and loyalty to national and local cultures by lower or popular classes” (Straubhaar, 1991: 51). This sector of the society seems “to prefer nationally or locally produced material that is closer to and more reinforcing of traditional identities, based in regional, ethnic, dialect/language, religious, and other elements” (*ibid.*). Following this logic, it could be argued that policy makers, as members of the ruling elite, would be less constrained by cultural proximity and often more open to foreign influences. Many of the proponents of cultural proximity take language as being an important and decisive factor that shapes the preferences for particular media products (Ksiazek and Webster, 2008). Studying the audience tastes regarding Hollywood films in different countries, Wayne Fu believes that people prefer their own language, because understanding the dialogue may be well considered a key prerequisite for enjoying watching a movie and “even dubbing and subtitling can only moderate but not smooth any linguistic frictions that exist” (2012: 792).

If cultural proximity is to be defined to a large extent by the use of a certain language, it then becomes a concept that defies geography, whereby local communities belonging to an ethnic minority in a certain country may have more cultural ties to a foreign country whose culture is closer than that of the majority of the inhabitants. Ebrahimpoura and Sepehrib (2011) explore how Azeri populations inside Iran show preference to media content in Azerbaijani, either from neighbouring Azerbaijan or Turkey, instead of the mainstream Iranian media in Persian³. Others have studied how communities in diaspora sense cultural ties to the country or region of origin. With this regard in mind, Myria Georgiou studied how Arab women in London reaffirm their sense of cultural proximity to the Middle-East, by consuming soap-operas stemming from the region (Georgiou, 2012).

Studies such as the one undertaken by Ksiazek and Webster (2008) focus on language as a factor that plays a major role at defining the preferences of monolingual individuals in a multicultural society. Therefore, cultural proximity would be decisive at defining what TV channels non-English speaking Hispanics living in the USA would choose in comparison to bilingual Hispanics or non-Hispanics (2008).

³ An interesting fact is that the largest number of ethnic Azerbaijanis live in Iran, followed by Azerbaijan.

Although most of the research has focused more on speakers of different languages living in different geographies, it is also worth looking into how nuances and subtleties between different regions within a particular language sphere can also affect the preferences of the audiences. For instance, within the language sphere of Spanish, films and TV series are often dubbed twice: once in the European version of the spoken language and another time in what may be considered a neutral version of the language spoken on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Even though there have been instances where a particular animated film has been dubbed several times and would include a Mexican or a *Rioplatense* (spoken mostly in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile) version, most of the time there are only the Peninsular and the Hispanic American versions with even different translations for the actual name of the movie. Most viewers would be adamant in showing preference to their variety of Spanish, and almost aversion to any other⁴. Similar parallelism could be drawn to differences between Québec and France, Brazil and Portugal, or even Taiwan and mainland China, just to name a few examples. This localisation indeed adds an extra level of analysis when considering language tied to cultural proximity as a factor that may determine a viewer's preference for a channel with news anchors either from Spain or Latin America. In some other cases, the news anchors are not native speakers of the language and their accents can vary substantially according to their level of fluency. Since clarity is essential to communications, it would be worth examining whether this has any effect on the audience's preference for any given channel or not. If so, could it be also explained by expanding the reach of what is understood by cultural proximity?

As valuable a contribution to the study of the preferences of audiences, language cannot be considered the only variable that explains the dynamics of international TV viewing. The difficulty to enumerate all factors arises from the fact that cultural proximity is an inviting name, but as difficult to explain as culture itself. Straubhaar explains some of the dynamics of cultural proximity by making use of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, taken from his work *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). Straubhaar identifies cultural proximity as a separate dimension of identity, which builds upon cultural capital. "Cultural capital focuses on

⁴ This information is based on interviews with Spanish speakers from different parts of Hispanic America and Spain, discussing the phenomenon of dubbing, particularly of popular animated sitcoms as *The Simpsons*.

the sources of knowledge that permit people to make choices among media and other sources of information and culture. Cultural proximity is more of a disposition or a tendency toward the use of cultural capital in a certain way” (Straubhaar, 2007: 203). This idea sheds light on explaining how knowledge that people have about other countries, including their cultures, (i.e. cultural capital) can define to a certain extent the kind of role that cultural proximity will play on their decisions towards foreign media content (*ibid.*).

1.5. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON INTERNATIONAL CHANNELS AND AUDIENCES

Whereas previous studies on global news networks are scarce and tend to analyse this phenomenon from the perspective of international politics and media flows, very few have focused on audiences. As previously mentioned in the introduction, one of the most comprehensive study of audiences’ perceptions of international news networks was conducted by Anne Geniets. Although the countries included in her study were only Asian and African, analysing her findings may be helpful to understand whether these also apply to Latin America or not.

In *The Global News Challenge* (2013), Geniets observes that international broadcasting organisations continue being relevant for audiences worldwide. She argues that the main challenge they face is not demand, but competition; therefore, for a strategy to be successful, it needs to provide audiences with value (Geniets, 2013). She proposes a series of strategic options broadcasters can use to become more competitive (*ibid.*). The first strategy entails making global news content locally relevant, i.e. the emphasis is on the local implications of international news. The second is a multiplatform strategy that highlights the importance of distribution and delivery through an array of different platforms, e.g. radio, tv, online, etc. The third strategy is the inevitable choice of target audiences, i.e. either focusing on elites already interested in international affairs or tailoring news in a localised manner that targets audiences beyond the elites. The fourth strategy refers to partnerships with other media organisations, e.g. in order to target particular regions. The fifth strategy identified by Geniets is that of differentiation through editorial values defined by the media organisations themselves.

Geniets recognises two main profiles of international broadcasters: resource rich yet editorially limited and resource limited but editorially independent (*ibid.*). Whereas

the first group may be financially dependent on government funds and thus editorially compromised, Geniets argues that the second group is more likely to enhance a nation's reputation because editorially independent organisations "may have the liberty to transform themselves into platforms for balanced and critical cultural, social, and political debate and exchanges of views across the social spectrum in these markets, entering into an authentic dialogue with their audiences" (*ibid.*: 147).

Many of the more recent studies have focused on CCTV and audiences in Africa. A pilot study conducted about CCTV's brand awareness in Kenya and South Africa showed that "slightly greater interest and awareness by white audiences in Kenya, and a problem of lack of awareness or sustained interest by black Kenyans in Kenya and educated pay TV subscribers in South Africa" (Gorfinkel et al., 2014). Jacinta Mwendu Maweu (2016) interviewed practicing journalists as well as students and lecturers in Kenya about their views about CCTV. She found that most interviewees did not watch it, and many were not even aware that the channel existed. Regarding sceptical attitudes with regards to CCTV as a credible source of international news, Maweu points out that this may be due to a transference of the perception from poor quality products made in China to media products broadcasting from China. She also suggests that airing on KBC, the national broadcaster in Kenya, may also be counterproductive for CCTV, because middle-class audiences would associate the Chinese channel with the Kenyan government. Another perception was that CCTV appeared to be a PR company for the Chinese government (Maweu, 2016).

One of the last studies up to date is that conducted by Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales (2018), where they carry out focus groups with 61 students of media and communication programmes in Kenya and South Africa about their consumption of and attitudes towards Chinese media. Besides limited consumption and negative attitudes towards China, they detected that "some students, both in Kenya and South Africa, were receptive toward some of the news values and journalistic norms that characterize Chinese news reporting in Africa" (*ibid.*: 2226). They refer to the so-called positive-news reporting style that characterises much of CCTV's output, which is considered part of a strategy of building links between China and African nations. One of the latest studies in this respect is Yu Xiang's (2018), who analysed how African students living in China perceive the ideology of Sinicism delivered by CCTV-Africa.

1.6. CONCLUSION

As seen along this itinerary of just a handful of theoretical approaches, international flows of information have been analysed from different perspectives. We started by analysing the broader debate on media imperialism, largely based on power relations between countries and their intentions to dominate through the control of media flows and content. Some scholars criticise this approach by identifying many shortcomings, such as a lacking any consideration for the internal dynamics within the countries that were supposed to suffer from foreign dominance. Nevertheless, some more recent works like those by Colin Sparks (2012) and Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2015) argue that the concept is still relevant, but in need of serious revision and reframing.

In order to address the new developments in information flows, which to a certain extent challenged the media imperialism approach, we focused on how news networks are being used by certain governments as soft power tools to spread their own understanding of the world. Although no secret formula can guarantee their success, there is a variety of factors that could help enhance their effect on the audiences. According to Nye, the soft power of a country relies on the following three basic resources: “its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority)” (2011: 84). Even though these three are essential to any soft power efforts, there is also the need for a certain degree of credibility, “without underlying national credibility, the instruments of public diplomacy cannot translate cultural resources into the soft power of attraction. The effectiveness of public diplomacy is measured by minds changed (as shown in interviews or polls), not dollars spent or slick production packages produced” (*ibid.*: 107).

As we have seen from the debate, the use of the term soft power “excites the suspicion that this is simply a fashionable code for propaganda or for what the US military dubs ‘perception management’” (Boyd-Barrett, 2015: 151). However, for the sake of studying the audiences’ response to international news channels, whether these media are in fact engaging in propagandistic activities or not is irrelevant. The focus needs to be placed on how the viewers perceive these media and whether they have a formed opinion about them. Any soft power strategy through news networks that is not aligned

with the interests, needs and preferences of the audiences may find it hard to achieve its goals.

Shifting our attention on to the audience, we focused on a very closely related concept that may be key to understanding how audiences relate to media content and make their choices regarding TV channels: cultural proximity. Any country trying to engage in international broadcasting needs to negotiate between sets of values, those of its own culture and those of others, otherwise it risks being misinterpreted or having the opposite effect and failing in any case.

Finally, previous studies such as Geniets' help understand how some strategies may be more conducive than others to build channels that would allow for soft power creation. Studies about CCTV and African audiences can also provide an insight into how China's soft power strategy through media is playing out in that continent.

2. METHODOLOGY

As discussed in the first chapter, the idea behind a soft power is to convince others to follow and support the policies of a given country without the need of exerting coercion. Thus, any strategy striving to advance such an agenda would inevitably need to influence policy makers to self-identify with the ideals of a certain country and consequently adjust their policies to the benefit of the country that is generating the soft power. Following this line of reasoning, this study seeks to explore how the potential target audiences respond to these efforts. The acceptance by foreign audiences is a key element that can help to create the circumstances for these channels to be successful, it is imperative to analyse the opinions of potential viewers, as this can help understand which qualities international news channels need to possess to gain their sympathy. Furthermore, the international nature of this strategy involves a series of transcultural concerns that also need to be addressed. It is arguably less probable that cultural considerations become an issue in the case of domestic television, where content producers and consumers (i.e. viewers) are more likely to be culturally aligned. Whereas some degree of adjustments may be needed for foreign audiences that belong to a shared cultural and/or linguistic sphere (e.g. English-speaking countries, Arab countries, Latin America, etc.), it could be argued that they will become greater when the broadcaster and the audience belong to remarkably different cultural and linguistic spheres (e.g. China and Latin America).

Many countries engaging in soft-power efforts, such as China, Russia and Iran, have developed multilingual media platforms. By looking closely at the choice of languages of the international television channels opened by these countries, it is possible to identify three main shared languages: English, Arabic and Spanish. There is little or no doubt that English is considered a priority due to its status as *lingua franca* in international affairs (e.g. politics, business, education, etc.) across the world. The choice of Arabic can be understood by looking at the political and economic situation across the Middle East and North Africa, particularly since the start of the 21st century –without ignoring the importance of region due to its oil production. Finally, a strategy that seeks to spread soft power through the development of international media in Spanish –and to some extent also Portuguese (although through media other than television)- can be seen as an effort to target a region of the world commonly known as Latin America, simply due to the fact that most speakers of Spanish –and also Portuguese- reside west of the Atlantic Ocean.

The objective of this chapter is to provide details about the rationale behind the choice of methodology used to carry out this study. First, I introduce the research questions and objectives. At this stage, I argue why this study is best approached through qualitative research and how focus groups are the method best suited. In the second part, I describe how the process of organising focus groups was undertaken in this research, with regards to the selection of locations and the recruitment of participants. In the third part, I focus on the structure of the sessions and provide details about the materials used for the analysis section. Finally, in the last part, I delve into the main difficulties encountered during the process of organising and carrying out focus groups and address some of the shortcomings that emerged from faults during the planning process.

2.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Having analysed the multilingual nature of soft power strategies through international media, this research focuses on Latin America as one of the target regions. After considering some particularities of this region, the regional dynamics and the media landscape throughout the continent, this research intends to enquire into three main aspects of this phenomenon. The leading research questions to start investigating this issue are:

RQ1: What sort of an audience (if any) is there in Latin America for international news channels that would justify such a strategy?

This main question stems from the basic consideration that without the existence of an audience, the *raison d'être* of any media organisation becomes void. It could be argued that the consumption of news is closely linked to how they may impact the news-consumer's life, i.e. news is expected to be regarded as relevant to the lives of those who consume them. In other words, the main question that this study seeks to explore is whether Latin Americans would be interested in watching media content generated by countries that are geographically very distant from them or not. If so, it is also worthwhile asking whether people in the region consider this proliferation of international media as a positive development conducive to plurality of voices or as a form of ideological promotion of foreign interests.

RQ2: What sort of a role (if any) does cultural proximity play in the viewers' decision when choosing an international news channel?

Having asked whether viewers would be interested in news from geographically distant countries, which could be considered as less relevant to the audiences' daily life, it is then pertinent to investigate if culture plays any crucial role in this decision. Be it intentionally or not, media content is not exempt from being infused with cultural elements. Therefore, considering the cultural distance between China or Iran and countries in Latin America, it would be appropriate to ask whether people in the region would be interested in watching media content generated by countries that are culturally very distant from them or not. Furthermore, it would be valuable to enquire into how certain cultural differences –e.g. Islamic clothing in the case of Iranian television- may or may not affect the experiences and decisions of viewers.

RQ3: How successful could such enterprise be in terms of soft power gains by the countries behind this strategy?

Even if international television channels are accepted by local populations in Latin America, it does not automatically mean that they will be successful at changing perceptions and generating soft power. Success could become measurable once the influence exerted through these media is so great as to create more positive images of countries like China, Iran and Russia and consequently be translated by Latin America into favourable foreign policy towards those countries. Thus, it is valuable to examine to what extent government funded media can be successfully instrumental in the generation of soft power.

2.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

After examining our research questions, it is possible to further elaborate on the objectives of this research.

RO1: To identify the extent of the interest in Latin America for international news channels from outside the region, particularly those from culturally distant countries.

If there is any prospect for international news channels from China, Iran and Russia to become sources of information that populations in Latin America would trust and regularly consume, it is necessary to analyse the media landscape in the region and determine whether interest in international content such as the one produced by these news organisations is significant or not. Furthermore, by being in direct competition with domestic channels known to audiences for many decades, new international

broadcasters would need to rise above the rest and offer something original, fresh and innovative, be it by its superior quality or at least from a brand-new perspective.

RO2: To determine the likelihood of a viewer to switch on international news channels, especially from culturally distant countries, instead of domestic or regional ones.

The theories discussing cultural proximity suggest audiences belonging to a particular cultural sphere are more likely to give preference to content produced within their own culture, rather than to that imported from culturally distant countries. In turn, it can be argued that preference for international content –and particularly resorting to international news channels- could be considered as a way of shunning domestic media. If this is the case, then in order to verify whether such correlation exists, it is essential to analyse the media landscape in Latin America and how populations relate to domestic news organisations in terms of reliability and trustworthiness.

RO3: To identify whether the exposure to international news channels may have any impact on the viewers' perception of the countries where these media originate from.

Perhaps the most challenging objective is to verify if there is any correlation between exposure to international channels and changes in attitudes, especially because it is not clear whether regular exposure to international media is conducive to re-shaping the audiences' perception towards a particular country or not. At the same time, it is also possible that people with a previous interest in a given culture are more prone to accept and adopt media consumption habits that include news channels from that cultural origin. In other words, it can be difficult to distinguish between general interest in international affairs and fan-like behaviour among people who already manifest admiration for a particular culture (e.g. learners of German watching Deutsche Welle, sinophiles watching Chinese media, etc.). However, “preaching to the converted” could be conducive to gains in soft power through indirect means, such as influence exerted by these “cultural-converts” over other people in their sphere. However, this line of inquiry exceeds the scope of this research.

2.3. THE QUALITATIVE NATURE OF THIS STUDY

Audience research can be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. While quantitative research prefers numerical correlations to infer causal relationships based on variables, qualitative research tries to describe processes based

on people's experiences (Berger, 2000; Brennen, 2013). The former is often considered as more scientific and reliable because researchers use numbers to quantify data extracted systematically from the world in order to understand an arguably objective truth. Qualitative researchers, however, "consider alternative notions of knowledge and they understand that reality is socially constructed" (Brennen, 2013, p. 4). By observing our research questions, it is possible to determine which approach is the most appropriate for this study. RQ1 seeks to understand the profile of potential audiences by understanding their thought processes, i.e. what type of people in Latin America would be interested in watching these channels. Similarly, RQ2 is concerned with the subjective perceptions and interpretations that people make of the world around them and the situations they face every day, which may have an influence in shaping their choices and decisions regarding media platforms as sources of news. Also based on perceptions and interpretations, RQ3 explores whether exposure to international channels can lead to changes in perception or not, which in turn could contribute soft-power creation.

While a quantitative approach would help understand the demographics and media consumption patterns of actual audiences, it would fail to provide a fuller understanding of what it takes for these channels to be accepted by audiences. By focusing on the impressions and opinions of potential viewers, this study aims to understand a process and its potential effect, rather than measuring levels of actual impact. Therefore, the nature of our approach is qualitative and pays close attention to "the complex, contingent and context-sensitive character of social life" (Hammersley and Campbell, 2012, p. 11).

While exploring the consumption patterns of international news among audiences in Latin America seems to be the starting point for this study, it is imperative to address a series of considerations beforehand. The first of such considerations is that, due to the marginal nature of this phenomenon at present, identifying current viewers of these type of media remains rather problematic. This is exacerbated by the fact that accessibility to these channels in the region varies according to each country. Whereas in some countries some channels may be accessible by free-view digital channels (e.g. RT in Argentina and Venezuela), in other countries they are only accessible through paid services through cable or satellite. However, while access via live television services may prove difficult and challenging at times, live streaming via the internet has already been reachable for a number of years, first through the channels' official

websites and lately also via user-friendly platforms of the likes of YouTube. These are accessible not only through personal computers, but also via mobile and tablet computer applications.

The second consideration is that a sizeable portion of this audience may be considered as “converts”, i.e. people that consume this type of channels due to a personal interest or admiration for a certain culture. In this case, sinophiles watching Chinese media may be likely to show a pre-existent preference aligned towards a certain type of ideology and therefore inclined to engage with “anything Chinese”. These cases pose a significant challenge to audience-based research due to the arguably high probability of a positive bias towards a specific media organisation broadcasting from an admired and often idealised country.

A third consideration is related to the difficulty of assessing their impact based on official data presented by individual channels, which at best give estimates about numbers of potential viewers. Some people may have access to a particular channel because it is offered as part of a certain satellite television package but may not have no knowledge that such channels are included. While people with access to these channels may be millions, researchers suspect that the actual number of viewers is rather limited (Rawnsley, 2009).

Having carefully considered these issues, it becomes clear that they do not apply directly to this study. We seek to look beyond the population of “fans” or “converts” and explore the room for expansion among other groups of the population, especially where any impact could be meaningful. If the ultimate goal of any soft power strategy is to influence policymakers more than any other section of the society, then it would seem necessary to talk to them. However, recruiting incumbent policymakers can prove problematic as they may already hold strong opinions and therefore be less susceptible to the influence of broadcasters. Taking this into consideration, it becomes necessary to identify which segments of the population are more likely to occupy these positions of power in the future. By analysing profiles of policymakers, it is possible to place them among the seemingly cultivated elites of a country, most likely having reached high levels of education. Thus, enquiring into the habits of news consumption among university students of degrees such as politics and international relations may prove valuable to understand how their opinions about the world are being shaped. This profile seems to strike the right demographic balance between being young and malleable, and at the same time being cultivated enough to be considered as having the

potential of becoming – or at least holding positions close to – policymakers in their respective countries. Examining how university students of international relations and politics consume news –particularly international ones- may help understand how likely it is or, in other words, what features international television channels need to have to be considered as trustworthy sources of news by would-be policymakers.

Finally, this study argues that only focusing on the content (i.e. programming) provides a partial understanding of this phenomenon and does not help to determine the likelihood of transnational television channels becoming a source of news to be considered by audiences in Latin America –especially those broadcasting from culturally distant countries-. Analysing the content exceeds our scope and would require a completely different approach and research design.

2.4. AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND FOCUS GROUPS

Having determined the qualitative nature of this investigation, it was imperative to identify the best suited research method to approach such a study on audience response. Since the aim is to explore the likelihood for news networks from culturally distant countries to be accepted by audiences in Latin America –and eventually become news sources of the likes of BBC or CNN-, it became clear that a direct interaction with audiences was much needed, either through in-depth interviews or focus groups. In-depth interviews are suited for exploring personal opinions on a particular topic and can be very flexible in their format. However, it is the interviewer who eventually decides how relevant comments are and whether a certain remark made by the interviewee is worth further exploring or not. In the case of focus groups, it is not simply a type of semi-structured interview, as Arthur Asa Berger (2000) seems to suggest, but it actually goes beyond the interaction between interviewer and only one interviewee. Besides the interventions by the moderator, the interaction between members of the group can also lead the conversation towards a direction previously not considered by the researcher. Interaction between participants is key, because it helps to generate new insights by encouraging them to share their own views. By agreeing or disagreeing with other opinions, participants are prompted to engage in a discussion by building on the reactions of other members (Liamputtong, 2011). Therefore, the dynamics of the group can be conducive to the emergence of new ideas (Krueger and Casey, 2009), which in turn can help challenge underlying assumptions about a given subject.

Similar to other qualitative research methods, focus groups are ideal for exploring a topic and providing context and depth to the ideas and thought processes in which participants are engaging, as well as helping expand the degree of interpretation, by confronting people with different opinions (Morgan, 1998). Nevertheless, despite the many assets, focus groups can also present some difficulties regarding not only organisational and operational aspects, but also the inner dynamics of the discussion and the interaction between participants. In certain cases, a few participants –and sometimes even just one individual- can prove to be more outspoken than others and inclined to dominate the discussion. Bonnie Brennen argues that “an overly enthusiastic focus group member can inhibit discussion and disturb group dynamics” (2013: 69), i.e. this can have an intimidating effect towards other participants, who either become more reluctant to share their views or tend to side with the prevailing opinion. Hence, the moderator becomes a key character in charge of encouraging debate and balancing the groups dynamics when needed, but at the same time flexible enough to identify and help develop new lines of discussion.

After carefully evaluating both options, it became clear that focus groups were the best suited method to carry out this particular research. It could be possible to explore not only how audiences react to audio-visual productions previously unknown to them, but also how they construct their judgement drawing from their previous knowledge and/or impressions, and from the opinions of other participants as well (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Indeed, any doubts about the choice of methodology were soon dissipated after the first session, where participants showed themselves decidedly keen on sharing their opinions, even before they were prompted to do so through questions.

2.5. SELECTION OF COUNTRIES

Once defined the methodology, the next decision was regarding the location for the focus groups. Thus, if this research attempts to explore Latin America as a target of a strategy of soft power expansion –or at least as it has been projected through international media-, it is necessary to briefly step back and define what the term *Latin America* exactly means and how it has been used throughout this research. After drawing some distinctions with other terms such as *Hispanic American* and *Ibero-American*, it will be possible to start defining the location to carry out the empirical part of this study.

As a historical construct, any definition of Latin America and similar concepts cannot avoid being charged with ideological connotations, and therefore some degree of clarity is required. By drawing parallelisms on both sides of the Atlantic, the term Latin America has long been regarded as a French invention rooted in the idea of a “Latin race” in contraposition to an “Anglo-Saxon race”. In order to justify French imperial ambitions in former Iberian colonies in the Americas during the 19th century (Gobat, 2013), it was an all-encompassing concept that would include most of the newly independent nations in the continent except from the other *America*, namely the United States of America.

Nowadays the word Latin America is the one that resonates the most in the English-speaking world, however it was only appropriated by intellectuals in that part of the world only at a later stage. In fact, the preferred terms among the elites of the region during the independence wars against Spain were the name *América* and the adjective *americanos*, as Michel Gobat points out on his study *The invention of Latin America: A transnational history of anti-imperialism, democracy and race* (2013). This was a means of forging a new identity based on geography that would seek to distance itself from the former metropolis. However, as new nation states started to sprout across the continent during the first half of the 19th century, there was a need to define their identities and one way of doing so was by pointing out what they were not. Thus, with the need to exclude the Portuguese, French, English and Dutch speaking areas of the continent, the term *Hispanoamericano* (Hispanic American) would highlight the shared cultural heritage among former Spanish colonies (*ibid.*). At a later stage, *Iberoamérica* emerged as a term that would include Brazil, by drawing parallelisms in the shared experiences of Iberian colonies in the American continent.

As these three concepts are used in the region to indicate supranational identities, it can be easier understood following the analogy of a Russian doll: Hispanic-America is inside Ibero-America, which in turn is inside Latin America. In a nutshell, *Hispanoamérica* refers to Spanish speaking countries. By adding Brazil to the mix, it becomes *Iberoamérica*, which in turn becomes Latin America by adding French speaking countries such as Haiti. Although this is the general understanding in the region and how it will be used along this study, some definitions become even more complex, such as the case of the *Ibero-American Conference of Heads of State and Governments* which includes Spain and Portugal.

Having made these conceptual distinctions, it is appropriate to address how they make sense to this research. While the creation of international television news channels broadcasting in Spanish has been prolific –e.g. CCTV-E, RT, HispanTV, DW Latinoamérica, CNN en Español, Telesur and TNT24, among others-, those broadcasting in Portuguese are practically non-existent to this day. Therefore, even though Brazil is considered the rising superpower in Latin America, it has been excluded from this study. As such, this research will focus on the Spanish speaking sub-region known as Hispanic America⁵, rather than *Ibero-* or *Latin America*. As Hispanic America is composed of 18 sovereign states and Puerto Rico (as unincorporated territory within the United States of America), a series of countries were analysed as possible locations to conduct the focus groups. Due to financial constraints and viability of such a study, it was decided that two countries would be selected for comparison purposes.

For this selection, the hypothesis was that any soft power strategy would have different priorities in terms of countries as targets. The first assumption would entail that the countries seeking to project influence would focus primarily on targets which are seen as “relevant” due to their perceived importance at an international level. For the sake of this study, the “relevance” of a country is shaped by its role in global politics, the size of its economy and its potentiality, among other factors. The first factor suggests that the number of allies a country has is less important than the support of countries whose voice appears to count in global politics. Due to their usefulness at international institutions and during times of conflict, it is arguably an asset to covet. The second factor relates not only to the size of the economy itself, but most importantly to its degree of openness. The bigger an economy is, the higher the purchasing power it has. Likewise, the more open the economy is, the higher the capacity to engage in international trade. The third factor suggests that the degree of development of an economy is not a defining element, since the wealth of a country in terms of yet-unexploited resources can also be regarded as desirable.

Having excluded Brazil and any other Latin American countries where Spanish is not an official language (e.g. Haiti), Mexico and Argentina were shortlisted as the ideal locations for the focus groups. The main criteria considered were the size of the

⁵ Not to be confused with the social construct of *Hispanic America* as meaning Hispanic population or subculture in the United States of America.

country not only in terms of population but also economy and purchasing power per capita, political role in the region and presence in international organisations. Since the concept of “country relevance” has been developed *ad hoc* for this study, there is indeed a number of various factors that could be taken into consideration as well. However, for the sake of simplicity, aspects such as military strength, among others, have not been considered.

In terms of population, Mexico ranks first in the region (after Brazil) with around 127 million inhabitants in 2015, followed by Colombia with approximately 48 million and Argentina with over 43 million (World Bank, no date). Regarding GDP (nominal), according to statistics from 2015 Mexico and Argentina occupy the second and third position among the Latin American and Caribbean countries respectively (*ibid.*), Brazil being at the top. Argentina shows the highest human development index in Latin America (UNDP, 2015), and together with Chile are the only countries in the region that classify in the Very High Human Development band. Geographically located in two extremes of a North-South axis, both countries are active members in various supranational bodies in the Americas that operate with different goals of cooperation and integration. Regarding their participation in international politics beyond the continent, they are the only representatives from Latin America at the G20, together with Brazil.

2.6. SELECTION OF UNIVERSITIES AND RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

As mentioned above, if the aim of these media is to target actual and future policy makers that can affect public policy in relation to foreign countries, then universities constitute the ideal place to look for this type of profile, in particular students of international relations and politics. Our hypothesis in this regard is that students of politics and international relations are more likely to show interest for international affairs and be curious to find out opinions beyond the national borders. For the initial step of identifying institutions where it could be possible to organise focus groups, only universities with faculties or departments of international relations or political sciences were selected. In order to include a more diverse population for our sampling,

both private and public⁶ funded universities were contacted in Argentina and Mexico. Another criterion taken into account was the degree of recognition of these universities, i.e. their reputation both domestically and internationally. As most of the prestigious universities were located in the capital cities of both countries, other universities located in smaller cities were also contacted. A last and perhaps the most decisive factor was the degree of responsiveness and will to cooperate with this study.

Different strategies were adopted during the recruitment process, according to the level of assistance provided by the universities that agreed to participate. At a first stage, the ideal institutions were identified and contacted through e-mail. In some cases, such as El Colegio de México and Universidad de Belgrano, this strategy was enough to establish contact and seek permission to conduct the focus groups, whereas in other cases the process only started once the universities were contacted through phone calls. Such was the case with Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and Universidad Torcuato di Tella. Another strategy adopted was to contact the universities through members of their staff or help provided by private contacts. Mostly used after e-mails and phone calls were not enough, this strategy was deemed necessary in the case of institutions with a high reputation in their respective countries, such as Universidad Autónoma de México and Universidad de Buenos Aires.

Besides the above-mentioned universities, many other were contacted. In some cases, where communication was established, the institutions agreed to participate but later cancelled after months of planning and, in some instances, even only a few days before the scheduled date for the focus group session. In other cases, some universities were willing to participate but found it difficult to recruit the minimum number of students needed for a session.

The goal of approaching both public and private funded universities had the aim of covering different perspectives in the respective educational systems. However, it was not possible in both countries. Although initial email and phone contact was established with private institutions in Mexico, only public universities agreed to participate. In Argentina it was practically the opposite situation: most of universities that showed interest in participating were private, whereas the focus group at

⁶ Not to be confused with “Public school” in the United Kingdom, the term “public university” in the context of Latin America means State funded.

Universidad de Buenos Aires (state funded) was only carried out after overcoming numerous obstacles.

In the case of Argentina, it could be argued that private universities struggle with being perceived as private companies linked to profits, and therefore they tend to be keener on engaging in international cooperation as a way of improving their reputation. Public universities, on the other hand, are dependent on public funds and often become the battle ground of political factions mirroring politics at a national level. There is a level of politicisation in public universities, unseen in their private counterparts, which translates into two very different management systems. Whereas private universities are considered as for-profit companies, public universities are perceived as rather chaotic, often lacking funds and sometimes even taken hostage by strikes led by student unions sympathising with teachers' unions and/or different social causes.

As the experience conducting focus groups varied across countries, a total of seven universities agreed to participate, of which 3 were located in Mexico and 4 in Argentina.

2.6.1. EL COLEGIO DE MÉXICO (COLMEX)

The first university to be approached was El Colegio de México (*The College of Mexico*, also commonly referred as Colmex) and, upon agreeing to host me for a research stay at the Centro de Estudios Internacionales (CEI), it was used as a base for this study in Mexico.

Established in 1940, Colmex is located in Mexico City. Its origins can be traced to La Casa de España en México (The House of Spain in Mexico), an institution founded in 1938 to host intellectuals exiled during the Spanish civil war (El Colegio de México, no date). Considered one of the most prestigious research institutions in Mexico, its library boasts having one of the best collections on Social Sciences and Humanities in Latin America.

With only 427 students in 2015 according to its Annual Report (El Colegio de México, 2015), the institution has been described as highly selective (Granados, 2015) and elitist, due to an admission rate lower than 20% (Aviles, 2005; Cisneros, 2014). In fact, many of Mexico's leaders in foreign affairs are to be found among its alumni, such as Patricia Espinosa, former Secretary of Foreign Affairs and current Ambassador in Berlin; Arturo Sarukhan, former Ambassador in Washington; and Claude Heller, former

Ambassador for Mexico to the United Nations and the Security Council, just to mention a few.

A total of 4 focus groups were organised at Colmex, thanks to the assistance of the CEI, which provided contact details of dozens of students belonging to different cohorts of both international relations and political science. After analysing the students' schedules, the most suitable time slots were identified, and personalised email invitations were sent to the potential participants. As soon as the replies started to come in and the number of participants was deemed satisfactory, reservations were made for small classrooms where the sessions would take place. Email confirmations were sent back with the exact location and more details about the session.

The first session took place on the 21st September 2016 with undergraduate students of International Relations. Five students participated in the session, of which 2 females and 3 males. The second session was carried out the same day and it included graduate students of the master's degree programme on Political Science. Five students participated in the session, of which 1 female and 4 males.

The third session and fourth sessions were both carried out on the 26th September 2016, the former with undergraduate students majoring in International Relations and the latter also with undergraduate students but majoring in Politics and Public Administration. Regarding the number of participants, these two sessions did not live up to the expectations. There were only two participants (all males) in each of them, therefore they are not regarded as successful focus groups. However, the data will be considered as supplementary as will be explained in the *Difficulties and Shortcomings* section below.

All the students that participated in the focus groups at Colmex were Mexican citizens, one of whom also held US American citizenship.

2.6.2. UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO (UNAM)

The second university to be contacted was the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (*National Autonomous University of Mexico*, commonly referred to by the Spanish acronym UNAM). Undoubtedly the biggest university in Mexico and one of the most prestigious in the Spanish speaking world, it ranked 128th worldwide and 3rd in Latin America, after Universidad de Buenos Aires and Universidade de São Paulo, according to the 2016 QS World University Rankings (2016). Besides being the *alma*

mater of a number of Mexico's presidents, the country's three Nobel Prize laureates, Octavio Paz (Literature in 1990), Alfonso García Robles (Peace in 1982) and Mario Molina (Chemistry in 1995) can also be found among its alumni (Fundación UNAM, 2013). Business magnate Carlos Slim Helú (Slim Helú, 2015), ranked by Forbes magazine as the richest person in the world between 2010 and 2013 (Dolan, 2012; Estevez, 2014), also graduated from this institution.

After failed attempts of establishing contact through the official channels, it became apparent that another strategy was needed. It was possible to overcome the bureaucracy hurdles thanks to some Mexican acquaintances connected to the university. Once the link was established with the Postgraduate Office at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, the staff was very helpful at recruiting the number of participants needed for two sessions.

A total of two focus groups were organised at UNAM. The first took place on the 18th September 2016 with undergraduate and postgraduate students both working towards the completion of Master and PhD degrees on Political Science. A total of 5 students participated, of which 3 females and 2 males. The second group was carried out on the 6th October 2016 with both Master and PhD Degree students of International Relations. A total of 4 female students participated in this group.

All the students that participated in the focus groups at UNAM were Mexican citizens.

2.6.3. UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA METROPOLITANA (UAM)

Founded in 1974 with a strong emphasis on innovation and social engagement (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, no date), by 2016 it ranked 4th in the country, according to a research conducted by the magazine *América Economía* together with the newspaper *El Economista* (Becerril, 2017).

Upon my arrival in Mexico to conduct the focus groups at Colmex and UNAM, the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana was suggested to me as an institution to include in this research. After establishing contact with the team coordinating the master's degree in International Relations, the staff assisted in recruiting participants. Even though originally only one group had been planned, a total of two sessions were conducted.

All students recruited belong to the master's degree programme in International Relations. The first session took place on the 28th September 2016 and a total of 5

students participated, of which 2 females and 3 males. The second group was carried out a week later on the 5th October 2016 with a total of 4 participants, of which 3 females and 1 male.

All the participants in the focus groups at UAM were Mexican citizens, with the exception of one Ecuadorian female in the first group.

2.6.4. UNIVERSIDAD DE CONGRESO (UC)

Compared to the rest of the universities that participated in this study, Universidad de Congreso is a considerably smaller university. It was established in 1994 as a private institution (Universidad de Congreso, no date), in Mendoza, the fourth largest city in Argentina. Despite being a relatively small and new institution in the country, it has been growing steadily through a process of expansion not only to other large cities in Argentina, but also to smaller towns where higher education is mostly unavailable (*ibid.*). At the same time, it has created links with universities worldwide, which in turn has boosted international exchange programmes, both by allowing Argentinian students to experience university life abroad and also by hosting international students in Mendoza.

There were two interesting elements about the focus group organised at this institution. First, as Mendoza is noticeably smaller than Buenos Aires, it was convenient to investigate whether there were any differences with the opinions of participants in the highly cosmopolitan capital city. The second defining element was that half of the participants were Argentinian and half were Mexican, which helped to explore any disparities in the perception of international media by these two sub-groups.

Thanks to the university's assistance in recruiting participants, the session took place on 21 October 2016 and of a total of 10 students, of which 5 were Argentinian (4 females and one male) and 5 Mexican (2 females and 3 males).

2.6.5. UNIVERSIDAD TORCUATO DI TELLA (UTDT)

Established in 1992 as a private university in Buenos Aires, it was created after the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, a research centre founded in 1958, which during the 1950s and 1960s became the home of some of the country's most prominent intellectual and

influential artists (Universidad Torcuato di Tella, no date). It ranked 10th in Argentina, according to the 2016 QS World University Rankings (QS, 2016).

After being contacted, the authorities of this university showed themselves willing to cooperate and assisted in recruiting undergraduate students of Political Science and International Relations to carry out a total of two focus groups. The first session took place on 31 October 2010 with a group of 10 students of Political Science (5 females and 5 males). The second session was carried out the following day with a group of 10 students of International Relations (4 females and 6 male). All participants in both groups were Argentinian citizens.

2.6.6. UNIVERSIDAD BELGRANO (UB)

Established in 1964 it is a private university located in Buenos Aires. As one of the most prestigious universities in the city, it ranked 4th in Argentina and 11th in Latin America, according to the 2016 QS World University Rankings (QS, 2016).

After contacting the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, one session was organised with a mixed group of undergraduate students majoring in Political Science and International Relations. The session took place on 2 November 2016 with a group of 8 participants (3 females and 5 males). All participants were Argentinian citizens.

2.6.7. UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES (UBA)

Established in 1821, Universidad de Buenos Aires is also the largest university in Argentina in terms of enrolment (more than a quarter of a million) and ranked first in Latin America according to the 2016 QS World University Rankings (*ibid.*). Besides being the alma mater of internationally known personalities such as Ernesto Che Guevara and writer Julio Cortázar, its notable alumni include five Nobel Prize laureates and more than a dozen Argentine presidents. Despite being overpopulated and with frequent strikes due to insufficient budget (Infobae, 2016), it is still described as one of the most prestigious in the country (Reisberg, 2011).

As the only public university in Argentina to participate in this research, it was a challenge to navigate through its bureaucracy. Fortunately, with the assistance of some professors at the Faculty of Social Sciences it was possible to recruit a few students to conduct a focus group. Albeit being the first university to be contacted, it was where

the last focus group session took place, due to the difficulties to recruit students and organise a session.

The session took place on 4 November 2016 with a total of 5 participants, of which 3 females and 2 males. One of the females was a Peruvian citizen, whereas the rest were Argentinian.

2.6.8. DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN SUMMARY

- A total of seven universities agreed to host focus groups, of which 3 were located in Mexico and 4 in Argentina.
- 75 people participated in 13 focus groups, of which 36 females and 39 males.
- A total of 32 people participated in 8 groups organised in Mexico, of which 15 females and 17 males. Besides a total of 31 Mexican participants, there was 1 Ecuadorian female. One participant held both Mexican and US American citizenships.
- A total of 43 people participated in 5 groups organised in Argentina, of which 21 females and 22 males. Besides a total of 37 Argentinian participants, there were 1 Peruvian female, 2 Mexican females and 3 Mexican males.
- All sessions organised in Mexico were carried out in public institutions located in Mexico City. A total of 4 groups took place at El Colegio de México (of which only 2 proved successful), 2 at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and 2 at Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.
- Of a total of 5 sessions carried out in Argentina, only one took place at a public institution (Universidad de Buenos Aires), whereas the rest were at private universities. Two sessions took place at Universidad Torcuato di Tella, whereas only one session was organised in the remaining universities.
- Besides Universidad de Congreso, located in Mendoza, all other institutions for the focus groups organised in Argentina were located in Buenos Aires.

2.7. SESSIONS STRUCTURE

The focus groups took place in the universities' facilities, as this was deemed the most appropriate due to the fact that this setting was seen as familiar by the students.

Carried out in classrooms, all discussions were conducted in Spanish. The sessions were recorded using two different devices to ensure there would be no problems with recovering the data, even if there were issues concerning the quality of the recording. In order to avoid any technological issues of compatibility, the only equipment used was a laptop computer and loudspeakers. These were used to show the video excerpts that would be analysed during the sessions.

Due to the voluntary nature of the participation, variables of diversity such as gender, age, ethnical and geographical background were only deemed as informative, i.e. to be considered for further analysis. However, since this study does not seek to balance off all these different variables, they were not considered as reason to exclude participants. Before receiving the oral consent from the participants, all students were informed of the aims of the research in general and the purpose of the session in particular. At the same time, they were also made aware of the voluntary and anonymous character of their participation.

2.7.1. STRUCTURE OF QUESTIONNAIRE⁷ AND SUPPORTING MATERIAL⁸

The focus groups were structured according to the expectations vis-à-vis the data that would be collected. Therefore, each session consisted of two main parts: one with general questions about news consumption habits and a second one dedicated to analysing different video excerpts of the three channels selected for the study.

In order to explore which media formats in general and which media outlets in particular were among the most preferred, the session started off with questions about the participants' habits regarding news consumption. Once participants started sharing their experiences, they were asked about their preferred media outlets concerning international news. The aim was to detect if there were any significant differences in their sources of news between local and domestic news on one hand and international news on the other.

After describing how they consumed news on a daily-basis, participants were encouraged to discuss if there were any considerable differences between their own

⁷ For further reference see appendix III.

⁸ For further reference see appendix IV.

habits and those of their families and friends, and if so, how would they differ. This had the aim of detecting changes in habits between older and younger generations, i.e. it was noteworthy to explore to what extent their news consumption was different with regards to new developments in social media. This question was aimed at studying the suitability of a soft power strategy through traditional media in the midst of a consumption shift towards the internet and social media.

Following these general questions, the focus was moved towards international media. It was important to enquire into which international news networks were more familiar to them. At this stage, a sheet of paper containing three assignments was handed out to the students. They were told to regard it only as a visual aid to help them organise ideas. Thus, the participants were advised to refrain from writing down their names and instead were given a code identifying the session.

In the first assignment the students were given a list of acronyms corresponding to international television networks and then were asked to point out which ones they recognised. The list included BBC, CNN, Telesur, NTN24, DW, TVE, CCTV, HispanTV, TV5, France24, Arirang, Euronews, Al-Jazeera, NHK, PressTV and RT. After this, the participants were encouraged to elaborate and explain in which context they became aware of the existence of the channels they recognised and, if applicable, how often they would watch them.

The second assignment consisted in grading a list of countries from positive to negative according to the students' perceived image of those countries. In order to prevent any influence upon the opinions of the participants, the list was compiled in alphabetical order according to the spelling in Spanish, i.e.: Alemania (Germany), China, Colombia, España (Spain), Estados Unidos (United States), Irán (Iran), Rusia (Russia) and Venezuela. The reason for this particular choice of countries was that all of them had set up news channels broadcasting in Spanish.

The participants were given the option of placing countries in a continuum from positive to negative or in clusters wherever they felt it was more appropriate according to their impressions about these countries, due to a number of reasons. As they were given the freedom to approach the assignment from multiple perspectives, some of them graded the countries depending on the international image they had of these countries due to how they were portrayed in international media. Others graded the countries according to the image they had developed during their studies in university

and some even according to the level of trust they had towards media from those countries.

The degree of liberty for them to choose their own criteria was deemed conducive to discussion and debate, as they needed to provide explanations for their choices. While most participants engaged actively in this activity, a handful of them (out of all the participants in both countries) chose not to participate due to different reasons as will be described in the *Difficulties and Shortcomings* section below.

The last assignment was linked to the analysis of the audio-visual material. The students were asked to take notes of their impressions while they were watching the various video excerpts compiled from the three television channels. The task consisted of a table in which they could write their notes. On the X-axis were the names of the three channels: RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E. The students were asked to pay close attention to three aspects placed on the Y-axis: style, presenters and content.

During the sessions the students were given examples of the aspects they needed to pay attention for further discussion after the viewing, through a list of key words that included: clear, credible, trustworthy, interesting, boring, evident ideology, biased, pertinent questions, pleasant, professional, etc. These words had the aim of illustrating some examples of how they could take notes based on their impressions, rather than merely trying to describe what they were seeing. On the style section, they were encouraged to focus on how attractive the style was, both visually and as a format. The presenters section was closely related to style, but the participants were also asked to comment not only on what kind of impression they had from the presenters, but also on more technical aspects such as the accents and even levels of proficiency in the Spanish language, i.e. due to the fact that many presenters are not native Spanish speakers, it was worth exploring whether this could be seen by the participants as a decisive factor to change channel or not. On the third section, the students needed to focus on whether the content offered by the channels was seen as valuable, relevant and trustworthy or not.

2.7.2. SELECTION OF VIDEO EXCERPTS AND CRITERIA

The videos shown in the second part of the session were selected and downloaded from the YouTube channels of CCTV-E, HispanTV and RT, where they showcase part of their online content. Since this study focuses on these channels as potential source of news

for viewers across Latin America, the videos to be used on the second part of each focus group session were taken from news related formats, such as news bulletins, interviews, debates or magazine programmes, rather than fiction, entertainment or documentaries. The idea behind the selection of the video excerpts was to condense the variety of content of these channels in videos of around 5 to 6 minutes each. Each video was composed of segments taken from different programmes which were considered representative, not only regarding the type of content but also showcasing the overall audio-visual style. Although the initial priority was to balance and mirror the selection throughout the three channels, e.g. showing similar programmes, it was also necessary to use videos that could potentially generate discussion around aspects deemed central for this study.

One of the aspects to explore in connection to cultural proximity was whether viewers would react differently towards presenters speaking different varieties of Spanish or not. In this case, three aspects were considered. First, the videos would showcase native speakers and non-native speakers. Second, in the case of native speakers, the priority was to show segments with European and Latin American speakers. Third, when possible, segments with speakers from different countries in Latin America would be selected as well. The short segments were edited with an *in medias res* effect, i.e. in such a manner that it would mimic how one would turn on the television and start watching a channel live, when the programme has already started. In the same way, most of the excerpts would end abruptly. The aim of this method was to find out if the content would attract the participants' attention and possibly awaken their interest to continue watching those programmes.

The excerpts were chosen from videos broadcasted within a 6-month period previous to the start of the field trip, i.e. from April to September 2016. The video selection was done during a process of monitoring, which took place in April, June and September. Since the fact that the participants could regard some news as out-of-date, they were made aware of this fact. Besides this, while the structure of the sessions remained unchanged, minor adjustments were needed in the sets of videos shown to the participants in both countries. In order to explore the reaction of seeing news about their home-countries covered by these broadcasters, videos related to Mexico and Argentina were chosen respectively. Although the compilation of excerpts shown in Mexico lasted 15:34 minutes, compared to 16:42 in Argentina, the reason behind this difference is that each excerpt was edited separately. Following the principle that the

content needed to present a sufficient degree of coherence, this was achieved within variable lengths.

Table 1: Video compilation shown to participants⁹

Channel	Excerpt Number	Content	Original programme	Length	Reasoning behind selection
RT	1	Trump and Peña Nieto exchange tweets about border wall	News Bulletin	01:07	US-Mexico relations. Controversy over Trump's wall plans during election campaign. One of the presenters is not a native speaker of Spanish.
	2 (M)	Clash between police and protesters in Oaxaca	News Bulletin	00:42	Focus on Mexico. Conflict in Oaxaca State where protesters died during demonstrations. Protester is interviewed.
	3	Debate criticising financial system	In-depth analysis: "Keiser report"	02:10	Critical of the West. Analysis of the financial system from a perspective that criticises the role of Western governments. The video is originally in English but with voiceover in Spanish, but not completely simultaneous.
	4	Native Americans protest against Dakota Access pipeline	In-depth report: "Detrás de la noticia"	00:39	Native Americans. News anchor is not a native speaker of Spanish and speaks with a strong US American accent.
	5	Censorship and the media	In-depth analysis: "El zoom"	00:51	Criticism of freedom of speech in the West. Russia is mentioned. The presenter speaks European Spanish.
	6 (A)	Vatican declassifies documents about Church involvement during Argentinian dictatorship	News Bulletin	00:40	Focus on Argentina. The news anchor speaks European Spanish.
HispanTV	1	Hillary Clinton part of the establishment	Debate format: "Fort Apache"	00:46	The presenter is a famous young politician in Spain. Presenter and guests speak European Spanish.
	2	Arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Israel	News Bulletin	00:42	Critical of the USA and Israel.
	3	Female car racers in Iran	News bulletin	00:33	Reports about women in Iran often talk about oppression. This report goes against that misconception. The reporter is not a native Speaker of Spanish.
	4 (M)	Kidnapping in Mexico	News Bulletin	00:29	Focus on Mexico. It is not clear whether sources may be creditable or not.

⁹ Originally published on Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture (see Morales, 2018).

	5 (A)	Demonstration in favour of former president Cristina Fernandez Kirchner	News Bulletin	00:45	Focus on Argentina. The decision of reporting on this may be linked to the ideology of the channel.
	6	Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's declarations about hostilities between Iran and the West	News Bulletin	00:35	Religious leader criticising the West. Religious component.
	7	Uncertain future of undocumented migrants in the USA	News Bulletin	00:27	Latin American migrants in the USA.
	8	Facebook's collaboration with Israeli occupation	News Bulletin	00:21	Critical of the West. It is unclear whether the reporter is Muslim, or she only wears a hijab as a requirement from the channel.
	9	Latin American artists in Teheran	News Bulletin	00:32	Latin Americans in Iran. The reporter is not a native speaker of Spanish.
	10	Indigenous communities in Chile and Bolivia	News Bulletin	01:04	Native Americans. Title of the video may be misleading. Interviewees are Latin American experts.
CCTV-E	1	China publishes report about human rights in the USA	News Bulletin	00:43	Human rights are a sensitive topic in China. Critical of the USA. The news anchor is not a native speaker of Spanish and speaks with a strong accent.
	2	Election polls in Peru	News Bulletin	00:23	Latin American News. The news reader is Mexican.
	3	Angolan Designer	News Bulletin	00:41	Reports about Africa often talk about poverty or war. Voiceover in European Spanish.
	4	Survey about reading habits in China	News Bulletin	00:34	Report about China that does not involve politics or economy. The news anchor is not a native speaker of Spanish and speaks with a strong accent.
	5	Earthquake in Ecuador	News Bulletin	00:23	Latin American news. The news anchor is a native speaker of Spanish, but it is not clear if she is from Chinese descent.
	6	Contemporary Chinese women and gender unbalance in China.	Debate format: "Puntos de vista"	01:14	Demography is a considerable challenge for China. However, the discussion may seem superficial. Besides, one of the guests speaks with a strong accent and viewers may have difficulties to understand.
	7 (M)	Reports about Latin America	Magazine format: "América Ahora"	00:36	Report about Latin America. The presenter is not a native speaker of Spanish and speaks with a strong accent.
	8 (A)	Reports about Latin America. One report about Mendoza, Argentina.	Magazine format: "América Ahora"	01:00	Focus on Argentina. The presenter is not a native speaker of Spanish and speaks with a strong accent.

Note: The edition was made as one video compilation with most excerpts shown in both countries, being the exception those marked with (M) and (A), which indicate excerpts only shown in either Mexico or Argentina respectively.

RT

A total of 6 excerpts were selected from RT, from which 4 were shown to all groups and 2 were country specific. Considering the differences in length of the country specific excerpts, the compilation of RT excerpts shown in Mexico lasted 5:31 minutes, compared to 5:59 in Argentina.

The first video was taken from part of a news bulletin (published on YouTube on the 5 September), where Victoria Aramburu (an Argentinian news anchor) and Inna Afiguenova (Deputy director of the Spanish version of RT's website) discuss about the controversy over Donald Trump's plans of building a wall along the US-Mexican border during the election campaign.

The second video was only shown in Mexico and focused on the clashes between police and protesters in Oaxaca. By June 2016 the conflict had escalated and caused a number of deaths. Since the report includes an interview with one of the main teachers involved in the protests, this video was seen as vital to explore whether Mexican audiences would identify any differences in how the conflict was covered by the mainstream domestic media.

The third video was taken from the programme called *Keiser report* (published on 17 September 2016). In this particular episode, host Max Keiser and his wife and co-host Stacy Herbert analyse the world financial system from a perspective that criticises the role of Western governments. It was thought that this aspect of criticism towards policies stemming from industrialised Western nations could be of interest for viewers in Latin America.

First published on YouTube on 17 September 2016, the fourth video was taken from the programme *Detrás de la noticia* (Behind the news) hosted by Eva Golinger, which includes a segment about Native Americans protesting against the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline. Due to the fact there are significant populations of indigenous peoples in Latin America, it was considered that viewers in the region could regard this particular video with particular interest.

The fifth excerpt was taken from the programme *El zoom* (The zoom), published on YouTube on 20 April 2016. Hosted by the Spanish presenter Javier Rodríguez Carrasco, the video consists of a starting monologue and analysis around freedom of speech. Although it mainly focuses on Western countries, it also mentions Russia. This was seen as an interesting aspect to explore the issue of credibility.

The sixth video was only shown in Argentina and it centred around the Vatican declassifying documents with regards to the involvement of the Catholic Church after the 1976 coup-d'état and during the following military governments until 1983. Due to the sensitive aspect of this issue, it was deemed valuable to be included.

HispanTV

A total of 10 excerpts were selected from HispanTV, from which 8 were shown to all groups and 2 were country specific. Considering the differences in length of the country specific excerpts, the compilation of excerpts shown in Mexico lasted 5:29 minutes, compared to 5:45 in Argentina.

The first excerpt was extracted from the programme *Fort Apache* (published on YouTube on 3 September 2016). The main reason to select this video was the fact that the host, Pablo Iglesias Turrión, is the secretary general of the relatively new Spanish political party Podemos, whose growth in popularity threatened the Spain's de facto two-party system (Minder, 2016). This specific episode of the programme was chosen due to the interest it could generate among the participants. On it, the host and 5 guest hold a round-table type of discussion about Hillary Clinton and her campaign as candidate for the presidency of the United States during the national elections in 2016.

Two excerpts show a certain degree of criticism of Western countries, one considerably outspoken and another less so. One (the second according to the order in which they were shown) was published 20 September 2016 and refers to arm sales by the American government to Saudi Arabia and Israel. The other one (the seventh) was published 20 April 2016 and describes the difficulties faced by undocumented migrants in the USA and their "uncertain future".

Three of the videos relate to Iran (i.e. the third, sixth and ninth). One (published 12 September 2016) is a report by Parvin Ebrahimi about female drivers in car races in Iran and it was chosen to explore whether it differs from the image the participants had of Iranian women or not. Another (published 20 April 2016) shows Ayatollah Ali Khamenei giving a speech about hostilities between Iran and the West due to the Iranian nuclear technology. The other one (published 18 April 2016) is a report by Asa Esfandiari about Latin American artists on a circus tour in Teheran.

The fourth and fifth videos were country specific excerpts. One is a report regarding impunity and delinquency in Mexico and the other shows a correspondent in Buenos

Aires describing a demonstration in support of former Argentine president Christina Fernandez were selected.

Besides the report about female drivers, in which the reporter and the drivers are seen wearing hijabs, another video (the eighth in order) shows a veiled woman called Isabel Pérez reporting from Gaza (published 19 September 2016). Due to the fact that wearing a hijab is compulsory in Iran –and by extension on Iranian television-, all female reporters wear them, even correspondents outside the country. This video was chosen in relation to culture proximity and to explore how the participants –especially females- would react to this cultural phenomenon rarely seen in Latin American television.

As in the case of the video on RT about Native Americans demonstrating against the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, one of the video excerpts selected for HispanTV is also connected to indigenous populations. In this particular clip (the tenth) published on 11 April 2016, a Chilean analyst discusses how indigenous communities in her country follow the developments of politics in Bolivia, among other aspects.

CCTV-E

A total of 8 excerpts were selected from CCTV-E, from which 6 were shown to all groups and 2 were country specific. Taking into account the differences in length of the country specific excerpts, the compilation of excerpts shown in Mexico lasted 4:34 minutes, compared to 4:58 in Argentina.

The first video is related to a report compiled by the Chinese government about human rights in the United States. Due to the fact that China itself is often targeted by the media due to human rights violations (Ruz, 2015), this excerpt was considered appropriate to see how the participants would react.

Two videos (i.e. second and fifth) were selected because, besides covering news from Latin America, they were also presented by newsreaders from the region. One (published 10 April 2016) is presented by the Mexican Jorge Octavio Fernández Montes and the other (published 17 April 2016) by the Peruvian Lourdes Fernández Esquivel.

The third excerpt focuses on Africa and was selected to show how China's attention is not solely directed to news from the industrialised countries, but also to the Global South. The video (published 10 April 2016) reports the Angolan Nadir Tati and her career as a fashion designer, thus portraying Africa in a positive light through what has

been called a “Constructive Journalism” type approach (Greenslade, 2015; Wekesa and Yangqiu, 2014).

Two excerpts relate to China itself (the fourth and sixth). One (published 19 April 2016) is a report regarding a survey about reading habits in China. The other one (published 18 April 2016) was extracted from the programme *Puntos de Vista* (Points of view) and it shows a female host and two female guests –a Chinese and a Venezuelan- discussing about demography and gender imbalance in China, and related phenomena such as the “Leftover women”.

In the case of CCTV-E the country specific videos (seventh and eighth) were not selected from news bulletins, but from the Magazine format programme *América Ahora*. This programme focuses on showcasing reports from the American continent, therefore the videos selected related to Mexico and Argentina respectively.

2.7.3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

After viewing the videos, the participants were encouraged to point out which channel they preferred and to explain briefly why they felt drawn to that channel in particular. This was a general question aimed at discovering how opinions were shaped by a first impression, rather than by an in-depth analysis. Follow-up questions were devised to help participants elaborate gradually on their impressions about different aspects. This was structured in the same way as the third assignment on the form handed out to the participants, i.e. focused on three aspects: style, presenters, content.

Regarding style, participants were asked to point out specific elements that they found attractive, not only about the visual aspect, but also about the format. Some of the items discussed included the quality of production, the use of technologies and visual effects, the choices of colours, etc. The presenters section aimed at exploring elements related to the presenters that could have affected the participants’ perception of the channels. Therefore, the questions focused on linguistic aspects ranging from seemingly irrelevant or superficial ones such as pointing out if they recognised any non-native speakers and identifying the country of origin of some presenters, to exploring to what extent some of the content presented was not properly understood due to issues with diction or regional varieties of the Spanish language. This exercise also aimed at discovering how viewers react to varieties of Spanish other than the one used by their

domestic media and whether this plays any meaningful role in determining a preference a given television channel or not.

After these considerations, the focus of discussion was shifted towards the content. Among the subjects discussed were whether the content offered by these particular channels was considered trustworthy or not. While debating the issue of trust, the participants were confronted with different hypothetical situations in which they had to explain whether they held a preference for domestic or international media reporting on both international affairs or domestic news. A few specific cases were provided as examples such as the bombings in New York on 17 September 2016, the G20 Summit in Hangzhou (China) on the 2-5 September, the teacher protests and clashes with police in Oaxaca (Mexico) during 2016 and news about the United Nations demanding Argentina to release the indigenous leader Milagro Sala –these last two cases were used according to the location of the session being conducted. In each case, the students were encouraged to share their feelings about whom they would naturally feel more inclined to trust, either international or domestic media.

The issue of trust was also further explored by asking participants to elaborate on what these channels should do in order to gain their trust and that of audiences in Mexico and Argentina, respectively. Besides this, another aspect covered during the session was whether their perception about these countries had experienced any kind of change during the course of the session, i.e. once having seen the videos, whether they had felt some degree of new curiosity towards these countries or it had reinforced their previous perception.

The students were also asked whether they would personally consider continuing watching regularly any of these channels or not, and if they thought these channels had any chances of being accepted by the audiences in their countries. As with other questions, the students were encouraged to give their opinion and also to try imagining themselves in the shoes of their relatives and friends and speculate whether the answer could be any different than their own.

Finally, by the time all these issues were covered, the dynamics of the discussion in most of the cases would start to show signs of saturation –i.e. the point where new information is no longer received (Krueger and Casey, 2009)-, thus marking the end of the sessions, most of which lasted roughly 90 minutes in average.

2.8. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Upon return from field work, the recordings of the sessions were fully transcribed. In order to preserve the participants' anonymity, their names were replaced by pseudonyms (see Appendix II). Data coding was carried out using NVivo and categorised in nodes and sub-nodes according to emerging themes and subthemes. After identifying leading themes, the findings of this study are presented in four analytical chapters, which correspond to Chapters 4 to 7 of this thesis. In order to simplify the referencing of participants, pseudonyms are easily traceable to a specific focus group session according to the initials (as explained on table 2). The original recordings and transcriptions in Spanish are not included in this thesis but are available upon request. All quotes of focus groups participants have been translated by me. Similarly, any translations of sources in Spanish, Chinese and other foreign languages have also been done by me.

Table 2: Referencing and traceability of pseudonyms

Pseudonym starting with	University	Acronym	Country
A	Colegio de México	COLMEX	Mexico
B			
C			
D			
E	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México	UNAM	
F			
G	Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana	UAM	
H			
I	Universidad de Congreso	UC	Argentina
J	Universidad Torcuato di Tella	UTdT	
L			
M	Universidad de Belgrano	UB	
N	Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires	UBA	

2.9. DIFFICULTIES AND SHORTCOMINGS

A number of difficulties were encountered along the process of planning, organising and carrying out focus groups. Although conducting a pilot session would have been ideal, recruiting participants with the desired profile in London proved to be logistically troublesome. Whereas finding Spanish speakers was relatively easy, finding the right number of Latin Americans studying international relations or politics and that would be willing to participate was harder than expected, therefore deemed organisationally not feasible. Once in the field, a few shortcomings were also identified during the sessions, some of which could be corrected or amended. In other cases, the problematic elements needed to be clarified and notified to the participants.

2.9.1. UNIVERSITIES AND RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

The first difficulty encountered was during the process of contacting universities to seek their permission to recruit and carry out focus groups in their premises. As explained above, the strategy consisted in different measures being taken according to the degree of responsiveness from the institutions. While in some cases emails through the official channels would be sufficient, phone calls proved more efficient in others. In some instances, even multiple phone calls to different departments seemed to be hopeless. Having overcome that first step of contacting universities, the real challenge was recruiting the participants and organising the sessions. Most institutions assisted in recruiting students and it was only necessary to agree on a date. Others agreed to host the sessions and provided contact details of students. In these cases, the main challenge was the real possibility that after contacting all the participants, some of them would not attend. Since this can seriously jeopardise the success of the discussion and the session itself, measures were taken in order to avoid such instances. However, a few difficulties along the way were inevitable. As stated earlier, of all the groups organised in Mexico and Argentina, it happened twice that after contacting more than 20 students, only the minimum number of students for a group responded and just two attended. Therefore, a different approach was adopted with the intention of obtaining as much meaningful data as possible. As with the other groups the discussion was also encouraged by the pre-structured questionnaire. However, in these two cases, some of the discussion was also prompted through the opinions of other groups. The goal was to mimic the effect common to groups composed of many more participants. The result of this technique developed ad hoc proved to be effective and thus, whereas in other

circumstances these groups would have been formally excluded, due to the high quality of the data provided, the opinions of the participants that attended these two sessions will also be considered during the analysis.

2.9.2. QUESTIONNAIRE AND SUPPORTING MATERIAL

One shortcoming detected was regarding the material handed out as a support for encouraging debate. The second assignment included grading a list of countries from positive to negative according to the students' perceived image of those countries. Students were told in advance that the list had been arranged in alphabetical order, so that they would not feel influenced by the order. Nevertheless, after a few sessions some students pointed out that the visual layout of the second assignment could lead to bias, due to the fact that the list of countries and the grading ruler were placed too close to one another. Thus, Germany ("Alemania" in Spanish) was placed in the extreme left, just above the +++ (three times positive) sign on the grading ruler, and on the opposite extreme the list ended with Russia and Venezuela, just above the --- (three times negative) sign. After this concern was mentioned, it became necessary to explain during each following session that the fact that the list and the ruler coincided was arbitrary. Besides this issue, other students felt they were unable to judge certain countries due to insufficient knowledge and excused themselves from participating in this activity.

With regards to the questionnaire prepared for conducting the discussion, the order of the questions was frequently altered depending on the direction the debate would take. Moreover, if a line of debate would prove fruitless and therefore appear to be conducive to creating a sense of boredom among the participants, it would be changed according to each situation. Likewise, some comments made by the participants would open new lines of inquiry and therefore further explored by follow-up questions, some of which would become new fix questions to be raised in future sessions. Such was the case of one of the last questions of the session that would ask about the future of these channels in Latin America and the level of interest in international news among audiences in the region. During the first session I noted that some participants answered positively due to a high degree of novelty regarding these channels and specifically CCTV-E as being somewhat exotic. This prompted me to ask if it was not the case that this interest could be short-lived, due to an over-excitement for something exotic and new, rather than for the quality of content it could provide.

2.9.3. VIDEO EXCERPTS

During the sessions, a series of shortcomings were detected regarding the videos used for the analysis, the first of which was related to the selection and edition of the excerpts. The initial reasoning for the choice of the video excerpts was to give the participants a general idea about the programmes offered by these channels and their particular style, among other aspects. However, a more thorough selection balancing both content and length would have been ideal.

The priority was to produce a video that would roughly last 15 minutes; therefore, the length of each compilation of excerpts was kept within 4 to 6 minutes. While this aspect was partially achieved, it would have been more appropriate that the number of excerpts corresponding to each individual channel was kept the same. For instance, whereas the compilations for RT in both countries contained 5 videos each, the ones for CCTV-E contained 7 and the ones for HispanTV totalled 9. Although this might seem arbitrary, it is less so when taking into consideration that, in the case of RT, each individual excerpt lasted for longer. However, keeping a ratio between the number of excerpts and the lengths of each one of them would have been advisable.

A similar situation was detected when comparing the final editions of the videos shown in both countries. While the video compilations prepared for the Mexican sessions were shorter for each individual channel, the final edition of the video shown in Argentina lasted 68 seconds more than the one shown in Mexico. It would have been advisable to maintain roughly the same format.

Another issue regarding the videos was that the effect of *in medias res* turned out to be detrimental in one RT's excerpts, where the host, Mark Kaiser, is seen holding a rubber chicken in his hands while discussing about international bankers. It was supposed to have humorous effect, but since the excerpt shown to the participants did not include any explanation about the rubber chicken, they found it somehow unsettling and out of place. It seemed to have affected the way they thought about that particular video, as a number of the participants appeared to be focusing on the rubber chicken, rather than paying attention to what was being said.

Among the greatest priorities for the selection of the videos was to give examples that were rich and representative of the average content that viewers of these channels would come across with relative frequency. However, one of the first surprises during the first sessions in Mexico was that some of the participants appeared to have a certain

degree of sensitiveness towards gender issues and noticed that the most anchors on CCTV-E were female. After a few participants commented on the same issue, the concern arose that it may have more to do with the selection of the videos, rather than the recruitment decisions of the network itself. In fact, out of the 12 presenters profiled on CCTV's website, there is a perfect gender balance with 6 females and 6 males. After this information was checked, participants in the following groups were made aware of this issue.

2.9.4. DISCUSSION AND GROUP DYNAMICS

At the very start of the sessions, as consent was sought from the participants, they were made aware of the conditions of participation. While anonymity would guarantee the protection of their privacy and avoid any chances of traceability, participants were also reminded of the voluntary character of their participation. This meant they could opt out from answering questions and also stop their participation and leave the session at any moment. Whereas most groups understood this aspect as a formality, there was only one instance when a female participant in one of the most crowded groups decided to leave unannounced and without giving any reason. Besides this, during the discussions some students appeared to be more talkative and willing to engage than others. However, the fear of one participant dominating and unconsciously discouraging others to participate did not become an issue. Moreover, the opposite did arise during the more crowded sessions. Indeed, in a few instances, some students seemed to limit their interventions and replicate what other members had said, without adding any personal input.

2.9.5. DATA ANALYSIS

Identifying leading themes represented a challenge, due to the difficulty of categorising opinions. While some ideas were easier to identify because they were shared across numerous groups in both countries, others were just voiced by only a handful of participants. Nevertheless, these seemingly non-representative opinions proved to be crucial to understanding other aspects of the phenomenon, thus adding an extra layer of analysis. Drafting the analytical chapters of this thesis was a long and painstaking process, where the main criteria for assessing the value of the participants' opinions was determined by how instrumental they were to answer the research questions of this study.

2.10. CONCLUSION

Conducting a research based on audiences' perception can be challenging, especially in the case of international media, where it is difficult to obtain information about the audience and the impact these media outlets are having upon the viewers. Being access to this type of media a major obstacle for their development, the main concern is whether news television viewers are genuinely interested in international affairs. In fact, it is hard to imagine the likelihood of success for countries like China, Iran and Russia in their strategy of spreading soft power around the world through international news channels without the existence of a substantial audience among policy-makers. As I try to explore this phenomenon with regards to Latin America, in this chapter I provided an account of the methodology adopted to conduct this study.

In the first part, I described the scope of this study by introducing the main research questions and objectives. I examined why this study is best approached through qualitative research and how focus groups are the method best suited, due to their capacity of being conducive to generate new insights about a phenomenon. In the second part, I described the series of previous decisions need before carrying out the focus groups, such as determining the profile of the participants. Besides explaining how Mexico and Argentina were selected as the locations, details were also provided with regards to the universities approached and the recruitment of students. Despite some challenges, the help of the universities that agreed to participate proved to be vital for the success of the focus group sessions, in most cases. In the third part, I explained how the structure of the sessions was tailored according to the type of data to be collected, i.e. from general information about news consumption and the exposure to international media, to the projection of video excerpts and the following group discussion.

By paying close attention to the many difficulties encountered along the way, in the last part, I offered a reflection upon the entire process of organising and conducting focus groups, as well as analysing the data collected. I do this not only with regards to the organisational aspects, but most importantly by analysing some of the shortcomings that became evident as the sessions were carried out. In fact, focus groups can be difficult due to the numerous challenges faced not only during the planning process but also throughout the sessions. Finally, some of these shortcomings came to my attention only during the process of analysis of the data collected.

3. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

Having defined the scope of this study by looking at potential audiences in Mexico and Argentina, it is necessary to start by analysing not only the presence of international broadcasters in Latin America, but moreover how these fit within the configuration of the media systems in the region. By looking at the overall media landscape in the Latin America, it may be possible to detect how international broadcasters are operating in the region and how accessibility varies across different countries. The particular focus of this research will be placed on the countries where Spanish is the official language, i.e. *Hispanic America*. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to provide a brief account of the media environment in Latin America, paying particular attention to developments in Mexico and Argentina, the two countries where focus groups were conducted for this study. The purpose of surveying the media environment in these countries is to ultimately understand what kind of media is available for television audiences and what place is left for international broadcasters to develop.

We will start by casting a general glance to the complexity of the media system in Latin America and its main features. Two cases will be analysed in more detail in terms of developments in the last few decades: media concentration in Mexico and media polarisation in Argentina. Close attention will be paid to media access, news consumption and television viewership. In the second part, we will look at how Latin America has been long targeted by international broadcasting stemming not only from Europe and North America, but also Asia. For this aspect, a brief description will be provided of how different countries have been operating since the first half of the 20th century by setting up international radio stations broadcasting in Spanish, on shortwave at the beginning, and expanding their online presence in the last 20 years. Finally, the focus will be turned to international television channels broadcasting primarily news-related content in Spanish, with a particular attention to three different profiles: channels from the industrialised “West” such as CNN and Deutsche Welle; channels from within the region, such as Telesur and NTN24; and lastly, new channels neither “Western” nor regional, such as CCTV, RT and HispanTV. These last ones arguably appear to provide a new voice and a different perspective, with the aim of countering a both ubiquitous and hegemonic Western narrative at the same time. Particular attention will be paid to these three, as they constitute the focus of this research.

3.1. MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN HISPANIC LATIN AMERICA

The media around the world has been experiencing significant changes in the last few decades, particularly as a result of a process of globalisation, from which Latin America has not been exempt. In fact, long before discussions about globalisation became mainstream, the media in the region had traditionally been exposed to international flows (Waisbord, 2014), not only as a recipient of technology, techniques and content, but also as a producer itself –e.g. the fiction genre such as telenovelas. Yet, being open to international trends does not mean that the media system in the region is a replica of that of Europe or the United States. Although some countries drew inspiration from both commercial and public service models, the framework in which media systems took shape throughout the continent can be understood primarily by the national contexts (Lugo-Ocando, 2008), especially by analysing domestic politics and the role of the state (Waisbord, 2014).

Despite some distinguishable differences from country to country, the media system throughout Latin America presents a series of shared challenges in three main aspects: concentration, regulation and sustainability (Podesta, 2016). The first two aspects – concentration and regulation- are closely intertwined. In many countries, the mutually beneficial relationship between governments and media owners have been conducive to a lack of regulation on media ownership, thus allowing the development of the biggest media conglomerates in Spanish and Portuguese languages, i.e. *Televisa* and *Globo* in Mexico and Brazil, respectively. These and other groups have flourished thanks to their fundamental role in supporting dictators, authoritarian governments or even arguably moderate governments with conservative agendas (Márquez-Ramírez and Guerrero, 2014). Under these circumstances, the media has had two choices, either to ignore their role as a watchdog to protect the public interest and become accomplices of the government, or to uphold those values and at the same time make themselves the target of persecution by oppressive regimes. In *The Media in Latin America*, Jairo Lugo-Ocando elaborates on the relationship between the media and the governments as follows:

“While, more often than not, it has resulted in an inappropriate degree of collaboration between politicians and the media, in other aspects it has translated into open confrontation. The result, in the first case, is a perverse scenario in which both the media and elites have forged alliances to protect their own markets and interests. Subject as it is to the concentration of power that results from these alliances, journalism is reduced to a decorative role. It engages with politics, but only by means of scandals. It prioritises fashion, gossip and sports and is less willing to adopt controversial political agendas, unless they reflect dissidence among the ruling elites.

Superficiality, then, becomes a journalistic strategy of survival and a *modus vivendi* for media owners. In the second case, the outcome is the realignment of interests and a new subversive role for the media, which has, in some cases, been proactive in conspiracies to overthrow governments. The confrontation between political leaderships and the media has also meant that these leaderships have strengthened their control by means of implementing new legal frameworks, drying up resources for opposing media and restricting access to official sources” (2008: 2–3).

This type of arguably toxic bond between the government and the media has eroded competition and the emergence of a plurality of voices, through both explicit control by the government and self-censorship adopted by media practitioners, thus ultimately hampering the media’s informative role as watchdog of the government (Guerrero, 2014). Even though nowadays democracy is prevalent in most countries throughout the region, the fears of the past are still present and thus practices evolve rather slowly or remain unchanged. In several cases, “newly elected governments have opted to perpetuate the censorship mechanisms created by the former military regimes, a phenomenon that still defines the normative and legal framework of the media in many places.” (Lugo-Ocando, 2008: 3). According to Manuel Alejandro Guerrero, the post-transitory politics enabled the traditional media owners to “forge alliances with certain political groups and by pulling their strings to reduce the consequences of regulations contrary to their interests” (2014: 44–45). At the same time, thanks to this deregulation, some politicians also ventured in the business and became media entrepreneurs themselves, thus adding an extra layer of complexity to this already intricate issue.

The need to control the media, however, has not been the monopoly of right-wing or military governments alone. Far from that, since the start of the 21st century a wave of left-wing populism swept across the continent, and they too have tried to take control of the media in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Nevertheless, the means have been slightly different. Whereas before the media was seen as “collaborative” by right-wing authoritarian governments and military regimes, populist governments have considered the established media companies as an almost existential threat, capable of undermining their legitimacy and overthrowing them. Therefore, this late wave of populism has tried to take control by advancing an agenda of reform based on strengthening the role of the state. They have fought this battle from many fronts, as Silvio Waisbord suggests, not only by investing heavily in state-owned media and using government contracts and advertisement as reward, but they have even gone to the lengths of expropriating media companies, as in the case of Venezuela and Ecuador. “They also tried to muzzle press criticism by passing ‘gag’ laws and, with the help of judges, imposing hefty fines on libellous content” (Waisbord, 2014:

31). In the case of Argentina, the administration of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner¹⁰ devised a law in 2009 arguably seeking to weaken the power of traditional media by limiting the concentration of ownership and expanding a third of the broadcasting licences to ‘social’ entities, i.e. private non-profit organisations, among other features. By doing so, the government successfully gained the support of various segments of the population, who believed their voices had been heard vis-à-vis the traditionally stronger power groups that had been operating the mainstream media for decades (Waisbord, 2014).

Although some changes to the law have been put forward by the new government¹¹ in order to ease the limitations regarding ownership (Crettaz, 2015a), it is an example of how a government succeeded in gaining support by curbing concentration of ownership on the hands of media conglomerates and questionably “empowering” alternative media. This does not only apply to the case of Argentina, other countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, also advanced new broadcasting laws that were favourable to community media. A sector that had been traditionally excluded from access to broadcasting licenses (Hintz, 2011), community radios in particular are arguably one of the main sources of news for large sections of the population in different countries around the region. In rural areas where literacy rates tend to lag behind, they are effective by delivering news that are meaningful to their audiences but often ignored by the mainstream media stemming from the urban centres.

The intricate relationship between politics and the media, as well as the presence of community media as alternative enterprises that seek to advance their own (very often social) agenda, are some of the features common to many media systems in Latin America. However, as a diverse region, each country has had its own particular experience with regards to media development. Although it would be interesting to explore how this experience has been lived in countries such as Cuba or Venezuela, this chapter will only provide details about Mexico and Argentina.

¹⁰ President of Argentina during two terms: 2007-2011 and 2011-2015.

¹¹ Mauricio Macri won the presidential elections in 2015.

3.1.1. MEDIA CONCENTRATION AND TELEVISION IN MEXICO

In the case of Mexico, researchers have described the media system as being of a hybrid nature, combining elements from both authoritarian and commercial models. Although on the surface it may seem consistent with practices typical of the commercial model, many features from the authoritarian model such as alliances of interests between media elites and political actors are still present, albeit in a subtler fashion, as if they had adapted to modern times (Márquez-Ramírez, 2014). In this respect, advertising has been long regarded as one of the main tools used by the government to keep the media under control, thus creating a state of symbiosis whereby advertising revenues are rewarded with goodwill gestures by the media. Under these circumstances, journalists that fail to follow suit are often subject of abuse by state-level politicians who “occasionally use weak judiciaries and holdover authoritarian laws” as punishment (Hughes, 2008: 147).

With regards to broadcasting, the alliance between the State and the media has been historically conducive to concentration of ownership in just a few companies, such as *Televisa* and *TV Azteca*, putting Mexico at the top of the media concentration ranking around the world. In fact, until the establishment of *TV Azteca* in 1993, *Televisa* was the only commercial network in the country and one of the first to be granted broadcasting concessions by the government (Hughes, 2008; Márquez-Ramírez, 2014). By 2007, *Televisa* controlled 70% of the market and *TV Azteca* had most of the rest (Court TV, 2007). This fact is highly meaningful in a country where 98.3% of homes have an average of 2 TV sets per home, according to a survey conducted by the Instituto Federal de Comunicaciones (IFT) in 2015. The same report shows that 56% of respondents only have access to free-view television channels, which are the most watched even among those who have pay-television services (IFT, 2015).

Nevertheless, the *Televisa-TV Azteca* duopoly arguably came to an end in October 2016 as a new channel *Imagen TV* started broadcasting after Cadena Tres I won a broadcasting bid in 2015 (Arias, 2016). Only time will tell whether *Imagen TV* will be able of bringing about changes in the media system in terms of content and quality, or simply adjust and become part of the status quo. Grupo Imagen’s *Imagen TV* is the only television channel with a national reach that does not belong to either *Televisa* or *TV Azteca*. Out of the main five television channels that are available all across Mexico, *Las Estrellas* (formerly known as *El Canal de las Estrellas*) and *Canal 5* belong to *Televisa* Group, whereas *Azteca 13* and *Azteca 7* belong to *TV Azteca*. There is a number of other

popular channels, such as *Gala TV* (owned by *Televisa*), *Canal 22* (owned by Televisión Metropolitana and operated by Mexico City's Secretariat of Culture), and *TV UNAM* (owned and managed by the largest university in the country), among other, however they are only partially accessible throughout the country. All these channels have their respective headquarters in Mexico City.

According to IFT's report, *Las Estrellas* is the most preferred TV channel among both people that only have access to free-view television as well as subscribers of pay television. *Azteca 13* follows and then *Canal 5* and *Azteca 7* almost at the same level. These four channels also rank at the top as the most watched channels by subscribers of pay television. Among viewers with only access to free-view television channels, most respondents consume news bulletins, followed by *telenovelas*, films, series and sports (IFT, 2015). There is a number of news themed channels in Mexico which are partially available throughout the country mostly on cable or satellite, such as *Foro TV* (owned by *Televisa*), *Milenio Televisión* (owned by Milenio), *Excélsior Televisión* (owned by Grupo Imagen Multimedia), and *ADN40* (owned by *TV Azteca*), among other.

Even though the existence of many television channels could be regarded as an apparent plurality of voices, diversity and quality of the content is mostly decided by the two main companies that own most of them. By being instrumental in shaping opinions through this array of different channels, *Televisa* and *TV Azteca* are largely considered "political powerhouses" (Hughes, 2008: 141), as they arguably play a substantial role in manipulating politics regardless of any specific political party. In fact, during the election campaign in 2012 *The Guardian* published a series of articles accusing *Televisa* of commissioning videos against rivals of the then presidential candidate for PRI¹² and current president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto. Even though *Televisa* and *The Guardian* later published a joint statement, whereby *The Guardian* acknowledged that "Televisa's political news coverage has been found by Mexico's Federal Electoral Court to comply with the country's strict broadcasting regulations on political impartiality" (*The Guardian and Televisa Joint Statement*, 2013), it caused a stir in Mexico as it was reproduced by the local press. Another such concern was raised in 2016 when *Televisa* launched a new telenovela called *La Candidata* (The female candidate), which was seen by many as an official endorsement and promotion of

¹² Between 1929 and 2000, all presidents of Mexico belonged to the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI).

Margarita Zavala (wife to the former PAN¹³ president Felipe Calderón) ahead of the 2018 presidential elections (Delgado, 2016). These apparent –and very often evident– alignment between the traditional media organisations and the government have undermined the audiences’ trust in *Televisa* and *TV Azteca*, as it will be discussed in subsequent chapters throughout this study.

3.1.2. MEDIA POLARISATION AND TELEVISION IN ARGENTINA

Broadcasting in Argentina has experienced considerable changes during the last 40 years, which mirror developments in the political environment throughout a period of consolidation of democracy. Jorge Liotti, from Universidad Católica Argentina, recognises three clear stages of development in the relationship between the media and the government in this period. The first stage coincides with the last military dictatorship from 1976 until 1983, when politics dominated the relationship with the media and the government exercised its control by directly managing radio stations and television channels (Liotti, 2014). A second stage started with the return to democracy in 1983. This period was characterised by a neoliberal wave of privatisation of television channels and radio stations, which enabled media conglomerations to take shape. Among the most renowned ones were Clarín Group –which was granted the license of Mitre radio and then took over channel 13 and afterwards created cable operator Multicanal- and Telefé –controlled by Editorial Atlántida, acquired licenses for Channel 11 and Continental radio, also entering into the cable television business (*ibid.*). The main feature of this stage was the withdrawal of the state as a key participant in the media scenario, but at the same time the private commercial expansion had close links to politics (Viale et al., 2008).

A new stage started during the Kirchners’ administrations (husband and wife¹⁴), which sought to limit the power of the media through numerous ways. One of the strategies included the infiltration of the market, whereby entrepreneurs linked to the government invested in or acquired media organisations; at the same time state advertising with political purposes became more often, as well as public pressure on

¹³ The *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) is one of the three largest political parties in Mexico, which in 2000 ended the PRI’s *de facto* 70-year rule.

¹⁴ Néstor Kirchner became president in 2003 until 2007, followed by his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who ruled the country in two consecutive administrations between 2007-2011 and 2011-2015.

the media and journalists (Liotti, 2014). As discussed above, the Fernández de Kirchner administration succeeded in passing a law with the aim of setting up a new regulatory regime that would limit media concentration and, in time, would undermine political opposition. This resulted in a polarisation of the media landscape between relatively new media organisations often partisans of the government's agenda on one side, and the older media outlets on the opposition, although roles have shifted since the general elections in 2015.

The media polarisation in the last decade mirrored a more general ideological fracture in the Argentinian society which became popularly known as “la grieta”, i.e. the crack (Falchi, 2016; Fermo, 2017; Iglesias, 2013). Somewhat related to issues of trust and distrust towards traditional media, this phenomenon has been accompanied by a shift in media consumption away from print media, to online broadcasting and social media. Nevertheless, television remains one of the main sources of both news and entertainment among Argentinians. According to the *National Survey of Cultural Consumption and Digital Environment* conducted in 2013 by the Sistema de Información Cultural de la Argentina (SInCA) under the Dirección Nacional de Industrias Culturales, most Argentinians do not rely on free-view television and have access to cable (68%) or satellite (13%). Most respondents watch news-bulletins (73%), followed by films, series, sports and comedy (SInCA, 2013).

As in the case of Mexico, the most popular television channels in Argentina also broadcast from the capital city. However, most provinces also have their own channels which combine local productions with programmes from the national networks. Only one out of the five main television channels is state-owned: *Televisión Pública Argentina*. It is the oldest television channel and, as in the case of Argentina's national and international radios, it is operated by the state-owned company Radio y Televisión Argentina S.E. The remaining channels are *América* (owned by Grupo América and Claudio Belocopitt), *El Nueve* (owned by the foreign companies Albavisión and Grupo Prisa), *Telefe* (owned by the American company Viacom) and *eltrece* (owned by Grupo Clarín). Besides these, there is a number of news themed TV channels in Argentina which are also largely accessible throughout the country mostly on cable, satellite or digital network, such as *Todo Noticias* or *TN* (owned by Grupo Clarín), *Crónica Televisión* (owned by Grupo Olmos), *A24* (owned by Grupo América), *Canal 26* (owned by TeleCentro), *Canal 5 Noticias* or *C5N* (owned by Grupo Indalo), and *Cultura y Noticias 23* or *CN23* (owned by Grupo Indalo), among other.

3.2. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING IN SPANISH AND LATIN AMERICA

Although the focus of our study are news television channels, international broadcasting is not a phenomenon that started with television itself; moreover, it can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century, when the discovery of short waves allowed European powers such as the Netherlands or France to broadcast easily to their colonies all over the world (Geniets, 2013). According to James Wood, in the case of the United Kingdom, it was the BBC the one in charge of materialising such 'propaganda' effort by broadcasting to Australia and Canada at first, and then to the Arab world from 1936 onwards (1992: 2). Even though the main reason why many international stations mushroomed during the Second World War was to counteract broadcasts from Italy and Germany, some scholars suggest that a central aspect was the imperialistic effort of reinforcing the political integration between the European colonial powers and their dominions overseas (Geniets, 2013). The case of Latin America was different because most of Spain's former colonies had either declared independence in the first half of the 19th century or been lost as the aftermath of the Spanish-American war in 1898. In the case of Spain's Radio Nacional –which started broadcasting regularly through short wave from 1942 and since 1978 has been known as Radio Exterior de España-, the priority during the Cold War was reportedly to fight against communism and serve as a link between Spanish emigrants and their families (RTVE, no date). Therefore, Latin America has been primarily targeted by countries foreign to the Spanish speaking world not only from Europe and North America, but also East Asia and the Middle East.

3.2.1. BROADCASTERS FROM EUROPE

The Voice of Russia

Ten years before Spain, Russia's Radio Moscú (Radio Moscow) had already started broadcasting in Spanish in 1932 and although the amount of listeners remained limited during the Spanish Civil War, audiences started to grow –also thanks to radio programmes in Catalan (Bas, 2012). Radio Moscow's strategy towards Latin America not only involved opening a correspondents' office in Cuba and broadcasting in Spanish and Portuguese (from 1935), but also producing programming in indigenous languages such as Quechua (between 1964 and 1984), Guaraní and Aymara (Rupprecht, 2015). In 1993, Radio Moscow became The Voice of Russia and since 2014 it was replaced by Radio Sputnik.

BBC

The BBC started broadcasting internationally in 1932 and during the second world war, it expanded its reach to become “the world’s largest propaganda broadcaster; its output ran to 850 programme-hours per week in 46 different languages. This was greater than the total output from the USA and the USSR combined” (Wood, 1992: 2). The BBC targeted Latin America by broadcasting in Spanish and Portuguese since 1938 (BBC, 2016), whereas in Europe, the service ran between 1939 and 1981, roughly coinciding with the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975). Arguably one of the most trusted sources of news around the world, in his *History of international broadcasting* James Wood suggests that the BBC’s “key to success lies in its image as an independent voice in the world, and not the voice of the British government” (1992: 4).

Deutsche Welle (DW)

Germany’s *Weltrundfunksender* started broadcasting internationally in 1929 and, although it only broadcasted in German, it can be considered the first German attempt to spread its worldview. Four years after, it was transformed by the Nazis into a propaganda machine by the name of *Deutscher Kurzwellensender*, which by 1937 was broadcasting in more than 30 languages (Groebel, 2000). After the Second World War, German broadcasting is divided in two. Deutsche Welle (DW) was created in the Federal Republic of Germany (i.e. West Germany) and started operating in Cologne in 1953. A year later it started broadcasting in Spanish (Hoffmann, 2013b) and although it only consisted of a 5-minutes news bulletin, in march 1960 the service was expanded to a regular radio programme directed to Latin America; in 1964 DW started broadcasting for audiences in Spain as well (DW, no date). A few years later, the Democratic Republic of Germany created Radio Berlin International (RBI) in response to DW’s growing presence. It broadcasted from 1959 until it was absorbed by DW in 1990, following the reunification of Germany (Berg, 2008).

Radio France Internationale (RFI)

Created in 1931 on the occasion of the Paris Colonial Exposition, France’s first international radio was called Poste Colonial and it quickly becomes diplomacy tool (RFI, 2010a). Renamed Paris Ondes Courtes and later Paris Mondial, by 1938 it was already broadcasting in 30 languages. During the German occupation, the French resistance used the BBC and Radio Brazzaville, while the Vichy government appeals to the empire through la Voix de la France, la France fidèle and even la France musulmane (RFI, 2010b). After the war, it became RTF Radio Paris in 1945 and ORTF in 1965. After

much restructuring, Radio France Internationale (RFI) was created in 1975, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (RFI, 2010c). Throughout the Cold War it remained culturally driven, thus by avoiding the ideological war between East and West, RFI arguably “never suffered from Soviet jamming, unlike the BBC, VOA, Deutsche Welle and Kol Israel, [...]” (Wood, 1992: 199).

Oriented primarily towards Africa where it claims 33.1 million listeners, RFI has also targeted Latin America by broadcasting 3 hours a day of programmes in Spanish and one hour in Brazilian Portuguese. It boasts an audience of 4.3 million people in South America (RFI, 2014). More than 410 partner radio stations not only in Latin America but also in the United States and Canada re-transmit RFI’s programmes in Spanish, which are also broadcast in FM in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador (RFI, 2017).

Rai

Italy was one of the first countries to begin shortwave broadcasts internationally in 1930. Primarily directed to regions of the world where Italian emigrants had made their home, RAI Italia Radio started broadcasting to North America in Italian and English from 1934, and later to South America in Italian, Portuguese and Spanish from 1938. After that, other transmitters were built and directed to other parts of the world. After more than six decades of service, broadcasts in 25 foreign languages on shortwave were interrupted in 2007. The radio was dissolved on 31 December 2011.

Radio Nederland Wereldomroep (RNW)

Another of the main players until recently was Radio Netherlands Worldwide. Although its origins go back to 1927, *Radio Nederland Wereldomroep* (RNW) was formally founded in 1947 as an international media organisation and soon started broadcasting in Spanish (RNW, no date). In 1968, it opened the *Radio Netherlands Training Centre*, which aimed at providing training for radio personnel from Latin American countries and other regions in the world. In 1991, RNW intensified its collaboration with radio stations in Latin America by broadcasting programmes directly through satellite (*ibid.*). Due to funding cuts and major restructuring, most of the short wave services were interrupted in 2012, when it became an NGO under the name of RNW media and shifted to a web-based operation by promoting positive social change and “free speech in countries where freedom of expression is severely restricted” (*ibid.*). In 2013 it developed a new brand to reach young people in Cuba through the web-portal eltoque.com.

Radio Prague

Radio Prague's broadcasting in Spanish started in 1937 in the former Czechoslovakia. Although the radio's shortwave service was interrupted in 2011, it still offers radio programming through its website, as well as rebroadcasts by local radios not only in Spain and Latin America, but also on Radio Miami International (Radio Praha, no date).

3.2.2. BROADCASTERS FROM NORTH AMERICA

Voice of America (VOA)

The Voice of America (VOA) was established in 1942 primarily to counter Nazi propaganda during the Second World War, so after the war was over, it directed its efforts to counter Soviet propaganda. Throughout the Cold War, "VOA faced recurring questions about objectivity vs. editorializing, whether a hard or soft tone against communism was the better strategy, and who was listening and whether the VOA message was having any effect" (Berg, 2008: 12). It claims to exemplify the principles of a free press, albeit being funded by the U.S. Congress (VOA, no date a). This has prompted many critics to question its editorial independence. With an annual budget 218.5 million USD at present, concerns have been raised about the scope of manipulation by the Trump administration (Borchers, 2017).

In the case of Latin America, although it broadcast in Spanish from the very first year it started operating, a Spanish branch was only created in 1961. At present it boasts a weekly audience of 59.4 million people throughout the region (VOA, no date b), although it is unclear how this figure was calculated. Other attempts at advancing its agenda in Latin America was through the creation of Radio Martí (1985) and TV Martí (1990) directed at Cuba, with the aim of "providing news and information to the Cuban people without the censorship of the Cuban government" (Marti Noticias, no date). Despite the efforts, these two have been fiercely criticised and repeatedly jammed by La Havana.

Radio Canada International (RCI)

Whereas many of the European international radios were born as a means of linking the colonies with the metropolis, Radio Canada International was conceived in 1942 to serve the Canadian Armed Forces during the Second World War. It was only a few years later that it began broadcasting in foreign languages and in 1947 it started targeting Latin America by broadcasting in Spanish and Portuguese (RCI, no date). In 2012 it interrupted all broadcasting on shortwave due to budget cuts and its foreign language

services was reduced to 5 languages, marking the end of the Portuguese service. Currently it only broadcasts its programming online (*ibid.*).

3.2.3. BROADCASTERS FROM EAST ASIA

China Radio International (CRI)

Founded in 1941 as Radio Peking, it was renamed in 1983 as Radio Beijing and as China Radio International (CRI) ten years later. In more than 70 years, CRI's production has expanded to 61 languages, either by broadcasting on shortwave, FM or online. The Spanish service started broadcasting on shortwave in 1956 and in 1998 it opened its website, which arguably receives 150 thousand visits per month, primarily from Spain, Mexico, Argentina and the USA, among other countries (CRI, 2010). Besides having correspondent offices in Mexico City and Buenos Aires, in 2010 CRI started broadcasting live on Uniradio AM1470 from Tijuana, on the border between Mexico and California, with the aim of also targeting Spanish-speaking audiences in the USA. It is unclear how long such broadcasting efforts lasted or whether they are currently operating or not.

CRI's target audience is composed by people from the "middle-higher group, young, diplomats and business people from Spanish-speaking countries living in China" (*ibid.*). Despite the access restrictions to social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube in China, CRI has put considerable effort in strengthening its presence in them as a means to promoting their programmes and website (*ibid.*). Acknowledging the changing habits of audiences, CRI is undergoing a process of transformation into a multilingual and multifunctional broadcasting organisation by the name of China International Broadcasting Network (CIBN), which was formally established in 2011 (CRI, 2017). Latin America has also been targeted by CRI broadcasts in Portuguese, not only via shortwave but also through programmes re-broadcast by local FM radios in Brazil. In fact, CRI's General Bureau in Latin America was established in 2011 in Rio de Janeiro (CRI, 2009).

NHK

Another traditional player in Asia has been Japan, whose NHK World Radio has been broadcasting in Spanish since 1937 (NHK, no date). As the home of great numbers of Japanese immigrants and their descendants since the late 19th century, Latin America is currently targeted by daily broadcasts of 30-minutes programming on shortwave and satellite in Spanish and Portuguese (*ibid.*) –the latter being the language spoken by

the world's largest ethnic Japanese community outside Japan of around 1.5 million people (AP, 2014).

KBS

The Korean experience with international radio broadcasting dates back to 1953, during the Korean War, with the establishment of *The Voice of Free Korea*, later renamed as *Radio Korea* and *Radio Korea International*. Currently known as *KBS World Radio*, it broadcasts in 11 languages and also targets Koreans living overseas (KBS, no date). Since 1962 it has been broadcasting in Spanish on shortwave and since 2011 is re-broadcast by Palermo FM (RPLM, no date) in Buenos Aires, Argentina –home of the second biggest Korean diaspora in Latin America after Brazil.

3.2.4. BROADCASTERS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

TRT

Turkey started broadcasting internationally on shortwave in 1937 through *Radio Ankara*, which arguably became a nonpartisan voice during the Second World War (TRT, no date), as did Turkey until February 1942. At the end of the 1950s was renamed *The Voice of Turkey* and in 1964 it started to be under the management of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT). At present it broadcasts in 41 languages, including Spanish and recently Portuguese as well (*ibid.*).

Kol Israel

In the case of Israel, international broadcasts were closely linked with immigration policies of the newly established state since 1948. Initially called *Kol Zion le-Golah* (Voice of Zion to the Diaspora), its broadcasts on shortwave were primarily directed to the Jewish communities around the world, but also to the newly arrived immigrants. Later renamed *Kol Israel* (Voice of Israel) it started broadcasting in Spanish in 1952, even though broadcasts in Ladino -i.e. Jewish Spanish spoken by descendants of Sephardic communities expelled from Spain in 1492- can be traced back to 1948. Throughout the Cold War its broadcasts to the Soviet Union were frequently jammed by the USSR until 1988 (IBA, 2008).

IRIB

Although Iran's effort to broadcast internationally started in 1956, its agenda changed substantially after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) World Service has been broadcasting in Spanish since 1982 with

the aim of countering the “informational imperialism” of the Western mass media, “which attempts to restrict world public opinion” (IRIB, 2010). Besides this, IRIB’s World Service has a religious and arguably proselytising aim of catering for Islamic needs of Muslims around the world and “those who are interested in knowing Islam” (*ibid.*). In 2016, IRIB launched Pars Today, a news website closely linked to IRIB World Service, which provides information and radio broadcasts in a number of foreign languages (ParsToday, no date; PressTV, 2016).

3.3. INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION CHANNELS AND LATIN AMERICA

During the first decade of the 21st century and particularly during the economic downturn in 2008, many of the more well-established international news networks of the West such as BBC (Plunkett, 2011), RFI (Hürriyet, 2006), DW (DW, 2005; Nelepcu, 2011) and others started downsizing their offer in different platforms. However, China and other emerging economies started to set up their own international news networks that would help them express their message in their own terms, by challenging the worldview portrayed by Western media. The main aim of this strategy is to enhance their national image by means of increasing their soft power, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Even though English has been the main international language chosen to address viewers around the world, Spanish has been considered as a strategic language to reach audiences in Latin America, where it is the official language in 18 sovereign countries and Puerto Rico (US Territory). The countries that have invested in establishing international TV news channels in Spanish can be classified in three groups, according to their cultural and geographical proximity to the region: a first group is constituted by TV networks broadcasting from the industrialised West, such as the United States (CNN En Español) and Germany (DW Latinoamérica); a second group has its origins within the Spanish speaking countries in Latin America, such as Venezuela (Telesur) and Colombia (NTN24); and finally a third group broadcasting from both geographically and culturally distant countries, such as China (CCTV-E or CGTN Español since 31 December 2016), Russia (RT) and Iran (HispanTV). It is worth mentioning that whereas the BBC is one of the most prestigious news outlets from Europe, it does not broadcast to Latin America as a TV channel, but rather through radio service and its web portal BBC Mundo, as mentioned above.

3.3.1. NEWS NETWORKS FROM THE INDUSTRIALISED “WEST”

One of the traditional players among the international news networks broadcasting in Spanish has been *CNN en Español*. With headquarters in Atlanta (USA), it is both directed at Latin America as well as the Hispanic population north of the Rio Grande. It is not the only Spanish-language television channel from the United States, other long-established networks include *Telemundo* and *Univisión*; however, *CNN en Español* is the only news-specific one. Among the news networks broadcasting from Europe, Spain has been one of the traditional leaders with *TVE Internacional* since it was launched in 1989 (RTVE, no date). Whereas TVE does not expressly target Latin America to advance a government agenda of spreading soft power, it is often referenced as a source of international news in the Spanish-speaking world, together with the Spanish news agency EFE. Germany is another European country that early on set up a news channel broadcasting in Spanish up to date, first as part a multi-lingual channel and later as a 24-hour channel dedicated to Latin America. Besides this in September 2017 the French TV news network *France 24* launched a Spanish language version of the channel.

CNN en Español

As one of the most widely known international news channels, *Cable News Network* (CNN) was launched by Ted Turner in 1980. It started targeting Spanish-speakers by broadcasting in Spanish first on *CNN International* since 1992, and then 24 hours by launching *CNN en Español* in 17 March 1997. As mentioned above, the channel is not only directed to audiences in Latin America, but also to the fast-growing Spanish-speaking population in the United States (Silva-ferrer, 2012, p41–52). Besides this, it has also expanded its services by setting up localised versions for Mexico and Chile.

Since its beginnings, *CNN en Español* targeted Mexico in a differentiated way by launching a specific Mexico feed in March 1999. In 2007, CNN Expansion was created as a result of an alliance between Time-Warner and the Mexican publisher Grupo Expansión (Grupo Expansión, no date), which in turn gave birth to *CNN Mexico* in 2010. Besides the case of Mexico, the network also established a separate channel for Chile in 2008. *CNN Chile* was launched as the first 24-hour news channel in the country and the first to be part of the CNN network in South America (CNN Chile, no date).

CNN has also been the target of criticism by governments in the region, particularly Venezuela. In 17 February 2017 *CNN en Español* announced it had been “kicked off air”

in Venezuela, after a report about the country allegedly issuing passports and visas to individuals from the Middle East with ties to terrorism (Almasy, 2017). However, Venezuela's National Commission of Telecommunications claims the channel was taken out of air on 15 February due to a series of programmes that violated the country's Law of Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Electronic Media (Meléndez, 2017). As a response the channel started broadcasting live on YouTube exclusively to Venezuela and opened separate accounts for Venezuela on Facebook (@cnneve) and Twitter (@CNNVenezuela).

CNN en Español has also expanded its online presence, by opening accounts on mainstream social networks. By 30 September 2018, it had more than 12 million Total Page Follows on Facebook (@CNNe) and 16.7 million followers on Twitter since opening its account (@CNNEE) in April 2009. Its YouTube channel, which opened in September 2013 as *CNN en Español*, has more than 656 thousand subscribers and 138 million views.

DW

Besides providing radio programming, Germany's Deutsche Welle (DW) opened an international television channel in 1992, after it inherited the broadcast facilities of RIAS-TV –an American radio and TV station located in West Berlin and directed to audiences in the East (Binder, 1992). Originally broadcasting in German and English, it was initially available in Europe. Three years later, it started broadcasting 24 hours a day all over the world and Spanish was selected as the third language (Hoffmann, 2013c).

With the aim of promoting the understanding and exchange of cultures and people, as stated by its constituting law "DW-Gesetz" (DW, 2016), in Latin America DW started by offering only 2 hours of daily programming in Spanish on a multi-lingual channel that would alternate programming in German and English as well. However, as DW experienced an increase in of its covering at the start of the 21st century, its usage in Mexico rose from two percent in 2009 to six percent weekly reach in 2012 (Hoffmann, 2013a). Following this trend, it re-launched its Spanish-language channel as *DW Latinoamérica* in 2012 (Pohlmann, 2012) not only with the aim specialising, but also to address the growing competition from all over the world (ElUniversal/Efe, 2012). Since 2015 DW's content has been made available through a multilingual application for smartphones and tablet (Delgado, 2015).

Its strategy in Latin America does not contemplate just presenting news from a German perspective, but also paying close attention to the politics, history, culture and current affairs in the region. Indeed, in 2010 it produced *Bicentennial debates* (DW, no date), a series of programmes about the 200-year anniversary of Latin American independence, in collaboration with three TV channels from the region: TV CUATRO (Mexico), UCV-TV (Chile) and RTVC (Colombia).

In order to expand its online presence, DW has opened accounts on mainstream social networks. By 30 September 2018, it had more than 1.25 million Total Page Follows on Facebook (@dw.espanol) and 296 thousand followers on Twitter since opening its account (@dw_espanol) in May 2007. Its YouTube channel, which opened in 2012 as *DW (Español)* and where it also broadcasts live, has more than 290 thousand subscribers and 71 million views.

3.3.2. REGIONAL POLITICS AND BROADCASTING

International broadcasting in Latin America is not been exclusively the monopoly of broadcasters from outside the region. In fact, with the expansion of cable and satellite television providers during the 1990s, channels from different Latin American countries started to be available throughout the region. Besides, political developments in the region throughout the last decade have also led to the creation regional news channels with distinct narratives and agendas, the most prominent being Telesur and NTN24.

Telesur

The dominance of international news networks from outside the region led to the creation of Telesur by the Venezuelan government in 2005, as a counterpart of CNN en Español (Galindo et al., 2015), and to broadcast news from a Latin American point of view. The former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez' emphasis on regional integration is founded on a belief that there is a shared sense of identity among Latin Americans not only due to linguistic reasons, but also because of a common history of Colonialism. Some academics argue this is a superficial notion based on observations that also focus on a common indigenous symbolism (Cañizález and Lugo-Ocando, 2008: 211). Nevertheless, Telesur is very clear about its profile as "a Latin American multimedia

platform oriented to lead and promote the unification of the peoples of the SOUTH¹⁵ (Telesur, no date), which at the same time strives to counter voices arguably “imposed” by the NORTH¹⁶ (Cañizález and Lugo-Ocando, 2008).

Its news agenda has been criticised of mirroring the interests of its shareholders (Burch, 2007), i.e. the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela. In fact, the presence of Andrés Izarra, the Minister of Information in Venezuela, as the first chairman of Telesur, “undermined any pretence at government Independence from the outset” (Cañizález and Lugo-Ocando, 2008: 212). Moreover, the presence of many international and regional left-wing intellectuals in Telesur’s advisory council defines the orientation of the network.

Since its inception Telesur has aimed to become the Latin American version of Al-Jazeera. In fact, it is possible to recognise some similarities in their world-view and their critical approach to Western politics. As Cañizález and Ocando point out, both channels have also “tried to exploit the perception of pan-Arabism and pan-Latin Americanism as a means of promoting themselves among potential audiences” (*ibid.*: 220). However, the comparison falls short in terms of their relationship with their funding governments. Both networks received grants, but Al-Jazeera then turned into a commercial broadcaster, while Telesur has been a public service broadcaster since its inception (Cañizález and Lugo-Ocando, 2008). In fact, the independence from government intervention is seen by many as the main challenge for Telesur to fully become an impartial and objective news outlet.

Cañizález and Lugo-Ocando suggest that “the complexity and diversity of Latin America’s cultural and political constructed hegemonies and realities provides an unavoidable challenge for the multiculturalism and cultural hybridity that Telesur seems to want to incarnate” (*ibid.*: 223). In time this will make it difficult for Telesur to become a regional public broadcaster, especially because the political landscape in the region is undergoing considerable changes, the impeachment of the Dilma Rousseff (or possibly institutional coup-d’état) in Brazil in 2016, and the political unrest in

¹⁵ High case in the original text, “SOUTH” is defined by the same network as “geopolitical concept that promotes the struggle of peoples for peace, self-determination, respect for Human Rights and Social Justice” (Available on: <http://www.Telesurtv.net/english/pages/about.html>)

¹⁶ High case is mine.

Venezuela especially during 2016 and the start of 2017. In fact, after the election of Mauricio Macri as president of Argentina in 2015, the government announced Argentina's pull-out due to "financial" and "editorial" reasons (AP, 2016).

Concerning *Telesur's* online presence, the channel has opened accounts on mainstream social media networks. By 30 September 2018, it had more than 1.65 million Total Page Follows on Facebook (@TeleSUR) and 1.57 million followers on Twitter since opening its account (@Telesurtv) in June 2009. Its YouTube channel, which opened in June 2007 as *Telesur tv* and where it also broadcasts live, has more than 380 thousand subscribers and 255 million views.

NTN24

With headquarters in Bogotá, Colombia, NTN24 was launched in 2008 and calls itself "The Channel of the Americas" and differs from Telesur not only because of its private ownership, but mainly in the way it informs. According to Ómar Rincón, from the Universidad de los Andes (Colombia), the difference between Telesur and NTN24 is that the former reports from a perspective originating in the "South", that of Chávez' Bolivarian project, whereas the latter aligns itself to former Colombian president Álvaro Uribe's perspective which is intrinsically anti-Chavez and with a horizon set in the "North" (Rincón, 2015). While both channels focus on Latin American affairs, Telesur strives to be an alternative to CNN as an anti-hegemonic news network (Thussu, 2006), but in the process shows itself strongly partisan of Venezuela's government (Painter, 2008), whereas NTN24 is more likely to coincide with CNN en Español regarding news selection (Cushion, 2010).

According to a 2014 report, NTN24 is accessible to 8.8 million homes in 21 Latin American countries, the USA and Spain by satellite and cable television (NTN24, 2014). In order to expand its online presence, NTN24 has opened accounts on mainstream social networks. By 30 September 2018, it had more than 1.74 million Total Page Follows on Facebook (@NTN24) and 3.88 million followers on Twitter since opening its account (@NTN24) in April 2010. Its YouTube channel, which opened in July 2010 as *NTN24* and where it also broadcasts live, has more than 436 thousand subscribers and 179 million views.

NTN24 has been subject to blocks by the Venezuelan government, even before CNN. In 2014, the Maduro administration ordered cable operators to interrupt broadcasting NTN24 following a series of student protests (El Universal, 2014; NoticiasRCN, 2014),

alleging NTN24 was damaging and disrespecting Venezuelan by actively supporting the destabilisation of the country (Conatel, 2014). As with the case of CNN, NTN24 has also opened accounts dedicated to Venezuela on some of the mainstream social media networks. By 5 April, it has more than 2.37 million followers on Twitter since opening an account focusing on Venezuela (@NTN24ve) in October 2010. Its YouTube channel dedicated to Venezuela, which opened in May 2012 as *NTN24 Venezuela* has more than 143 thousand subscribers and 26 million views.

3.3.3. *NEW MILLENNIUM, NEW CHANNELS*

The start of the new millennium witnessed the increasing visibility of television broadcasting efforts stemming from countries beyond the industrialised West. Among them, China was the first one to target the Spanish-speaking world in 2004, followed by Russia in 2009 and Iran in late 2011.

CCTV/CGTN

China's need to convey its message to the world through audio-visual media and the internet increased considerably since the start of the 21st century. After opening its first foreign language channel in English in 2000, China Central Television expanded its offer first with a bilingual channel in Spanish and French in 2004 (Zhu, 2012), before dedicating a separate channel for each language in 2007 with the names CCTV-E for the Spanish version and CCTV-F in the case of French (CCTV, 2007). The following years it also began broadcasts in Arabic, Russian and Korean. In 2011 it readjusted its logo and changed from CCTV-E to CCTV Español until 31st December 2016, when it was renamed CGTN Español, following a complete rebranding of China's Central Television international broadcasting as China Global Television Network (Wang, 2016).

CCTV's rebranding as CGTN arguably follows the trend of media convergence by introducing a television network composed of six channels in five languages. With headquarters in Beijing, CGTN has production centres in Washington and Nairobi, and plans for a new centre in Europe are being considered (*ibid.*). Just like CRI, CCTV has set its Latin American regional offices Brazil, but unlike CRI, CCTV opted for São Paulo (Stenberg, 2015).

Available online and through satellite and cable in a few countries in Latin America (Díez, 2008), China's Spanish-speaking channel broadcasts an array of programmes ranging from news bulletins and documentaries to cultural magazines and cooking

shows. Besides this, one of the key elements in CCTV/CGTN's strategy to target Latin America has been the production of drama series, in order to take advantage of the popularity of the telenovela genre in the region (Silva-ferrer, 2012, p41–52).

In order to expand its online presence, former CCTV opened accounts on mainstream social networks. By 30 September 2018, it had 12.4 thousand followers on Twitter since opening its account (@cctvenespanol) in January 2013. Its YouTube channel, which opened in March 2009 as CCTV Español and where it also used to broadcast live, has more than 54 thousand subscribers and 21 million views. After the rebranding as CTGN, it opened new accounts on the major social media platforms. By 30 September 2018, it has 14 million Total Page Follows on Facebook (@cgtnenespanol) and 525 thousand followers on Twitter since opening its new account (@cgtnenespanol) in August 2016. Its new YouTube channel, which opened in 2015 as CGTN en Español and where it also broadcasts live, has more than 47 thousand subscribers and 15 million views.

In 2015 CCTV en Español included an online survey on its website. By 7 April 2017, it is still possible to participate, but only 132 people participated. Although the quality of the survey is dubious due to the numerous mistakes, it is possible to point out some key facts (CCTV, no date): When asked about how participants heard about CCTV, 22.64% said it was “by chance”, followed by “rebroadcasts by other channels” (13.21%). Most respondents (51.55%) access the channel through its website, followed by cable TV (16.77%). An 85.47% said watching CCTV-E had improved the image they had about China. When asked about CCTV-E’s presence on social media, 43.66% knew CCTV’s Facebook account, followed by 30.99% that knew its YouTube channel. The two largest groups of viewers describe themselves as “professionals (physician, lawyer, teacher)” (33.88%) and “students” (13.22%). The main problem with this survey is that it is not clear whether the respondents would classify as sinophiles or not, and to what extent their opinions would be biased positively towards China because of their previous interest in this country and its culture.

RT

Russia’s RT is a multilingual news network already broadcasting in English, Spanish and Arabic, besides an online platform in German and French. RT is available to 700 million people in more than 100 countries, according to the network’s official website (RT, no date). *RT en Español* was officially launched in December 2009, the third in a foreign language after the channels in English (2005) and in Arabic (2007). Less than

a year after its opening, it was awarded the 2010 PromaxBDA (Promotion, Marketing & Design) Latin America Awards in six categories (Promaxbda, no date).

With correspondents in Madrid, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Havana, Mexico City, Washington and Miami, RT's programming mainly consists on news bulletins, news and politics-oriented debates and documentaries. In Latin America, RT is available on free-view in Argentina, Venezuela and Ecuador, whereas in other countries such as Bolivia and Colombia, it is broadcast through state-operated satellite systems (RT, no date).

In Argentina it started to broadcast on the open digital television network in 2014 after a launching ceremony that included a videoconference between Russia's president Vladimir Putin and former Argentinian president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. After the 2015 presidential elections in Argentina, the new administration notified RT in June 2016 that it would suspend its broadcast in order to give room for domestic provincial channels (DYN, 2016; RT, 2016a). However, after discussions between RT and the Argentine government the suspension never took place. RT committed to include more news and programmes about Argentina and to increase the exchange documentary between both countries (RT, 2016c). As a result of this, on 19 September 2016 the channel was re-launched in Argentina with the projection of a documentary about the Falklands Islands conflict and arguably a documentary about Argentinian Tango would be broadcast in a cultural TV channel in Russia (Télam, 2016).

On 1 September 2016, RT started broadcasting in Mexico as it was included by the television operator *Izzi Telecom* in its international package *Hazlo internacional* (RT, 2016d). In 2016, RT en Español was awarded for the third consecutive year the International Journalism Prize for best multimedia news coverage by the Mexican Press Club, mainly due to its coverage of the war in Syria (Fierro, 2016; RT, 2016b).

In order to expand its online presence, RT has opened accounts on mainstream social networks. By 30 September 2018, it had more than 6.7 million Total Page Follows on Facebook (@ActualidadRT) and 2.92 million followers on Twitter since opening its account (@ActualidadRT) in December 2009. Its YouTube channel, which opened in December 2009 as *RT en Español* and where it also broadcasts live, has more than 1.79 million subscribers and 1,169 million views.

Besides RT, Russia's Sputnik news agency offers its services in 38 foreign languages (Sputniknews, no date) and was born in 2014 after the dissolution of RIA Novosti

(Sputniknews, 2013). At the same time Radio Sputnik replaced The Voice of Russia (Sputniknews, 2014), the successor of the legendary Radio Moscow. Both under the umbrella of *Rossiya Segodnya*¹⁷.

HispanTV

In January 2012, the Islamic Republic of Iran opened HispanTV, the Spanish language sister channel of *Press TV* (English) and *Al-Alam* (Arabic), both belonging to the state-owned broadcasting corporation IRIB (Ricco, 2012). Available in 17 countries across the Americas (HispanTv, no date a), HispanTV reportedly vows to promote the rapprochement between the peoples of Iran, Hispanic America and the Middle East, but also considering the need to create greater ties between all the peoples of Latin America (*ibid.*).

In January 2013 the Spanish government ordered that the channel needed to be taken out of air due to restrictive measures put in place by the European Union concerning individuals or entities responsible of human rights violations, such as the Iranian politician Ezzatollah Zarghami, who was in charge of IRIB, which in turn manages HispanTV and PressTV (Europa Press, 2013).

HispanTV also soon became famous in Spain due to *Fort Apache*, a debate programme hosted by the Pablo Iglesias, the Secretary General of the Party *Podemos*. The press reported how the young politician started working as a host through the production company 360 Global Media and how the Iranian government arguably had transferred a total of 2.5 million euros to *Podemos* between 2013 and 2015, separate from Iglesias' salary (Negre, 2016).

In the case of Latin America, HispanTV has had to resort to small cable TV companies to carry its signal, because most of the main cable companies “are in the hands of the North Americans”, argues HispanTV's Narges Mohamadi, from the Department of International Relations, according to a report published by the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* (Gómez Ángel, 2013). With an overt critical stance against Israel, HispanTV has been accused of antisemitism by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre (Infobae, 2015). On YouTube, HispanTV warns its viewers that “in case videos are not uploaded in 48 hours, it means the Zionist lobby has blocked the access” (HispanTV, no date b).

¹⁷ Literally “Russia Today” but separate from the TV channel.

In order to expand its online presence, HispanTV has opened accounts on mainstream social networks. By 30 September 2018, it had more than 1 million Total Page Follows on Facebook (@HispanTV) and 63 thousand followers on Twitter since opening its account (@HispanTV) in November 2010. Its YouTube channel, which opened in November 2010 as *HispanTV* and where it also broadcasts live, has more than 533 thousand subscribers and 236 million views. Alleging this account had been blocked, in November 2017 HispanTV opened a new account on YouTube (*HispanTVcanal*), which by 20 September 2018 had 25 thousand subscribers and 2.2 million views.

CCTV is not the only channel concerned about viewers. HispanTV also includes a survey on its homepage, albeit considerably shorter than CCTV's. By asking about the viewer's level of satisfaction regarding the content presented by HispanTV, the channel is interested in knowing the profile of viewers and their preferences (HispanTV, no date c). Out of a total of 14 questions, 6 regard Iranian cinema. This may suggest HispanTV is considering an emphasis on cinema in order to reach audiences.

3.4. CONCLUSION

As emerging powers choose Spanish as part of their global broadcasting strategies, it is necessary to understand the place of international news networks within the media system in Latin America. By analysing the overall media environment in the region, it is possible to have a comprehensive understanding of television consumption patterns and how international broadcasters fit in this market. With this aim in mind, this chapter briefly covered some of the main features of the media system in the region, paying special attention to the complex situations in Mexico and Argentina, as well as the developments in both countries during the last few decades.

As discussed above, one of the main challenges that the region faces in terms of media development is the concentration of ownership that undermines the plurality of voices, and at the same time creates a rather toxic symbiosis between politics and media owners. This not only deters calls for regulation, but ultimately affects professionalism among practitioners. Other serious limitations throughout the region include access to media, especially to paid-services such as cable or satellite-TV, which weaken the reach of broadcasters. This aspect is particularly important for international broadcasters that seek to reach audiences and affect perceptions.

In the second part, we saw how different countries have been targeting Latin America by radio broadcasts on shortwave since before the Second World War. Even though

most of those radio stations have interrupted their short-wave broadcasts and some have even completely closed their international services, some of the most influential ones have survived by expanding their online presence and broadcasting on-line.

In the last part, we focused our attention on international television channels that broadcast in Spanish. Among those specialised on news-content three different profiles were identified: channels from the industrialised “West”, channels from within Latin America and channels from beyond these two regions. As the focus of this research is put on the international broadcasting strategies of China, Russia and Iran, detailed information was provided about CCTV, RT and HispanTV, with special regards to their inception and operation, as well as their on-line presence in social media networks.

Other aspects of these channels will be covered more in depth in the following chapters, as this study moves on to analysing the findings of the focus groups carried out in Mexico and Argentina.

4. BUILDING TRUST

The practice of news consumption entails a tacit pact of trust between news organisations and consumers, whereby the former need to be perceived by the public as believable and trustworthy sources of information. Tsfati and Cappella define trust as “an expectation by the trustor that the trustee can be relied on and that the interaction with the trustee will increase the probability of gains, rather than losses, to the trustor” (2003: 508). A key to understanding such process is the word “perception”, i.e. appearing trustworthy is a more coveted asset than pledging to tell the truth, particularly in times of ‘post-truth’ and ‘fake news’, when the truth is often regarded as a category both elusive and illusive. Under these circumstances, news organisations struggle to enjoy the devoted loyalty of audiences who seem more sceptical than ever before.

The difficulty of measuring trust has long been a topic of debate among scholars, particularly due to the difficulty of defining and operationalising certain concepts. While earlier studies would focus on the correlation between credibility and the “prestige” of a specific source, researchers like Hovland and Weiss (1952) analysed how the passage of time allows for a disassociation of the content and the source. They observed how audiences become more accepting of content over time, even if there was an initial resistance to seemingly untrustworthy sources. As “credibility” became the focus of numerous studies on “trust” in the media, some researchers seem to have used both concepts interchangeably. However, Hellmueller and Trilling (2012) argue there is a clear distinction between both constructs:

“Whereas trust research heavily depends on media’s function in society (on a rather mezzo or macro level), credibility research relies more on interpersonal factors (i.e. source credibility on a rather micro level), on characteristics of the message source, or on characteristics of the medium through which the message is delivered” (*ibid.*: 3).

This characterisation helps illustrate how the complexity of this phenomenon requires an approach that considers multiple layers of analysis. For example, trust needs to be understood in relation to the different elements that need to be trusted: the message, the messenger or the institution. Ann Williams (2012) recognises three layers of trust in the media, i.e. trust of news information, trust of those who deliver the news and trust of media corporations. “The first is a form of media trust that applies to content; the second is a form of interpersonally based media trust of the individual actors working within the media industry; and, the third is a form of institutionally based media trust in the organizational structure of media establishments” (Williams, 2012:

126). Thus, for example, when asked about trust in the news, participants may be thinking of particular news (i.e. content) they do (not) trust, or they may be thinking of a particular news presenter, correspondent or columnist they particularly (dis)like (i.e. media workers), or they may be thinking of a particular channel (i.e. media corporation) that is owned by a powerful business (wo)man that is involved in politics. In the case of domestic media, it is expected that audiences would have less difficulties to analyse these three aspects. However, in the case of international media, it could be argued that lack of exposure would make it more difficult to identify these nuances.

Despite the theoretical complexities and the technical difficulties of this kind of research, some institutions have attempted to quantify the level of trust in the media by carrying out surveys. Even though the way this type of surveys is conducted could be subject to criticism, the results can help shed some light into understanding trust in the media across Latin America. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer 2017, trust in the media worldwide has plunged to an all-time low and in all three Latin American countries included in the study levels of trust have fallen to less than 50% (Edelman, 2017). Argentinians appear to be the most sceptical with 40% of people trusting the media (13 points less than in 2016); Colombia follows with 45% (10 points less than in 2016); Mexico stands at 47% (11 points less than 2016); Brazil shows the highest level of trust in the region with 48% (6 points less than 2016). In a region where news organisations used to enjoy considerably higher levels of trust in 2012, this is arguably a worrying trend (Layton, 2012).

Although the general development is similar throughout the region, small differences can be identified between experiences in the two countries on which this study is focused. During an opinion poll about trust in different institutions and organisations conducted between 21 and 25 January 2017 in Mexico¹⁸ (Parametría, no date), 83% of respondents reported having little or no trust in news bulletins broadcast by television, compared to 17% who said they would trust them. Entirely the opposite scenario from 2002 when 70% of the respondents reported having a lot or some trust in TV news, compared to only 24% of mistrust (Ibid). Mistrust transpired to other media such as

¹⁸ According to *Parametría*, the opinion poll was carried out, by interviewing 800 people between 21st and 25th January 2017. The company reports a level of confidence of 95%, with an error margin of (+/-) 3.5% and a rejection rate of 30%. The design, sampling, fieldwork and analysis were conducted by Parametría SA. Other details are available on the company's website: http://www.parametria.com.mx/carta_parametrica.php?cp=4946

radio and newspapers, with 81% and 79% of respondents having little or no trust in them, respectively. According to the same survey, the most trusted institution was the army (58% of trust), followed by the Catholic Church (57%). At the opposite end of the spectrum was the Presidency of the Republic (85% of mistrust) and political parties (84%).

In the case of Argentina, although earlier surveys showed higher levels of trust, the trend appears to be similar. An opinion poll conducted in 2015 by CIO Creative Investigation¹⁹ suggests that although 53% of respondents reported trusting the media in 2004 and 2015, this percentage fluctuated from an overall high of 64% in 2009 to an overall low of 40% in 2012 (Crettaz, 2015b). The phenomenon can be better analysed by breaking down the different components of the “media” category. The research shows an increase of overall trust in journalists (4%) and radio (3%), which reached 54% and 63%, respectively. The sectors with lowest trust levels in 2015 were Television and newspapers, which fell 16% and 6% respectively compared to previous years, reaching 47% and 50%. Compared to Mexico, Argentinians seem to trust more NGOs (75%), rather than the Catholic Church (58%). Trust in the president and the armed forces were each at 26% in 2015.

An online survey conducted in January 2017 by the polling company OH! PANEL suggests that radio stations are more trusted than any other media in Argentina, followed by cable/satellite TV, newspapers, journalistic websites online, free-to-view TV channels and magazines²⁰ (TotalMedios, 2017). According to the same study, among the most trusted news channels were CNN (36%), Todo Noticias (33%) and Canal 13 (32%).

As mentioned above, ‘trust’ is a slippery concept and any attempt to ‘measure’ it can prove difficult if not impossible. Therefore, it is worth considering that these studies were conducted at different times by different institutions and employing different measures and criteria. Nevertheless, these results can be understood as indicative of a trend that is not unique to Latin America. Research conducted in the USA suggests that

¹⁹ A total of 800 people from Buenos Aires and the suburbs were interviewed between 20 July and 15 August 2015.

²⁰ The survey was conducted online between 22 December 2016 and 3rd January 2017. A total of 1,150 people in Argentina took part. More information about the company is available on: <http://www.ohpanel.com/about-us>.

while overall trust in the media has been falling, attitudes vary considerably when people are asked about specific news organisations. According to a study conducted by the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research, Americans show themselves more sceptical of the media as an abstract construct, but at the same time tend to trust those organisations whose news they consume on a regular basis, even traditional and mainstream media (American Press Institute, 2017). It remains to be seen whether this feature is shared across Latin America and/or whether it may evolve in a similar way.

As these studies help identify how trust in the media is one of the key difficulties faced by news organisations, the purpose of this chapter is to explore to what extent trust issues could undermine the work of international broadcasters and their efforts to reach Latin American audiences. The first part examines the popularity of international TV channels by assessing their level of recognisability as viewed by the participants of the focus groups. By determining which international news channels are best known to audiences it is possible to identify some clues about what elements have helped them gain a certain degree approval and trust. Special attention will be paid to the three channels that constitute the focus of this study. With the aim of identifying factors that generated both trust and mistrust among the participants, the second part examines their first impressions of RT, HispanTV and CCTV. By testing a number of hypothetical scenarios, the third part explores audiences' preferences and their perception of trustworthiness associated to both domestic and international news channels. The fourth part studies how ideology helps instil or undermine the audiences' trust in news organisations. In the last part this chapter adopts a constructivist approach and asks participants to reflect and define the elements they consider as conducive to building trust with regards to a particular news organisation. By focusing on the participants' opinions, this section seeks to understand what audiences perceive as being trustworthy. Examining these issues will be helpful to understand the phenomenon that is the object of this research and at the same time explore possible answers to the research questions raised in Chapter 4, particularly RQ1 (i.e. *What sort of an audience (if any) is there in Latin America for international news channels that would justify such a strategy?*) and ultimately RQ3 (i.e. *How successful could such enterprise be in terms of soft power gains by the countries behind this strategy?*).

4.1. RECOGNISABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS CHANNELS IN LATIN AMERICA

Focus groups proved to be a suitable tool for exploring the recognisability of media organisations, because it gave the opportunity to inquire about the details behind answers, which also prompted other participants to elaborate on their opinions. With this idea in mind, at the early stages of the sessions, participants were given a piece of paper with three tasks that would help them engage in the discussion. The first task consisted in a list of the main international broadcasters of news both in Spanish and in English, which included: BBC, CNN, Telesur, NTN24, DW, TVE, CCTV, HispanTV, TV5, France24, Arirang, Euronews, Al-Jazeera, NHK, PressTV and RT. Participants were asked to point out which of these international media organisations were known to them, how they became aware of their existence and if they watched them frequently.

The BBC and CNN were the best known of the whole list, with all participants claiming to know where these broadcasters were from. Sharing the same degree of recognition was one of the regional channels: Telesur. It was known to a few participants in all sessions both in Mexico and Argentina. Although a number of them reported having watched it (or at least having heard of it), many had troubles trying to pinpoint exactly which country it was from. While many thought it was from Venezuela, others guessed it was from Argentina. As explained in Chapter 3, the channel was launched in Venezuela as a multinational project with the participation -and funding- of other Latin American countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, therefore it was expected that participants would not necessarily be aware of all these details.

The fact that most news anchors come from different countries in the region also helps create confusion among some viewers. Such was the case of a few sessions in Mexico, where participants could not agree on whether the channel was Argentinian (Ana, Alejandro, Fernanda, Fátima, Graciela) or Venezuelan (Andrés, Damián, Esteban, Gisela). Others knew that it was Latin American (Daniel, Francisca, Helena) or particularly South American (Gabriel). Some participants recognised it from social media (Hortencia, Herminia) and reported having read some articles, but had never seen the channel itself on television. Daniel reported having seen some people on his Facebook feed sharing articles from Telesur. In the case of Carlos, who had experience living in China as a foreign student, he heard about Telesur from a class about Latin America but did not know it previously to that. Carlos also reported having no knowledge about whether the channel was broadcast live in Mexico or not.

Participants in Argentina showed themselves more knowledgeable about Telesur, presumably because of it being broadcast through the Open Digital Television, as mentioned on Chapter 3. Marcos from UB, not only knew that the headquarters were located in Venezuela but could also quote the broadcaster's slogan *Nuestro norte es el Sur* (Our North is the South). Elaborating on this, he reckoned "their vision is to expand throughout the whole region". Juan from UTdT described it as being "controversial in Argentina", arguably due to the decision taken by the then newly elected Argentinian government of pulling out from the project in 2016, which was extensively covered by the press²¹. To a certain extent, the previous government (i.e. that of Cristina Kirchner) allegedly enjoyed the sympathy of Telesur, due to a tacit ideological alignment with the other governments participating in the project, in particular Venezuela²².

Compared to their knowledge of Telesur, none of the participants in Mexico knew NTN24. In Argentina, some people (particularly in three different groups) were aware of its existence, but most had troubles trying to pinpoint the exact country where the channel's headquarters were located. The only exception were two participants from the University of Belgrano:

Martín: It is from Colombia, but there are many exiles that because of [Hugo] Chavez left and work there... Furthermore, I think the manager or [maybe] the main news anchor, [I can't remember exactly] because I don't watch NTN24 often, is an exile.

Marcos: I know because my mother lived some time [in Colombia] and therefore I have some idea, but just that.

Moderator: How did you find out about the channel?

Martín: Because of the student crisis in Venezuela in 2014. TN (Todo Noticias) is the channel that I watch the most here and they would broadcast images from NTN24 and even talk to journalists that said that CONATEL that would be like the old COMFER or ABSCA here, in other words the agency in charge of regulating the media, banned the broadcast of NTN in Venezuela because it was the only channel reporting what was really happening.

Marcos: The facts as they were happening, the true facts.

The focus on Venezuelan affairs had also made Nadia from UBA think that it was a channel managed by the Venezuelan opposition. Despite having the potential of

²¹ Although seemingly a local news, even The Guardian published an article on 4 December 2016, with the headline: "Argentina pulls out of leftist TV network Telesur".

²² See the article "The Kirchner Legacy in Argentina: 12 Years of Gain" written by Isobel Finbow and published by the Telesur's English website on 19 December 2016. The style in which is written shows a clear inclination and/or sympathy for the Kirchners' governments.

becoming a competitor of Telesur, it still remains to be seen whether it can reach as many viewers and grow in recognition.

Out of all international broadcasters Deutsche Welle was one of the most recognisable to most participants. The only exception was one group where no participant had knowledge of it. While some participants had troubles recognising the acronym DW, others only realised they actually knew the channel once they were told the complete name was “Deutsche Welle”. Most of those who recognised the channel, identified it as German and had watched it on cable television.

In one particular group at the UNAM in Mexico, the participants claimed the channel was well known in Mexico saying:

Fernanda: [It is] also [known] because it is broadcast on open television (free-to-air). DW programmes, especially their reports, documentaries... and they have just opened here in Mexico like a Mexican version of DW, because there was not [such a thing], before it was only about Latin America. It has been almost a year since they opened, that is, that they make the DW news bulletin here in Mexico.

Fátima: Yes, in fact a German friend was surprised that the free-view television... we were switching channels and she said: ‘Why do they have news [from Germany]’. She was very surprised, because she was like: ‘On pay TV is okay, but I didn’t think that [they would also have it on] free-view TV’.

In Argentina, where the channel has been available on cable since the 1990s, one participant seemed to be updated about the developments in the last few years.

Martín: I used to watch it on cable when the channel was in Spanish and English. Some times it was in German, other [times] in English and other in Spanish. But a few years ago, they underwent some restructuring and they created some regional signals and the channel that I have on the cable is only in German, so no... I don’t watch it anymore.

As in the case of Deutsche Welle, most participants admitted recognising TVE only when mentioned as “Televisión Española”, which is also the name the channel uses the most during its broadcastings. Likewise, both French language television channels included in the list, TV5 and France24, were almost equally known to a considerable number of participants, many of whom would either speak or study French. Only one participant seemed to know more about TV5 being “francophone, because it has some stuff from Belgium, Switzerland, Canada and African countries, but it is indeed centralised in France”, as Martín explained. Regarding France24, many recognised the name of the channel, but only a handful recalled having watched it either on cable or the Internet, namely on YouTube.

Euronews was mainly known to people that had either spent some time in Europe or had friends or family connections living in Europe. Very few participants reported it was included in their cable subscription. Others had seen some content online.

Ignacio: (Argentinian) In my case, I have an uncle that lives there in England and I heard of it like that. He sent me a piece of news that he had seen. But I have never watched it myself.

Moderator: Anyone else knows about it?

Iván: Likewise, I have a cousin that lives in Paris and she shared some news that are of my interest and it [was] like that [that I found out about it].

With regards to international channels from East Asia, less participants were knowledgeable of their existence. Arirang was not directly recognised by any participant, although people in four groups guessed it was Korean only because it “sounded Korean”. NHK was only recognised by two people in two different groups, one in Mexico and one in Argentina. In the case of Alicia, she had attended the Liceo Mexicano Japonés, a Japanese school located in Mexico City.

From the mainstream international channels broadcasting in English, Al Jazeera was without a doubt one of the most recognised channels together with BBC, CNN and RT. With the exception of one of the sessions at UAM, participants in all groups had knowledge of its existence. While Antonio from Colmex described it as being “famous”, many participants had found out about it during courses about the Middle East. Three participants, two in Mexico (Andrés from Colmex and Gabriel from UAM) and one in Argentina (Martín from UB) associated the channel with the aftermath of 9/11 terror attacks in New York saying Al-Jazeera was the first channel to air Osama Bin Laden’s messages. Besides Martín who mentioned watching it on television, most participants that had seen it, reported watching it on the Internet.

With regards to the country where the channel is located, less than a handful of participants knew or rather guessed that the channel was from Qatar (Gabriel, Laureano, Laura), while others pointed to other Middle Eastern countries, or just that specific region in general. Nadia from UBA, did not know where the channel was from, but admitted recognising the logo:

Nadia: I know it, not because I’ve seen the broadcast itself, but because I have watched some clips from CNN or BBC that rebroadcast [material from Al-Jazeera]. Sometimes when they report about something, you can see the logo of this channel. That is how I know it.

Having provided a general overview of the degree of recognition enjoyed by some of the main international channels broadcasting in the region both in English and Spanish, in the next few paragraphs the attention will be turned to the three channels that constitute the focus of this study.

4.1.1. RT

Compared to HispanTV and CCTV-E, RT was by far the most recognised channel among participants. This does not mean that everyone knew it, however there were participants in all groups, both in Mexico and Argentina, who reported recognising it. From these people, almost everyone associated it with Russia. Furthermore, many participants like Alejandro, Esteban and Mariana, recognised it by its former name *Russia Today*, albeit having changed it to just RT arguably in order to sound less linked to Russia and, by extension, its government.

Some participants had come to know RT through recommendations or comments from other people such as teachers (Irene) and friends (Alejandro, Bruno, Herminia). Mexican participants who knew the channel reported having seen it online (Francisca, José) and particularly on YouTube, and only one person mentioned watching it on television. Other participants reported consuming RT through social media (Damián, Daniel, Ismael, Josefina). In one case in particular, the participant knew RT from social media, but had also seen RT advertisements on the streets.

Damián: At the very beginning [I heard about RT] on social media, and lately they have put some advertisements here in the city, so...

Moderator: In the city? For example, what?

Damián: The last thing I saw was on Saturday. They put a billboard on Insurgentes [Street] saying, I don't know [something like]: "The NSA captured data from 1500 US citizens" with the RT logo. That's it...

Besides this, he reckoned many of his acquaintances would easily recognise RT.

Damián: Yes, [BBC and CNN are very popular] but I would say RT as well. Yes, because from the people I know, more than 70% know RT. If I say RT, they would know the channel.

4.1.2. HISPANTV

While less popular than RT, HispanTV was known to more people than CCTV. During one of the sessions at UAM, three people recognised the channel and two even knew it was from Iran. The remaining one thought it was from Spain. Graciela found out about

HispanTV online and realised the videos were recorded in Spain. Gisela, on the other hand, reported having watched it on YouTube.

In Mexico, Braulio and Héctor said they could recognise the name but were unsure about where it was from. Braulio said he had doubts about pinpointing a specific country because of the “many references to countries in Hispanic America”. Héctor, however, reported having seen it on social media. In Argentina, Jacinta was under the impression that it was a channel from the USA catering for the Hispanic population in that country. Javier said he heard of the channel while working at an NGO in the UK but had never watched it himself.

Two Mexican participants during the session at UC in Mendoza had watched the channel. Irene reported knowing it was from Iran and a friend had told her about it, whereas Ismael said he found it on Google. Both reported watching it on YouTube. Similar to Mexico, during the focus group at UB in Buenos Aires, one of the participants (Manuel) thought it was from Spain. However, another participant instantly knew it was an Iranian channel. Martín was even aware that *Podemos'* leader Pablo Iglesias worked as host for a programme there. Besides this, Martín even recalled that Pablo Iglesias was allegedly involved in a case of funds transfers from the Iranian government to *Podemos* (as mentioned on Chapter 3). At the UBA session, Nahuel reported having watched a documentary made by HispanTV about migration.

Regarding its sister channel in English, Press-TV, only a few participants said it sounded familiar (Fabiana, Gustavo and Hortencia in Mexico, and Isabel, Leonardo and Martín in Argentina), but nobody reported knowing the channel was Iranian. Laura mentioned having a Spanish friend allegedly working for the Press-TV website but was unable to provide any more details.

4.1.3. CCTV-E

Although most participants had never heard of CCTV and some even believed it sounded European (Daniel), French (Francisca) or even British (Jacinta), there were people in five different groups who had heard of and/or watched CCTV. Most of the participants that had seen it, knew it was Chinese, but none reported having watched the Spanish version of the channel, which is the focus of this study.

In Mexico, Ana said she had seen the channel in English as it was part of the grid offered by her cable company. However, she also confessed not knowing what the acronym

stood for and could only tell it was “Asian”. Others like Andrés and Carlos knew the channel was Chinese and had even knowledge of Xinhua, the Chinese news agency.

In Argentina, Lautaro had spent some time living in Thailand and had seen CCTV in Chinese broadcast on the television. During the same session at UTdT, two other students, Laureano and Luis knew the channel and had seen it online, either in English or Chinese. It is worth mentioning that both of them had studied Chinese at some point in their lives.

Among the group in UB, Martín only recognised it by name and knew it was Chinese. Nevertheless, another session where a few participants knew the channel was at UBA. Nahuel immediately recognised it as being the “Chinese channel” and said he had watched it only online. A different case was that of Nancy who had studied Chinese and had watched the channel on television in Peru, where there were “3 or 4” CCTV channels in Chinese. Nancy also mentioned that she was of Chinese ancestry “very far back”, although her grand-mother would not speak the language.

4.2. FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND TRUST

This section examines the answers provided by the participants and the discussions generated within the groups regarding their first impressions after being shown a series of clips corresponding to different programmes broadcast by the RT, HispanTV and CCTV, as explained on Chapter 3. As trust can be fundamental to the success and the sustainability of these channels on the long term –not as commercial enterprises, but rather as soft-power expanders-, the aim is to identify factors that inspired trust or generated distrust among the participants (summarised in table 3 on page 102) and whether there were any differences between opinions in Mexico and Argentina. Although arguably first impressions may not be ideal to carry out such an analysis, they can ignite a spark of curiosity, which eventually can grow and turn occasional viewers into loyal audiences.

4.2.1. RT

The participants that chose RT as the most credible of the three channels had different reasons for their opinions. While some had a good impression of the channel, in some cases, a rather negative impression of the other channels would leave them with no option but RT. Some thought that, besides taking a side or having a clear ideology, RT would also give account of the news first and then provide some kind of opinion.

Natalia: If I had to choose one, I would choose RT, but because it was easier for me to identify and separate the news from the ideology of the presenters. Just because of that, I would choose RT.

Nancy: With regards to RT, at least you can see that they present facts, besides their opinion. So, when you watch the news, it is simpler to have the “raw” news and then access what others are saying.

In other cases, participants like José from UTdT, would not blindly believe everything RT says, and would place his trust on a case-by-case basis. However, overall RT's would be better valued than other channels, because they would provide an analysis, before trying to advance their agenda:

José: It depends, [regarding] some [news], yes [I would trust RT. For instance, the news about the native Americans, I would trust it. But there were other that no, [I would not trust]. [...] Because they showed what was happening and they were showing the reaction of the government. I mean, they were showing the facts. Besides sending a message against the USA, they were showing what had happened. In other [news], specially the interviews, I feel that RT's journalists do a commentary and then a question, that is... they were not doing an interview, they were just talking. Regarding HispanTV, I felt that when they ask a question, they are expecting a specific answer. It is like saying something like: 'What's your opinion about the disaster done by the USA?'. Obviously waiting for an answer in that line.

Javier: [In my case] I mean, I trust more RT than CNN, for instance, and [overall] I put the USA as more credible than Russia.

Regarding the way news were presented, other participants also compared RT to HispanTV on terms of usage of sources as an element that would instil trust.

Gisela: Well, I paid attention to the statistical tables presented by HispanTV, and (inaudible) sources. So, they showed data, but I don't know where it came from. Nothing. And even the presenters didn't mention it, so that was a shock to me, and that explains my mistrust. On the other hand, RT, well they always include sources. Therefore, if we compare it [with HispanTV], I trust more RT.

Related to the same aspect, other participants praised RT for being on the front line, interviewing the people involved in the stories, i.e. the direct source of arguably reliable information.

Héctor: What I thought was that ... not so much the sources, I did not pay attention to that. [But what I realised] was that the interview was at the point where the events were taking place. So, it was not an interview in which you interview someone walking and they tell you any opinion, instead they were really asking the actors (i.e. the people involved in the news). So, they were really there, and they were not behind their desks giving their opinion.

While participants showed themselves more hesitant to declare which of the three channels they found most trustworthy, they were rather vocal at pointing out what generated mistrust towards any particular channel. When RT was distrusted by some participants, it was often related to the content, and in particular to politics. In two

different sessions, one at UNAM in Mexico and the other at UB in Argentina, some participants that had previously watched the channel, expressed their concern ABOUT RT showing double standards, i.e. critical about international affairs, but less so when the news were related to Russia. Francisca from UNAM reported feeling that RT would show a certain degree of bias when reporting about domestic issues and especially about the issue in Crimea. During the time of the unrest in Ukraine and the subsequent independence referendum and annexation of Crimea by Russia, Martín from UB also reported being interested in RT “precisely to have a different point of view [about what was happening in Ukraine] and it was practically television from the Soviet Union”, Martín explained. He elaborated saying that RT’s reports were “totally against the Ukraine, they said that the people protesting on the streets in Ukraine were practically paid by the USA”. Even though Martín was critical of RT with regards to this issue, he would also condemn American channels like Fox News for being “blatant propaganda from the Republican Party”.

Cristian from Colmex thought that RT’s “style was impeccable and the presenters, too”. However, he was very hesitant with regards to the content and particularly the framing of the news:

Cristian: I do not doubt that there are problems in the USA and these are mentioned by many, from the New York Times to the Washington Post. They were very critical of the system itself, but it was a criticism that in my opinion it was rather exaggerated and tainted at the same time. Therefore, it sounded very suggestive. It would condition [your opinion] from the very start of the programme [...].

Besides being perceived as attempting to manipulate viewers, another issue raised by one of the participants was the use of generalisations. Mauricio from the focus group session at UB argued that RT and HispanTV used expressions such as “the Mexicans” or “the Israeli people” to legitimise their opinion and disguise it as part of the news. This could be understood as an attempt to conceptualise those countries as a unified front (i.e. the foe), without considering domestic politics.

Also in Argentina, Mariana thought that presenters showing themselves “too excited” would undermine the channel’s credibility. She was referring to a video clip where two female journalists are discussing about the then Republican candidate Donald Trump and his Twitter exchanges with Mexico’s president Enrique Peña Nieto. Mariana further explained her impression by saying: “if you are telling me the news, I want it to be as impartial as possible, and not happy to tell bad news about another country”. From her opinion, it could be argued that, although a report may be grounded in facts,

the attitude of the presenters can jeopardise the credibility of the whole channel. Besides this, other participants like Francisca also suggested they should sound “a little less [European] Spanish, less *gringo*²³”, in reference to speakers with non-Latin American sounding accents. This aspect, however, will be revisited in the following chapter.

4.2.2. HISPANTV

HispanTV was better received by people interested in the Middle East. Regarding news from that specific region and particularly about Saudi Arabia, some participants said they would trust HispanTV rather than any channel from the USA, “because I know that the USA cannot criticise Saudi Arabia publicly”, Luis from UTdT explained. In this case, HispanTV would be trusted to see opinions different from the Western media. Other participants expressed similar views, especially during the session at UBA in Argentina.

Nadia: [I would trust] HispanTV also (inaudible), but to see explicitly the other point of view. I mean, I would not watch it to keep informed, but rather to compare it with other media, because I did think it was very biased and that it was very evident.

Nancy: [...] Regarding HispanTV, it is more about their opinion. It is true that the way they conduct debates is conducive to see contrasting opinions and live. But with (inaudible) [regards to the] news, I think that (inaudible) [I would trust them] much less.

Pablo Iglesias’ programme made a positive impression on some of the participants like Helena whose attention was not only caught by the debate between the host and the guests, but also by the overall content of the different clips which she described as “trustworthy” or even “looking more credible [than others]”.

Besides some aspects in common with other channels as already mentioned above, some participants like Daniel from Colmex “would not question the quality of the news in terms of veracity but would indeed question the channel when trying to find out what problems China has or Muslims have”. In this sense, Daniel would trust less these channels when they are reporting domestic news rather than international affairs.

Hortencia from UAM said RT looked more trustworthy than HispanTV and CCTV, whose content “appeared very *conducted*”. In the original Spanish rendering Hortencia

²³ Colloquial word meaning “foreign” and in Mexico often used to describe USA nationals in particular.

used the word *dirigido*, which in this context can mean “conducted”, “aimed at” or even “supervised”, as if it had been purposely scripted and directed to a specific aim.

Although it will be discussed later on Chapter 6, it is worth mentioning that the presence of women wearing hijabs was considered as a factor that would undermine some viewers’ trust, particularly among female participants.

4.2.3. CCTV-E

Very few participants considered CCTV-E as trustworthy. Those who did, however, linked it to formality of the presenters. Some interesting insights in this regard came about during the focus group session at UBA, where participants had contrasting opinions about CCTV.

Natalia: Regarding the Russian [channel], I got the impression that most of the presenters would talk to each other, as though it was a conversation that we could have with any friend. None of them was looking at the camera, for instance. In fact, during the first video, the camera goes in circles, looking for the (female) presenters’ faces. But the (female) journalist is only focused on her interlocutor and on the screen to her side. The Chinese channel instilled more confidence, [especially] the last [video] where they were looking straight to the camera, (inaudible) positive. I thought that, among those three [channels, the Chinese] was the most impartial one ideologically, because they were showing news about other countries, cultural stuff too, not just political and economic, but they were also promoting tourism and culture.

Nadia: In my case, it was the contrary. That is what I did not like from the Chinese channel. I thought it was too superficial and frivolous, compared to the kind of news that we saw on the other two channels, that were dealing with politics, economy and current affairs. The fact that [the programme] *América Ahora* was about wines from Mendoza and about art, it is like... I don’t know, [maybe] it is okay. Perhaps that is the kind of content they wanted to show on their clip, but I think there are more interesting stuff to say about the Americas, than [just] a winery here in Mendoza.

Nancy: Yes, that is something characteristic of CCTV, [that is] the fact that it puts conflict aside and tends to focus on maintaining that vision of a social balance. And that is something that, for instance on the Russian TV [channel] they tend to give more opinion about the current situation. It is more charismatic. We could say CCTV’s style is rather formal, and the way they present the news tends to be very clear. Something that seemed to lack at least on HispanTV. Even though there is some richness in the content they present, they tend to give a little more priority to public opinion over those of experts, which is good. However, there should be a mix of both [aspects] in order to show many perspectives in the news and not only something biased.

Comparing it to RT and HispanTV, Nancy argued CCTV did not offer any “additional content”. While the other two channels would provide more opinion, CCTV stayed rather on the surface and does not offer any meaningful insights. In the case of social issues, Nancy thought that CCTV would only provide statistics but would forget to

mention how a particular phenomenon was affecting the general population, i.e. how seemingly cold statistics would translate in ordinary citizens' lives.

Carlos: [...] I was thinking about what the purpose of each of these [news] companies is. And at least I don't know who finances RT and HispanTV. I don't know whom they belong to. But at least I know that CCTV has a clear pro-government stance.

Carlos also had the impression that CCTV was a channel more focused to show how the Chinese people see what is happening around the world, RT and HispanTV have a strategy of wanting the audiences to identify with them and therefore their style is more "interactive".

To the eyes of many of the participants, CCTV looked "auto-referential", i.e. news was either about China or at least compiled according to Chinese sources. This was related to one of the main factors that would undermine the viewers' trust in CCTV: the link to the Chinese government. For Ignacio, the fact that CCTV appeared as being "more controlled" did not instil trust. Jimena said she would doubt more when CCTV would present Chinese statistics. Javier, on the other hand, admitted not having any proof for his assertions but said: "[...] I don't trust the China's statistics agency. Any source. I believe more an international source or in fact a journalist that I follow on Twitter, rather than the Chinese government".

Cristian: No, the one that annoyed me the most was the Chinese. Why? Because all their information quoted sources from China. [...] Maybe many don't take it into account, but when I heard that all the sources they quoted were studies inside China, the first thing that provoked in me was mistrust, [...] If they had told me, for example: 'the Chinese [news] agency, [the Mexican newspaper] *Reforma*, and *The Guardian* all agree that...', then [in that case] more or less [I would have believed them], but all the news agencies and all the information was generated inside [China].

Cristian thought that this aspect really undermined CCTV's credibility. "If they say there is an attack in China and the first thing the Chinese reporter says is: 'according to a report from X government agency', I would switch it over immediately", he explained. Similarly, Marcelo mentioned CCTV quoting "sources that were not the best known to us, nor the most trustworthy". Other participants held opposite view and did not necessarily question the quality of the news just because they used government sources. Manuel from UB thought that "probably the data was gathered in a good way and it was compiled well, so I cannot say they are lying". Curiously, no one mentioned this as being an issue regarding other channels. Some participants like Francisca thought that the fact that there were presenters from Latin America did not change her perception. In fact, "sometimes I feel that when they are too well-dressed, like in the

case of the Chinese, it generates more mistrust in me”, she explained comparing it to RT whose style was more “pleasant” and “interesting”.

Table 3: First impressions.

Trust	Mistrust
Easy to identify news from comments	Seemingly advancing an agenda
Provide analysis	Different reporting standards for international and domestic news
Debate between different actors	Appear controlled
Multiple sources	Seemingly wanting to manipulate viewers
Reporting on location	Only one 'official' source
Involved with the stories	Using generalisations
	Women wearing hijabs

Table 3 serves as a summary of the factors that seemed to be linked to the participants’ ideas of trust with regards to their first impressions of RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E. Consistent with previous research, some of these factors seem to show similarities with the 12 items identified by Gaziano and McGrath in their attempt to operationalise ‘credibility’ by verifying whether news “are fair, are unbiased, tell the whole story, are accurate, respect people’s privacy, watch out after people’s interests, are concerned about the community’s well-being, separate fact and opinion, can be trusted, are concerned about the public interest, are factual, and have well-trained reporters” (1986: 454).

4.3. NATIONAL VS. INTERNATIONAL NEWS NETWORKS

After testing the recognition of international channels and analysing the impressions of RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E among participants in Mexico and Argentina, this section seeks to explore the perception of trustworthiness associated to international news channels, compared to domestic ones. By examining a number of hypothetical scenarios, we strive to understand whether dissatisfaction and/or distrust towards domestic mainstream media can create an advantage for international news organisations to gain on viewership.

4.3.1. TRUST IN INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

When discussing issues of trust with regards to television networks from their own countries or international ones, Mexicans showed themselves comparatively more vocal in trusting international media rather than the mainstream television networks in their own country. This was a considerably wide-spread opinion among Mexican participants, who also provided an array of reasons and conditions to that assertion.

During one of the focus groups in Colmex, Bruno stated that he would “trust any international media more than any national one”. Beatriz supported that opinion explaining that she “would not trust anything” coming from Televisa. Bruno added: “Not even Milenio”, i.e. one of the main newspapers in the country who also offers television content.

Daniel, also from Colmex, explained that in his case he trusts more “the seriousness and formality of foreign media”. This position was echoed by participants in the focus group in UAM who thought that international journalists look more professional, compared to Mexican ones.

Gustavo: What I have seen in the domestic media is that, for example, when they covered the War in Iraq, Televisa and TV Azteca sent their specialists, but they did it like a show, as if it were a *reality show*. I mean, you can see the guy talking and behind him the desert. And he only describes what happened. On the meantime, I think a few of the cameramen from CNN died and they interviewed...

Gisela: They are more committed.

Gustavo: They are more committed. They are real journalists, not just like [here where editors think] “oh, there is an international story going on, send your best reporter so that everyone can see”. I mean, international news networks have reporters that have specialised in specific areas, and those are the ones to that go [abroad to cover this kind of news].

Others at UAM, would rather trust international networks because they have access to more authoritative sources. Herminia noticed that RT mentioned Human Rights Watch as one of their sources and that made her believe more what was being said. “[...] I believe that if it is international and it gives me a different vision of what is happening locally, based on opinions of another kind of sources, I would probably trust more international media”, Herminia pointed out.

A widespread opinion echoed during a few sessions and shared by many participants in Mexico was that they would rather trust international news organisations, because of the unhealthy links between the government, politicians and the television channels in Mexico. Ismael said that “there is a lot of political influence inside the TV stations

and they will say certain things and leave out other, whereas an international channel can be more critical and tell what is happening”. One of the examples mentioned by many was RT’s covering of the teacher protests and clashes with police in Oaxaca during 2016. During one of the sessions at UAM, Graciela said she would trust more RT, saying that “a Spanish reporter from RT went to interview the families and everyone that participated in the conflict in Oaxaca, and a Mexican channel wouldn’t do that”. “The channel here will say whatever the government says”, added Gustavo. Participants from one of the sessions at UNAM elaborated more how they felt about how some Mexican channels would cover such news, saying:

Fátima: Regarding the [news about Oaxaca], I mean. Here [in Mexico] I have seen some news, like she mentioned. They don’t go to the teacher [and ask]: “So, what do you think? What are your demands?”. They won’t do it. So at least someone [RT] has opened the opportunity for that person to speak and express himself. Besides, they are not in the country, so they won’t say: “Ok, I need to protect what the government tells me. I need to act according to what they are they are telling me”. No. Maybe they are a little more “free”, in quotation marks, of expressing or investigating a little beyond, projecting beyond what is allowed here. So, it would allow me to know another perspective, another angle, [...].

Fernanda: And sometimes, in those cases like tricky conflicts within the national politics, even the language used by the news anchors is terrible. For instance, in the case of TV Azteca, that I think is very rude [they would say]: “Look ma’am, now have a look at those hooligans”. And [they would show images of] the protesters walking by. Right? Very rude.

Fátima: “These delinquents” and... exactly. They label them and the (camera) shots. I mean, they are not saying: “This is happening”. No, [instead they just say:] “Let’s have a look at the hooligans throwing [stuff]”. But you are not seeing the [policemen, who are the] ones that are aiming [their guns] at them or that they are suppressing them. I mean, it is like [you need to show] that part, right?

The main idea was that in controversial cases where domestic politics could jeopardise the impartiality of reports, the international media could offer a less partisan analysis. And in some instances, reports published by the international media left no choice to the domestic media but to cover these issues as well. To a certain extent it could be argued that international media was conducive to more transparency, as in the case of the protest in Oaxaca, as Daniel recalled:

Daniel: Well, in the case of Oaxaca, I remember that... I can’t remember exactly the news, but it was in a town that someone said: “there are guns”. And the Mexican press and the government said: “No, there are no guns”. And then the international press showed (i.e. published) pictures and [provided] evidence. And then, [the press and government said] like: “No, there were always guns [as we have been saying]”. So at least in the case of Oaxaca, I would favour more the foreign press, because, we like it or not, there is in Mexico a line between what can be said and what cannot be said. Maybe it is not like that, but we do know that in Mexico if you say too much, you can end up dead. Therefore...

In Argentina, the opinions somehow echoed the idea that international media can help get more information, especially in controversial cases where the parties involved may be at odds with the government. During much of 2016 news about the imprisonment of Milagro Sala, an alleged community leader member of a grassroots organisation Tupac Amara, were frequently the focus of newspaper articles and debates on television. While she was charged with fraud, embezzlement and criminal conspiracy among other, many saw the case as politically motivated (Mouffe et al., 2016).

During one of the sessions at UTdT, Lautaro, who as Milagro Sala comes from the Northern province of Jujuy, said he had to resort to media organisations from Buenos Aires to keep informed about what was happening. He argued that the national media would have “a view from a distance”, while the local media in his province were “super biased”, either in favour or against Milagro Sala. Participants in other sessions expressed similar opinions saying they would rather trust “foreign media like the BBC”, as Martín said. Others like Nahuel, Natalia and Nicolás would also trust BBC and even RT, “because they are separate from the environment, from the political struggles in Argentina... like any other country”, Natalia explained. Nicolás argued it would be more “objective”. Others, like Natalia agreed saying: “Of course, yes, in this case it would be politically more objective”.

Laura, from one of the sessions at UTdT, recalled how it was the French media that asked the newly elected Argentinian president, Mauricio Macri, about his involvement in tax havens and the so-called Panama Papers, while “here (in Argentina) the media do not ask”. Therefore, in domestic cases like these, Laura would trust more the foreign media. Although many agreed, another of her fellow participants, Luciana, questioned the trustworthiness of the international media covering domestic issues, stating that that specific example was actually an issue of an international nature. In cases where it is really about domestic news, like natural catastrophes or the national elections, Luciana said she would naturally watch it on the domestic media, even though it would be covered by the international media as well.

During the last focus group in Mexico at UAM, a similar analysis arose from the discussion about the covering of the Oaxaca protests. The conclusion was that international channels can also be misleading sometimes, as in the case of some statistics presented by HispanTV:

Hortencia: It depends on the content that I see. Precisely, there [on the report from RT] you can see that they were interviewing in that [specific] place, right? They made it

easy for one of the actors to express himself and you could see the banners and everything that was going on. However, if in the other channels I don't see it like that, I won't give them credibility. For instance, HispanTV there was also a report about kidnapping and they put a chart [explaining the situation].

Héctor: But the source is this Wallace, Mrs. [María Isabel Miranda de] Wallace and I would not trust her. So, the polls are done by herself, by her own foundation. So, she is really the one doing things. Then, it is good that they use that data, but I would not believe her.

Moderator: Does anyone else share that opinion?

Hortencia: Besides that regardless of the person that is conducting it (the poll). Well, I do know the situation in my country, but I don't know where they got these numbers from. Therefore, it could be interesting [to know] how they see Mexico in other countries, but I don't think it is the most important. It is not necessarily reliable.

A similar discussion had taken place during the second session at Colmex, where Bernardo also recognised María Isabel Miranda de Wallace ²⁴ and condemned HispanTV for presenting it as “the absolute truth”. Bernardo proceeded to criticise some of his fellow participants as being gullible for believing what the Iranian channel had published, stating that “[...] after two days [of publishing the data about kidnapping] in Mexico, other NGOs came out to attack these figures [published] by Isabel Miranda [de] Wallace and [questioned] how truthful her data [really] was. And this was published in newspapers such as the ones you [guys] (talking to some of the participants) mentioned such as *La Jornada* or magazines such as *El Proceso* [...]”. As Bernardo's comments were not challenged by any of his peers, it was difficult to determine whether he simply appeared to be more politically-aware or he also held different political views than those of other participants.

During the session at UB in Argentina, a similar discussion about trust on international news channels led to other conclusions. While Martín suggested he would trust more an Argentinian correspondent reporting from China, because they would focus more on matters related to Argentina, than maybe a journalist from another country would deem insignificant, Mauricio argued that journalists from CCTV may be better prepared to cover international affairs. He elaborated on his argument by saying:

Mauricio: [...] I think the Chinese channel would look at it from a different angle than an Argentinian one that is not used to reporting that kind of news. The news bulletins in Argentina, for instance TN (Todo Noticias), they have 5 or 10 minutes of international news, and I am not exaggerating. And those news... are not meaningless,

²⁴ María Isabel Miranda de Wallace is a social activist that in 2010 was granted the National Human Rights Award by the Mexican Presidency, due to her work through the NGO “Alto al secuestro” (Stop Kidnapping).

but they are not really that relevant. [They present international news in a segment such as] “Round around the world in 80 seconds”, which is nonsense. [...]

María: When I mentioned that I watch international news on other channels is exactly because I see what you are talking about. There is a lack of...

Mauricio: ...of training, of interest [in international news]...

María: ...[lack] of space for international news, because they are not seen as important and therefore I would go to foreign sources. [...]

María’s opinion was that even the Chinese channel would report news about China with a local outlook; therefore, she would rather look for other sources than relying on either on CCTV or an Argentinian correspondent.

Some participants in Mexico also expressed a similar concern regarding the lack of interest on international news by the local media. Alejandro, from Colmex, said he would not trust the Mexican media reporting about international news, “because they don’t even have a section of their team that is dedicated to international issues; in other words, they actually copy reports from other [news] agencies”.

4.3.2. TRUST IN DOMESTIC NEWS ORGANISATIONS

Not all participants were so receptive of international news organisations. Some would rather trust the domestic media, due to a certain dislike for specific mainstream broadcasters such as CNN or the BBC. Jaime from UTdT said he would trust more “a more or less respected journalist” from Argentina, because he holds some “feelings against CNN”. Another participant that held animosity towards international media was Manuel, who without elaborating further simply said: “I wouldn’t believe any because I hate the BBC”.

Regarding the bombings in New York on 17 September 2016, some participants expressed some concern about trusting sources from the USA, somehow relating their arguments to conspiracy theories around the 9/11 attacks in New York. During the focus group in UBA, Natalia said she would prefer an Argentinian journalist reporting from New York.

Natalia: Initially [I would trust] the correspondent from the domestic channel, because regarding the USA, there was always the doubt that the attacks were generated by themselves, in order to justify any other action [of their side]. So maybe the US American channel would have an inherent ideology of “blaming somebody else”, while someone from another country, from outside -even though the correspondent from my country could also speak as if he were representing the interests of my country-, I think it would be a more neutral and informative dialogue [...].

Others expressed similar opinions concerning the media from specific countries such as the USA or China. Marcelo from the session at UB elaborated saying: “Because throughout history, Argentina, regarding all those issues about the USA, it has always been very controversial. Therefore, someone that thinks like us would instil more confidence”. Concerning the G20 Summit in Hangzhou (China) on 2-5 September 2016, some participants at the same session said they would trust the Argentinian correspondent, rather than a TV channel with links to the Chinese government.

Nadia: [...] the Chinese State does not instil a lot of confidence, in general. And regarding their policies, especially issues such as Human Rights and that, I would not trust a channel from the government [...]. The Argentinian correspondent would report information that will be interesting to me. I am not interested in anything that has to do with South Africa, but it would be interesting for me [to know] what the Argentinians think, or about Brazil, or maybe the USA.

Similarly, some participants in Mexico expressed their trust on Mexican journalists, because arguably they would have no vested interests that would influence their reporting. Such was the opinion of Fernanda from UNAM, who elaborated on this opinion saying probably “would not have any interest in presenting the news in a biased way, because they’re not from the country, and it doesn’t match either private nor public interests of the Mexican foreign policy”.

Other participants showed themselves more doubtful when given the choice between CCTV and a domestic television channel. During one of the focus groups at UAM in Mexico, most participants said they would trust the local media, only if they could exclude the two mainstream broadcasters: TV Azteca or Televisa. Hortencia and Héctor said they would look for other Mexican channels, while Helena and Herminia would rather use the Internet. This opinion was later echoed in Argentina by a Mexican Exchange student. Ismael said he would not trust the free-to-air broadcasters in Mexico, but rather a channel such as Excelsior TV, which is owned by the newspaper with the same name.

Similarly, concerning news stories about Mexico, a shared view among many Mexican participants was that there were trustworthy news organisations in the country, but the main television networks were not necessarily among them. Participants would first resort to newspapers or online media that they trusted before switching on international news channels. i.e. Mexican alternatives, rather than BBC or CNN. For example, Cristian from Colmex would probably choose RT or the BBC, rather than Televisa or TV Azteca. However, if the Mexican channel ForoTV was among the options, then he would most likely choose “professor [Gerardo] Esquivel from ForoTV or [the

journalist Carmen] Aristegui than BBC”. Cristian argued that they would have two advantages over the foreign media: “First, they know the situation [in Mexico] because they have lived it, because they lived in the country. And secondly, they are impartial. Well, at least I consider Gerardo Esquivel and [Carmen] Aristegui to be more impartial than others”, even the foreign media, he added later.

Table 4: Factors generating trust and mistrust in national vs. international news channels.

	National/Domestic	International
Trust	Easier access (e.g. in case of natural catastrophes) Better understanding of how international affairs can affect domestically Specific journalists	View from distance (i.e. detachment from domestic politics) Journalists appear professional, committed and specialised Access to authoritative sources
Mistrust	Ties to politicians (i.e. limits on what can or cannot be said)	News about their country of origin (i.e. RT speaking about Russia, HispanTV speaking about Iran or CCTV-E speaking about China).

Table 4 sums up some of the factors that would generate either trust or distrust towards national or domestic channels and international channels.

4.3.3. DEPENDING ON SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES

Although some participants would show a preference for either international or domestic media, most would not display any clear inclination and instead would be more flexible according to specific circumstances. In some instances, none would be appropriate. In other cases, the choices were made depending on specific media organisations, formats, journalists and countries, among other considerations.

In both countries, there were a few participants who reported no preference and stated that neither international nor domestic channels were to be trusted completely. With regards to the G20 Summit in Hangzhou, Francisca thinks that both CCTV and the Mexican channels would fall short on their reports:

Francisca: Oh, [I would trust] neither [of them]. Let’s see, if [Javier] Alatorre from TV Azteca presents [the news] or Televisa, they will say: “[The Mexican President Enrique] Peña Nieto went... and say... blah blah blah”. No, thank you. But if I watch a Chinese

news bulletin and it is [like]: “Everything was very good, there were no protests”. But, precisely I’m interested to know where they sent them to. Did they evacuate all the citizens from their houses so that the city would be empty and the G20 could take place? Televisa will not tell me that, and for sure CCTV won’t either. So, no, [I would not trust] either of them.

Luciana from UTdT in Argentina held a similar view, saying she would look for a different channel to get to know the implications of what is really happening:

Luciana: Specifically, for this example, I think I would look for other media, because the Chinese one won’t give me much information and the Argentinian one would not attach it the [same] importance that I think it has. They may say silly things, such as “[The Argentinian President Mauricio] Macri was wearing a blue tie”. That is not what the news is about. They are actually not saying anything about the G20, about the agenda, a little more about geopolitics which is what I am expecting in that kind of events.

Nadia from UBA echoed a somewhat similar opinion saying that she could not only put her trust on just one specific media organisation, and that having contrasting points of view would enrich the understanding of a specific event.

Nadia: Concerning the data, something cold and formal like the number of bombs, people injured, dead... those things, I would trust the local media, I would trust the news bulletin. But with regards to an analysis [...] of searching for culprits and else, the truth is that I would not trust either one of them. [...] I would not trust only on the correspondent of a channel from here, and neither [I would not trust] one from there. I would try to do some research and look for countries that are against. I would probably watch HispanTV, to see what kind of hypothesis they are working with. If the USA says it was Al Qaida or ISIS, whoever it is... What do those channels with an opposite ideology from that of the Americans say? What kind of hypothesis do they have?

Given the choices between international and domestic news channels, a number of participants expressed their reluctance to choose any and would rather resort to alternative media. In Mexico, Damian from Colmex said he would rather prefer independent media such as online newspapers. Carlos, who had lived in China as an exchange student and participated at another session in Colmex, expressed a similar opinion stating that “there are indeed Mexican alternatives that I would prefer to read rather than BBC or RT”.

In Argentina, some participants like Ignacia were unsure about “alternative media” but expressed a greater interest in “some public figures that have their own blogs or Facebook pages, etc., analyse current affairs and give their opinion”, like that of Atilio

Boron ²⁵, as Ignacia mentioned, or Pedro Brieger ²⁶, as suggested by her fellow participant Ingrid. This goes in line with polls conducted in Argentina, where particular journalists would be better trusted than specific TV channels. According to Gonzalo Diego Peña ²⁷, director of OH! PANEL, the public is increasingly aware of the ideological standpoint from where particular journalists report and therefore trust on these professionals is “key to validate the messages” (TotalMedios, 2017). In other words, the authority of trusted journalists seems to add credibility to their messages and by extension to the news organisations they work for.

Following certain public figures with an almost celebrity status was also mentioned by some participants in Mexico, who would not only trust them, but also whomever is somehow connected and working with them. And vice versa, if a celebrity journalist does not inspire confidence, then the people working with him will also be tainted with suspicion. Such were the remarks during one of the sessions at UNAM, were Francisca mentioned some correspondents that are “very interesting in what they do”, particularly because they were working with Carmen Aristegui²⁸ (who currently hosts her own daily news show on *CNN en Español* that only broadcasts in Mexico and the USA). One of the fellow participants, Fernanda agreed to that opinion, but added that she would not trust them if they were working with Joaquin López Dóriga from *Televisa*. Fernanda elaborated saying: “It is not the correspondent him- or herself, but rather where he belongs to institutionally. In other words, who is presenting them”. This last comment implies that there are two entities that convey trustworthiness, that of the celebrity journalists and behind them the institutions they work for.

Some participants like Estela and Estefanía from one of the sessions at UNAM, also stressed that trust would be linked to the topic of the specific report, rather than the media organisations themselves. Esteban even suggested that besides the topic also

²⁵ Available on www.atilioboron.com.ar.

²⁶ Available on www.nodal.am.

²⁷ Director of the Master's Degree in Market Research, Media and Opinion (MIMMO) and the Master's Degree in Political Analysis and Marketing at the Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales (UCES).

²⁸ Carmen Aristegui also has her own news portal available on aristeguinoicias.com.

the country where these media organisations are based would also play a role in affecting their trustworthiness.

An example of this phenomenon is how Carlos, from one of the focus groups at Colmex, theorises about his own perception of media from other countries. In his case, he would trust more an international channel reporting about the USA, but in the case of China, he would trust more a Mexican one, “but not because I feel that the Mexican ones are ‘trustworthy’, but rather because I know that the other ones are not to be trusted”, Carlos explained.

Damián made a similar comment during another session at the same institution. He linked the media diversity and infrastructure in the USA, as factors that would make it trust worthier than other countries. Damián elaborated saying that in the case of Venezuela or China, they have “state owned TV broadcasters with a very particular state-defined agenda, so in the end I think we could rather end up trusting more the Mexican one”.

In Argentina, however trust in a specific country’s news media was seen by some participants as undermined, due to connections to the government. Ignacia, who participated in the session at UC, reported trusting more the international reports made by the Argentinian news channel *Todo Noticias*, rather than the state-owned *TV Pública*. In fact, a study conducted in 2015 suggests that news organisations linked to the government seemed to lose on credibility. On an article published by the popular Argentinian newspaper *La Nación*, Cecilia Mosto²⁹, manager of the consulting agency CIO Creative Investigation, in charge of the above-mentioned research, stated:

“During this study we made a group of media not aligned with the government and another with those aligned to it. We found out that what pulls the confidence down are the latter, which have a level below 20%. When a government intervenes in a news organization, this one automatically loses on audience and trust. In the opinion of audiences, criticism and denouncing any political or power system helps revindicate the media” (Crettaz, 2015b).

Nadia from UB, regarded this phenomenon as also linked to international politics and economic ties between countries. She claimed that media broadcasting from countries near to Argentina would be less trustworthy because arguably their own country’s

²⁹ Cecilia Mosto is also the executive director of the postgraduate programme in Management of Corporate Affairs at the School of Government and Politics from Universidad Católica Argentina (UCA).

interests could exert some kind of influence on the way a specific issue is being reported. She elaborated on this by providing the following examples:

Nadia: It depends on the media organisation. Honestly, if it was from a country... for instance, if it was from Venezuela, I would not trust anything positive nor negative, because I know they have a lot of relations with Argentina. [I can't] trust in anything from Brazil, for example, because it has many interests and what happens here be of interest to them. But I don't see how... I don't know... [why] RT could be interested in A or B happening to Milagro Sala[s case], or any other topic? Even though there are relations, of energy or whatever, somehow, I see it further [detached, as if not linked].

4.4. APPARENT OBJECTIVITY VS DISTINCT IDEOLOGY

An online poll conducted in June 2017 by OH PANEL about the role of journalism shows that Argentinians are almost evenly split between those who think news should only include facts (49%) and those who prefer journalists to provide their opinion as well (48%) (OhPanel, 2017). When asked about whether journalists should make their political views clear or not, opinions were also divided: 48% of respondents would be against it, while 41% would be in favour. As ideology and politics are the driving forces behind the soft-power ambitions of channels of the likes of RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E, it is worthwhile exploring whether making those ideological positions clear helps instil or undermine the audiences' trust in news organisations.

4.4.1. OBJECTIVITY IS IDEAL

Among participants who preferred news organisations to be objective, some were vocal at displaying their dislike for being intellectually undermined by broadcasters. Jacinta from one of the sessions at UTdT expressed her aversion for news organisations that are constantly "treating the viewer like an idiot, trying to explain or instruct [them] ideologically about something, [but] coarsely, without any shades, without any kind of nuances, without any kind of reflexion or something like that".

Some participants suggested that, in order to achieve objectivity, news organisations should provide multiple sources and/or contrasting accounts of what is being reported. Leonardo and Luciana from one of the sessions at UTdT referred to this as being able to listen to the "two bells". If this was not possible, then broadcasters should be open about the perspective from which they are analysing a specific event, rather than "disguising their ideology", as María from UB explained. During the same session, Marcos argued that ideally broadcasters should remain objective by including discussions and allowing viewers to make their own conclusions.

If the aim is to explore the worldview of a specific country, some participants like Carlos from Colmex preferred broadcasters to be open about their ideology and “take off their masks”. However, if the goal is to keep informed, then impartiality is expected. “That is something different; in that case I would prefer them to be much more serious (i.e. objective)”, he explained. People in other groups expressed similar opinions, but from a slightly different perspective. During the focus group at UBA, Nadia agreed that objectivity was to be preferred if the goal was just to keep informed at a superficial level. If the intension was to enable further analysis at a deeper level, then different ideologies ought to be included, which would be conducive to discussion. She elaborated on the idea saying:

Nancy: Personally, with regards to objectivity, I think that one always looks at it as the aim, but in the end the presenters will give their opinion. So the way in which they (i.e. the presenters) talk about it will affect a lot the manner in which the rest (i.e. the audience) will perceive it. For example, [...] on channels like CNN or Fox News is very simple to see how they are presenting the news. [...] Therefore, they should strive for a real objectivity, give you the news [in a way] that you can sense it and do your own analysis. Then if they want to give you their opinions, then it would even be good if they could bring [on board] two contrasting opinions in order to see what is on the other side of the news.

As well Nancy, participants in Mexico also regarded objectivity as being hard to achieve. Cristian, a participant from Colmex, suggested that is even the case for the most careful news organisations such as the BBC, which despite being regarded as “one of the most impartial ones, has a clear biased towards the centre-left, so it is impossible of being [objective]”. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, appearing objective and “not recognising [bias] at least seems to observe the formalities of what journalism should be”, Bernardo from another group at Colmex explained. Showing traits of ideological bias may jeopardise the credibility of a specific broadcaster, Josefina from UTdT hinted by saying: “If you are looking for a piece of information or you are looking for something precisely more objective, then probably not; you would prefer that it is precisely objective, so that you can believe in that piece of information”.

4.4.2. ONLY NEWS IS BORING

German: It is difficult [to be objective], that is impossible. I am going to tell you one thing: a news bulletin that only presents news is boring. As simple as that.

A common opinion held throughout the sessions both in Mexico and Argentina was that objectivity belonged to an ideal scenario. However, many participants agreed that it was inevitable to have an ideology and therefore it was somehow preferable for

broadcasters to be open about it. For Francisca and Fernanda, objectivity is an illusion and context is crucial to understanding the news.

Francisca: I think I prefer to know what they think. It would be more interesting than just show you a façade corresponding to the channel, because they are trying to protect certain interests, ideas or ideologies. I prefer that they tell me what they think when they criticise the USA, Europe or whoever it is. Am I clear? I think it is a more interesting way, somehow more integral.

Fernanda: Me too, I mean... things that they won't tell you during the programme [, like]: "Hi, we are a public TV broadcaster from China and we are controlled by the government". [...] To watch the news in context, because any news bulletin can claim to be objective and that it is the truth. But no one is objective. [...]

In Mexico, Esteban from UNAM thought that using hard facts can be misleading and make viewers believe it is "objective". Therefore, for example, many people think that news organisations from the USA are objective because they use a lot of hard data. However, in his opinion, ideology cannot be separated from the mass media. In Argentina, Juan from UTdT even suggested that if broadcasters tried to conceal their stance on issues behind a cloak of objectivity, viewers risked being gullible and believing it as the absolute truth. During the same session, Javier disclosed his strategy for detecting ideologies: analysing sources.

Javier: I think it is also an issue of sources. If the Chinese [channel] quotes the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, then I will probably not trust it. If, and I think the Russian [channel] quotes Human Rights Watch or they interview Max Keiser, whom at some point I saw as someone with a certain reputation, that is a very particular character [...] that more or less, beside his bias, he is respected. Then I would trust a little more, because of the [choice of] sources. Let's put it that way.

A widespread opinion during the discussions was that openness about an ideological stance helps the audiences understand the framing of what is being said and then the viewer can make a conscious decision to either continue watching or switch over and look for another channel (Cristian, Estela, Esteban, Enrique, Fernanda and Francisca in Mexico; Laura, Luis, Lautaro, Juliana, Manuel, María, Mauricio, Natalia and Nahuel in Argentina). Consequently, many participants prefer broadcasters to "take off their masks", so that no guessing is needed. "It takes away the effort of doing it yourself", Mariana said referring to the burdensome task of reading between the lines.

By combining and comparing the different opinions given by different media, it is possible to "shape your own opinion", Mauricio explained. On the other hand, Natalia would prefer that they give the news on a rather objective way and then offer an analysis using their own ideology, so that "when one listens to the discourse broadcast

by the [news] medium, one can differentiate between the fact, the event, the news and then the point of view of the channel and how the channel processes the news”.

During one of the sessions at Colmex, Bruno considered Telesur trustworthy, precisely because, it was very clear about its ideology and would be open to “strike up a dialogue” among sources with different opinions. Unlike Telesur, in his opinion other channels from countries like the USA or China, would still broadcast news framed by their own specific ideologies. “They would not initiate a discussion, but rather would just give (i.e. broadcast) what they want to inform”, Bruno explained. Some participants in Argentina also held the view and valued channels that are open about their ideology.

Laura: What I value in this kind of channels is precisely that, that they don’t disguise themselves, they don’t stand and say: ‘we are objectivity and we come with the flag of truth’. But rather, [they say]: ‘we are this, support us if you like us, if not you can switch over [and watch another channel]’.

Cristian from Colmex thought that being open about their ideology is the best policy. He took the example of Fox News alleging it is fairly open about its stance on issues. He reckoned it was up to the audiences to decide whether they want to consume the product or keep the TV off. Daniel, from another group at the same university, thought that it was helpful to read between the lines and then decide whom to trust. In his opinion, “knowing from the start that it is biased” helped him be aware that this is one side of the story, one that others “would not tell”. This was the case especially for HispanTV and RT, which go in line with his own convictions of questioning the news. However, he had the impression the presence of the Chinese government was much felt in the case of CCTV-E:

Daniel: [...] when it is a version closer to the State, I do think that there is more censorship [...], that the confrontation is less evident, and there I feel a certain mistrust... because I would not believe what they say, whereas I would [believe in] the other. Even though what they (i.e. HispanTV) present [as news] will be more [ideologically] charged, I can trust in their data. In the case of RT, maybe I have less doubts because I like to question [the news], I believe in their data, which [goes in line] a little with what HispanTV showed us now, [i.e.] that we can be ideological and we can question [the news], but at least we are going to present our version [of the truth] and we are going to support it, while the Chinese one, they basically did the same, but being from the State [i.e. government], I [would trust less]...

The idea that the “truth” can be re-constructed by analysing different perspectives was a view shared by other participants. In the case of Gisela, from UAM, comparing contrasting narratives was her way of getting a clearer picture of any given event:

Gisela: [...] I always compare CNN with RT and Telesur with RCN from Colombia, for example. There you realise that the news about Venezuela, they showed them better in Colombia. Sometimes, depending on the bad, the negative [side], and the good (i.e.

positive side) they would present it here. So, there you have a more complete news, let's put it that way. So, for example, [by watching] RT and CNN you can add what is missing.

Table 5: Apparent objectivity vs. Distinct Ideology

	Pros	Cons
Apparent objectivity	Impartiality (i.e. observing formalities of what journalism should be) Naked news (i.e. only facts)	Intellectually undermined by broadcasters Misleading (i.e. using a façade to disguise their ideology)
Distinct Ideology	Extra layer of analysis Editorially honest (i.e. no need to second guess or read between the lines) Conducive to discussion	May jeopardise the credibility of the broadcaster Risk of having only one side of the story

4.5. TRUST IS EARNED

With the aim of further exploring the topic of trust –particularly with regards to international news channels-, participants in all sessions were encouraged to reflect upon this issue and provide more details about changes broadcasters would need to put in place in order to gain their trust. The rationale behind this constructive approach was that it would help identify some of the operating standards that viewers expect news organisations to comply with. At this stage, participants were encouraged to take a step back, analyse their previous experiences and try to verbalise what their expectations vis-à-vis a news channel were. Following the guidelines of this activity, Mauricio and Alicia argued that it was vital that news bulletins would not just state sources clearly, but also do it in a balanced manner. This does not only mean that sources should give accounts from different perspectives, but also the news organisation should put the sources to the test and question them, as suggested by Damián from one of the focus groups at Colmex in Mexico. During the same session, Daniel explained in detail how he thinks broadcasters should proceed in this regard:

Daniel: I think that the comparison between sources [is important]. In other words, I think that in the case of the USA, where there are many newspapers and press in general, where some have a vision from [a specific] ideology and they present the news. Others contrast it with other data and so emerges a debate that allows to have some clarity. At least in the case of Mexico, I think that the sources should be questioned and contested. [For instance], when someone publishes an article and then the civil society

like IMCO (Institute Mexicano para la Competitividad³⁰) and CIDAC (Centro de Investigación para el Desarrollo³¹) question it on a different platform or [even] on the same platform and contest it. That is when I believe it. But if you only have one voice or something very pro-government [...], or that is has an official vision like it happened with Televisa at the start of this [presidential] six-year term. That is when you doubt or lack credibility.

Besides questioning sources, Estefanía from UNAM stressed the need to include contrasting data from a variety of news agencies, i.e. it is not enough to present a plurality of sources if they only present one side of the story. According to Manuel from the focus group at UB, this can only be achieved by presenting contrasting accounts from different perspectives, i.e. the news organisations need to “show that there are people who think differently, because if I only show you that I think, it is like putting you inside a plastic container”. It is also important that they have some continuity with regards to their position and “avoid being too contradictory”, as María added during the same session. Fellow participants like Mariana also echoed her opinion.

Estefanía also explained that giving both sides of the story is compatible with keeping an editorial position, i.e. they can be both critical by defending their own opinion but presenting conflicting opinions at the same time. She cited the case of Pablo Iglesias’ programme on his pan TV explaining that the guests usually hold opposite views about a certain issue, which helps the viewer make his or her opinion and take the side that is better aligned to his or her convictions. In her opinion, RT should do something similar.

Estefanía: [...] I don’t think that this would prevent the programme from having an editorial line. That is, RT can continue having its editorial line, but when it speaks about the USA, [they need] to invite someone that is very critical and someone that maybe is not that critical. To me, that would generate interest, because I’d say that I can take something from it, not only reinforce the prejudices that I may have about a certain topic, because when you watch RT you know in advance what it is going to say about a topic or what it won’t say. [...] Personally, that would help me a lot.

Graciela from one of the focus group at UAM reported having watched both RT and HispanTV previous to the focus group. Being aware of the ideology of these channels, she liked the fact that they invite people to defend their position. “For example, when they present a report on HispanTV, they invite two [people]... always: one of the

³⁰ Mexican Institute for Competitivity.

³¹ Centre of Research for Development.

ideology [of the channel] and [someone] of the opposite [ideology]. The same on RT, that is... I think that is very good [...]", Graciela explained.

Some Mexican participants questioned that opinion arguing that some Mexican television channels also do that. Estela from one of the sessions at UNAM argued that Televisa and TV Azteca also include panels with different sources and points of view and that does not render these channels more believable. Instead, she thinks that trust is something more sophisticated that could be rather connected to specific journalists and their careers, rather than a whole channel. "I doubt that nowadays many people would 'marry' just one channel, or the programming of just one channel and the journalists of just one channel, as they did before", Estela explained.

Other participants thought that the way the programmes were produced and presented also play a role in instilling trust. Bernardo from the second session at Colmex, thinks that the visuals are very important, i.e. "[...] a program that is well produced, that you can tell there is an infrastructure behind it, that the stage is adequate, the lights, that [the presenters] look well dressed". He prefers that the programmes are more formal and serious, and that go beyond any "stated [ideological] position". Likewise, Antonio from the first focus group at Colmex, believed using language charged with ideological connotations, rather than inspiring trust, would prompt him to switch over to another channel.

Antonio: To me, the language, that is the vocabulary used by the presenter. If he starts to talk like the one from RT, whom I had already heard before. So when he talks about the OECD³² as the neo-colonial people in the world, I say thank you [that is all I needed to hear. Now I will switch over to another channel].

In this respect, other participants also stressed the importance that any programme needs to start by providing information as objectively as possible, before analysing it through their own ideological persuasion. Ana from Colmex stressed that the news need to be "[...] more evidence than opinion, i.e. if [the news anchor] is reading the news, [he or she] needs to tell me what happened and not so much start to give an opinion". Contrarily to this opinion, other participants like Gustavo believed that it would instil confidence if broadcasters would be true to themselves making clear what their ideology is and inviting guests that defend their ideals. Regardless of their

³² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

ideology, some participants like Bruno deems important that broadcasters are authentic and original, avoiding appearing copying others.

Bruno: It inspires me trust [to know] that they are authentic. That is, [they should] not seem to be repeating something they were told to say but seem that they reasoned [fully] what they have to say, not that it is like a script that (unclear audio). That's what gives me confidence.

Table 6: Trust checklist

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Provide news in 2 steps:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Provide information as objectively as possible,○ Provide an analysis presenting contrasting data.✓ State sources clearly.✓ Balance sources by giving accounts from different and opposing perspectives.✓ Put sources to the test and question them.✓ Show own style, i.e. authentic and original, avoid appearing to copy others.✓ Avoid using language charged with ideological connotations (i.e. revolutionary tone, etc).✓ Ensure formality and high quality in all stages of production, from content to visual presentation. |
|---|

4.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter is based on the assumption that audiences consume news information they can trust (Tsfati and Cappella, 2003), and as such it aims at exploring how issues of trust could influence the cognitive process, by which audiences conscious or unconsciously decide to watch a specific news channel. We started doing this, by examining the level of recognition of different international news channels, most of which can be easily accessed by audiences in Mexico and Argentina. It soon became clear that traditional players such as the BBC, CNN and DW are by far the most recognised channels, whereas among the regional channels Telesur seems to enjoy a certain degree of popularity. However, from the three channels that constitute the focus of attention for this study, RT appears to be the most easily recognisable, despite opening in 2009, several years after CCTV started broadcasting in Spanish, first as a bilingual Spanish-French channel (2004) and later as an only Spanish one (2007). As reported by the participants, distribution through cable, satellite and digital networks, together with a strong online presence, particularly through social media, have helped RT become easily accessible to audiences in Latin America. In this respect, HispanTV and CCTV-E seem to be lagging behind. Although it could be argued that exposure enhances the chances of a channel to be trusted, this could not be taken for granted, e.g.

the participants' views with regards to Telesur seems suggest that exposure does not guarantee trustworthiness. In this case, exposure only allowed viewers to have an informed opinion. While some of them trusted it, others did not.

Regarding first impressions, RT's apparent informality proved more appealing to most participants, who reportedly would be more inclined to trust it, rather than HispanTV or CCTV. Furthermore, RT was also seen as more dynamic and involved with the news, whereas CCTV was perceived as only providing information largely according to Chinese sources without offering any additional analysis. Even though CCTV's formality was praised by some participants, others saw this aspect linked to a control by the government, and therefore less trustworthy. This pattern coincides to a certain extent with previous research that shows "a negative association between (state) ownership of TV and trust in nondemocratic societies, and a positive association for countries with high level of democracy" (Tsfati and Ariely, 2014: 776). Even though Mexico or Argentina could not be classified as authoritarian regimes, both countries rank among "flawed democracies", according to the latest figures for the Democracy Index compiled yearly by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU, 2017). Thus, links to governments were perceived as detrimental and undermining credibility not only in the case of the domestic media, but also some international channels. Given the choice between international or domestic news organisations, participants showed themselves relatively sceptical and would not trust any particular channel. Instead, they would consult a variety of different sources, especially alternative media from their own countries. This aspect also seems to agree with previous research, according to which people who are sceptical towards the mainstream media tend to consume more alternative media (Tsfati and Cappella, 2003). Thus, it could be argued that the process by which the participants assessed the credibility of international media was not so different from local media. To a certain extent, audiences seemed to have a similar set of requirements. Whereas objectivity was seen as an ideal to aspire to, there was a common understanding of the difficulties to achieve it. Thus, a large number of participants welcomed channels that besides reading news would also provide an analysis from their own ideological perspective. Moreover, participants reported they would rather trust channels that would not only balance out sources by including multiple and opposing views, but also question those sources. Being open about their ideology, as well as authenticity and originality were also listed as the main features that would instil credibility and trustworthiness.

The discussion around trust contributed to understanding how audiences make sense of news and their expectations vis-à-vis both international and local media. Participants seemed to assess international media by their experience with local media, which often involved a general sense of dissatisfaction. Concerning our research questions, this chapter has shown that the perceived presence of governments behind news organisations can prove detrimental to soft power gains. The audiences that took part on the focus groups in Mexico and Argentina showed a certain degree of interest in international broadcasters, but would hardly trust any news organisation, either domestic or international, that appears to have links to governments. No matter how trustworthy a channel may seem, the target audiences do not appear to be so easily persuaded and would rather consult different sources before making their own judgement. Political developments and the subsequent effect on the media systems in both countries have been conducive for audiences to become more susceptible to being ideologically manipulated by news organisations. In this respect, individual journalists are often perceived as assets that can help increase the audience's trust in a particular news channel.

Being perceived as credible and trustworthy is only one of the ingredients in the recipe that can help international channels become more accepted by audiences and in the long-term assist in creating and consolidating soft power. In the next chapters, other aspects such as format and content will be examined considering cultural proximity as one of the key factors that could boost or undermine any chance of success, especially for news organisations broadcasting from countries culturally distant as China, Russia and Iran.

5. ADAPTING TO LOCAL TASTES

Having discussed the issue of trust, and how this can help or hinder international broadcasters, we now turn to the role played by culture and how cultural differences might jeopardise a country's global media efforts if these are not properly addressed. In *Chapter 1*, cultural proximity was mentioned as a factor that needed to be considered seriously, particularly to analyse the obstacles faced by international broadcasters. On one hand, proponents of this theory argue that viewers are inclined to prefer media products created within their own cultural sphere, rather than imports from places culturally distant. On the other hand, this attachment to the local culture seems to differ in intensity between sectors of the society. Joseph Straubhaar argued popular classes show a greater loyalty towards national and local cultures (Straubhaar, 1991), which would suggest that other sectors arguably with more opportunities of travelling abroad such as elites would be less constrained by this factor and more open to foreign influences.

Our findings suggest that cultural proximity is indeed a factor that needs to be considered at different levels, as cultural differences can undermine the perception of international channels. This chapter consequently looks into RQ2, i.e. what sort of a role (if any) does cultural proximity play in the viewers' decision when choosing an international news channel? This question will be explored from the point of view of the "form", i.e. how things are presented. In the relation between "content" and "container", this chapter seeks to understand the importance of the latter. The focus will be on how things appear to be, rather than what they are, i.e. how audiences perceive RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E from the "packaging", rather than analysing their messages. Analysing the content exceeds the scope of this study and would entail a different research approach and design altogether.

As cultural systems arguably help shape the way people interact and communicate with each other, in the discipline of media studies the cultural aspect also permeates to the way television programmes are designed, from the use of the language and the visual aspect, to the format itself. Having this idea in mind, it is possible to infer that international news channels to a certain extent can be regarded as transcultural media. Particularly when taking into consideration the cultural distance between countries like Russia, China or Iran and Latin American countries like Mexico and Argentina, a mere translation of the news bulletin is not enough; international broadcasters need

to learn how to navigate different cultural systems and understand how their messages will be perceived and interpreted by viewers overseas.

This chapter will explore this issue by analysing the participants' perception of language and style, and how these ultimately influence the perception of professionalism. The first part examines how language and its use by presenters was viewed by the participants. The second part looks at style, particularly from an audio-visual perspective. The third part studies the opinions of participants with regards to professionalism, i.e. whether they sensed these channels were working in a way that fulfilled the duties of journalism according to their own impressions.

5.1. CULTURAL PROXIMITY AND LANGUAGE

Since the Spanish Crown started its colonisation of large territories in the “New World” at the end of the XV Century, the language they brought with them soon became the mother tongue of their offspring and that of many native inhabitants, either by coercion or adaptation to the new power (and economic) structure of the Spanish empire. Throughout five centuries, the Spanish language has been evolving in different ways on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. When dealing with a language spoken by 572 million people (477 million native speakers) (Instituto Cervantes, 2017), it is only natural that concerns about the unity of the language arise. However, there has been a sense of need to maintain the unity of the language, i.e. conserving the mutual intelligibility among speakers. One clear example is the creation language academies, among which arguably the most renowned is the *Real Academia Española de la lengua* (RAE or Spanish Royal Academy of the language), an institution in charge of overseeing the Spanish language since 1713. Together with national academies in many countries throughout Latin America, RAE is part of the *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española* (ASALE or Association of Spanish Language Academies). These academies have been cooperating for more than 50 years and from 2014 have been engaged in publishing as co-authors one of the most respected dictionaries of the Spanish language: the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (ASALE, no date; RAE, no date).

Now, why is this important for international broadcasters? Besides trying to define cultural proximity and its effect, in Chapter 2 we quickly addressed the issue of language and how subgroups coexist within a particular language sphere. In the case of the Spanish language, it is possible to identify two main subgroups, i.e. the European and the American varieties. Within these two subgroups, it is possible to identify other

subgroups such as regional accents and/or dialects on both sides of the Atlantic, which in turn are composed of smaller subgroups, etc. By looking at this phenomenon of gradual differentiation and divergence, it could be argued that the idea of cultural proximity can also be applied to subgroups within one culture sphere, albeit in a more nuanced way. Following this hypothesis, the choice of a particular variety of Spanish by broadcasters could be key to the acceptance or rejection by the viewers of not only particular TV programmes but also an entire channel.

5.1.1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS VARIETIES OF SPANISH

Despite a few dissenting voices, participants were more inclined to prefer presenters speaking their own variety of Spanish, possibly due to the reassurance that the message was understood in full, arguably both at a denotative and connotative levels. During a few sessions, a certain degree of anxiety could be sensed among some participants when the message was delivered in an accent they would not necessarily be familiar with. This section discusses the participants' opinions towards different varieties of Spanish as seen on the video clips shown to them as part of the focus group sessions.

European Spanish

A few participants in both countries expressed some degree of dislike for the European Spanish accent, i.e. the variety of Spanish spoken in the Iberian Peninsula. In some cases, participants only mentioned that the Spanish accent bothered them, without explaining further. Laureano from UTdT would even switch over to another channel, especially in the case of dubbing. In Mexico, Gisela from UAM also expressed a similar opinion.

During one of the focus groups in UNAM, Fabiana mentioned that the Spanish accent often reminds Mexicans of the historical events such as the Conquista and the colonisation of the territory by the Spanish crown. Fabiana suggested Mexicans are more sensitive to this aspect, and therefore it would be accepted differently if the presenter was speaking with a Latin American accent. Gisela and Gabriel later echoed this opinion at UAM. Somehow related to this issue, in Argentina Natalia from UBA noticed that "the three channels would talk about news from Hispanic America, but all had a [European] Spanish accent". She reckoned that it was almost a contradiction that news reports that were related to and directed to Latin America were communicated with a European accent.

There were other participants who did not like the accent as well, but were more interested in the content, i.e. what they had to communicate, instead of how they communicated it. Graciela from UAM said she liked the content and had the impression that the presenters were professional; therefore, she was not bothered by the accent, despite not liking it. Others like Nadia felt bothered by the Spanish accent, especially when spoken by “foreigners” (i.e. not native speakers). It would not be an issue if the channels were only directed at Spanish viewers. If the aim is Latin America, however, Nadia thought they would not be well received by Latin American viewers. Therefore, she thought the best would be to use a “neutral accent” as used in cartoons and movies.

Regarding non-native speakers and in particular the Chinese presenters, Fabiana felt “uncomfortable to listen to them speaking with a Spanish accent”. One of her fellow participants, Fernanda, elaborated saying it was not really “uncomfortable” but rather “unsettling” or “confusing” that a “person with slanted [sic] eyes would speak Spanish to me”. She also blamed her own prejudices for that.

Latin American Spanish

While some people did not necessarily express any dislike for the European accent, many participants in both countries showed a preference for presenters with Latin American accents. Antonio from Colmex said he liked the two female presenters from RT³³ because they did not speak with a Spanish accent. Likewise, Herminia from UAM said the reason she would watch DW was because the presenters speak like Latin Americans. Esteban from UNAM reflected on what these channels intensions were and concluded:

Esteban: If the issue is the expansion [of these channels around the region], then I think it would be in their interest [to choose] the Latin American [accent]. Even, for instance, I think that often when people look for dubbed movies, they look for *español latino* (i.e. Latin American Spanish), because of the expressions [used] are not necessarily the same.

The idea that speakers of European Spanish would use set-phrases (i.e. idioms or idiomatic expressions) and regionalisms (i.e. expressions used within a particular region) was a common perception, especially among participants in Mexico. Antonio from Colmex and Estela from UNAM felt programmes dubbed in Spain to a certain extent were difficult to understand. Antonio and fellow participant Andrés agreed that it was easier for them to pay attention to someone speaking with a Latin American

³³ Victoria Aramburu (Argentinian) and Inna Afiguénova (Russian).

accent, rather than a European one. Antonio even stressed: “When there is [European] Spanish, I don’t listen”.

Despite the vast geography of the continent, the shared historical process in the region has helped shape Latin American varieties of Spanish following similar patterns. This led a few participants to describe Latin American accents as being closer to home. Mauricio from UB felt the Latin American accents give a sense of proximity. During the session at UBA, the Peruvian participant Nancy noticed HispanTV was easier to understand because, in her opinion, they had more Latin American presenters than the other two. Fellow participant Nadia agreed and explained that having people from the region would make her feel closer, i.e. easier than understanding an Iberian accent. In Mexico, Baltazar argued that “the expressions used by Latin Americans are more understandable (i.e. easier to understand) than [European] Spanish ones, due to a cultural proximity”.

When participants agreed that a Latin American accent was preferable than a European one, Mexicans seemed to be referring to their own accent, especially if the news were about their own countries, as Daniel from Colmex pointed out. In less than a handful of cases some participants in Mexico suggested a different accent such as the Colombian (arguably due to their exposure to Colombian telenovelas). An interesting case was that of Cristian, who associated the Argentinian accent to left-wing political movements in South America and therefore it was appealing to him, due to his own political convictions. Nevertheless, it seemed to be an isolated case.

In comparison to Mexico, Argentinians appeared to be more used to the fact that international programming would use a different accent. Liliana and Leticia agreed that they would prefer an Argentinian accent, but it would not bother them if it was a different one. Leticia explained further: “I think I’m used to the fact that they are not [in Argentinian Spanish]. No programme, not even the Children’s [programmes], nothing is spoken in Argentinian [Spanish]”.

Regarding the issue whether participants would show a preference or dislike for Latin American accents other than their own, most participants were not as vocal as in the case of expressing their dislike for the European accent. In Argentina, most participants did not show any particular dislike concerning other Latin American accents, with the exception of Leonardo from UTdT who expressed his aversion for the Chilean accent. In Mexico, however, a few participants agreed that the Argentinian accent was less liked than other accents. Fabiana from UNAM explained: “There is not that much

sympathy [for Argentinians]. If it was a Peruvian, or Ecuadorian, someone from the centre, maybe [it would be better received]”. Fellow participant Fernanda agreed saying she had the same impression, but acknowledged it was “just an impression”. Nevertheless, during one of the focus groups at UAM, all participants agreed the Argentinian accent was not of their liking. Besides this, one of the participants explained that Mexicans tend to prefer their own accent and probably it had to do with their experiences with telenovelas:

Gustavo: I come from a traditional family. When my grandparents or my uncles watch television –and I don’t have anything against South Americans or other accents-, but sometimes they don’t understand them (i.e. South American accents) and then [say]: ‘they speak too quickly, switch it over’. [...] They don’t understand. They think it is too fast, even [people] from other States [in Mexico] that speak [as quickly] as that. That is why, with regards to South American telenovelas, compared to the Mexican culture, our mothers and aunts used to watch them (i.e. telenovelas in general), but right now a lot of them are Colombian, so they are not interested, because they have an accent that is not their own. They use words that they don’t know. [...]

Gustavo’s opinion provides an interesting insight into how cultural proximity may have also played a role in the decision to remake telenovelas which were originally produced in other Spanish speaking countries. An example is the Colombian telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, which besides becoming an international hit with its multiple productions in countries such as the USA, Russia, China, India and other, it was remade by Televisa in Mexico as *La fea más bella* and even by Telecinco in Spain as *Yo soy Bea* (Mikos and Perrotta, 2012; Murillo Sandoval and Escala Rabadán, 2013).

“Neutral” accent

The term *español neutro* or *neutral Spanish* commonly refers to the attempt of delivering messages in a way that is easily understood by any Spanish speaker (Guevara, 2013). This includes not only the necessity of stripping the language of any element (mostly words) that could cause confusion among listeners, but also of finding common ground between different varieties of Spanish. Consequently, the result is difficult to pinpoint to any specific geographic location. Although some participants valued the idea of a shared language based on common elements, many expressed an open aversion to this hybrid accent. In fact, from the very few participants who showed a clear preference for European Spanish, one of the reasons for this was the dislike for the neutral accent used by presenters on US American networks like Univision. Braulio from Colmex described this kind of TV stations as being “sensationalist”³⁴ and

³⁴ Word commonly used to describe the tabloids or the “gutter” press.

explained that any time he would hear a presenter speaking with this seemingly Latin American accent, he would automatically –and to a certain extent unconsciously- doubt its credibility.

Other participants were also categorical in their rejection of the “neutral” accent, which many described as the “Miami accent”. Cristian from Colmex was very vocal at explaining the reasons behind his open aversion for this specific accent, which he recognised as being used by *CNN en Español* and *Telemundo*. Arguably devoid of any elements that could be traced to particular regional accents, this neutral accent is an attempt to bring together all the features common to most accents throughout the Spanish speaking countries in Latin America. Cristian’s antipathy for this accent is partly due to its association to the United States of America and its “condescending way” of “transmitting an ideology” by disguising it in a Spanish that is not the same spoken by populations in Latin America, i.e. “it is a Spanish a little different; you can tell that it is not the Spanish of someone that you trust”. He saw it as an “artificial” Spanish associated with “a vision of imposition” by the USA.

Participants in Argentina also mentioned this particular variety of Spanish specially used in the international media from the USA. Javier from UTdT thought it was less credible than the accents from any other country, while fellow participant José argued the credibility of some news can be in jeopardy when they use certain words that “sound funny” in Argentina. Martín from the focus group in UB said he rather likes Telesur which lets people speak with their own native accents, instead of forcing them to speak in a particular way.

Compared to Mexico, in Argentina a few participants did praise the idea of a neutral accent. Speaking of the video excerpts from RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E, Lautaro from UTdT said he would not expect to see someone speaking with an Argentinian accent on any of those programmes. Luis from the same group had the impression that even the Spanish presenters on RT did not have a strong accent, but rather spoke in a “neutral way”, which he found to be good. During the focus group at UBA, Natalia would prefer a neutral accent. Nadia agreed saying that it would be “more accessible to everyone; maybe an Argentinian accent is not attractive for someone from Colombia or Spain, but a neutral one is something fair”.

5.1.2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATIVE SPEAKERS VS. NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

Besides the perception of regional accents and their acceptance or rejection by audiences, another important aspect explored in this study was the presence of presenters that are non-native speakers of Spanish, and whether they were appreciated by viewers or not. The international nature of broadcasters like RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E means that, to a certain extent, viewers regard them as representatives of their own countries. Some participants during the focus groups were curious about seeing Russians, Iranians and Chinese presenters speaking Spanish, e.g. Antonio from Colmex said: "If I'm going to watch a Chinese channel, I want to see Chinese people". Others thought it was difficult to understand some of the presenters with seemingly non-native accents.

A common perception was that most presenters that were non-native speakers were less clear. Ana from Colmex noticed that particularly presenters from Iran and China were less clear. In another session at the same university, Daniel thought that a presenter with a strong non-native accent can undermine the credibility of the news. He reckoned people would normally switch over to another channel, saying: "I know people that would not listen to the accent more than five minutes if the topic is not that interesting". Daniel thought this could instil mistrust in some viewers that would wonder: "If you don't speak Spanish, why are you reporting? [...] Why aren't you a [native] Spanish speaker?".

The Ecuadorian participant at UAM provided an interesting outsider view about the situation in Mexico compared to her home country. Gisela believed Mexicans are comparatively more nationalistic and would feel less comfortable with foreign accents, whereas in Ecuador people would be more used to watch the news dubbed with a European Spanish accent. Since television content from other places would be more readily available, contrary to the situation in Mexico, in her opinion people in Ecuador would feel less comfortable with programmes dubbed with an Ecuadorian accent.

During the same discussion, Graciela agreed with Gisela's opinion, but stressed that there is a generational gap, whereby younger generations are more open to diversity, familiar with foreign accents and "would take the time to watch a news bulletin that is not Mexican and that has foreigners as presenters". However, Graciela thought older people would stay on the surface: "My mother would watch it 5 minutes and then she would say no. It is like she gets distracted by other things, like... where is she from? It

is like they still haven't been captivated by that side of globalisation. They are more reluctant in this respect".

Other participants said they would prefer having subtitles, rather than listening to non-native speakers. "If I see that they speak Spanish like that, I would switch over to another channel", María from UB said. She did not mind foreign accents but in her opinion, someone presenting the news should have a good pronunciation. Her view suggested that news channels should ensure good quality in their reporting and the way in which they reported news (i.e. clarity in their gesticulation besides being fluent, among other elements) was part of being professional. In her opinion, the problem was "simply not pronouncing well the language". Fellow participant Mariana agreed and apologised for being blunt at saying she did not like the accents because it did not seem credible.

While a few participants expressed their preference for native speakers, most did not mind as long as their level of Spanish was up to professional standards. Daniel from Colmex thought that, despite the fact that promoting diversity is something many channels are doing, having a Chinese person presenting news in Spanish from Beijing was per se a reason to doubt. Although he did not elaborate on this, it is indeed an interesting insight into how some viewers would perceive international channels from culturally distant places such as China.

Chinese presenters

The command of the Spanish language by the Chinese presenters was an issue that many participants in both countries highlighted and therefore it deserves taking a closer look at their observations. Particularly in Mexico some participants were categorical in their opinion regarding this aspect. During one of the focus groups at UNAM, while Esteban only expressed concern about their command of the Spanish language, Estefanía thought the level was "very bad" and Enrique even thought it was "terrible". Other participants were less direct, but their comments seemed to point in the same direction. Germán from UAM thought "they lacked clarity at speaking well", apparently because they did not move their tongues fast enough or did not open their mouths wide enough. Fellow participants agreed, stating the problem with diction was evident.

In Argentina, Josefina thought it would be better to have more native-speakers "because it is pretty obvious they are not native, and some are difficult to understand".

Her fellow participant, Juan, was blunt at saying he “did not understand anything of what one of the girls that was there said”. At UC, while Ignacia thought “the accent [was] very thick”, in Ignacio’s opinion, the Chinese accent was evident and “some words were difficult [to understand]”. Esteban from the first session at UNAM thought the programme seemed “ridiculous” due to the “language barrier”. In his opinion, it would be difficult that people pay attention to someone that cannot speak Spanish properly:

Esteban: The programmes are not directed to university students or people that can find what the essence of the discussion is but will be carried away by how it is presented. If there is a presenter that, honestly, is chewing her Spanish, besides everything else being Chinese. I think what they intend to convey will be overtaken by the language limitations and a cultural issue that I think is very generalised in Latin America.

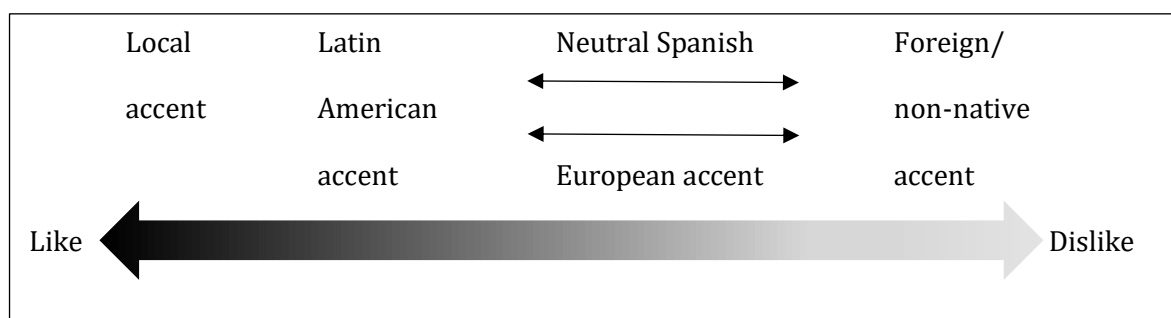
The most common view among participants was that the language barrier would undermine the overall quality of the news bulletin, i.e. viewers would focus their attention to a superficial feature such as the accent, rather than the content itself. Fátima from another session at UNAM thought the problem should be the quality of the content, rather than the language itself. Although she appreciated the effort made by the Chinese presenters in speaking Spanish, she suggested it would be better if they spoke Chinese and included subtitles. In Argentina, María from the session at UB, also suggested subtitles, especially because the language used on television should be somehow “official”. The elaborated saying it was distracting to the extent that she would “not pay that much attention to the news [itself], but rather to the way they are speaking”. Fellow participant Mariana argued that if the news had been more interesting, then she “personally would not change the channel only because the accent is not perfect”. In her opinion, “the news has more weight than how they speak”.

Some participants in both countries appreciated the effort made by the Chinese presenters. Esteban from UNAM said: “I can’t speak Chinese, so it is great that they can”. Martín in Argentina even thought their Spanish was good “compared to that of a lot of Chinese [immigrants] that have been living here”. During one of the focus groups at UTdT, a few participants liked the style saying it was “agreeable to the ear” and that the accent “funny but could be understood”. Nevertheless, people in other groups were less understanding. Manuel from UB thought “they were very boring in the way they talk” and María from the same session would not think twice to “switch it over”.

Figure 1 shows in general lines the preference range with regards to different varieties of Spanish accents, as reported by participants. While they often expressed a preference for their own local accent, this did not imply that they would automatically

reject any other Latin American accents. Moreover, the so-called “neutral Spanish” and the European varieties appeared to be less welcome, albeit some particular exceptions. Finally, the difficulty of understanding some non-native speakers (particularly of Chinese origin) reportedly constituted a reason for some to switch over to another channel.

Figure 1: Apparent accent preference



5.1.3. TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: SUBTITLING AND VOICE OVERS

This section explores the impression of participants with regards to the use of translation techniques used for content audio-visual content in foreign languages. While not unique to international broadcasters, these techniques are rather connected to the very nature of the content of international news. Besides this, as the three channels that constitute the focus of this study belong to multilingual media conglomerates in their respective countries (i.e. RT in Russia, IRIB in Iran and CCTV - now rebranded CGTN as the international branch- in China), it is not uncommon that part of the content is often produced by their sister channels which broadcast in other languages. This content is frequently translated either with subtitles or by using voice-over techniques. While dubbing tends to be common practice in Spain, Latin American audiences are also used to consume subtitled content, arguably due to its lower cost of production. The popularisation of subtitling is often linked to the widespread access to US-American channels through cable and satellite services especially among the middle classes in different countries across the continent. However, decreasing costs have also allowed less affluent segments of the population to have access to this type of cultural products.

The use of dubbing (i.e. synchronised voice over) instead of subtitles was an aspect pointed out by many participants in both countries. While some expressed their dislike and preferred subtitles, others thought it could be useful to attract viewers of other genres such as fiction (e.g. TV series, *telenovelas* or films). Regardless of the genre, the

use of these techniques generates a number of issues according to the audience. In the case of subtitles, its degree of acceptance appears to be directly related to literacy rates and reading habits of different populations in a specific country. Voice overs (and particularly dubbing), on the other hand, seem to be more or less accepted depending on features such as the quality and tone of the voice, the actor's performance and even his or her accent. Whereas subtitles enable access to the original text for those who can understand foreign languages to a certain degree (i.e. linguistic elites), it is believed by the proponents of dubbing that it allows broader access to large segments of the population. This is not limited to areas with lower literacy rates and other more general educational challenges. Moreover, dubbing is also seen as a service for elderly and younger viewers which may have difficulties with reading.

In the case of dubbing, the need of synchronising lip movement with speech poses an enormous challenge for translators who have no option but to manipulate the text, sometimes making meaningful alterations. Although standards differ according to genre, the interference with the original meaning is an issue which has been the focus of many researchers in translation studies. As Emilio Audissino points out, "original connotations can be silenced, new meanings can be arbitrarily added, and even the overall meaning can be seriously modified. The worst thing is that often this is not done deliberately, but it is the simple consequence of carelessness, lack of time, or slim budgets –when not a fatal combination of the three" (Audissino, 2014: 115). In order to explore if audiences would be susceptible by this issue, participants were encouraged to share their opinions on a video excerpt taken from the programme *Keiser Report*, which is produced by the RT's English-language channel and broadcast by the Spanish one after being dubbed. This particular video included the presenters Max Keiser and Stacey Herbert with voiceovers done by male and female voice professionals, one speaking with a neutral accent, and the other with a European accent. It is worthwhile mentioning that it is not lip-synchronised.

The result was that most participants in both countries agreed that they disliked this technique, particularly when done by an actor speaking with a European Spanish accent –in line with the findings presented earlier in this chapter. Laureano from UTdT argued watching a Spanish channel was different than watching a programme dubbed in European Spanish. He would not mind the former, but he would definitely switch over to a different channel rather than watching the latter. In some cases, participants such as Gustavo, Nadia, Leticia and Laureano were very vocal at expressing their

preference for subtitles. “I thought the dubbing was very annoying; I hate dubbing in that; I prefer it in English and with subtitles”, Nadia explained. As young students in University, many participants were able to understand English and to some extent preferred consuming television in the original English-language version.

During one of the focus groups at UTdT some participants mentioned how they “suffered” when the Warner Channel started broadcasting iconic sitcoms dubbed in Spanish, instead of the original language.

Leticia: When Warner did a study to see whether Latin America preferred dubbing or subtitles. For us, I think it ruined our lives that they do it dubbed. I mean, my ears bleed every time I have to listen to [the US American TV sitcom] Friends [dubbed in Spanish].

Fellow participants agreed and some thought it was related to a law put forward in July 2013 by the Argentinian government, whereby foreign television series and films needed to be dubbed to neutral Spanish or the languages of indigenous peoples (Doblaje, 2013). However, the Warner channel explained the decision was made following market research conducted in three key countries namely Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, which suggested viewers preferred watching series in their mother tongue (Radio Cooperativa, 2015). Warner also clarified viewers were able to choose between the dubbed version and the original one with subtitles. Nevertheless, after numerous complaints on social media and newspaper articles (Cueva, 2016), some viewers decided to put pressure on Warner to reinstate programming in English by starting petitions³⁵ on the website change.org. This case illustrates how passionate people in the region can feel about subtitles and dubbing.

Some participants did not appear to make any distinction between audio-visual translation techniques and seemed to suggest that voice-over was the same as dubbing, but of a lower quality. Germán from UAM argued dubbing should sound natural and not like RT’s excerpt, where the original voice could still be heard in the background and the actor’s voice was overlapping. In Argentina, Leticia from UTdT said it was annoying and that would make her anxious. Nadia from UBA pointed out that the “delay” between the original voice and the translation was very annoying. It was not just the fact that the lips and the sound were not synchronised which was annoying, but rather

³⁵ One example is the petition started by Carlos Mendoza and directed to Vicky Zambrano (then Vice President and General Manager at Warner Channel Latin America) and others. It gained the support of 16,577 people before being closed. It can be accessed on: <http://bit.ly/2hzhCRZ>.

that the people were not synchronised either, i.e. “you can hear the voice of the woman and they would be showing the man”. When her fellow participant Nicolás argued it was distracting, Nadia explained further saying that following people’s voices and the gestures they make was important to understand their reactions and make sense of what is being said. Nicolás agreed saying it was impossible to “understand what their body language is saying, [because] you cannot either see it or analyse it”. Another participant, Natalia, did not think it was annoying, but pointed out that the tone in which the presenters were speaking in the original language was considerably lower than that used by the actors of the Spanish version, as if the attitude displayed by the voiceover was somehow misleading.

Other participants saw the benefits of using voice-overs in certain circumstances. Martín from UB said this technique can be practical in the case of live news, where an interpreter can provide a direct translation. However, in the case of recorded material, Martín prefers subtitles, as many of his fellow participants.

Dubbing and telenovelas

Although unrelated to news, a few participants both in Mexico and Argentina suggested that Telenovelas was a genre where dubbing would be more suitable. During one of the focus groups at UNAM, Estefanía, Esteban and Enrique argued viewers would not watch telenovelas with subtitles. Estefanía elaborated saying:

Estefanía: In the case of Mexican TV, you are almost not used to consuming [content] in another language. I would say, TV, no, because... and I would say it like this: if it was a Chinese *telenovela* that would reach other parts of the country, where people really have little education or reading habits, they would not sit two hours or one hour and 45 minutes to read the *telenovela*...

Esteban: And they are generally the ones one watch more telenovelas in the country.

Estefanía continued explaining and giving examples of Brazilian and even Turkish soap operas that were dubbed and became successful in Mexico. In Argentina, participants shared similar views implying the decision has to be made according to the needs of the market. During the focus group at UC, participants believed telenovelas would be more easily accepted if they were dubbed, partly because most people who watch them are elderly ladies in their homes, as Ignacia argued. Inés added that viewers would do other stuff while they listen to the soap opera, hence dubbing would be more appropriate.

Many participants held a similar opinion when thinking of older generations. In Mexico, Germán considered dubbing would be more suitable for many people that are not used

to reading subtitles and would prefer to watch films dubbed in Spanish, rather than in their original language. In Argentina, Nahuel from the focus group at UBA pointed out that his own mother would not watch movies with subtitles. The Peruvian participant at the focus group in UBA thought that “dubbing in European Spanish tends to be unintelligible in some cases when it is very fast like in the case of debates. That makes people receiving the news not able to focus because of the accent”. Nancy thought that broadcasters should consider that Latin Americans audiences are more exposed to their own accents and would have problems understanding European accents. Fellow participant Nadia agreed saying it was distracting and that the fact that the accent was not attractive made her focus on other elements, like the clothes the presenters were wearing of the background view with the city of London³⁶.

Beatriz from another session at Colmex said she would prefer dubbing made in Latin America “a thousand times more” than from Spain. Even Bernardo who reported liking the Spanish accent, said he would [even] prefer a thick *porteño*³⁷ accent from Buenos Aires, rather than the Spanish *ceceo*³⁸. During the first focus group in Colmex, Alicia argued the European accent was “an acquired taste”, referring to the particular the case of dubbing. Others thought that had it been news, it would matter less. It bears the question whether this is related to the fact that the formal language of news is less permeated with local expressions, as fiction would be. Bruno from Colmex did not even recognise the accent as being European saying it was “very flat”, i.e. without any localisms. Thus, in his opinion a neutral language was preferable than “any of both extremes with a lot of accent” (i.e. the extremes being the Latin American accent on the one side and the European accent on the other). During one of the sessions at UAM, the Ecuadorian participant Gisela also thought that in the case of news the Spanish accent was less of an issue. In Argentina, Martín from UB said that although he would prefer the Latin American accent, it was not that important, as long as the content is understandable. His fellow participants Marcos and Mauricio echoed this opinion.

³⁶ The programme is produced by RT in London.

³⁷ “Porteño” refers to the city of Buenos Aires, and by extension to the most easily recognisable accent from Argentinian Spanish.

³⁸ “Ceceo” as opposed to “seseo” refers to the pronunciation of the “c” (before e and i) and “z” as /θ/, typical of many varieties of European Spanish, whereas most American varieties would render it as /s/. It is one of the most evident distinction between the varieties of Spanish spoken on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Nevertheless, all agreed that if it was about dubbing a film, they all preferred the Latin American accent.

Some participants who had experience living in Europe recognised the practice of dubbing would be wider spread in countries like France or Spain, where it seems to be widely accepted by the audiences. However, they argued the situation on the ground in Latin America was somewhat different.

Nadia: It's that I am very against dubbing... the truth is that [unintelligible]. I know that in some countries they are very used to it. I know that in Spain it is very common that everything is dubbed. They usually don't listen to other languages, but to me that it doesn't sound good. To me, dubbing is very annoying.

5.1.4. TONE

Some participants not only paid attention to the content of the news, but also to the tone used by the reporters in the moment of presenting the news. Germán from UAM thought it was possible to recognise some bias regarding the way RT's female reporters presented the news about the twitter exchange between the then Republican candidate Donald Trump and the Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto. Although he did not elaborate into the details of why he held that opinion, he argued they were discussing a topic that as a Mexican he would be very perceptive of how the news is being presented. Regarding the tone of voice, fellow participant Gabriel argued he was very sensitive in this respect, and in his opinion, "HispanTV raises more the voice, is more sensationalist, including the background music". Speaking of HispanTV, Alicia from the first focus group at Colmex reported feeling very annoyed when reporters speak with a "revolutionary" tone, by which she seemed to refer to a seemingly over prescriptive attitude infused with ideological undertones. In the case of CCTV-E, Daniel from Colmex thought that some presenters read the news with a very "flat" tone, i.e. "there was no feeling in the news". By analysing these observations, it is possible to infer that the tone used by presenters can also influence the way viewers perceive a specific channel.

5.2. STYLE

The decision to switch to a particular news channel often depends on the style of a particular channel, rather than the quality of the news. The way voice professionals (news anchors) read the news, the audio-visual effects, the music, the use of humour, the rhythm, and the edition of reports are some of the elements that attract viewers, help maintain their attention and ultimately guarantee their loyalty.

5.2.1. PERCEPTION OF VISUAL ELEMENTS

Some participants in Mexico were not so impressed by RT's style. During the first session at UNAM, Estefanía thought it was "nice to watch", but "not super spectacular". Estela believed the style to be "more serious", with the "design of the stage changing according to the format of the programmes". Although the style is "very clean", Estela suggested it was a way of leading the viewers' attention away from the content, e.g. "you can see this format of the two girls and everything is very neat, very delightful and they are talking pure nonsense, like the first female ones [on RT] or the Chinese".

Despite this, others had more positive opinions. Germán from the first session at UAM thought RT "indeed masters the format". In his opinion, the style "was quite agile and that agility makes it attractive, interesting to watch". Hortencia from the second session at UAM thought RT's style "helps you stay there", i.e. stay tuned. Many participants in Argentina also had positive opinions with regards to RT. At the first focus group at UTdT José thought "RT is the most attractive one, besides it is the one that most resembles the Western media". Juliana agreed and pointed out that the visual aspect such as the quality of the image and the brightness gives the impression that it is more "designed" or "organised". Jaime compared it to Al-Jazeera as one of the Non-Western broadcasters that used a Western format to generate more credibility to themselves. Other groups also noticed this; Melisa from the session at UB thought it "looked more like the channels here" in Argentina. Manuel agreed saying it looked "very Western". Marcelo pointed out that RT had an energy that made viewers become interested in the news, whereas the CCTV-E was very "calm". At UB, Nancy believed RT's "colours were a bit more vivid" and Natalia suggested RT's graphs and transitions were more dynamic.

Regarding HispanTV, Nadia from UBA described its visual style as being the "flashiest" of the three channels. In her opinion, the use of audio-visual resources was somewhat excessive. Despite that, she described it as being "youthful", which helped to make it stand out and therefore memorable. Laureano from UTdT argued that "the issue with HispanTV is that it is ugly, it is visually ugly, the news bulletin is ugly". Liliana agreed saying "they set up a TV channel with two pesos³⁹", implying that it looked less sophisticated. Nicolás from UBA thought that "even the colours of HispanTV seem strange". Other participants seemed to like some aspects of the visual style of HispanTV.

³⁹ "Two pesos" is often used to mean an insignificant amount of money. It is also used to refer to what in the UK is known as a "pound-shop", i.e. a shop where goods are sold mostly for £1.

With regards to the studio, presenters and clothing, Herminia from UAM thought it looked more “flexible” (i.e. informal) than RT. Juan from UTdT mentioned liking the use of Google maps to locate the origin of the news.

In the case of CCTV-E, Ester from UNAM thought it was “visually very attractive”. Gabriel from UAM thought CCTV-E had a very “serious and neat image, which was very attractive” to him. Hortencia from another session at UAM reported that what caught her attention was that “everyone was very formal”, with the presenters “wearing suits and dresses”. This formality seemed to make José from UTdT believe the other channels looked more “amateur”. Luis and Leticia even thought that CCTV-E’s studio looked like a “space ship”. Nevertheless, not everyone felt CCTV-E was that appealing:

Fátima: [...] Something I noticed is that the with the other two [channels, i.e. RT and HispanTV], I was indeed attentive to see what would follow next. In the one about China it was like [I paid attention to] the first image and then unconsciously I started to drift away. It was like, it was not appealing what I saw and the information was not making me feel like “wow, this is so interesting! [...] So, in the case of the other two, yes. Visually, [...] what they were saying, it all called my attention and I stayed watching. But with the other one [i.e. the Chinese], no. The tension would come and go like when you’re watching and not watching TV.

CCTV-E’s visual style made some participants draw comparisons with CNN, arguably by the use of the colour red among other elements. “CCTV-E is a Chinese CNN”, Estefanía from UNAM said. Fernanda from a different session at UNAM thought it “has an image, at least in the logos, in the colour, in the presentation of the names and that, very similar to CNN” (see figure 2). By looking like CNN, Fernanda believed CCTV-E was trying to visually deceive viewers “in order to gain legitimacy”.

Figure 2: Visual similarities between CCTV and CNN



The screen shot on the right shows how the logo of CCTV (on the lower right corner) resembles that of CNN en Español on the screenshot on the left (also on the lower right corner).

At the same time Fernanda also realised that the use of colours bore resemblance to the Chinese flag, giving an impression of nationalism and promoting their own country (see figure 3). She recalled one presenter wearing a red dress while the background was yellow. Fellow participant Francisca agreed and elaborated on her analysis suggesting CCTV was busier promoting an image than providing interesting news. Gabriel and Gisela from the last focus group at UAM also noticed the colour red of the presenter's clothes. Nevertheless, since the rebranding of CCTV-E as CGTN Español the colour red has been replaced by different tonalities of blue. It remains to be seen whether viewers would make similar comments if they were shown video clips from 2017.

Figure 3: Nationalism and CCTV's choice of colours.



On the left a screen shot of America Ahora's presenter Xu Xin wearing a red dress against a golden-coloured background, similar to the Chinese flag on the right.

5.2.2. PERCEPTION OF STYLE

In terms of clarity, i.e. that the message was being easily understood as it was being delivered, participants seemed to like more RT and occasionally HispanTV, rather than CCTV-E. "The only one that was not clear was the Chinese", Juana from UC in Argentina said emphatically. This seemed to be mostly related to the way presenters spoke and their level of Spanish.

Besides this, CCTV-E was described as "boring" by a number of participants in both countries Antonio was the first to use the word "boring" during the first focus group at Colmex. Carlos from a different group did not like the fact that CCTV-E had a "very traditional format" which he described as "serious" and "dull". In his opinion, the channel looked as if it was "trapped in a model of news presenting where the person

(i.e. the news anchor) is sitting and there is a series of images on the side”, which is “boring”. Damián from a different session at Colmex had the impression the presenters would read everything from a teleprompter, which in his opinion was a clear proof that the content was strictly controlled.

Damián: “[...] It seemed that all the presenters were reading everything from a teleprompter and it looked quite evident that there was no questioning, that everything was like a line coming from somewhere and precisely that gave me the impression that there was a certain control by the state behind the channel. That instilled mistrust. I understand that it is also the case with HispanTV and RT, but here (i.e. CCTV-E) they did not disguise it neither with a nice production nor with presenters that would make the programmes more attractive”.

Francisca from UNAM thought that CCTV-E’s style looked too “neat and stylish” and focusing on superficial aspects, therefore making it “boring”. In Argentina, Laureano from UTdT made a similar remark saying “they are very professional, but it becomes boring”. During the focus group at UB, Manuel thought “they are very boring in the way they speak”. María elaborated on that observation saying there was “a presenter speaking, without interviewing, nothing”. “The [volume of the] voice was low and very slow”, Mauricio explained. Compared to CCTV-E, there was only one mention of the word “boring” to describe HispanTV (second session at UTdT) and none to describe RT.

5.3. PROFESSIONALISM

By analysing a number of comments made by participants, it became apparent that professionalism and formality were sometimes understood as being almost synonyms or at least as belonging to different sides of the same coin. Indeed, the perception of professionalism is arguably often constructed through the level of formality by which media people conduct their duty. This is often crystallised by the use of a formal register in speech, which can give the impression of belonging to highly educated individuals. However, it is difficult to establish a direct correlation between formality and professionalism. Unlike formality, professionalism relates to the standard by which practitioners measure up the quality of their work and the way they conduct themselves while doing it. Despite the difficulty of providing a detailed definition of what and/or who can be considered professional, in *Media Professionalism and Training* Sarah Niblock (2013) identifies the following criteria for professionalism in the media:

“Expert and specialized knowledge in the field which one is practicing.
Excellent manual/practical and thinking skills in relation to the profession.
High-quality work.
High standard of professional ethics, behaviour and work activities

Positive attitude and motivation
Positive relationships with colleagues” (Niblock, 2013: 46).

Although this set of features may be contested by some critics, for the sake of this study it does provide an insight into what elements are often perceived as connected to professionalism, e.g. expertise, excellence, high quality, positive attitude, etc.

When asked about which channel looked more “professional”, this word was defined as fulfilling their duty as journalists or reporters. In this respect, participants often mentioned RT. In Mexico, Francisca felt that the relative informality of RT when compared to CCTV-E made it resonate more with her. In her opinion, RT had “really interesting elements” both in the style and the way they were presenting and analysing the news.

In Argentina, some participants that had watched the channel prior to the focus group mentioned liking RT’s interviews. “I love RT, the interviews they do”, Luis from UTdT said. Nadia from UBA liked the energy of RT’s presenters, especially because it made her feel “involved”. Although Nadia felt this kind of style was engaging, it did not have the same effect on fellow participant Natalia who did not like “that presenters constantly talk to each other without looking at the camera”.

Some participants argued HispanTV was more professional at providing detailed reporting. Fabiana from UNAM felt “there was a little more commitment and more in-depth analysis from the reporters that would explain facts and the situations in which they had been and what they had seen”, even though there was a clear bias against the USA which “was to be expected”. For Estefanía from a different session at UNAM, being professional was linked to having a diverse group of presenters, analysts, subjects and opinions, which helps to generate a discussion and at the same time makes it more appealing to the public. This aspect was echoed by Natalia in Argentina, who praised Pablo Iglesias’ programme on HispanTV, where a few people were sitting around a table involved in a debate. In the case of Martín from UB, he was surprised to see the Iranian channel’s “quite advanced technology”, which he was not expecting.

In the case of CCTV-E, professionalism did not seem to be a word that participants associated to this channel. Nevertheless, some thought that it was the most “formal”. As mentioned above Francisca from UNAM thought the style was too “neat” and that would make it less trustworthy specially when compared to RT. Hortencia from UAM, however, associated this formality with a cultural aspect and her impression of Chinese

people being “more devoted [to what they do], in all aspects, so from the way they dress and their work, it looked normal to me”.

5.4. IDENTIFICATION

An observation made during one of the focus groups at UNAM sheds some lights into how important the ethnic profile of presenters can be for some participants. Fernanda noticed that most presenters looked “foreign” or “not Latin”. “Super blond, very white and they speak like Spaniards. I don't mean that that is not legitimate, but it feels alien to me”, Fernanda explained. However, when confronted by Francisca, who argued being “Latin” was not important and that she did not intend to feel identify, Fernanda elaborated on her feelings as follows:

Fernanda: It's not that it is important to me that they are Latin, that I feel identified, or that that is important in the news. However, it is a way of observing who is saying that to me. I mean, is it a Caucasian that comes to tell me what is happening in Latin America? [Is a Caucasian] that comes to talk about poverty when [he or she] lives in wealth? Stuff like that. It is just to understand who is there. To me that is important [indeed], not because I would believe them more than other.

Fernanda argued that in Mexico there is an institutionalised racism that has been internalised by the population itself, whereby *rubios* (blonds) would be desired over *morenos* (dark-skinned, i.e. indigenous, *mestizo* or from African descent). “In Mexico, you walk on the street and [among] the most spectacular (i.e. fashionable) predominate the *blancos* (fair-skinned, i.e. from European descent)”, Fernanda explained. One of her fellow participants, Fátima, explained how this was the case particularly in the media, where fair-skinned people are overrepresented:

Fátima: I believe that has to do with what is not common to see here, so that is why it can also be attractive to them. And [judging] by the programming of the two main television broadcasters here, it is clear that the main characters need to be blond, otherwise they turn them blond. [...]

Although not mentioned during the focus groups in Argentina, standards of beauty there are arguably not far removed from those in Mexico, where presenters with European ancestry seem to be preferred by broadcasters (Hugues and Prado, 2011, p109–146). Whether beauty standards and discrimination against those who do not fall within those criteria play a significant role in viewers decisions is not a line of inquiry that was followed during the focus groups, however it could be worthwhile pursuing in future research.

As there appears to be a predominance of European ancestry among those who constitute the “faces” of channels in Latin America, exploring issues of discrimination

and racism in the media in this region in particular could shed a light into whether this could be considered a significant factor that determines whether a particular channel would be more or less accepted by audiences.

5.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter started by focusing on how two aspects such as language and style can play a role in influencing the degree of acceptance by viewers. With regards to language, the findings confirm the hypothesis that cultural proximity plays a significant role even between subcultures in a particular language sphere. The structure of this sphere would differ according to geography and the distance to other subgroups would be determined by the degree of familiarity with differences. Thus, as the category of “local” seems to be anchored on a cultural reality which in turn is tied to a particular geographical location, the task of adapting to local tastes may prove elusive when the target audiences amount to half a billion people scattered in more than 20 countries. This is even more evident when “local” is understood at a subnational level.

The findings show that viewers tend to formulate their expectations of international news channels based on their previous experiences, particularly with local media. Furthermore, even though foreign (i.e. non-local) accents will be expected in foreign (i.e. international) channels, accents will be preferred according to their degree of similarity to their own. As such, Latin American presenters seemed to be more welcome than their European counterparts. One of the reasons was a lack of familiarity with regards to the European variety of Spanish. This was related to a number of aspects such as pronunciation and vocabulary (especially use of idioms), among other. This was mirrored with regards to non-native speakers of Spanish, i.e. when speaking with a European accent they gave the impression of “not belonging”, therefore seemed to be less accepted.

Concerning non-native speakers, the major factors affecting the degree of acceptance by the participants was the clarity of their pronunciation and their ability to speak the language with fluency. This was particularly evident in the case of Chinese speakers, who appeared to be the least understandable. More than a question of fluency, this aspect also seems to be linked to viewers’ expectations vis-à-vis media professionals. Newsreaders, reporters and journalists, , make a distinct use of the language that is typical of their profession (i.e. sociolect). This is evident in different aspects, from the choice of vocabulary to their pronunciation and intonation. There seems to be an

expectation among audiences that media professionals would speak in a particular way, which at the same time could be considered as proof of experience and training in the field. This is closely related to one of the dimensions of ‘credibility’ as identified by Gaziano and McGrath and mentioned in Chapter 4, i.e. to “have well-trained reporters” (Mcgrath and Gaziano, 1986: 454). Training in this case needs to be understood as relating to both the content of the news and the way they are delivered. In the case of some presenters, the way the content was presented (e.g. strong foreign accent) obscured its delivery, thus overriding its importance. Similarly, in the case of native speakers, it could be argued that the accents that were preferred were not “local” accents, but rather a specific accent typical of media professionals that have undergone training or enjoy prestige thanks to years of experience working in their field.

Delivery was also an issue with regards to the tone of the presenters, e.g. some participants expressed their dislike both for “flat” tones (reportedly “without feelings”) and also for reporters that sounded too “revolutionary”. In this case, it could be argued that sounding “revolutionary” also relates to the dimensions of “credibility”, as they would possibly be seen as not fulfilling the need to be “unbiased” and to “separate fact from opinion” (*ibid.*: 454). At the same time, it is worth questioning whether a similar reaction could be expected from audiences in countries such as Cuba or Venezuela, where a revolutionary narrative seems to be part of the counterhegemonic frame used by the media to analyse current affairs (e.g. see Telesur).

Another aspect analysed by participants was the use of audio-visual translation techniques such as voice-over and subtitles. Voice-overs were deemed as useful for viewers who were unable to speak foreign languages. In the case of fiction, dubbing (i.e. synchronised voice-overs) was seen as imperative. Similarly, synchronisation seemed to be necessary in the case of pre-recorded programmes, particularly when the entire programme had been produced in a foreign language. In the specific case of simultaneous interpretation, synchronisation was not a necessary condition. However, participants who had exposure to foreign languages (i.e. able to consume media in foreign languages) expressed a clear aversion to these techniques and preferred subtitles. As many of the participants who held this opinion had experience either studying, working or just travelling overseas, this difference in preference may be more revealing about the makeup of the focus groups in terms of social class and privilege.

The second focus of this chapter was style, particularly from the audio-visual perspective. Deemed the channel that most resembled Western media, RT seemed to

have the best reviews. Despite CCTV-E being described as visually attractive, the high level of formality made it feel “boring” to many participants. There seem to be a certain rigidity in the style, in stark contrast with RT’s dynamism. However, after the re-branding of the international branch of China’s Central Television as China Global Television Network (CGTN), the style seems to have shown some changes. The use of the bright red that reminded many participants of CNN has now been replaced by different shades of blue. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether this brand shake-up will be conducive to building its own style and differentiating itself from other broadcasters (namely CNN) or not. As the present study only considers the observations made by participants in 2016, the analysis needs to be considered in a pre-rebranding context.

The third part of this chapter studied the perception of participants with regards to professionalism, i.e. whether they sensed these channels were working in a way that fulfilled the duties of journalism according to their own impressions. As with the observations about style, most participants also had a positive impression of RT, which was seen as highly engaging. While HispanTV was praised for its in-depth reporting, CCTV-E was again seen as the most formal of the three, which was not necessarily considered a positive element. Similar to “trust in the media”, professionalism is also a category that poses serious challenges to operationalise and measure. Nevertheless, the fact that participants mentioned it to refer mostly to RT rather than HispanTV or CCTV-E gives clues about their expectations about what journalism needs to “look like”. Although some aspects seemed superficial at a first glance, it soon became clear that participants felt passionate about particular issues. Hence, they are helpful to understand the viewers’ perception and determine to what extent a potential viewer can become an assiduous consumer or just switch over and look for other channels.

6. BEYOND CONTROL - CULTURAL ISSUES JEOPARDISING ACCEPTANCE

The previous chapter discussed some of the issues around cultural proximity and how this may affect any efforts to attract potential viewers. However, it would be difficult to suggest a single cause to such a complex phenomenon. This chapter explores how audiences' acceptance of international channels does not entirely depend on what broadcasters do or fail to do, but also on other factors that may be well beyond their reach. International channels are often perceived by viewers as representative of their respective countries of origin, and as such, pre-conceived images of countries may also (perhaps unconsciously) be attributed to broadcasters. In the next few pages we will try to understand how this phenomenon may affect the viewers' acceptance of international broadcasters, either by facilitating or jeopardising it. Hence, this chapter extends the scope of the analysis that looks into RQ2 (i.e. *what sort of a role (if any) does cultural proximity play in the viewers' decision when choosing an international news channel?*) and, at the same time, provides insights into some of the aspects that provide a frame of inquiry for RQ3 (i.e. *How successful could such enterprise be in terms of soft power gains by the countries behind this strategy?*).

The first part looks at the concept of *country image*, how it has been employed in other disciplines and how it can be useful to this study by helping understand another layer of the complexity surrounding international broadcasting. Following this, we will focus our attention to the participants and the way they described and evaluated the images of different countries before they were shown the video excerpts of international broadcasters during the sessions. Although particular attention is paid to analysing the images of Russia, Iran and China, comments about other countries will also be briefly discussed, as they can help assess how viewers in Mexico and Argentina see other countries.

The second part explores whether those previous images experienced any changes after being briefly exposed to broadcasters such as RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E or not. The aim of this section is to analyse how participants reflected upon and elaborated on their feelings about this first impression -as it was in most cases-. Although it could be argued that a brief exposure will have little to no effect, the impact made by this first contact can enhance or dissuade viewership.

The third part analyses the different attitudes of the participants with regards to the future of international broadcasters in their countries and the potential success or failure of RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E in trying to become an important source of information. As this was one of the last questions during the focus groups, the participants' opinions not only constructed their opinions considering their previous knowledge about the media environment and the unique features of the societies in their respective countries, but also reflect the result of discussing with their peers during the sessions. According to their opinion, their attitudes could be classified in four groups (i.e. *optimists*, *conditionalists*, *cautious* and *pessimistic*), which will be explained in detail.

6.1. COUNTRY IMAGE

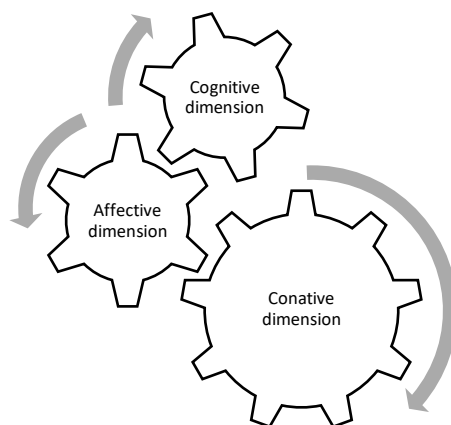
Studies around country image as a factor that may influence consumers' purchase intention have been popular in the fields of business and marketing, particularly focused on the links between consumer behaviour vis-à-vis country-of-origin (vide infra). As it may help draw some parallels to the kind of challenges RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E face as cultural products trying to be "sold" in the Latin American "market", it is worthwhile looking at some of the key concepts used by scholars in this discipline.

There seems to be a relative inconsistency with regards to a unified definition of country image and the components it is built upon. In a very comprehensive account of the literature around this subject, Roth and Diamantopoulos trace how the construct of country image has been defined in different studies and recognises three distinct groups: those regarding the overall image of a country, those pertaining to countries and their products and those concerned with products from a country (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). As a complete review of the debate would be less relevant for our research, this study will use that of Wang et al who appears to condense the main aspects shared by most studies, i.e. country image as "the mental representation of a country and its people, including cognitive believes of the country's economic and technological development stages, as well as the affective evaluations of its social and political systems or standpoints" (2012: 1041). Drawing from the field of psychology, this definition seems to suggest that the image people have of a country is constructed both from arguably objective or factual knowledge as well as from a subjective component of feelings that certain aspects generate. Indeed, the cognitive and affective aspects of country image have been the subject of numerous research in the field of

marketing, with some scholars comparing the impact of each component in different circumstances, e.g. product judgement and purchase intention during rational and experiential purchases (Li et al., 2014). Others aim to identify even smaller dimensions within those two components, which are ultimately more likely to affect consumers' willingness to buy products from that specific country (Maher and Carter, 2011). A third aspect, however is crucial to understanding the importance of country image. The conative dimension relates to the behaviour prompted by the cognitive and affective aspects (Laroche et al., 2005), i.e. the way consumers act (or at least intend to act) after considering both information and emotions.

The main concern for the above-mentioned scholars was to understand how the variable country-of-origin affects the consumers attitude and potential behaviour with regards to products such as cars, or even brands in general. It could be argued that news channels are cultural products and as such differ little from other products. Even though this is an interesting comparison, the accuracy of this estimation could easily be questioned due to the very nature of news channels and their principal function as rich conveyors of information (including ideologies, etc.), which possibly surpasses similar capabilities of other products. Nevertheless, cognitive, affective and conative dimensions are all part of the same entity; any change in one of these dimensions will inevitably affect other dimensions (see Figure 4). Although their level of interaction can prove difficult to assess, it provides a stimulating framework of analysis to try to understand the views of audiences and their choices to switch certain of international channels and to what degree this decision depends on a pre-conceived image of the country of origin.

Figure 4: Country image dimensions



As explained in Chapter 3, during the focus groups participants were given a list of eight countries which they had to place within a scale going from positive to negative,

according to what impression they had of these countries. They were given relative freedom to choose their criteria such as the impression they had of these countries according to media reports or even how they would feel about these countries being the source of information. The list consisted of those countries that had international news channels broadcasting in Spanish (either supported by government or privately funded) based in their territories by September 2016, i.e. Germany, China, Colombia, Spain, USA, Iran, Russia and Venezuela.

The aim of this activity was not to measure the number of participants with a negative or positive image of a specific country, but rather to unveil some of the reasons behind those impressions. Although there seemed to be patterns suggesting participants would consider certain countries in a better light, the next few paragraphs include some of the observations made by different participants during this particular activity and also while discussing other issues during the session. At this point it is necessary to consider that no matter how informative these opinions may seem, they can hardly be considered as representative either of all groups or of the general populations in Mexico and Argentina.

Overall, Germany seemed to enjoy the best reputation across most of the sessions, whereas Venezuela was often to be found at the opposite end. All other countries would fall somewhere in between, with Colombia and Spain closer to Germany and Iran closer to Venezuela. Ratings for the USA and Russia were the most unpredictable. Although some participants would place them in completely different positions, there was a pattern that often showed the USA on a slightly more positive light than Russia, albeit not in all cases.

Negative image was sometimes related to the perception of corruption as being rampant. Alicia from Colmex believed “there is more corruption in those countries”. She argued journalists were often bribed, which she believed “happens here [in Mexico] and in the whole world”. Trying to understand the issue from a different angle, Andrés, from the same group as Alicia, tried to elaborate on his perception. Although he did not use the term cultural proximity, he seemed to suggest that it was indeed a factor that affected the way he perceived different countries, particularly in the case of Venezuela, compared to China or Russia.

Andrés: [...] When they talk about Russia, [my reaction is to think] how strange they think. When they talk about Iran, [my reaction is also to think] how strange they think. China, the same. And Venezuela is [a country that they speak] with a tone, it is more familiar to me, that is, if I read them, I know how to interpret them.

Although it is not the focus of this study, Venezuela's perceived negative image seemed to be connected with the fact that participants appeared to be more familiar with the political situation in the country. To a certain extent this could be attributed to domestic media both in Mexico and Argentina following closely the political and social developments in that Caribbean country. While sometimes participants would hesitate to judge countries they knew little about, the degree of familiarity with Venezuela seemed to make participants more categorical in their opinion, i.e. the media from that country is not to be trusted because of a perceived high level of control exerted by the government, as reported by Alejandro from Colmex:

Alejandro: [...] the characteristics of the political system, what has happened with some opposition leaders, the attitude of the government towards certain media in Venezuela, make me distrust that the content I am seeing or reading is honest, or how much the government wants me to know about Venezuela.

Alejandro's comment can explain, to a certain extent, why Telesur may not necessarily be considered trustworthy by those who know about it, independently from having watched it or not. In the case of Argentina, the opinion of some participants helped understand another layer as to why Venezuela's image has also suffered among certain sectors of the population. "I have friends in Venezuela and what we know from the media is very different [from reality]", Inés from UC explained, and added that Venezuela's negative reputation was related to the fact that in recent years Argentina lived through a similar process of "media manipulation" by "leftist governments". She was referring to the media polarisation process that took place during the administration of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner. As described in *Chapter 2*, this phenomenon explains how accounts by the media about current affairs in Argentina differed greatly along partisan lines.

Even though participants were not asked about their political persuasion due to the concern of creating animosity during the discussions, it was expected that their comments would be infused with their own ideological beliefs. Therefore, in the case of Alejandro and Inés, it seems evident that their own personal political views also affected -and to a certain extent also limited- perception of Venezuela and other countries.

In the case of the USA, many participants showed themselves critical about it as a country and the policies of its government around the world. Nevertheless, when considering its media, a few participants seemed to admire the diversity within the

American media arena, which through its perceived plurality of voices makes it possible to distinguish ideologies between media outlets.

Beatriz: I don't think that all media are the same. Of course, it depends on which [we are talking about]. But if they give me a piece of news and it is signed by *The New York Times*, then I will not [doubt] it.

Estela from UNAM thought the media in the USA was trustworthy because of "content policies" (i.e. tradition of objectivity and independence from government, etc.), which she thought was something more valuable than the situation in Mexico. Estefanía elaborated saying news outlets in Mexico tend to "recycle news and information" from other media. This discrepancy in the perception and attitude of the participants regarding the USA, its government and its media, seems to fall in line with research by Wang et al on country image which suggest that "people may often simultaneously hold inconsistent cognitive perceptions and affective evaluations of a particular country" (2012: 1043). The USA was not the only example. Many participants also held similar seemingly conflicting views about other countries.

6.2. RUSSIA AND THE WEST

The difference between the perception participants had of the USA and Russia seemed to be closely related to the level of familiarity they had with their northern neighbour compared to a relative lack of knowledge about Russia. Gabriel from UAM believed "the USA since the Cold War has tried to sell us [an image of Russia] that it is a very bad and backward country". At a later session, the same idea was echoed by Helena from UAM. She suggested that a lack of news about Russia in Mexico left the gap to be filled by news filtered by the media based in their Northern neighbour, i.e. the USA.

Ana from Colmex thought Russia and other countries like Iran and China were authoritarian in the way they broadcast news. She explained her views saying:

Ana: Because, yes, it is true that they are authoritarian, moreover when they read the news, at least the ones that we have access to, that are about critical things that happened in those countries, I see that they are much more objective than with a criticisable thing that happened in the USA, where I see a wider spectrum of opinions. And for example, [in the case of] Russia, no. [It is] almost always like the government is always good. As in [the case of] Iran.

In the opinion of Fabiana from UNAM, it is common to judge Russia due to a "bipolar inheritance" from the Cold War. However, she argued it is interesting to see the way Russia -mostly led by Putin- is engaging strategically in the world, making it an interesting actor worth observing and possibly more credible than others. In Argentina,

however, Laura from UTdT reported having visited Russia and had the impression that Russia “plays a little with the issue of freedom of expression”. This made her doubt the information presented by broadcasters such as RT. “It depends on the topic and what I know; the one we know the most here [in Argentina] is Russia Today and there are things on RT that are a disgrace and other things that are brilliant”, Laura explained.

6.3. IRAN, WOMEN AND RELIGION

The colonisation of the territories that today form part of Latin America was a process that enjoyed the legitimacy given by the Catholic church. In fact, by helping spread Catholicism in the New World, countries like Spain and Portugal received the consent of the Church to spread their realms beyond the Atlantic Ocean. From early on, the native populations were encouraged and (very soon after) coerced into converting to Catholicism, particularly after the Holy Inquisition was established in the newly formed colonies. Besides this, travel from Spain to settle in the overseas territories was highly restricted and a permission was only granted to those who were able to provide proof of “purity of the blood”, i.e. without Jewish or Muslim ancestors. Despite an unquestionable survival of unique elements belonging to the faiths of native (i.e. pre-Hispanic) populations and its syncretism with the new religion imported and/or imposed by the European colonisers and settlers, Catholicism is still a factor in shaping the lives of Latin Americans.

The arrival of migrants of Jewish, Muslim and other religious beliefs can be only considered a relatively recent phenomenon. It could be argued that large segments of the populations in the region are less familiar with customs pertaining to any religion but Catholicism. In the media, the portrayal of religion is mostly associated with Catholicism (e.g. broadcasting of mass on Sunday and sermons by priests and sometimes nuns at night time, among other) and to a certain extent with the rapidly expanding Evangelical churches as well. As such, during the focus groups it was interesting to observe the participants reactions towards certain cultural and religious -particularly Islamic- elements present in HispanTV’s programming, including news, current affairs and even fiction. Indeed, by broadcasting content closely related to Islam such as films, series (“Santa María”), documentaries and interview-format programming (“El Islam Responde”), HispanTV could be regarded as building bridges between cultures, or even as having an arguably proselytising agenda.

An element that caught the attention of some participants throughout many of the focus groups was that of females wearing hijabs. Alicia from Colmex believed Mexican viewers would be less inclined to accept female presenters wearing them “because there are a lot of very ignorant people who do not understand that a woman wearing a headscarf⁴⁰ is not a terrorist”. She elaborated saying a non-Muslim colleague that was verbally abused because she was wearing a head covering and someone believed she was Muslim. Contrarily to Alicia’s opinion, a number of participants during a session at UNAM believed that Mexico was a culturally very diverse and some kind of head-coverings were a common sight in some places and even *burka*-style coverings would not necessarily be outright rejected.

Estela: I would say some women here, in some places, they still put on [knitted] fabrics on the head.

Esteban: ...or they wear a little headscarf when they go to mass, especially when they go to mass, and they are the ones that consume a lot [of telenovelas].

Estela: I think it has to do with the cultural richness that Mexico has. You can see something that is so different [than what you are normally used to] even inside Mexico itself, that I feel this is why it doesn’t surprise us so much.

Enrique: Yes, there is acceptance for that type of differences.

Esteban: But with a *burka* it would be a different kind of story, well, because they couldn’t even be in front of the camera.

Estela: The people maybe would think she is a [Catholic] nun.

(Many participants laugh)

Unidentifiable participant: ...or that it is a [cartoon] character.

Estefanía: No, to be honest, there are people who would think she is a nun. [...]

In Argentina, Ignacia from UC suggested women wearing hijabs on TV is something that indeed would catch people’s attention and “shock” because it is something exotic. Fellow participant Isabel reported feeling curious to know more, rather than uncomfortable. Other participants did not have a particular reaction and thought it was normal for people from the Middle East. Mexican exchange student in UC, Isidoro, thought that although “it is not that common to see someone [dressed] like that in Latin America, you know that in the Middle East it must be like that, or rather it is stipulated

⁴⁰ The original word used in Spanish is “velo”, which can be directly translated as “veil”. However, participants often used the word “veil” to convey the idea of a “headscarf”, rather than a veil that would cover the face. The same translation adjustment has been applied when appropriate.

[to be] like that”. Josefina from UTdT understood people could wear it out of respect for the place they were at, like in Gaza, “although if here in Argentina, I see one [woman] wearing the headscarf, indeed it would probably shock me a lot more”.

Luciana from UTdT believed it is ultimately the choice of the viewer and suggested that viewers need to be open-minded if they decide to watch this kind of channel. Fellow participant Fernanda argued it “is a [different] culture that has to be respected” and explained that “it would surprise me if they wouldn’t have [i.e. wear] it”. However, when asked to put herself in the shoes of her mother or other people, Luciana accepted that some people would find it shocking.

Francisca from UNAM argued it was attractive to see something different like a female anchor wearing a hijab, but had some doubts about how representative it was from Iran, i.e. “I don’t know to what extent they can present this kind of news bulletins inside their own country”. Similarly, Baltazar from Colmex felt “surprised by the role of women” on HispanTV. He argued this channel was trying to get rid Iran’s international image as a conservative country. Similarly, in Argentina, María from UB was surprised to see so many female reporters and anchors.

María: I wasn’t expecting that there could be female presenters. I know that they were wearing headscarves, but there were too many compared to the male presenters and that surprised me. I am not saying that in Iran women have perfect lives, because that is clearly not the case. But it was surprising to me that an Iranian channel had almost the same number of female presenters as male ones.

Many participants seemed to be aware that wearing a hijab was mandatory according to Iran’s Islamic laws. However, some expressed discomfort to hear even women outside of Iran were expected to wear them. José from UTdT noticed that “[...] all women [wear hijabs], at least on all the programmes that I have watched, unless they are interviewing someone, [in that case] the interviewee doesn’t [wear a hijab]”. Martín from UB expressed horror regarding this issue:

Martín: [...] It was shocking especially because... well, even though I am very critical of Islam, I do think it is crazy what is happening in France, like: “Oh, she’s wearing a headscarf, let’s put her in jail”. However, one thing is that an Iranian or Arab woman, or the journalists in this case, wear a headscarf because it is their culture, because they want, or they are [on] live [TV]. But another [thing] is that Western journalists that work for the channel are required to wear a headscarf. I find it horrific.

Similar observations were voiced in other sessions. For instance, Julio from UTdT wondered whether “all the people that work for the channel believe [in Islam]” or not, because “maybe it is a prejudice, but I don’t know if I would a headscarf if I didn’t believe [in Islam]”. Some participants in other groups, both in Mexico and Argentina,

had assumed the reporters working for HispanTV were Muslim. “It is not clear to me that they do not practise the religion”, Gabriel from UAM thought. In Argentina, Manuel also wondered: “But you [guys] don’t know if they are Muslim”. This could even be the case of reporter with Spanish-sounding names, which in María’s opinion, “may have converted to Islam” (See figure 5). Confronted with such hypothesis, even Martín expressed understanding: “Well, if they converted to Islam, [it is] a religious issue, then I don’t find it wrong”.

Figure 5: Isabel Pérez reporting for HispanTV from Gaza



Nevertheless, some participants seemed to be more informed about Iran and suggested that, if the channel wanted to portray progress in women’s rights, then it was sending contradictory messages. After watching a clip of a report about women participating in car races, Mariana from UB elaborated on her impression saying:

Mariana: I thought it was contradictory, because, for instance, not long ago there was a general protest in Iran, where women cannot take off their headscarves. There was a campaign where men wear wearing them, [it was] a campaign about women’s rights. And here you see that they are showing you that women compete in car races. And that is completely irrelevant to women’s rights, when you see what is happening in Iran. To me it is completely irrelevant that they show it. They’re showing that they are covering [i.e. hiding] everything that is happening.

Mariana was referring to a campaign during July 2016, whereby Iranian men started posting on social media pictures of themselves wearing hijabs in a display of solidarity with women, for whom wearing headscarves is compulsory (Saul, 2016).

In other groups, this was considered a cultural element and seemed not to bother most participants. Nevertheless, some comments during the first focus group in Mexico and the last focus group in Argentina can offer a better insight at how many participants (particularly female) may feel at a more unconscious level. In Mexico, Ana from Colmex was not necessarily against headscarves and did not particularly dislike HispanTV, “but I did not feel identified, that is, I feel it is very alien to our culture”. Later, she added saying HispanTV “does not have a future [here]” because in her opinion “it is not

'relational', as they say, [i.e.] people would not feel identified". In Argentina, Nadia from UBA thought HispanTV had more work to do to improve, compared to the other channels, because "it is the one I could relate the least. I mean, I would watch it, but just out of curiosity to see presenters with *burkas* or headscarves or whatever. But I find it is a more distant culture".

In Argentina, another issue that may contribute to shaping a negative image of Iran was suggested by Martín from UB. In his opinion, Iran had the most negative image because of its connection to a series of bombings against the Jewish community in Buenos Aires during the 1990s, where "a lot of people died and most of them were Argentinians of Jewish religion and also from other religions". Marcelo agreed, saying that was the reason why "Iran does not instil trustworthiness" in Argentina.

6.4. CHINA: CENSORSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In the case of China and its country image, the affective component seemed to play a bigger role among viewers, than the cognitive one, i.e. pre-conceived negative images regarding China's political system and its control of the media appeared to take precedence over any appreciation for either its rich culture or economic development and technological advancements in recent years.

Fernanda from UNAM said her opinion of China had been shaped to a certain extent after talking with Chinese people during a conference. Her impression was that people in China had a partial understanding of things; the reason being that information was centralised and "very, very biased because the government interferes with everything". Fernanda did not consider China as a viable source of "truthful news" because if the government "is capable of taking away Google from the kids, it is capable of taking away anything". Fellow participant Fátima agreed with Fernanda saying China lacks credibility due to excessive censorship. She argued people cannot use globally popular social networks such as Facebook and are restricted to use those approved by the government. Similarly, in Argentina, María also explained that the negative impression she had of China was due to "the intervention that there is in that country over the press and the media". These and other comments during different sessions show that internet censorship not only was part of their pre-conceived image of China, but it was also particularly linked to the affective dimension.

Another issue that appeared to form part of China's country image among participants was that of Human Rights, which was particularly raised by many after watching one

of the video excerpts from CCTV. The clip that seemed to catch the attention of participants in most groups was a report about human rights in the USA. Besides this, there was at least one instance when this issue was also mentioned, but in relation to the choice of topics covered by the broadcaster. Manuel from UB had the impression that RT and HispanTV would broadcast news that were more significant than CCTV. He argued CCTV seems to offer a lot of information, but it was more “contained” (i.e. within certain boundaries) or “basic” (i.e. relatively less significant). With this comment, Manuel also seemed to point out to the issue of censorship as an overarching theme in the broadcaster, which in turn would affect the choice of topics.

Manuel: This is a consideration of my own, obviously, but it seems to me that being in China you have more important things. For example, the violation of human rights or the situation that China is going through in the conflicts it may have with its neighbours than a cultural exhibition in Cuba, in Havana.

Despite the fact that Manuel’s observation could be influenced and to a certain degree compromised by the selection of video excerpts (which inevitably fails to reflect the full range of topics covered by the different programmes), it nevertheless confirms that “the violation of human rights” to a certain extent forms part of a pre-conceived image of China throughout Argentina.

With regards to CCTV’s report on the situation of Human Rights in the USA, it was perceived by many as a defensive response from China, because it is often the target of condemnation by the international community concerning its Human Rights record. Despite being aware of this, a few participants that held this opinion, like Baltazar from Colmex and Josefina from UTdT, also expressed their interest in continuing watching the report to find out more.

Baltazar: [...] the USA published [a report] and now we are going to publish one. I don’t know, anyhow, I would have liked to continue watching to see how they framed it and to know what the criteria was or where the news was heading to.

Josefina: Well, it was also that, like [the Chinese would say:] they (i.e. the USA) complain so much about other [countries], now we are going to counter-attack. And that was interesting, like he said, I can take it, consider it, but I don’t know. [...] It was definitely a retaliation, but that doesn’t mean that in part it is true.

In Mexico, Ana from Colmex seemed to question the credibility of the information offered by a state-sponsored broadcaster when reporting on domestic issues. arguing she would not trust any channel that would report about the country it is based. “I would not trust that [channel] of Iran. Well, I would not trust anybody to talk about their own country. That is, neither in Russia with Russian information, neither in Iran nor in China, when they spoke of human rights in China”, Anna explained.

Enrique from UAM argued that all three channels seemed to be biased, but CCTV's bias was evident when comparing the report about reading habits among Chinese people (positive bias towards China) with the report about Human Rights in the USA (negative bias towards the USA). Besides this, he had the impression that the channel was "self-referential", i.e. news mostly focused on China, similar to other participants' opinions as seen in the previous chapter.

During another session at UTdT, Luciana seemed to like CCTV because it was "providing data all the time, [e.g. they say:] 'according to a survey'". Nevertheless, when asked whether she had noticed where the sources came from, a few fellow participants replied without hesitating: "China". Lucas even explained that was proof of CCTV's "passive influence" (i.e. bias). Previously he had argued RT was "actively biased", whereas CCTV was "passively biased, [because] it avoids [certain] topics due to bias or issues related to foreign policy". Later Luciana concluded saying there was a "posture of seriousness, if you like, to read the news", arguably implying both the posture of the newsreaders and the way the news was presented gave the impression that the information was reliable and based on indisputable facts. In Mexico, this style was deemed by Bruno from Colmex as "too formal, like nothing more than a script that they were reproducing" because there was no "spontaneity from the presenters".

Although not entirely certain on her observation, Ignacia from the focus group at UC in Argentina believed CCTV's report on Human Rights in USA was based on Chinese sources. During other groups, participants also expressed their concern in this regard. When Jimena from UTdT doubted the "Chinese statistics", fellow participant Juana added with irony: "Yes, the Chinese talking of Human Rights". By this comment, Juan seemed to suggest China lacked authority and/or credibility to talk about Human Rights.

A similar opinion appeared during a session at UB, whereby China was seen as hypocritical for discussing the Human Rights situation in the USA and not addressing their own issues as well.

Martín: [It's] hypocrisy, China speaking of Human Rights.

Manuel: I don't know if it's hypocrisy. We all can talk about Human Rights. The issue is that I cannot talk about the USA when I don't talk about myself. That is where authority is born.

Melisa: Well, the same happened with the other channels. There were things that they said, but maybe they were not the best example.

Manuel: Obviously.

María: It somehow makes sense that they would not talk about their own flaws on Human Rights if it is a channel of the Chinese government, I mean...

Marcos: But they also talk about their own flaws, in the case of the demography indexes. They also declare the flaws they have, they rectify them and at the same time they want to generate change. It is like they criticise themselves.

María: This also instilled me some trust, even though it was not everything that I saw that instilled me trust. The fact that they are capable of doing self-criticism, be it with domestic sources or not, the fact of doing self-criticism itself, I think that at least gives room to discussion and questioning.

The discussion led to the conclusion that being auto-critical helps build authority and generate trustworthiness among audiences. A similar argument had been put forward during a focus group at UNAM, i.e. taking an overly defensive stance can turn out being counterproductive.

Francisca: [...] I have the idea (i.e. impression) that they are presenting the idea of defending their stance, because they have been attacked a lot from the point of view of the Human Rights issue. So, they were presenting the idea that the USA also have problems with human rights. So, it is a defensive stance and it is a superficial stance that they are only presenting a superficial stereotype, instead of questioning what is happening in the world, what is happening with Human Rights at a global level or why they are not doing it. The truth is that I wouldn't watch it (i.e. this channel).

6.5. (UN)CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

After watching the video excerpts corresponding to the different channels, the reactions of participants could be classified in mainly two groups: those whose perception changed to a certain degree (either on a positive or negative way), and those whose perception reportedly remained the same (either positive, neutral, or negative). In Mexico, Héctor from UAM argued “it opened the horizon a little bit, maybe to see and compare what they are saying”. Javier from UTdT, for example, thought he would “revise the previous question (i.e. ranking countries according to a pre-conceived image), [and] I would give more credibility to Russia, Iran and China, than what I gave them in the previous question”. His fellow participant José was less positive, he argued “the fact of watching a channel that I feel all the time is trying to show ‘the truth’, as though its way of seeing the world was the ‘real’ way of seeing the world, it makes me trust it even less”.

6.5.1. RT

For Fátima from UNAM, RT was somehow enlightening, it showed her “there can be another type of TV, a type of TV that I didn't expect being from Russia”. Similarly, Gisela

from UAM felt RT let her “feel Russia more trustworthy. For instance, I had a perception of Russia [that] was a little vague and a little ambiguous, but I have been watching RT for years and, I don’t know, it has changed a lot my perception”. The Peruvian student at UBA said her perception of RT changed in a positive way.

Nancy: Yes, I had a slightly different opinion of how Russia could present the news. I was really surprised to see that they try to side with the population, without having to... I mean, they are not afraid of doing some kind of criticism about how politics is being conducted, how the economy is being handled, stuff like that. [...]

Her fellow participant Nadia said she had a similarly good impression of RT because, living in the West, it felt culturally “closer”. She was surprised to see how “international” the channel was, suggesting “one could watch it and maybe not know that it was Russian”.

Some participants were more cautious. Hortencia from UAM, for example, said she had the impression that Russia was “a little closeminded, like more isolated, [but now] I think it is not like that”. Nevertheless, she “would need to continue watching the programme” to find out more. Unlike Hortencia, Héctor stressed he “still thinks Russia isn’t inspiring trustworthiness in me, just as I had put here [on the ranking] at the start”.

6.5.2. *HISPANTV*

Helena from UAM thought HispanTV changed her perception of Iran but did not elaborate on her opinion. A Mexican exchange student at UC was surprised to know about HispanTV: “I didn’t even know they had a channel in Spanish and that they would address issues from Latin America”. Jacinta from UTdT was also surprised that Iran had “such a good channel”. Similarly, Lorenzo from another session at UTdT found it surprising that “Iran would give so much attention and importance to the Spanish-speaking community”. Fellow participant Laureano did not expect that HispanTV would have a correspondent in Buenos Aires.

Given the impression that “women in Iran have no rights, which is what is seen from here (Argentina)”, Laureano was not expecting so many female reporters. This gave him the impression that “women are progressing in terms of rights”. During the session at UB, María was also surprised about the presence of female reporters but had a different opinion: “I haven’t stopped thinking there is a massive violation of women rights in Iran”. Fellow participant Mariana mentioned HispanTV reinforced in her the idea that “it is a medium to transmit something that is not so”. Marcelo completed the

sentence saying it was *staged*⁴¹, meaning it was seemingly all a set-up, i.e. something to give a good impression abroad, rather than being descriptive of the reality in the ground.

6.5.3. CCTV-E

At a first glance CCTV-E did not appear to help change people's perception of China. During the session at UC, both Argentinian and Mexican students seemed to agree that they still had the same impression of China as before watching the video clips. Mariana from UB thought "the one from China did not generate much [interest], to be honest". Fellow participant Martín still thinks China "is an authoritarian country". In Mexico, Gustavo from UAM did not like that CCTV-E would focus on fashion. He was aware of the fact that the video clips were only selected fragments, that not necessarily reflected the whole array of topics covered by the channel. However, he argued "China has a lot to talk about" instead of fashion. "If I want to talk about fashion, then I watch TV from France or Italy, but not from China", he explained.

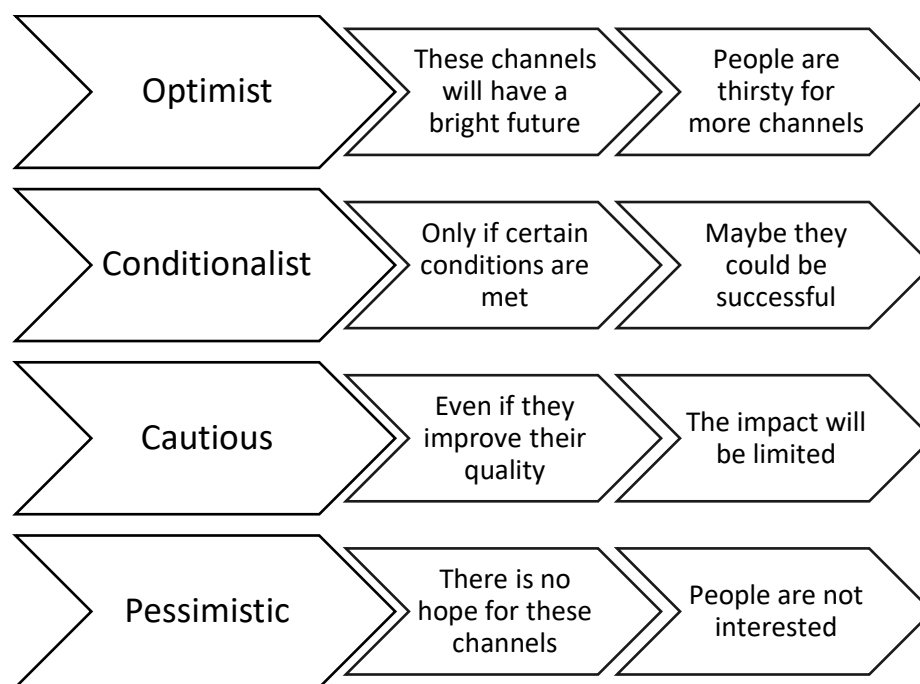
By examining this and other comments, it could be argued that participants had conflicting expectations from a Chinese channel. On the one hand some criticised that CCTV-E was exceedingly auto-referential and Sino-centric, whereas others suggested China had more to offer, i.e. unique topics that would be more interesting for viewers. However, the main question is whether the choice of topics itself or the reporting approach to the topics could undermine CCTV-E's attractiveness to viewers.

6.6. FUTURE IN LATIN AMERICA

Acceptance by the public could be regarded as a *sine qua non* of increasing viewership. Participants were encouraged to share their views on the potential degree of success of these channels in Latin America, i.e. which channels were more likely to catch the attention of the general population and consequently become a regular source of news. After analysing the opinions of the participants about this issue, it was possible to recognise that most participants tended to fall within four profiles or categories, which I call: *optimists, conditionalists, cautious* and *pessimistic*.

⁴¹ The word originally used in Spanish was "montaje" which can be translated as assembly, setting, set-up, montage, etc.

Figure 6: Four profiles assessing the future of international TV channels



Optimists were generally excited about these channels. They would see viewers turning their backs on traditional broadcasters, i.e. suggesting people would accept different channels if more options were available to them. Bruno from Colmex thought it would be “refreshing” having this type of channels on Mexican TV, because the domestic channels are very discredited as described in *Chapter 5*. *Conditionalists* tended to have a positive view, but only if certain conditions were met. They argued these channels could have a bright future, provided they carried out some important changes. Only then they would be more likely to be accepted among audiences. Unwilling to generalise, some participants were very *cautious* in their judgements. They reckoned that even if these broadcasters improve their overall quality and attend to the needs of the general public, their impact would be rather limited, simply because those interested in international affairs are just a very specialised segment of the population. Unlike them, the rest of the population may just demonstrate an initial interest, that would soon wash away. Similarly, *pessimists* also had a rather negative view of the project, but they considered it was doomed to fail seemingly because people are naturally inclined to be curious about news that affects them directly and would not necessarily be interested in what is happening on the other side of the globe. Besides, they also held pessimist views about audiences, who arguably consume low quality television and broadcasters consequently adjust their content accordingly.

Baltazar from Colmex thought that, despite domestic channels being discredited, these channels “would not have a big impact” because the average viewer would find it

difficult to understand the topics being discussed, i.e. “it is not the same to see the conflicts between [the first Lady, La] Gaviota⁴² and [the president Enrique] Peña Nieto, as maybe the kind of dynamics involving international conflicts or international politics or other things”. His opinion suggested Mexican audiences were seemingly not cultivated enough to understand the implications of international news, therefore local broadcasters would resort to light entertainment and gossip about politicians.

Somehow contradicting that view, during the same focus group Beatriz argued the reason why these channels would not be accepted by the public is because “the ideological issue that we noticed in these channels does clash a lot with the way in which the bulk of the population is used to receive news, for example, I repeat, from Televisa”. Beatriz seemed to argue that if audiences were unable to understand international news charged with ideology, local broadcasters were the ones to blame, due to their low standards of reporting.

6.6.1. RT

A larger number of participants mentioned RT as the one with best chances of being accepted by audiences in their countries. One of the reasons was the perceived availability of RT both in Mexico and Argentina. Alejandro from Colmex mentioned RT “is already broadcasting”, suggesting its mere presence meant people were already watching the channel. At a different group at Colmex, Damián seemed to have no doubt that RT could have a future in Mexico:

Damián: RT, definitely, and I think it is already doing it (i.e. being successful). I mean, more and more often I meet people that know the channel and that know more about Russia and the world thanks to RT. And it specially called my attention when I started to see physical advertisement of the channel, because it means the there is a [clear] intention from the channel to enter the Mexican market. I have never watched it on television. I have only seen it on the internet, but, who knows? I think if they continue like this, they will probably get what they want, which is to get inside [the Mexican market].

Herminia from UAM had a similar opinion, saying that RT and HispanTV had more chances than CCTV-E, especially because she had noticed some RT programmes being broadcast by local, free-to-view channels such as channel 34. In Argentina, Martín from UB stressed that RT was available on the *television digital abierta* (open digital

⁴² Angélica Rivera Hurtado also known by the nickname “La Gaviota” (the seagull) is the wife of the then Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto.

television) network, whereas “the other two [channels, i.e. HispanTV and CCTV-E] are not”. Luis from UTdT pointed out that being on the tv listing was precisely the reason why people watch it. Fellow participant Laureano added that he knew “a lot of people that watch it particularly in Spanish”.

Other participants were more pessimist and pointed out that even widespread availability would not guarantee success. José from UTdT thought that, despite broadcasting through the open digital network, RT had failed to position itself as the leader of what he called “the international media market”. He argued in Argentina there are not many people that consume international news media, and from that segment “there are probably more that consume CNN en Español than RT”. Although a few of his fellow participants agreed on this point, others said they could imagine people starting to like it. Jimena, for instance, imagined her father using RT as a source of information as he would read *La Nación*⁴³.

Some participants like Fátima thought that RT is more likely to be accepted by “people like us”, seemingly suggesting RT viewers fell within a specific profile. She did not elaborate whether she meant people with an interest in international affairs or university-educated, highly cultivated people in general, or even people with particular ideological convictions aligned to those of RT. Fátima, however, mentioned two aspects that would catch the attention of viewers: content and “the way of dealing with information”, seemingly referring to RT’s reporting style. Nevertheless, improving availability was, in her opinion, the main condition that RT had to meet in order to become more visible to Mexicans.

Participants both in Mexico and Argentina mentioned RT’s format was advantageous to attracting viewers. Daniel from Colmex thought RT’s “format is very attractive nowadays”. Isabel, a Mexican student at UC, thought that “RT would have more success among the general population, because of the format of the news [bulletin] which is more informal; and in general, I feel that the bulk of Mexican society is more interested in being informed by a news bulletin that is more eye-catching, not so boring [...]”. A fellow participant, Ignacia, agreed and pointed out that the same was applicable to Argentina, where “the bulk of the population could be interested by RT for the same reason, because of the format, which is more relaxed”.

⁴³ One of Argentina’s oldest and most popular newspapers.

The style was seen as attractive by some participants because it was similar to “more established sources of information like CNN, by using touch screen and screenshots from social media”, as Natalia from UBA explained. Fellow participant Nadia agreed by saying it was “more modern, [and] people are more used to that”, while another student nodded in approval.

In Argentina, comments made during one of the focus groups at UTdT suggest that besides content and style, cultural proximity was a factor considered by some. Lorenzo suggested that RT was “moderately European” and elaborated saying “it is also closer to the culture [that we have]”. “We must take into account the ideology in a large number of countries, right?”, said Leticia and explained why: “I believe there are many [people] who would feel identified with RT, more than anything”.

Similarly, Mauricio from UB pointed out that Argentines like controversy and having strong views about different issues. “We like to throw ourselves more to one side or to the other due to ideology”, he explained and argued RT would be better received as it “generates controversy”. A fellow participant thought RT had something “spicy” to it that would make people wonder what its stand would be regarding certain topics. In his opinion, RT appears to be “very committed to the topic” it is reporting about more than the content itself. He was implying that the manner in which the content was presented was arguably more appealing than the content itself.

Cautious voices warned about credibility and news that would undermine the way RT is perceived by audiences. Ismael, a Mexican student during the mixed session at UC, believed RT’s success would be short lived “due to the content”. He follows RT on Facebook and he noticed that RT publishes “very silly things” like “whale has been seen in Baja California” or “girl dances like [...]”. Isidoro, a fellow participant also from Mexico, argued this could curtail RT’s credibility, especially of established followers. He elaborated saying that the opinions posted on the comments section on Facebook had left him with this impression.

Isidoro: [...] Even on the comments [people] start writing things like: ‘before they had some credibility, now they uploaded absurd stuff’. Depending on who is commenting; some love it and some do not.

Some cautious opinions suggested RT is an interesting source to confront with others during specific cases. Luciana from UTdT mentioned switching on especially RT to follow the alleged coup d’état attempt in Turkey during 2016, because “I knew it was the only one that would be broadcasting about it, all the time”. Nevertheless, “It was

something sporadic. In general, you don't go home and say: 'Oh, I want to watch Iranian TV', I mean...no". With this, Luciana seemed to doubt that ordinary people would naturally feel inclined to watch these international channels.

6.6.2. *HISPANTV*

Enrique from UNAM was optimistic about HispanTV. He argued it could have a future in Mexico, because "alarmist (i.e. scaremongering) stories" have a wide audience in the country. Fellow participant Ester suggested HispanTV's audience is rather limited and depends greatly on their ideology. In Argentina some participants pointed out that HispanTV would face challenges similar to RT, i.e. being accepted by a "very reduced audience, and could never be compared to a national news organisation", as Julio from UTdT said. Isabel, a Mexican student at UC in Mendoza, believed HispanTV could be interesting for students and professionals. At UTdT, Josefina thought HispanTV could be suitable for a niche audience, and Pablo Iglesias' Fort Apache could be an attractive programme.

Nadia from UBA thought only people interested in the Middle East conflict could watch HispanTV. Manuel from UB suggested "the general population -including myself- don't know a lot about the Middle East", therefore it could help ignite some interest about that particular region. His view was diametrically different from the one voiced by Alicia in Mexico. Mentioned earlier in this chapter, her view was that HispanTV "would not be so accepted in Mexico because there are a lot of very ignorant people who do not understand that a woman wearing a headscarf is not a terrorist". Alicia seemed to suggest that relative ignorance about Islam could create mistrust, which in turn would prompt rejection by the viewers. Ana, a fellow participant during the same session at Colmex, thought HispanTV would not have a future in Mexico because it was hardly "relational", i.e. "people would not identify themselves". Ana elaborated further saying she "felt that it was very foreign⁴⁴ to our culture".

Damián from Colmex, who had been very optimistic about RT's future in Mexico, thought that the Mexican public is eager to have access to new media products. In his opinion HispanTV and CCTV "probably would need a wider strategy than just more

⁴⁴ "Ajeno" in the original Spanish, the meaning of this adjective is "other people's", i.e. something belonging to somebody else. By extension it could be translated as "alien" or "foreign".

publicity and getting in social networks”. However, he did not elaborate on what strategy that could be. Fellow participant Daniel believed HispanTV was dynamic and plural, and “if it had a stronger marketing campaign, probably would have a lot of success”. In his opinion, HispanTV’s “bias” or open ideology would catch viewers’ attention, as well as being from the Middle East. Likewise, during the focus group at UBA in Argentina, Peruvian participant Nancy believed HispanTV could be more attractive, because it offers a different perspective, albeit more opinionated. In her opinion, HispanTV -and to a certain extent CCTV- would be well received in Peru. However, hardly any participant suggested their circle of friends and family could show interest in HispanTV. One exception was Braulio, who thought the report about female racers “despite being of poor quality or badly prepared” could be appealing for his family, because they are “very curious”.

6.6.3. CCTV

Very few participants showed themselves optimistic about the future of CCTV-E in Latin America. In Argentina, Josefina from UTdT could picture her father “hooked on the Chinese [channel], but as an exception in the whole of Argentina”. In Mexico, Ana from Colmex believed CCTV-E “could have a future, but I am not sure”. Fellow participant Andrés from Colmex thought “in general there are more people interested in Asia than in the Middle East”. In his opinion, CCTV could have some viewership because China has become a focus of attention for many and “not necessarily because of the content”.

Nancy, the Peruvian participant at UBA, believed CCTV could attract some viewers in Peru, due to “that *approach*⁴⁵ it has to show you news that are a little more social or cultural”. She seemed to suggest that viewers are tired of negative news and therefore CCTV-E “could have some success, [because of] that frivolous and uncontroversial way of looking at things”. In Mexico, Estefanía from UNAM believed the biggest barrier was language: “The truth is that I do indeed feel that if they didn’t have so much problems with the way they speak, many Latin Americans would watch that channel” because the topics would attract “a certain audience that is very [inclined to watch] television” such as “housewives”. Fellow participant Esteban was less convinced and suggested

⁴⁵ Nancy used the English word “approach” in her intervention.

people would “watch it for a while to have a laugh and be entertained by the way they read the news or speak the language”, but ultimately would not become a source of news for them.

Daniel from Colmex held a rather pessimist view with regards to the future of CCTV-E in Latin America. He doubted it could be successful “even with changes and all the Latin-friendly modifications that one would want”. In his opinion, the channel was unable to detach itself from “the Chinese state and its formalism”. Besides this, he thought there is a certain degree of racism against Asian people in Latin America, which would act as a “quite strong barrier” for CCTV-E to attract viewers. Somewhat on a similar line of opinion, Héctor from UAM thought “people would change [the channel] because, as we mentioned a while ago, that a Chinese person would come to tell me what I have to do, how is my country, I think people would not accept it because of that”.

Other participants elaborated less but were forceful in suggesting CCTV-E would not have a bright future. In Argentina, Nadia from UBA said “the news was not interesting and the presenters were cold”. Fellow participant Natalia thought “everything was very schematic and kind of far [removed from our reality]”.

6.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown how the complexity of factors which affect the images of foreign countries render it a difficult task to develop an explanation that could satisfy all different scenarios. Even though the overall analysis suggests pre-conceived images of countries can hinder acceptance of international broadcasters, it is also important to stress that the cause-effect relation is a more nuanced than it may appear. The multilayer makeup of country’s image, with its cognitive and affective aspects, help explain how people can have conflicting opinions about the same country (e.g. the USA, Venezuela, etc.). This dynamic becomes even more important once the conative dimension is taken into consideration, because it assists in understanding behaviour, i.e. how images can affect the likelihood of potential viewers becoming actual viewers.

In the first part we examined the images participants had of different countries before being exposed to these channels. Images tended to be more monolithic in the case of countries that were less familiar to participants, such as the cases of China and Iran, and to a lesser extent Russia. Familiarity, however, was not necessarily a synonym of blind acceptance, as was seen in the case of Venezuela. It would be misleading to assume that only the media are responsible for the way these images were shaped.

Very frequently the images portrayed by the media are shaped by politics, both domestic and international. Furthermore, foreign policy and diplomacy also contribute to shaping the media agenda and arguably dictating (very often indirectly) how certain countries are to be regarded by the population. An aspect that was not addressed during the focus groups but that is closely related to this is the influence exerted by the educational system. It would be worthwhile exploring the effects of government policy on the curricula at different levels with respect to subjects such as history and politics, among other. Whether either Mexico or Argentina want to present themselves as part of the Enlightened West and stress historic and cultural links to Europe or want to advance a counter-hegemonic narrative that strives to liberate itself and the region from Capitalistic oppression would certainly have an effect on how citizens perceive other countries and their own. However, this exceeds the scope of our study.

The second part showed how a brief exposure to these broadcasters had a rather limited effect on changing the way these countries were perceived. Although it was interesting to see how in some instances participants became curious to know more about these channels, in other cases it appeared to have helped re-enforce pre-conceived images. This finding supports the idea that changing perceptions is a complex process, i.e. besides accessibility and content adaptation, prolonged exposure is also a factor that cannot be overlooked.

The third part discussed the likelihood of these countries of being successful in attracting viewers, according to the views voiced by the participants during the different sessions in both countries. It became apparent that Mexicans and Argentinians were more drawn to RT, which was perceived as being culturally closer and similar to news media in the region, both in style and format. Although HispanTV's content and ideological stance seemed interesting to some participants, religious elements linked to Islam made some participants feel it was foreign to the Latin American culture. In the case of CCTV-E, opinions were less optimistic. The reasons were manifold, from the language barrier and style, to the news content and its perceived control by the government.

Overall, the opinions of the participants seem to support the idea that cultural proximity plays indeed an important role in affecting the viewers' decision to switch on one particular channel, when given an array of options. However, it is not the only factor to consider. Indeed, viewers in Mexico and Argentina appear to be avid for good quality news content and RT seems to be the one closer to fulfilling that need. Part of

this could be linked to the fact that it was not automatically identified as Russian, and thus less affected by Russia's image, albeit not completely exempt from it (e.g. RT losing credibility when reporting about Crimea, as discussed by some participants). Contrarily, CCTV-E seemed to be the furthest from achieving its goal, as it was broadly perceived as carrying the official views of the Chinese government, besides other issues. In this respect, a common opinion was that being auto-critical helps build authority and generate trustworthiness. However, this auto-criticism was not necessarily defined as the media organisations themselves conducting a critical analysis of their role and how live up to their own standards, whether they would publicly admit any faults in their journalistic service or not. It was rather seen as the media organisation as being a representative of a country adopting a critical approach about the same country, as if truly conforming to the highest standards of impartiality and objectivity.

7. THE FUTURE IS SOCIAL MEDIA

During the design stage of this research, the structuring of the focus groups tried to understand how the participants would consume news in general, and international news in particular. It was a surprise that one of the most unexpected findings would come out from this initial ice-breaking exercise. This finding was related to changes in media consumption particularly affecting but surely not limited to younger populations in both countries. Although traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television are still vital for people to learn about what is happening in the world, online and specifically social media are increasingly becoming important platforms by which large sections of the population keep themselves informed.

As news consumption patterns start to shift from traditional media to mobile platforms such as smart phones and tablets, the need to invest and expand operations to social media has turned inevitable. This chapter looks at the overall strategy of projecting soft-power through news channels and provides an extra layer of analysis for RQ3 (i.e. *how successful could such enterprise be in terms of soft power gains by the countries behind this strategy?*).

If used strategically, new trends in social media could help boost the visibility and impact of traditional media outlets. It could be argued that failure to do so could undermine audience reach and eventually jeopardise any chances of success. In light of this, the aim of this chapter is to analyse to what extent the chances of success for international broadcasters such as CCTV-E, RT and HispanTV are increasingly becoming more dependent on online presence and specifically social media. For this purpose, it is imperative to examine which news platforms are preferred by audiences in Mexico and Argentina, how they relate to them on their daily lives and how habits vary between members of their families.

This chapter will focus primarily on the opinions of participants of the focus groups. However, with the aim of contextualising the findings, it is also necessary to provide information relevant to the societies in both countries. At the same time, studies on similar trends in other parts of the world will be helpful to understand this phenomenon and provide a richer analysis. The first part will explore to what extent traditional media platforms such as newspapers, radio and television still play an important role in the way participants keep informed. As Internet accessibility grows around the world, it is worth investigating to what degree people have shifted towards

online media and how news consumption has changed with the popularisation of social media platforms. The second part will analyse what challenges international broadcasters face in their quest to expand their operations around the world, and specifically to Latin America. Without a doubt, distribution channels play a crucial role in making international television channels accessible to audiences in different countries. Special attention will be paid to Internet access as a factor responsible for changing and shaping new media consumption patterns among different sections of the population across the region. Likewise, the role of social media as a mediation platform between media organisations and audiences will be examined closely. As social media has become a tool to reach new audiences, this chapter will look into how this approach has been used by some international media outlets. Finally, a few words will be dedicated to identifying some challenges and threats jeopardising the success of such strategies.

7.1. CHANGING HABITS AND NEWS CONSUMPTION

The arrival of Web 2.0 technologies has allowed audiences to play an increasingly important role by interacting with the mass media and becoming involved in the news cycle (Hermida et al., 2012). As in many parts of the world, the popularisation of smart phones has deeply changed the way people interact with the reality around them, in part due to the blossoming of social networks designed to help people engage with one-another. These changes were quickly recognised by the traditional media, who in turn were prompted “to either migrate to the Internet or also provide their online version” (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013: 693). This does not mean that traditional platforms would be completely replaced by online media. At least not for the time being. In fact, a number of studies suggest that audiences have diversified their news consumption to include an array of different sources both on- and off-line (Jansson and Lindell 2015; Papathanassopoulos et al. 2013).

By looking closely at the changes in news consumption and the degree of adoption of new online media, researchers such as Stylianos Papathanassopoulos and others have identified different profiles of news consumers according to platforms and depending on the preference for on-line versus off-line sources (2013). According to this classification, people that consume all kinds of media, both traditional and through the Internet, can be regarded as *omnivores*. It is an all-encompassing category that includes people who not only are frequent users of the Internet but also access traditional media

such as television and the press on a regular basis. Within omnivores, it is possible to distinguish three different profiles depending on their higher preference for audio-visual platforms, print or the Internet. Thus, *Audio-visuals* are frequent users of the Internet that also show a preference for audio-visual platforms such as television to consume news, neglecting the press on variable degrees. People belonging to the *Digital Press* group are also consumers of the Internet, however they characterise themselves from the audio-visual group by their preference for the press, over television broadcasts. Finally, *Born Digitals* belong to a set of people that rely almost exclusively on the Internet to keep informed, with arguably no use of traditional platforms (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013).

People that have not yet shifted to on-line platforms are considered by Papathanassopoulos as being in the category of *traditionals*. They still rely primarily on television and newspapers to keep informed. Within the category of *traditionals*, it is possible to identify two different profiles: that of the *TV Only* subgroup and that of the *Only Press* subgroup. As both names suggest, these subgroups tend to show an almost exclusive preference for either television or the press. A last group with seemingly no representatives during the focus groups was that of the so-called *No News* group, i.e. those with a low consumption across all media (*ibid.*).

Although such categories are illustrative of different news consumption patterns and helpful to understand overall trends, it is rather difficult to assign a person to only just one given profile. After analysing the data collected during the focus groups conducted for this study, it became evident that most participants' consumption of news could be characterised as that of the *omnivorous* group, albeit with different degrees of mixing and/or preferences towards online news outlets. In this Chapter, rather than trying to squeeze participants into those profiles, it is worthwhile analysing their media consumption by looking at how they relate to different platforms and how habits have evolved throughout their lives.

7.1.1. NEWSPAPERS

In Mexico, many participants expressed the view that either their families or themselves had stopped buying print newspapers. Such was the case of Ana, who said her family had switched to online newspapers between 2007 and 2010. Alejandro could not recall the exact date but believed "it is already a long time that I don't buy the paper". Other participants admitted never having bought the paper themselves, such

as the case of Andrés who elaborated saying it was rather his father that used to buy it once a week when he was very young, but since 2010 had stopped altogether. Some participants reported buying the paper on specific days. Such was the case of Francisca who buys it sometimes on Sundays, although she also mentioned her father had a subscription to *El Universal*. Others like Hortencia said they would only buy the paper for a particular article or when she finds a particular piece of news is interesting, and that could be once a fortnight or even just once a month.

Gustavo was the only participant in Mexico that said he would still buy the newspaper, even though he thought “the newspaper has one problem, which is that it is not instant news. News are from the day before”. Another case where the newspaper was still a common feature in the household was Cristian’s. Although he does not purchase it himself, he mentioned that his father, who does not trust television networks other than the *Deutsche Welle* from Germany, still gets *La Reforma* and *La Jornada* delivered from Monday to Friday. Similarly, in the case of Helena, the newspaper has always been a part of her household. The newspaper used to be delivered daily, first it was *Uno más Uno*, then *El Universal* and the last one was *El Economista*. By the time of the focus group in October 2016, it had already been six months that her family had interrupted the tradition, partly based on economic reasons, but also because her mother would now either read the news online or watch television. This trend of buying less newspapers reported by participants in Mexico is supported by news published on the local media, e.g. *El Economista* reported a fall of 35% in newspaper sales in the country in 2015, due to the “emergence of new media and a low rate of reading habits among Mexicans” (Notimex, 2015).

In Argentina, the impression was that many families still buy newspapers, particularly on weekends. This is still common not only in cases like Ignacia’s, who lives in a relative smaller city like Mendoza, but also in Buenos Aires as in the case of Javier, Luciana, Leonardo, Nadia and Nancy –a Peruvian student currently living in Argentina. In the case of Martín, his family used to buy it every day but now has switched to just weekends. Only a few participants in different groups mentioned they would still get the newspaper delivered on a daily basis, although it is worth mentioning that those who did were Juan and Mauricio and they both still live with their parents. Therefore, it is unclear whether they would buy or not, were they living alone. A similar pattern was echoed by Luciana, who shared her experience as follows:

Luciana: [...] when I was younger, my parents used to buy either *Clarín*, *La Nación* or *Página 12*, which were the only domestic newspapers we had, and there were no other options. [Indistinguishable] Now there is more variety, more access, if you want. But there is also the issue of the fact that if I was living by my own, I don't know if I would buy the paper... I mean, I read it at home because my parents buy it. But if I was living alone and having to survive on my own, I don't know if I could afford it.

Moderator: Would any of you buy it [if you were living on your own]?

Lucas: I do it, but rarely.

Luciana: I mean, I'm not saying I wouldn't, but perhaps, if I had other priorities... it depends on the budget I had.

Lucas: That is why, for example, I stopped buying *Le Monde Diplomatique*, because it was an expenditure to buy it and I preferred to read it online.

Luciana: That doesn't mean that you stop keeping informed... of course...

[other unidentifiable participants on the background] No, no.

Leticia: Time is another issue, because you have to sit down and that takes time. When I read the news, I generally do it on my mobile phone when I am on public transport or between lectures, because sitting down to read the paper takes a lot of time. I wouldn't do it.

From this conversation it is also possible to understand that in a few cases like Lucas', participants were or would buy print newspapers only in specific cases that were related to their studies. Lucas and Mauricio, for example, were interested in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, whereas Laureano reported buying the *Buenos Aires Herald*⁴⁶ every Friday. As in Mexico, newspapers in Argentina have also experienced a steady decline in sales in the last 15 years (Basualdo, 2014; Crettaz, 2013; Gaceta Mercantil, 2013), arguably accelerated by changes in news consumptions such as in the case of Ileana from UC in Mendoza, whose parents "listen to the radio and watch TV a lot. They don't buy the newspaper that often, they rather search the news online, and mostly radio and TV". In both countries, even though only a few participants mentioned they would still buy print newspapers, none expressed that the print press was their only source of information. Therefore, nobody that participated in the focus groups can be regarded as a pure traditionalist within the *Only Print* subgroup. This appears to be also the case of the participants' friends and families, as long as it is possible to assess from the participants' comments.

⁴⁶ Founded in 1876 it is arguably one of the oldest and still existing English-language newspapers published in Argentina.

7.1.2. RADIO

Concerning radio broadcasts, most participants referred to them mostly while describing the news consumption habits of their parents' generation, rather than their own. While this appeared to be the most common scenario, radio consumption patterns changed from household to household. Some participants seemed to be aware of their parents listening to radio but ignored any details about the type of radio stations they would prefer. Hortencia, a student from UAM, only knew that her father sometimes listens to some AM radio stations. Likewise, Iván, a Mexican student who at the time of the focus group was doing an exchange programme at Universidad de Congreso in Mendoza (Argentina), said his father would listen to the news on both AM and FM radio stations while driving, but was not able to mention which stations.

Describing radio as still playing a central role as a source of news for their parents' generation was a common feature mainly among the younger participants. Such was the case of Ana, who studies at Colmex in Mexico, who admitted only listening to the radio when her parents had it switched on. The same was echoed in Argentina by Nadia, from UBA, who confessed: "[...] At home people listen to the radio a lot: AM, news, for example. [...] However, personally I don't listen to it, only my parents switch it on, maybe a commentary. In general, the way I keep informed, the channel through which I follow (the news) is social media". Even the Peruvian participant in the focus group at UBA in Buenos Aires, Nancy, gave account of a similar pattern in her family, by saying she would listen to whatever radio station her aunt would tune in.

Other participants such as Bernardo, Bruno, Daniel from Mexico and Leticia, Lautaro and Laura from Argentina also expressed that radio was still important for their parents. However, the popularity of radio broadcasts among older generations did not seem to be exclusively linked to news consumption. In fact, Héctor, from UAM, said his parents would still listen to the radio, but "not that much because of news, but rather because of music. It's like they still like announcers, right?". Although more popular among older generations, some participants in Argentina reported listening to radio broadcasts. Laura, from UTdT, shared her journey saying: "I used to listen to (Radio) *Del Plata* (AM 1030), but I got tired and now I listen to *AM 750*. I also listen to *FM 2x4* and sometimes *Metro* which are more relaxing".

In other cases, listening to the radio has seemingly become a tradition passed on by parents to the following generation. This is arguably the case of older (40+) participants like Francisca who described her tradition in the following way:

Francisca: In my case, since I was 14 years old, my dad used to get up early and I would follow him. He used to switch on the radio, so I continued that tradition of switching on the radio. [At that time] we listened to Carmen Aristegui's old boss [Pedro] Ferriz de Con. My dad also had a subscription to *El Universal*, but the newspaper... print. So, I got used to listen to the radio every day with him and finally that is the tradition that inherited from him, and since then I have not separated from neither the radio nor the newspaper [...]

Francisca has also been following the journalist Carmen Aristegui for the last 15 to 20 years. And that is also a behaviour common to many listeners in both countries who tend to listen to specific programmes due to a particular radio host. That is also the case of Martín in Argentina, who often tunes in Buenos Aires *Radio Ciudad AM 1110* to listen to journalist Juan Miceli or *Radio Continental AM 590* to follow journalist Nelson Castro.

7.1.3. TELEVISION

Even though television seemed to enjoy more popularity among participants and their families, the most common pattern seemed to show that younger generations are less likely to use it to keep informed than older generations. This behaviour did not suggest dislike for television among younger generations, but rather a discrepancy in news habits. Jimena, for instance, said her family watches television comparatively a lot more than her. In Mexico a similar pattern was to be found, such as in the case of Alejandro, who together with his brother are more used to reading the news online, whereas his father combines both television and the internet and his mother prefers watching the news mainly on television.

Some participants are more assertive about the news habits of their family. "I am 100% sure that my family at least 80% of the ways they find out about stuff is through television, and particularly Foro TV", said Damián, whose family is originally from Mexico but lived a few years in Canada. In fact, in some families, watching the news bulletin is a daily ritual often linked to sitting at the table either during breakfast, lunch or dinner. In Argentina two participants gave account of this ritual. Ignacia, who attended the focus group at UC in Mendoza, said that watching the news during breakfast has become a part of a daily morning ritual for her. In the case of Marcelo in Buenos Aires, he described the ritual saying: "At home we often watch television during

lunch or dinner. Normally the news bulletin is in the background. Not all of us are watching, but if we see any interesting news, then we pay attention”.

Generational differences exist, but it does not mean that younger participants do not consume the news to keep informed. Mexican exchange student in Mendoza, Isabel, reported keeping informed through television more often when she was in her home country than in Argentina. In the mornings, she would often watch “national channels like *TV Milenio* or *Canal 4* for the domestic news. And later in the evening, around dinner time, some international news bulletins, like CNN”. In Argentina, some participants reported watching television during the evening especially because many channels broadcast debate programmes focused on political news. Such were the cases of Jacinta, who watches *TodoNoticias* and *América*, and Jaime who follows Marcelo Zlotogwiazda on *C5N* or Carlos Pagni on *TN*. In the case of Josefina, often switches on *TN*, *América* or *C5N*, but she confessed that was not always her choice, as her parents often “monopolise” (i.e. take full control of) the TV set.

No television

Among the participants that expressed an open dislike for television as source of news, most of them were in Mexico. The reasons were manifold, ranging from poor quality of content to ideological bias and inconveniences of traditional television programming. As seen in previous chapters, participants agreed that local television channels were arguably manipulated by domestic politics, thus undermining the quality of the news:

Fernanda: [I mostly keep informed through the] Internet and social media. I don’t switch on the TV. Regarding free-to-air channels, I know who are manipulating them, and I am not interested in their point of view. I basically go to social media and the apps of newspapers that I am interested in.

[...]

Fátima: [...] Generally, I also don’t like keeping informed through television, because we all know what ideology they have, what their intention is and the quality of information they offer, including the opinions that you can even feel offended by listen to it.

Fernanda’s and Fatima’s opinions were echoed by other participants throughout different sessions. However, in another group, Estela gave account of how social media had become her new source of news, as an alternative to television. This goes in line with previous research suggesting that social media such as Twitter are gaining on popularity as alternative sources of information, due to the traditional media’s gradual loss on credibility (Tandoc and Johnson, 2016). Estela described her experience as follows:

Estela: Generally, I don't consume news on television. I don't like the TV networks in Mexico and their politics or editorial line even less, so I don't do it. On cable, I don't like it that much. What do I do then? Facebook and Twitter. And what I do is to follow either journalists or specialised magazines or newspapers, because now if you want to know immediately what is happening, social media are the ones that are reporting immediately. This is what is happening. In my case, I am interested not only in knowing what is happening, but also in an explanation about their impact. So, I follow a few editorialists and a few specialised magazines. So, I try to find articles that can explain the implications on a national and international level, which is what I am interested in.

The opinions of a few participants seem to suggest that television as a format presents inherent issues that make it difficult for it to maintain its primacy over other media platforms. On one hand, Graciela, who originally is not from Mexico City, finds that news bulletins on live television are somehow inconvenient, because they are broadcast only at certain times and "if I am not there sitting, I can't watch it". Fátima, on the other hand, is more concerned about the quality of the information provided by television channels. She believes television sometimes picks up information that has long been discussed on newspapers, besides staying on the surface of the information and failing to offer in-depth analysis or up-to-date details:

Fátima: [...] I see that there is news that I had already seen a week ago and they are just talking about them on television, when they (newspapers) already made an analysis or something more in-depth, whereas in television is as though there were just reading the headlines of a newspaper.

Not all of the participants that expressed their dislike for television were Mexican, some Argentinians also held similar views, among them the most succinct opinion was that of Nahuel. When asked about his news consumption habits, he replied: "Television, no. I don't like it". As television broadcasts move online, it is unclear whether such dislike is limited to the traditional definition of television as a platform, rather than audio-visual material in general.

7.1.4. SHIFT TO ONLINE AND MOBILE

While many participants still make use of traditional media such as print newspapers, radio and television, a considerable amount reported having shifted towards online media and regard the internet as their primary source of information. This goes in line with data included as part of a dossier published by Statista in 2016 about Internet usage in Latin America, which shows that the number of internet users in Latin America and the Caribbean has experienced a steady growth in the last decade and reached 384.75 million in 2016, more than double the amount compared to the 186.9 million in 2009 (Statista, 2016). Mirroring trends in other parts of the globe, forecasts suggest

that user penetration in the Latin America is set to grow from 58% in 2017 to 60.8% in 2019 (*ibid.*). The expansion of Internet services around the region has enabled the popularisation of social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, among others. In fact, with 91% reach of unique visitors, social media was one of the most popular online content categories in Latin America in December 2015, based on online audience reach (*ibid.*). With 141.36 million unique visitors as of January 2016, Facebook was one of the most popular websites in the region.

Participants in both countries reported a high use of social media as a source of news. In Mexico, Beatriz admitted using “only social media” to keep informed, stating: “Yes, I neither watch TV nor listen to the radio”. Others like Daniel, tried to be more open and accurate at describing his news consumption habits, saying: “I am not ashamed to say it. 80% of my news are from social media, the other 20% is from news apps that give *headlines* and then if I like it, I have thorough look”. Similar patterns were echoed in Argentina, where participants like Nahuel follow the news on social media and Nadia, who keeps updated primarily through Twitter and the internet, although she also watches television channels such as the local *América* and *Todo Noticias*, as well as *CNN*.

In some cases, younger participants that had recently left their family home referred to television (and to a certain extent newspapers and radio, i.e. traditional media) as being central to their families, but that no longer played a significant role in their own newly independent lives. Such was the case of Lucas, who now prefers mobile phone apps to keep informed, compared to his family who would normally watch television or read newspapers. In other cases, audio-visual content traditionally linked to television, is now consumed through the internet. That is the case of Germán, who studies at UAM. He reported having completely switched over to online news and specifically YouTube:

German: Lately I've been watching the news on YouTube. Some [people] share news. These days, depending on whether it is relevant news or not, it is the only platform that I use to keep informed. But that is just my case, because my family still watches TV on a daily basis.

This is an example of a pattern related to audio-visual consumption and how viewers have expanded their habits from traditional media like television to include on-line platforms such as YouTube. And the numbers are staggering, according to the dossier published by Statista, among the entertainment websites, YouTube had 132.7 million unique visitors as of April 2016 (Statista, 2016). Despite the statistics, this trend does not mean that audiences are only looking for alternative voices on such platforms.

Actually, very often viewers visit YouTube channels opened by broadcasters known to them, mimicking to a certain extent a previous off-line consumption pattern (Flaxman et al., 2016). Indeed, as early as 2010 researchers were already studying the political implications of corporate media operating on platforms such as YouTube and the role they were playing in attracting audiences, especially younger people (May, 2010).

According to the 2016 *Survey of Telecommunication Services* conducted by the Mexican Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones, most internet users both in urban and rural areas identified instant messaging (through WhatsApp and Skype), social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) and viewing short videos (as found on YouTube) as their main activities carried out online (IFT, 2016). A trend of speech virtualisation is fundamentally re-shaping the way people make sense of and relate to the world around them. Conversations are to be engaged by texting, posting or sharing. Likewise, emotions arguably need to be conveyed by “likes” and emoticons, or even reaction-videos on any imaginable subject. And it is not a feature exclusive to hectic lives in big cities, in fact the urban-rural divide seems to be less pronounced than previously thought. According to the same survey, mobile phones are the most favourite device to connect to the internet by dwellers in both rural and urban areas, although urban citizens tend to use the internet on their laptops, desktops, tablets, smart TVs and videogames on a higher scale than their rural counterparts (*ibid.*).

Younger participants seemed to be fully immersed in a trend that has been pushing traditional platforms to the side. Ana, who is an undergraduate student of International Relations at Colmex, was categorical at asserting that she *never* watches television, and instead she keeps informed with the BBC app. She also follows a number of newspapers on Twitter and Facebook, and only when something really calls her attention, she then browses the Internet to find more information. As reported by the participants, *applications* can serve both as sources of news or as a filter of sources. In other words, besides downloading specific apps designed by media outlets themselves, there is also a trend of using smartphone or tablet applications that put together content from different websites and filter it according to the settings determined by the user. Mariana, a regular user of such apps, described them as follows:

Mariana: There is an app that I use a lot, it is called *Flipboard*, where you can select [news] by topic and by the newspaper that you want to read. It’s like you go in and you have all the sources there, so you can also go directly to the source. For example, if the topic is Argentinian Foreign Policy, there you have all the newspapers that are talking about it at that moment. So, you can find different sources about a particular topic, or

everything that published by a specific newspaper. I use it a lot, because I can have everything on the same platform.

Moderator: Similar to Google News?

Melisa: Yes, like the Google alerts that you can set by topic and it tells you about the topic you want to know about.

Mariana: I find it very useful, because I have all the topics on the same device.

Participants in the focus group organised at UBA reported similar usage, e.g. Nicolás said he has an app on his mobile phone that filters news from “the most important national newspapers and even some regional ones”. Similarly, the Peruvian participant Nancy explained she is constantly on the road, therefore she would mostly follow current news through an app that filters different international media, such as *The New York Times*, *Financial Times* or *Le Monde*, and even newspapers from China and Brazil. She also admitted not limiting herself to just reading news from the same newspapers, explaining she likes to explore different ones. The mobile aspect seems to be vital for Nancy, who also enjoys listening to podcasts from the BBC and RFI. This pattern of behaviour seems to confirm what André Jansson and Johan Lindell call a paradigmatic transition, by which “the spatial practice of news consumption is changing into an increasingly amalgamated, mobile practice” (2015: 92).

Filtering news through specific applications designed for such purposes, to a certain extent works in a similar way to social media such as Twitter and Facebook, whereby filtering is done also through the people “followed” or “befriended”. While in the first case it is users themselves are the ones defining the filter by choosing variables such as specific media outlets, geographical regions or news genre (e.g. politics, technology, crime, etc.), in the second case it is members of the personal network who define those variables by their sharing/posting choices. Research conducted in Canada on the impact of social media spaces on news consumption has found similar conclusions, stating that a “significant number of social media users value their personal network as a way to filter the news, rather than solely relying on the professional judgment of a news organization or journalist” (Hermida et al., 2012: 815–816). It could also be argued that even though people and their personal network seem to be in control of their choices in both cases, it is actually a mirage, i.e. the control is actually exerted by technology companies and the algorithms they choose to put in place. Although this theory undoubtedly gives food for thought, it is out of the reach of this study.

7.2. CHALLENGES FOR INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTERS

Until now this chapter has focused in describing the numerous changes in the way people nowadays consume news and relate to different media outlets in Mexico and Argentina, as reported by the participants in the focus groups carried out as part of this research. In the second part, we look into how media outlets might adjust to such changes. Special attention will be devoted to international media organisations and the specific challenges faced by broadcasters, who have had no option but to update their strategies and modify their operations.

7.2.1. ACCESSIBILITY TO INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

One of the main challenges that international news broadcasters face is making themselves accessible to their audiences overseas. This is by no means a new phenomenon; since the first half of the last century and until the inception of satellites and the Internet, most listeners of international radio stations could only access their broadcasts if they were equipped with short-wave receivers. One of the strategies to overcome this issue was to resort to local radios that would re-broadcast their programming (be it in part or in full). International television broadcasters faced the same issues, especially due to the comparatively high prices of cable and satellite providers, which most likely would be less accessible to populations with meagre disposable income around the globe. With the popularisation of the Internet, the costs of connecting to the World Wide Web have been in constant decline, allowing millions of users to gain access to either live streaming on-line or at least some sort of programming.

During the focus groups, participants seemed to know more about international channels that were available on television, and to a lesser extent through the Internet. One reason for this could be that it is considerably easier to find a channel within the TV grid, than browsing on the Internet. For instance, concerning the three channels of interest for this study, more participants in both countries knew Russia's RT than Iran's HispanTV or China's CCTV. At the same time, RT was slightly better known to participants in Argentina than in Mexico. This may be due to the fact that by the time the focus groups were conducted (September-November 2016), RT was broadcasting on Televisión Digital Abierta (Open Digital TV network) in Argentina, whereas in Mexico it was only available on cable and satellite TV. A few participants also reported knowing and accessing RT's online news portal Actualidad RT.

Regarding HispanTV, a significant smaller number of participants reported having knowledge of the channel and had seen it only online, either through its web-portal or YouTube. Likewise, in the case of CCTV, only a handful of participants were aware of its existence and had also watched it online. Of this small number of participants that knew CCTV, most had seen the English-language channel and even the Chinese one, but no reports about the Spanish channel.

Since most participants that reported knowing any of these three channels had seen them and/or had access to them online, it is worthwhile contemplating whether online presence could play a substantial role in its success, especially in a time when news consumption habits are undergoing substantial changes, as already discussed. In order to explore this aspect, it is necessary to consider Internet accessibility and social media in Latin America.

7.2.2. INTERNET ACCESS SHAPING NEW CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

According to the World Bank, Latin America as a region has undergone a profound transformation in the last 15 years, cutting extreme poverty by more than a half (from 25.5% to 10.8%) and overall poverty decreasing from 42.8% to 23.4% between 2000 and 2014 (The World Bank, 2017). Despite extreme levels of inequality, the quality of life among the general population seems to be improving. As such, Internet access is spreading even among the least fortunate. According to a report published by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the penetration of internet connections experienced a sharp growth between 2010 and 2015, especially through broadband and mobile devices, which grew from 7% to 58% of the population (Rojas et al., 2016).

The report suggests that declining costs in internet connections are to be found among the reasons behind the growth, e.g. while in 2010 it was necessary to spend 17.8% of the average monthly salary to hire an internet service provider, in early 2016 that figure had been reduced to just over 2% (*ibid.*). This was possible thanks to a business model that targeted sectors of the population that could not afford long-term contracts, by making available an array of pre-paid options according to the amount of mobile data desired or even alternatives that offered a fixed amount of data to be used within a limited time frame. This flexibility allowed prices to decrease considerably, making Argentina and Paraguay the countries with the cheapest daily plans in January 2016;

however, pre-paid services lasting up to 30 days where more affordable in Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Mexico and Costa Rica, according to ECLAC (*ibid.*).

As the Internet and online technologies become accessible to larger sections of the population, more people seem to be accessing social media, and the forecasts are promising. According to predictions made by eMarketer and included in the dossier published by Statista, 76.8% of the Internet users (i.e. 46% of the overall population) in Latin America will be also accessing social networks by 2018, compared to 67.1% of Internet users (i.e. 31.5% of the overall population) in 2013. Likewise, the number of social media users is expected to reach 290.5 million people in 2018, compared to 189.2 million in 2013 (Statista, 2016). While Social network penetration in Argentina is estimated to grow steadily from 47.68% in 2015 to 53.15% in 2018, in Mexico the growth is expected to be even more accelerated, from 38.28% in 2015 to 49.57% in 2018 (*ibid.*).

Since many of the new Internet and social media users belong to older generations, these statistics illustrate how important it is to understand media consumption patterns in the region in general, and across generations in particular. Although most participants gave accounts of clear differences between their own media consumption habits and those of previous generations, some participants reported signs of change among older generations. Even though they would still prefer traditional sources of news such as newspapers, radio and television, nevertheless, sometimes they would feel encouraged by their peers to try out new technologies. Such is the case of Fátima's father:

Fátima: [I watch] Mexican television, yes. There are two [channels]: Televisa during the morning, which is really terrible, and TV Azteca, the same. Really, far from informing they do the opposite. I listen, because my father does, when he gets up, he switches on the television and that is how he keeps informed. Lately, because he got a tablet from his job, he has also started to look for alternatives. Sometimes he goes to channels on YouTube or [whatever] his colleagues that have Facebook [suggest to him]. He doesn't have [Facebook], but his colleagues tell him: "Oh, there's that news on Facebook", so he goes and looks for it. In my case, however, I regularly listen [to the news] while I am preparing breakfast. What I normally do is open Facebook and it is there that I find which are the topics. It is there that I first hear about... if there was an earthquake in Spain, or Italy, here. I mean, that is my first source of news, to put it that way, because it is practical, and it allows me to check out quickly what information is going viral. I also check the newspapers there. I check which are the most important topics, normally on *La Jornada*, *El Universal*, I also like *El Financiero*, *Le Monde* or *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Le Figaro* and *El País*. These are the ones that I check more frequently. And unless it is a specific videos or article, I almost don't [use] Twitter. I mean, I have it, but I feel Facebook is more practical, maybe because of the images and videos, I feel that it is quicker to access to information. In general, whatever calls my

attention, that is how I keep informed. Besides that, I barely buy any papers, but it's quick and allows me to keep updated.

In the case of older participants like Fátima, generational differences are also evident when confronted to younger generations. As such, differences are not only distinguishable between her and her father, but also between her and her children:

Fátima: Well, in the case of my family, for instance, I have two teenage daughters and what they do is to use electronic devices such as mobile phones or tablets and computers. They like using social media, for example: YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and download information. So, what I can gather is that what calls the attention of this generation of teenagers are flashy commercial ads or photographs. Basically, gossip and news. Like 'what happened to my favourite artist', 'Brad Pitt and [Angelina] Jolie are getting divorced?' So you go [to social media] and suddenly other things come up, because you find out that they were partners in I-don't-know-what, and then you find a piece of news with more in-depth information. But I think, it is the opposite, the advertisement side more than the topic. That is what I can observe.

The main difference among participants and their parents seems to suggest that people that grew up with the Internet are more likely to have adopted social media, in the same way that older generations would keep their own traditions alive, such as listening to the radio and watching the news on TV:

Héctor: At home, my parents still listen to the radio [...] and regarding news, well, they watch free-view television: either channel 2 or channel 13. So, they do watch the news bulletin in the evenings. Then my brothers, since our age difference is only 2 or 3 years, everything is social media.

Hortencia: At home my parents still watch television, they watch Azteca 13, they don't like Televisa at all. My father still buys the newspaper, but he only gets the one that calls his attention. So, he doesn't have a favourite one. My mother basically watches television, no social media. She only uses her mobile phone to search for information when she has doubts about something, [for instance] what is this medicine good for or this plant, stuff like that, but not specifically news.

The shift towards online content has been experienced by different generations. Those who grew up in the pre-Internet era seem to have adopted online media to a certain degree but are arguably less keen on using social media. Those who grew up using the Internet as a tool, however, seem to be more open to access information almost exclusively through the Internet, and at the same time more prone to accepting and actively using social media. The generational differences concerning news consumption –and to a certain extent associated to access and usage of new technologies- appear to show a certain level of consistency in terms of an age-group divide, by which younger people seem to be at the forefront, making use of cutting-edge gadgets. However, this theory comes crushing down in some instances, where older generations show themselves savvier than their offspring. These exceptions may be linked to educational background, as Inés' family:

Inés: My mom in particular, she majored in Educational Technology and Communication, so it's like I'm always the last one to know [about the news]. About all that, my mother is always [aware]... well both my parents are professionals, they like politics and economics... administration, all that. So, they read a lot. Now I'm living here [in Mendoza], but I am from another city. On weekends when I go to my parent's place, we watch international news bulletins, we watch CNN, sometimes in Spanish, sometimes in English. My mom, it's very funny because she always knows about stuff that when I hear about it, she already knows, because she already read international newspapers. She also spends a lot of time on the Internet and knows a lot about mass media. So many times, she is the one to tell me [about what is going on].

The case of Inés and her mother seems to coincide with studies on the adoption of Twitter which suggest that age is not necessarily the most determining factor and point to online skills and mobile phone experience as playing a greater role in attracting new users, which seems to support technology acceptance models (Hargittai and Litt, 2012). Besides skills, some participants consider the usage of social media to keep informed as linked to a certain educational background. Fernanda, from UNAM, believes that people with a higher level of education, are more likely to consume alternative media, rather than mainstream television.

Fernanda: [...] it seems to me that the ways different generations get informed is not only 'generational', right? The difference between me and my parents, who have also tried to keep updated and follow technology trends, although they don't watch the news anymore. But there is a difference. I mean, social media allow quick access to information, and so on. But there is a difference in the 'profile'... professional... depending on the level of education people consume different media. I mean, you won't only have a mobile phone just to have access to *The Washington Post*. [Because] first, maybe you don't speak English. Ok, then [in that case] I have access to *La Jornada* [which is in Spanish]. Or maybe I don't care, because the main news bulletins, such as those broadcast by Televisa and TV Azteca, have a considerable impact on popular opinion, because I can feel it. I see it in my friends' parents that really consider them, be it the morning news or the evening news... as...

Moderator: As holy?

Fernanda: As absolute truth, exactly. Then, I believe that consulting social media [to find out about the news] is not just typical of young people, but [also of people] with a specific academic background.

7.2.3. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MEDIATION PLATFORM

As news consumption habits have been gradually shifting towards the Internet, social media started to behave as mediators between news organisations and audiences. Participants in both Mexico and Argentina gave account of using them as a centralised platform that acts mainly as a source filter. This is possible by becoming followers of certain news media organisations on platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, among others. Mexican participant Estefanía explained briefly the reasons why she considers Twitter as her main source of news, saying she feels "it is the fastest way to know what

is happening. It is instantaneous and with few characters, few words. Then if it is interesting, you can take it into account". Ester, one of her fellow participants elaborated on this last aspect saying: "I follow a few newspapers (on Twitter) and I see the news there, and it usually takes you to the website where they published it".

In Argentina, participants had similar experiences. Mauricio, who attends a private university, shared his experience as follows:

Mauricio: [...] I mostly keep informed through Twitter. I follow domestic and international newspapers, such as *The Washington Post*, *The Huffington Post*, *Al-Jazeera*, *RT*, *CNN*. I mean, I use Twitter to follow different newspapers and keep informed. Then, about domestic news, as well I generally use either Twitter or the Internet, but with newspapers such as *La Nación* or *Perfil*.

The process of filtering sources works as a starting point, whereby users are able to identify pieces of news that call their attention and subsequently go over to other media platforms in order to further explore the implications of a particular piece of news. This is a process that the Mexican student Germán often employs:

Germán: What I usually do is to use social media and keep informed that way. However, when it comes to more relevant or important news, then I try to find as much information as I can... sometimes on television, but very occasionally, and sometimes on newspapers. But I generally do this to check information, because the problem of getting informed from just one media outlet is the bias. So I try to find the most objective and least biased form of information. I only depend on the news or rather the context, therefore I always try to consult various sources, not just one.

From Germán's experience it is also possible to understand another behaviour pattern, which is directly linked to the awareness of media bias detected by many participants. This could be understood as a certain distrust towards specific media organisations and by extension the "fear" of being presented with untrustworthy information.

Reflecting on his own experience with social media, Mexican participant Braulio admitted just becoming aware that for the last three years he had been unconsciously keeping himself informed only through the Facebook wall or "News Page" –as he called it-. Fellow participant from Colmex, Bruno has also switched completely to social media. He had been buying *La Jornada* until he started his master's programme and since then he keeps himself informed primarily through social media. Only if he finds something interesting, then he searches for more information on other websites, mostly from renowned newspapers like *El País*, *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, or even from RT's Spanish-language news portal *Actualidad RT*.

Participants in almost every focus group echoed similar patterns of exclusive online news consumption in two steps: using social media as a starting point and then moving

over to other websites to explore specific news in greater depth. Only a handful of participants in both countries mentioned they would consult alternative media platforms such as blogs online. In those cases, blogs on specialised topics such as politics would be the most preferred, mostly due to the relevance to the participants' subject of study at university. Some of the blogs mentioned in Argentina were *Artepolítica*⁴⁷, *Project Syndicate*⁴⁸, whereas participants in Mexico mentioned *desInformémonos*⁴⁹ and *Animal Político*⁵⁰.

7.2.4. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2011, a study on the use of Twitter and Facebook by news media in *Iberoamerica*⁵¹, suggested that social media was proving to be a good strategy to reach specific audiences, such as “readers outside the region, young people, or those who wouldn’t read the newspaper on the traditional format, but would do so on social media” (García-De-Torres et al., 2011: 617). As seen on Chapter 4⁵², news outlets from outside the region have also started to work on their social media presence. Even though RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E have all realised the importance of engaging with audiences through social media, at the time when the focus groups were conducted, only RT seemed to be reaping the fruits of its efforts. Indeed, its strategy of “fishing” audiences through social media was detected by some of the participants.

During the focus group conducted in Mendoza, some of the Mexican exchange students described how they thought this strategy was supposed to operate. Ismael, who follows RT on Facebook said he had noticed how RT tends to post short clips about “silly things” such as “whales” or “girls dancing” to appeal to people’s curiosity, who then consequently click on the posts and are automatically taken to RT’s homepage. There, next to the clip of the whale, “on the right you can see news that are more interesting and then you can break it down and read everything”, Ismael pointed out.

⁴⁷ Available on artepolitica.com

⁴⁸ Available on www.project-syndicate.org

⁴⁹ Available on desinformemonos.org

⁵⁰ Available on www.animalpolitico.com

⁵¹ Refer to definition in Chapter 3.

⁵² Refer to international news channels and their social media data on pages 74-84.

7.2.5. CHALLENGES AND THREATS

While most participants reported to openly engage with social media and appreciated many of its features, some people –especially the older participants- had a rather cautious and critical approach, pointing out at its shortcomings. Such was the case of Francisca, who described following people on social media as “a waste of time”:

Moderator: Do you follow anyone in particular on Twitter?

Francisca: No, no. I think it is crazy and a waste of time. I mostly check it when there is an article, then I go on Twitter, because some story goes viral, so you can find information and know what is happening. But to follow someone, no. Social media sometimes are... most of the time are a waste of time. Therefore [only] when there is something important. I have an account, but I use it only when I handle it, not when they send me information every other minute, even every second.

Excessive media exposure and consequent saturation may bear some—if not all- of the blame for people feeling overflowed with information and willing to reject new ways of sharing and interacting. In fact, studies suggest that, as media exposure increases, people have greater access and consume multiple media (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013). At the same time, online news and social media by extension have supplemented, rather than replaced traditional news use (Tandoc and Johnson, 2016). Confronted to a continuous and never-ending feed of news, people may feel discouraged to engage in social media. Thus, the challenge for broadcasters is to accommodate the audience’s needs while offering high quality content and striving to avoid overwhelming viewers. To a certain degree linked to media bias, some participants also expressed distrust towards social media due to the threats of “fake news”. Although social media has been gaining ground and participants gradually recognise its capabilities, some expressed their concern about the quality of information and the possibility of fake news making their way to their feed. While Mexican participant Bernardo appreciates social networks’ contribution to understanding other “perspectives”, he stressed the need to “distinguish a little more (true) information (from fake)”.

7.3. CONCLUSION

Juliana: In the morning, I watch some TV before leaving, [for example] TN. After that, during the day, I also Twitter. I follow many journalists and news. We also share news [between friends and classmates]. [For instance,] “Hey, this [article] is very good”, through WhatsApp. And we read them. A few newspapers as well: *La Nación*, *Página 12*, and] *Ámbito [Financiero]*; a bit of everything. Just that, social media, etc.

Without a doubt, Juliana’s profile is that of a highly educated person studying in one of Argentina’s most prestigious private universities. Juliana has the potential of becoming a policy maker in her country and as such embodies the profile of people, whose opinions international channels like CCTV, RT and HispanTV strive to influence, i.e. still young and malleable, compared to actual policy-makers whose worldview may arguably be already biased and therefore difficult to persuade.

With every new development in communication technologies, audiences are compelled to adjust their news consumption habits, in order to accommodate more sources. Juliana is no exception. For her, traditional media has neither become completely obsolete nor been replaced by social media. In fact, she still gets her daily dose of morning news from television. However, as her day advances, she relies more on mobile technologies such as her smart phone, where she uses Twitter to keep herself updated at all times. She does not buy newspapers herself, but instead likes checking them online and sometimes even sharing some articles with her friends through instant messaging apps like WhatsApp.

This chapter started by describing how news consumption habits have been changing, especially since the inception of the Internet and the popularisation of social media platforms. While inviting participants to share their own experiences, they were also encouraged to compare how their own practices differed from those of their families and friends. Part of the findings of this study confirms and supports previous research stating that, just as Juliana and many of the participants in this research, people tend to consume media in multiple platforms. Rather than settling for just one kind, people like to combine traditional media with online sources, although the ratios for such off-line/on-line combinations may be difficult to ascertain, as they vary from individual to individual. Despite exceptions, older generations seem to be more inclined to consume more traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television at a larger scale, compared to online news or social media. Younger generations, however, appear to be fully immersed in the on-line world, paying a considerable amount of their attention to social media, albeit some exceptions.

These trends are indicative of fluctuating habits and, as such, they would need to be carefully considered by news media outlets wishing to expand their reach and impact across the world. By analysing how distribution through digital, cable and satellite television has prompted RT to be easily recognised by many participants in both Mexico and Argentina, it became apparent that both HispanTV and CCTV still need to take significant steps to raise their visibility. As Internet access grows all across the region, an active online presence and a comprehensive social media strategy need to be placed at the forefront. The three channels are aware of this, as attested by their presence on social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, among others. While at the time of the focus groups sessions HispanTV and CCTV seemed to be lagging behind in terms of numbers of followers and, ultimately, recognisability, compared to RT's online presence as reported by several participants, at present it seems that this may be changing. Since CCTV's rebranding to CGTN, its social media accounts have experienced an exponential increase in the number of followers, e.g. its Facebook account (@cgtneenespanol) has jumped from 1,812 Total Page Follows on 5 April 2017 to more than 14 million on 30 September 2018, more than double that of RT (6.7 million) and surpassing even CNN en Español (12 million). Although it exceeds the scope of this study, it would be worth exploring how this remarkable achievement has been possible in such a short time.

A final observation for this chapter needs to include a few warnings. As there seems to be a social stigma linked to watching television, which would consider it a less cultivated form of news consumption, compared to reading (either print or paper), it bears the question whether it could be possible that some participants felt compelled to sound more "sophisticated", thus avoiding admitting they would watch television more frequently than stated. Many participants were vocal in making distinctions between their news consumption habits and those of their families, therefore it is unclear whether by distancing from television there was an intention of making themselves look more "cultivated". While that could be the case of some participants, others elaborated more on the reasons why they would not consider certain television channels as sources of reliable information. Although this does not disprove that people can have contradictory behaviours (i.e. both criticising and at the same time willingly consuming certain television programmes), at least it can be considered proof of a state of awareness regarding the mass media in their respective countries.

8. CONCLUSION

This project started with a particular focus on China and the aim of exploring how viable is the idea of international news channels helping China shape and improve its international image, at the same time as building a space to explain its culture (and by extension worldview), and ultimately to reassure the world of its “peaceful rise”. While China’s English-language channel CCTV (now CGTN) has been the centre of attention of numerous research, the outreach of its sister-channels in other languages has been less explored. Similarly, studies on RT until present have almost exclusively focused on the English channel. That is why this study focused on Latin America and Spanish-language channels. The comparative dimension of this study was then further enriched by taking HispanTV as a third subject. The frame of comparison was then deemed useful due to shared features such as instrumentalization by governments and apparent remoteness to target audiences, both geographically and culturally.

The last four chapters have analysed and discussed findings of the focus groups with regards to the different factors that international broadcasters such as RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E need to consider in their quest of winning the attention and hearts of audiences in Mexico and Argentina. Taking into account the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 1, the aim of this last and concluding chapter is to explore possible answers to the research questions presented in Chapter 2 in light of the ideas discussed in Chapters 4-7. Finally, some of the main limitations of this study are discussed before presenting a few suggestions for futures studies in this field.

8.1. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND LATIN AMERICAN AUDIENCES

With a particular focus in Latin America, the leading question for this study was concerned with the existence and nature of audiences interested in international news channels (i.e. *RQ1: What sort of an audience (if any) is there in Latin America for international news channels that would justify such a strategy?*). The discussions during the focus groups showed that despite limited audience reach, there seems to be a place for international networks in the media systems in both countries, particularly with regards to the role they can play as opposed to local or domestic media. Compared to the local or domestic media, some international channels tend to be idealised as embodying the ‘classic’ tenets of good journalism, i.e. objectivity, impartiality, professionalism, etc. This constitutes an asset that may be jeopardised if they then fail

to comply to the levels of these standards tacitly required by the audiences, particularly because credibility is the fine line between soft power and propaganda (Nye, 2011).

Although the three channels still have to work on this aspect, RT may be the one with the greatest potential, at least according to the opinions shared by participants of the focus groups. Some of the ways that RT uses to build its credibility is by challenging Western narratives in a more active way. In this respect HispanTV follows the same strategy. RT and HispanTV also takes advantage of the popularity of some journalists and politicians in the Spanish speaking world and invite them to participate as presenters, e.g. Ecuador's former president Rafael Correa and his show "Conversando con Correa" on RT; Pablo Iglesias, leader of the Spanish political party Podemos, and his show "Fort Apache" on HispanTV. In this way, they gain access to audiences that would follow these public figures by association to certain values represented by them.

There seems to be an assumption that international news channels need to be unbiased and impartial in their reporting. However, the focus groups demonstrated that viewers are not naïve and read between lines. Some even prefer that broadcasters are direct in conveying their views without hiding them within a seemingly unbiased and impartial frame. While discussing her own findings, Geniets believes that "having an identifiable point of view seems to work as a successful strategy to carve out a competitive niche" (2013: 146). Nevertheless, this seems not to be enough for CCTV-E, which arguably does have an identifiable point of view, i.e. China. Compared to RT and HispanTV, CCTV, remains rather defensive and "auto-referential", i.e. overly focused on portraying China and Chinese affairs in a positive light.

In the case of this study, RT appears to be the channel with the best potential to be successful in becoming a source of news both in Mexico and Argentina. This seems to be possible due to an array of factors. By making the links to Russia less apparent (e.g. the name-change from *Russia Today* to just *RT*), RT seems to be trying to avoid being labelled as following a nationalistic agenda, thus reducing negative connotations in this respect. At the same time it also shows a deep understanding of the media systems in Latin America and the particularities of each country, i.e. being seen as challenging a Western narrative is a strategy that can resonate among politically engaged audiences in the region. This seems to be working. However, it is unclear whether RT's ultimate goal is to challenge existing narratives or to substitute them with new ones. While challenging would entail presenting different sides of a discussion, substitution would mean a complete replacement of a particular worldview for another. If this is poorly

executed, however, there is an enormous risk for broadcasters being perceived as prescriptive, patronising and even manipulative.

Another way broadcasters try to enhance viewership has been by association with media organisations that would be more familiar to audiences in the region. Such is the case of RT and CCTV which on different occasions have collaborated with Telesur. By collaborating with an openly self-declared anti-hegemonic news channel representing the voice of the South, RT and CCTV would tell audiences that they are also on their side (without specifying what this side is about). Nevertheless, while associations both to public figures or to third parties seem to be an effective strategy to attract some viewers, at the same time it could be driving other segments of the population away from their viewership, e.g. Jacinta Mwendu Maweu argues that one of the reasons why CCTV fails to gain popularity in Kenya is due to the fact that it airs on the national broadcaster KBC “which the middle-class elite have very low opinion about, because they still regard it as a government outlet” (2016: 130).

As explored in chapter 5, being associated with a particular government seemed to affect negatively the level of trust participants would have vis-à-vis international broadcasters as news-sources. In the case of CCTV-E, this channel was mostly associated with China and a particular vision of the country that the government wants to disseminate, and, to a certain extent, it seemed more engaged in PR activities of self-promotion, rather than striving to adhere to seemingly shared journalistic values. The channel’s planned name-change to the Voice of China is likely to further consolidate this image. If the change is not accompanied with an overall readjustment of its journalistic style, it risks losing any impact.

Being perceived as controlled by the government together with a rather negative pre-conceived image of China among participants, proved to be undermining the effort of making the country attractive to the eyes of viewers. This finding is in line with the idea that “being perceived as a government mouthpiece does not resonate with a global audience” (Geniets, 2013: 145), which seems to apply even more so when governments are perceived as authoritarian, as in the particular case of China, Russia and Iran⁵³.

⁵³ According to the latest figures for the Democracy Index compiled yearly by The Economist Intelligence Unit, China, Iran and Russia are authoritarian regimes (EIU, 2017).

Similarly, disregarding other factors such as cultural proximity may undermine its acceptance by audiences.

8.2. THE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL PROXIMITY

Having confirmed the limited existence of audiences interested in international news channels, our second question addressed the issue of cultural proximity as a factor that can limit the capacity of international broadcasters to attract viewers, consequently jeopardising the sustainability of these projects (i.e. *RQ2: What sort of a role (if any) does cultural proximity play in the viewers' decision when choosing an international news channel?*). Throughout this thesis, we have seen how cultural proximity seems to play an important role not just in terms of how relatable the content is, but also how the product is packaged, i.e. different audio-visual components that create a particular style. In the case of culturally distant countries where journalistic practices may differ from those in Mexico and Argentina, this seems to play an even more decisive role. One of the most discussed aspects was the difficulty for Chinese presenters to gain the attention of viewers, particularly due to their difficulties in commanding the Spanish language.

As emanates from the discussions during the focus groups, Latin American viewers prefer presenters and journalists that they can either recognise or easily understand what they are saying. Therefore, other Latin Americans are preferred by viewers, followed by Spaniards and non-native speakers proficient in Spanish. Although it could be argued that to some extent this was related to a feeling of identification with the news readers or reporters, the data is not sufficient to draw such conclusions. However, it is worth-while mentioning that to some viewers these issues did seem to play defining role in their attitude to either continue or stop watching a particular channel. This appeared to be especially so during a specific report about the viewers' country of origin. Mexicans seem to be more susceptible to identity politics and who holds the moral authority to criticise and even lecture other countries. Although a comprehensive content analysis of these channels was not conducted, a succinct discourse analysis of the videos used during the focus groups would suggest that RT and HispanTV may be using this type of narrative as a strategy to gain viewers, i.e. perpetuating a narrative of victimisation that sees Latin America's current ills as tied to its colonial past and to US American intervention throughout the 20th century. CCTV-

E, however, seems to be more constrained with regards to the level of criticism of other countries.

Beyond the packaging of the product, cultural proximity has other dimensions and it also affects the viewer's perceptions at other levels, e.g. the way certain stories are framed and the way characters in those stories are portrayed may not correspond to what is standard practice in the culture where audiences are based. Thus, understanding how stories are read or de-codified by audiences in different cultural and developmental contexts can help these broadcasters tailor their productions in a way that preserves the original message, but that is relatable to viewers and their socio-economic context. Thus, deciphering the impact of cultural proximity can help fine-tune international broadcasting strategies in a way that the messages can be easily de-codified by the audiences. The challenge will be then to make global messages resonate with local audiences (Geniets, 2013). This needs not to be confused with feeding audiences ideologically easy-to-digest information; nor it means to feed audiences what they are supposed to like. It rather means navigating cultural differences, acknowledging them and re-codifying messages in order to ensure a successful de-codification by the audiences, i.e. whether the effect will be persuasive enough to shape policy in the long-term or not will ultimately depend on how messages are received and processed by audiences.

Looking at the history of Latin America may be the key to access their way of understanding the world. These are countries that experienced "multiculturalism" in a context of colonialism and even before they became "modern" nation-states. The experience of colonisation and nation-building after gaining independence have contributed to a rich and diverse ethnic make-up, product of the subjection of native populations, forced migration (i.e. slavery), as well as voluntary migration (i.e. waves of mainly European, but also middle Eastern and East Asian immigrants). Nevertheless, these are also societies that present high levels of inequality among social classes, which often run along the lines of race and ethnicity. The difficulty for broadcasters is to identify their audience and whether they can appeal to different segments of the population, i.e. bridge the enormous gap between wealthy elites and disadvantaged groups.

However, as societies are in constant evolution all throughout the continent. Broadcasters would need to keep up with the changing landscape of Latin American societies. Considering Russia's "gay propaganda law", it would be interesting to analyse

how RT covers LGBT issues considering the developments in Latin America, where despite seemingly strong influence from religion and family ties, LGBT rights have been advancing steadily and sometimes even at a greater pace than in often perceived as more advanced societies like the USA and Europe. Another example are Women's rights, an issue that is increasingly gaining the attention of the media in Latin America. Without taking an active approach to explain its culture of origin, HispanTV could meet resistance from Latin American societies that have had very limited contact with religions such as Islam, especially when knowledge of that region has been often articulated and filtered by Western perceptions, particularly after 9/11.

This study has shown that cultural considerations are an aspect that cannot be underestimated by international broadcasters even in the case of young and curious viewers already interested in international affairs such as the participants in our focus groups. Consequently, it could be argued that at present it is unlikely that general audiences would embrace international news channels of the likes of RT, HispanTV and CCTV at a large scale.

8.3. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AS A TOOL FOR CREATING SOFT POWER

Soft power assets are important as long as they have the capacity of changing behaviours and being instrumental to influencing foreign policy. The last and main RQ of this study aimed at exploring the likelihood of international news channels having any impact upon viewers and their perception of the countries these media originate from, thus potentially contributing to creating soft power (i.e. *RQ3: How successful could such enterprise be in terms of soft power gains by the countries behind this strategy?*).

Soft power is supposed to allow the country that has it (e.g. China, Russia or Iran) to "shape" the targeted country's basic beliefs, perceptions and preferences (Nye, 2011), and RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E are arguably some of the tools that can assist in materialising such an agenda. Those three aspects can be also be understood by tracing links to the concept of *country image* and the three different dimensions explored in Chapter 6. Broadcasters can challenge the cognitive understanding of viewers by broadcasting content that would be conducive to changing their basic beliefs. Shaping the perceptions of viewers would arguably have an impact on the affective evaluations that result from their consumption of the broadcasting material. The conative level

thus relates to the behavioural implications of changing the audiences' preferences. This last stage is crucial as it means that a country has soft power only if these preferences are translated into behaviour, i.e. concrete measures that would enable the achievement of foreign policy objectives. Nevertheless, the findings of this study show that the process of influencing people's perceptions of a country hardly depends on the narratives spread by the media only and are rather the result of a combination of inputs stemming from a variety of sources. Therefore, at a preliminary stage, these channels can only aspire to influence perceptions about specific topics relating to particular countries, i.e. preparing the conditions that would allow audiences to be more willing to accept alternative views compared to those propagated by Western or mainstream media. Change can only be slow. The effect needs to be understood as sediments that accumulate on a river bed and that gradually have the potential of changing the course of the entire river. Similarly, creating soft power is a process that cannot be forced, and is a result of years if not decades in the making.

The first obstacle faced by broadcasters with soft-power ambitions is improving their recognition among audiences. For example, the overwhelming majority of the focus groups participants had never heard of CCTV-E. These findings are similar to those of Jacinta Mwendu Maweu in Kenya, where most people either are not aware of the existence of CCTV or, if they are, they seem not to be watching it (Maweu, 2016). Other broadcasters, however, seem to be overcoming this issue. In the case of RT, its recognition by many participants suggests previous knowledge. As shown in previous chapters, RT has made itself easily accessible by being available in a wide range of platforms, from cable, satellite and digital TV, to live broadcasting on YouTube and active accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Telegram e Instagram. This shows a high level of awareness of perhaps the most important finding in this respect, i.e. the changing news consumption patterns across Latin America. Similar to other regions of the world, more and more (particularly young) people are increasing their consumption of online content particularly since the popularisation of social media networks. This is not translated as a complete shift away from traditional media, but rather as a hybrid pattern, but with a definite inclination to online platforms. Although they have partially adopted the same approach, HispanTV and CCTV-E are still lagging behind and would need to follow the steps of RT and other broadcasters that have already put in place a more comprehensive (if not aggressive) strategy that contemplates the multiple

platforms that can be used to facilitate access and make themselves available to audiences.

Another basic principle of the soft power theory is that the targeted country is unlikely to be aware of the intensions of the country that has it (Nye, 2011), or even unable to realise the effect of the power exerted by the power that has it. However, viewers seem to be aware that international channels have their own agendas, and thus appear to be sceptical vis-à-vis their content. In other words, the cost of being transparent about the aims is the risk of being perceived as propaganda.

Considering all the aspects discussed in this chapter, the answer to Q3 would be partially positive. International broadcasters can indeed contribute to building soft power, but only if certain conditions are met, i.e. increasing availability and facilitating access throughout an array of platforms (and not just TV, even if TV still continues to be the most popular platform used by audiences in Latin America) and adapting content and style by reducing cultural gaps in order to match audiences' preferences, among other. However, the degree to which their capabilities can enable this is still very limited. Even though the agenda of certain countries may be understood as having imperialistic ambitions (e.g. Russian and Chinese communication technologies or media outlets trying to replace Western counterparts in Latin America at the expense of endangering the functionality of domestic and regional ones), the risk of this becoming a reality seems to be minimal, at least under the present conditions, mainly because of the limitations explained throughout this thesis. In any case, international broadcasters should be understood as only one of the tools at the disposal of soft-power hungry nations. Success will come only when they are used in tandem with other such tools.

8.4. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Not being entirely a study about actual audiences but rather an inquiry into the acceptance by potential audiences, there are multiple limitations to the scope of this research. One limitation that was mentioned in chapter 6 was that the focus groups participants were not asked about their political views. After considering the political situation in both countries and in particular in Argentina which had experienced a process of political polarisation (as explained in chapter 2), the concern was that asking about their politics could make them feel vulnerable or even the target of criticism. During the focus groups, it was evident that some participants had stronger political

views than others. Although this issue could have been confronted differently (e.g. by organising groups according to their political persuasion), the difficulties of the recruitment process in both countries made it impossible to develop such a research design.

Besides this, this study started focusing on China's global media strategy, but later grew to include other countries that are pursuing similar communicational strategies. However, by expanding the scope to include other cases, sacrifices had to be made in order to focus on the specificity. Thus, the geopolitical environment that gave birth to RT and HispanTV has not been comprehensively documented as the Chinese case.

Finally, during the time of this research (September 2015-September 2018), the international media arena has been changing both with the arrival of new competitors as well as with the expansion of existing broadcasters into new target areas. While RT has started broadcasting live in French, in Latin America, the offer has also increased with the arrival of France24 and its broadcasts in Spanish since September 2017. As the last analytical chapters of this thesis were being drafted, on 21 March 2018 the Chinese government announced that CCTV (including its rebranded international branch CGTN), CRI (China Radio International) and CNR (China National Radio) would merge into a new media conglomerate that, despite keeping the original names domestically, would be known internationally as *Voice of China* (Xinhua, 2018). Although this is a clear signal that China is trying to boost its impact by unifying its brand, the association to the Voice of America (VOA) could prove problematic, in some respects also beneficial. On the one hand it would be branded as "propaganda" by association to a news network that had even been banned domestically in the USA for disseminating propaganda. On the other hand, it could be argued that precisely by becoming associated to VOA as a state funded network, its operations could benefit from legitimacy, i.e. it would be seen as engaging in the same type of work as VOA. Nevertheless, it is still early to speculate whether this move will ultimately help or adversely affect China's soft-power agenda, particularly because it is still unclear whether soft-power creation by state-sponsored media is possible or not. Despite its limited scope and time frame, this study has contributed to the understanding of how international media (and particularly news channels) can be instrumental to soft power strategies. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive comparative research over a longer period of time could ultimately prove or disprove their overall effectiveness.

8.5. FUTURE RESEARCH

Since the opinions of most participants was based on their first impressions of RT, HispanTV and CCTV-E, a first natural development for this research would be to explore whether regular exposure could change perceptions or not. The challenge would be finding informants that are not already sympathisers of the countries where broadcasters are based (e.g. sinophiles, russophiles, etc.), but that can both provide insightful information and remain sufficiently critical.

Another step would be to test the same or similar hypotheses in other countries in the region that have been experiencing a different ideological and political development such as Venezuela and Bolivia, for example. This would be particularly interesting because despite numerous socio-economic, educational and other disparities between Mexico and Argentina, this study did not observe stark differences in the views and opinions expressed by the focus-group participants that would suggest systematic variations between both countries. Alternatively, it would be valuable to explore how receptive audiences are in countries where, for example, Chinese investment is especially strong, particularly in light of the *Belt and Road Initiative*.

One of the focus of our study has been on analysing the factors that would make certain news channels more trustworthy than others. By doing so, the assumption was that the main function of this type of media is to fulfil the need of obtaining information about what is happening in the world. There are, however, other motivations and needs that viewers who watch these channels may seek to satisfy. Tsfaty and Capella argue that trust in the media is not so relevant when people have other motivations, e.g. “[...] sceptics probably attend to mainstream news despite their scepticism to gratify other needs, such as social needs or the need for entertainment” (2003: 519). This could also constitute an interesting line of inquiry to explore.

Most participants belonged to a distinct sub-segment of the middle class that would have access to international media, not necessarily in terms of subscription to a cable or satellite TV services, but access in the sense of being able to de-code messages. As mentioned in Chapter 5, this is indicative of the makeup of the focus groups in terms of social class and privilege, i.e. having access to higher education and even experiences abroad. It would be valuable to enquire whether their views are echoed in other segments of the population.

As mentioned on chapter 7, it would be interesting comparing the social media strategies employed by various broadcasters, particularly in light of the remarkable achievements of CGTN en Español and the exponential growth of its number of followers on different social media platforms. Similarly, it could also be worthwhile conducting a comparison that included both mainstream international broadcasters present in the region and even the most popular domestic news channels. Acceptance depends greatly on the offer and Latin Americans are thirsty for quality content. A comprehensive discourse analysis of international broadcasters would entail an entirely different research approach but would be extremely illuminating as well.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUPS SESSIONS

Country	Group code	University	Acronym	Type of institution	City	Date	Number of participants	Females	Males	Participants' background	Level	Nationalities	
Mexico	M1	Colegio de México	COLMEX	Public	Mexico city	21/09/2016	5	2	3	International Relations	Undergraduate	Mexican (4), Mexican+American (1)	
	M2					21/09/2016	5	1	4	Political Science	Master	Mexican	
	M3					26/09/2016	2	0	2	International Relations	Undergraduate	Mexican	
	M4					26/09/2016	2	0	2	Politics and Public Administration	Undergraduate	Mexican	
	M5	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México	UNAM			18/09/2016	5	3	2	2	Political Science	Master & PhD	Mexican
	M6	06/10/2016				4	4	0	International Relations	Undergraduate & Master	Mexican		
	M7	Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana	UAM			28/09/2016	5	2	3	3	International Relations	Master	Mexican (4), Ecuadorian (1)
	M8	05/10/2016				4	3	1	International Relations	Master	Mexican		
Argentina	A1	Universidad de Congreso	UC	Private	Mendoza	21/10/2016	10	6	4	International Relations	Undergraduate	Argentine (5), Mexican (5)	
	A2	Universidad Torcuato di Tella	UTdT			31/10/2016	10	5	5	5	Political Science	Undergraduate	Argentine
	A3					01/11/2016	10	4	6	6	International Relations	Undergraduate	Argentine
	A4	Universidad de Belgrano	UB			02/11/2016	8	3	5	5	Political Science, International Relations	Undergraduate	Argentine
	A5	Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires	UBA			04/11/2016	5	3	2	2	Political Science	Undergraduate	Argentine (4), Peruvian (1)

APPENDIX II: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS BY PSEUDONYMS

Country	Group	Pseudonym	Gender	Citizenship
Mexico	M1	Ana	Female	Mexican
		Andrés	Male	
		Alejandro	Male	
		Antonio	Male	
		Alicia	Female	
	M2	Beatriz	Female	
		Bernardo	Male	
		Braulio	Male	
		Bruno	Male	
		Baltazar	Male	
	M3	Carlos	Male	
		Cristian	Male	
	M4	Daniel	Male	
		Damián	Male	
	M5	Estela	Female	
		Estefanía	Female	
		Esteban	Male	
		Ester	Female	
		Enrique	Male	
	M6	Fernanda	Female	
		Francisca	Female	
		Fabiana	Female	
		Fátima	Female	
	M7	Germán	Male	
		Gustavo	Male	
		Graciela	Female	
		Gisela	Female	
		Gabriel	Male	
	M8	Helena	Female	
		Héctor	Male	
		Hortencia	Female	
		Herminia	Female	
Ingrid		Female		
A1	Ignacia	Female	Argentinian	
	Inés	Female		
	Ileana	Female		
	Ignacio	Male		
	Ismael	Male		
	Iván	Male	Mexican	
	Isabel	Female		
	Irene	Female		
	Isidoro	Male		
	Jacinta	Female		
A2	Juan	Male	Argentinian	
	Jimena	Female		
	José	Male		
	Jaime	Male		
	Josefina	Female		
	Juliana	Female		
	Javier	Male		
	Julio	Male		
	Juana	Female		
	Luis	Male		
A3	Luciana	Female	Argentinian	
	Lucas	Male		
	Laura	Female		
	Laureano	Male		
	Leticia	Female		
	Lautaro	Male		
	Lorenzo	Male		
	Liliana	Female		
Leonardo	Male			
A4	Martín	Male	Argentinian	
	Manuel	Male		
	María	Female		
	Marcos	Male		
	Mauricio	Male		
	Mariana	Female		
	Melisa	Female		
Marcelo	Male			
A5	Natalia	Female	Peruvian	
	Nicolás	Male		
	Nadia	Female		
	Nancy	Female		
	Nahuel	Male		Argentinian
Argentina	A1	Ingrid	Female	Argentinian
		Ignacia	Female	
		Inés	Female	
		Ileana	Female	
		Ignacio	Male	
		Ismael	Male	Mexican
		Iván	Male	
		Isabel	Female	
		Irene	Female	
		Isidoro	Male	
	A2	Jacinta	Female	Argentinian
		Juan	Male	
		Jimena	Female	
		José	Male	
		Jaime	Male	
		Josefina	Female	
		Juliana	Female	
		Javier	Male	
		Julio	Male	
		Juana	Female	
	A3	Luis	Male	Argentinian
		Luciana	Female	
		Lucas	Male	
		Laura	Female	
		Laureano	Male	
		Leticia	Female	
		Lautaro	Male	
		Lorenzo	Male	
Liliana	Female			
Leonardo	Male			
A4	Martín	Male	Argentinian	
	Manuel	Male		
	María	Female		
	Marcos	Male		
	Mauricio	Male		
	Mariana	Female		
	Melisa	Female		
Marcelo	Male			
A5	Natalia	Female	Peruvian	
	Nicolás	Male		
	Nadia	Female		
	Nancy	Female		
	Nahuel	Male		Argentinian

APPENDIX III (A): FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE (ORIGINAL VERSION IN SPANISH)

Estructura y cuestionario para las sesiones de grupos focales
<p>Bienvenidos. Me llamo Pablo Morales y, en primer lugar, me gustaría agradecerles por participar hoy en este grupo focal.</p> <p>Recuerden que la participación es totalmente voluntaria y tienen la libertad de responder o no. También, si lo desean, pueden irse en cualquier momento. Con su participación, están dando consentimiento a que sus respuestas sean utilizadas en esta investigación. Para lo cual se realizará una doble grabación de la sesión.</p> <p>Para romper el hielo, podríamos presentarnos, diciendo el nombre, carrera, año de estudio, etc. Les recuerdo que la participación es anónima, o sea que los nombres no van a ser publicados en ningún lugar, por respeto a la privacidad de cada uno.</p>
<p>Para comenzar me gustaría saber en un día normal cómo se informan, por ejemplo, periódicos, radio, televisión, internet, celulares, etc.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Si encienden el televisor para ver las noticias, ¿cuál es el primer canal que sintonizan? ¿Cambian de canal para ver qué dicen en otros canales o siempre se quedan en uno? ¿Alguna razón en particular?2. Si quieren saber algo que sucedió en otro país, ¿qué canal sintonizan?
<p>Les voy a entregar un papel para realizar algunas actividades que nos ayudarán a discutir sobre el tema.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. ¿Quién ha visto alguno de los siguientes canales: BBC, CNN, Telesur, NTN24, DW, TVE, CCTV, HispanTV, RT...?4. ¿Alguna vez oyeron algún conocido/familiar/amigo hablar de alguno de esos canales? ¿Alguna vez vieron que en casa de algún amigo estaban viendo alguno de estos canales?
<p>Ahora me gustaría que ordenaran los siguientes países según el nivel de confianza que les generan. Alemania, China, Colombia, España, Estados Unidos, Irán, Rusia y Venezuela.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Si les dijera que estos canales son de China, Rusia e Irán, ¿en cuál confiarían más?
<p>Ahora les voy a mostrar algunos extractos audiovisuales de estos tres canales. Quiero que enfoquen su atención en los siguientes puntos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- el estilo (¿es atractivo?)- los presentadores (¿son claros?)- el contenido (¿es creíble?)" <p>El primero es RT de Rusia. El segundo es HispanTV de Irán. El tercero es CCTV-E de China.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. ¿Cuál les gustó más? ¿El ruso, el iraní o el chino? ¿Por qué? ¿Cuál les gustaría haber continuado viendo?7. ¿Qué aspecto les pareció más atractivo? ¿Por qué? ¿Es algo que hayan visto en otro canal?8. ¿Qué no les gustó? ¿Qué les molestó? ¿Por qué? ¿Es por algo que han visto antes y tampoco les gusta?9. ¿Qué canal les pareció más claro?10. ¿Qué les parecieron los presentadores? ¿Les parece mejor que sean hablantes nativos o les da lo mismo?11. Si pudieran elegir entre un presentador español y uno latinoamericano, ¿qué acento les parece más agradable? ¿Cuál les parece más creíble? ¿Cuál es más prestigioso?12. ¿Y de los acentos latinoamericanos, cuál les parece más creíble? ¿Alguno es más prestigioso?13. ¿Creen que pueden confiar en la información que presentaron esos canales? ¿Hubo algo que les generara desconfianza?14. Si en los canales locales dan información diferente de la que aparece en los canales internacionales, ¿en cuál confiarían más?15. ¿Qué hace que un canal les genere más confianza que otros?16. ¿Considerarían ver algunos de estos canales en el futuro o preferirían continuar viendo canales locales?17. ¿Qué tendrían que hacer estos canales para ganar la confianza de ustedes?18. ¿Les parece que estos canales podrían tener un futuro en sus países? <p>Final. Agradecimiento.</p>

APPENDIX III (B): FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE (TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH)

Structure and questionnaire for focus groups sessions
<p>Welcome. My name is Pablo Morales and, first of all, I would like to thank you for participating in this focus group today.</p> <p>Remember that participation is totally voluntary and you have the freedom to respond or not. Also, if they wish, they can leave at any time. With your participation, you are giving consent for your answers to be used in this investigation. For which a double recording of the session will be made.</p> <p>To break the ice, we could introduce ourselves, saying name, major, year of study, etc. I remind you that the participation is anonymous, that is, your names will not be published anywhere, out of respect for the privacy of everyone.</p>
<p>To start I would like to know on a normal day how they are informed, for example, newspapers, radio, television, internet, cell phones, etc.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you turn on the TV to watch the news, what is the first channel you tune in? Do you change channels to see what they say on other channels or do you always stay in one? Any particular reason? 2. If you want to know something that happened in another country, what channel do you tune into?
<p>I am going to give you a paper to carry out some activities that will help us to discuss the subject.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Who has seen any of the following channels: BBC, CNN, Telesur, NTN24, DW, TVE, CCTV, HispanTV, RT ...? 4. Did you ever hear an acquaintance / family member / friend talk about any of these channels? Did you ever see that in a friend's house they were watching any of these channels?
<p>Now I would like you to order the following countries according to the level of confidence they generate. Germany, China, Colombia, Spain, the United States, Iran, Russia and Venezuela</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. If I told you that these channels are from China, Russia and Iran, which one would you trust more?
<p>Now I'm going to show you some audio-visual excerpts from these three channels. I want you to focus your attention on the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the style (is it attractive?) - the presenters (are they clear?) - the content (is it credible?) <p>The first one is RT from Russia. The second one is HispanTV from Iran. The third one is CCTV-E from China.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Which one did you like the most? The Russian, the Iranian or the Chinese? Why? Which one would you like to have continued watching? 7. What did you find most attractive? Why? Is it something you have seen on another channel? 8. What did you not like? What bothered you? Why? Is it because of something they have seen before and they do not like it either? 9. Which channel did you find most clear? 10. What did you think of the presenters? Is it better for them to be native speakers or it doesn't matter? 11. If you could choose between a Spanish and a Latin American presenter, which accent do you find most pleasant? Which do you think is more credible? Which more prestigious? 12. And what about the Latin American accents, which seems more credible? Is any of them more prestigious? 13. Do you think you can trust the information presented by these channels? Was there something that generated mistrust? 14. If in the local channels they give information different from the one that appears in the international channels, which one would you trust more? 15. What makes a channel more trustworthy than others? 16. Would you consider watching some of these channels in the future or would you prefer to continue watching local channels? 17. What would these channels have to do to gain your trust? 18. Do you think that these channels could have a future in your countries? <p>Finish and give thanks.</p>

APPENDIX IV(A): SAMPLES OF SUPPORTING MATERIAL WITH ASSIGNMENTS TO ENCOURAGE DEBATE (ORIGINAL SPANISH)

Código: MUAM1

1. Indicar cuáles de los siguientes canales de TV internacionales conoces:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BBC	TV5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CNN	France 24
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Telesur	Arirang
	NTN24	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Euronews
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	DW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Al-Jazeera
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	TVE	NHK
	CCTV	PressTV
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	HispanTV	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RT

¿Algún otro?
we are change.org

2. Ordenar según sentimiento de confianza que te genera cada país.

1) Alemania, 2) China, 3) Colombia, 4) España, 5) EEUU, 6) Irán, 7) Rusia y 8) Venezuela

7	6	2	8	1	4	3	5
+++	++	++	+	+	-	-	---

3. Anotar mientras se ven los videos para posterior discusión.

	RT	HispanTV	CCTV-E
Estilo	formato fresco juvenil, sin descuidar la impresión profesional.	Estilo fácil de ver y permanecer. Dinámico.	Estilo un poco rígido, poca fluidez.
Presentadores	No se limita a tener periodistas, sino también personas académicas y profesionales de experiencia en la temática.	A veces dan su opinión personal. Son mujeres con hijas, lo que hace relacionar el papel importante de la mujer iraní.	No captan mi atención por mucho tiempo. Los presentadores chinos no me parecen entusiastas.
Contenido	Dan la nota presentando doctos, pruebas y datos. Evitan presentar la opinión personal del (los) presentador.	No gusta que inviten a expertos para debatir y opinar. Dan notas que otros medios no.	No me parecen atractivos los notes sobre China, creo que su cultura no es tan compatible con la latina.

Palabras de ayuda:
Claro, creíble, confiable, interesante, aburrido, de ideología evidente, tendencioso, preguntas pertinentes,

Código: ADT2

1. Indicar cuáles de los siguientes canales de TV internacionales conoces:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BBC	TV5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CNN	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> France 24
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Telesur	Arirang
	NTN24	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Euronews
	DW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Al-Jazeera
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	TVE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NHK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CCTV	PressTV
	HispanTV	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RT

¿Algún otro?
RAI
Fox News

2. Ordenar según sentimiento de confianza que te genera cada país.

1) Alemania, 2) China, 3) Colombia, 4) España, 5) EEUU, 6) Irán, 7) Rusia y 8) Venezuela

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧
+++	++	+	+	-	-	-	---

3. Anotar mientras se ven los videos para posterior discusión.

	RT	HispanTV	CCTV-E
Estilo	Directo, sencillo. El estilo del canal está en un lenguaje claro y ameno. Uso muy destacado de redes sociales.	Es un estilo poco llamativo, de tintes fuertemente ideológicos del país de origen. No es aburrido pero no me despierta interés.	Demasiado aburrido y similar a los programas locales. Bastante pesado a la hora de verlo, aburre. No es malo pero el ritmo es monótono.
Presentadores	Directos, buscan generar interés. Lenguaje cuidado y pensado para esto. En los extranjeros, buen uso del español en el guion.	Lenguaje poco cuidado, fuertemente influenciados por su gobierno (o por el canal). Mal uso del español. Hombres, aburridos a ver hablar.	Demasiado arcaico, antiguos, poco atractivos para los estudiantes de consumo actual. Buen uso del español por se not. el trabajo. Pocos periodistas latinos pero profesionales.
Contenido	Tiene hints amarillistas con el fin de generar interés, pero en general informa bien.	Información tremendamente distorsionada, en consonancia con los directores del régimen iraní y sus aliados (Pablo Iglesias).	Hay cierto neutralidad, sorprendente considerando con el país, a pesar de haber una obra institucional gubernamental. Profesional y coherente.

Palabras de ayuda:
Claro, creíble, confiable, interesante, aburrido, de ideología evidente, tendencioso, preguntas pertinentes, agradables, profesionales, etc.

APPENDIX IV(B): SUPPORTING MATERIAL WITH ASSIGNMENTS TO ENCOURAGE DEBATE (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

Code:

1. Indicate which of the following international TV channels you know:

BBC	TV5
CNN	France 24
Telesur	Arirang
NTN24	Euronews
DW	Al-Jazeera
TVE	NHK
CCTV	PressTV
HispanTV	RT

¿Any other?

2. Sort according to the feeling of confidence generated by each country.

1) Germany, 2) China, 3) Colombia, 4) Spain, 5) USA, 6) Iran, 7) Russia and 8) Venezuela

++++	+++	++	+	+-	--	---	----

3. Write down comments while watching the videos for later discussion.

	RT	HispanTV	CCTV-E
Style			
Presenters			
Content			

Useful words:
Clear, credible, reliable, interesting, boring, with obvious ideology, biased, pertinent questions, pleasant, professional, etc.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Almasy, S. (2017). CNN en Español kicked off air in Venezuela. *CNN*, 16 February. Available from <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/15/americas/cnn-en-espanol-venezuela-off-air/index.html> [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- American Press Institute (2017). 'My' media versus 'the' media: Trust in news depends on which news media you mean. *American Press Institute*, 24 May. Available from <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/my-media-vs-the-media> [Accessed 30 September 2018].
- AP (2014). In Brazil's multicultural melting pot, Japanese 'nikkei' left out of the mix. *The Japan Times*, 18 June. Available from <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/06/18/national/social-issues/japanese-brazilians-struggle-dual-identities-mutual-exclusions/#.WOI61xR-H-0> [Accessed 4 April 2017].
- AP (2016). Argentina pulls out of leftist TV network Telesur. *The Guardian*, 28 March. Available from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/28/argentina-telesur-tv-network-venezuela-hugo-chavez> [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Arias, A. (2016). Terminó el duopolio televisivo. *La Crónica de Hoy*, 18 October. Available from <http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2016/990313.html> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- ASALE (no date). Historia. *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española*. Available from <http://www.asale.org/la-asociacion/politica-linguistica-panhispanica/hechos-relevantes> [Accessed 20 September 2017].
- Audissino, E. (2014). Dubbing as a Formal Interference: Reflections and Examples. In: Abend-David, D. (ed.) *Media and translation: an interdisciplinary approach*. New York: Bloomsbury, 97-118.
- Aviles, K. (2005). Proyecta el presidente del Colmex más participación en debates nacionales. *La Jornada*, 31 October. Available from <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2005/10/31/index.php?section=politica&article=022n1pol> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- Bas, M. (2012). Hace 80 años Radio Moscú empezó a hablar en español. *El Mundo*, 31 July. Available from <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/07/31/comunicacion/1343720621.html> [Accessed 10 April 2017].

- Basualdo, F. (2014). Cae la venta del diario Clarín y las cifras ya son menores a cuando el país tenía la mitad de habitantes. *Télam*, 24 November. Available from <http://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201411/86456-venta-de-diarios-caida-clarin.php> [Accessed 10 June 2017].
- BBC (2016). Acerca de la BBC. *BBC Mundo*, 26 May. Available from <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/institucional-36400007> [Accessed 29 March 2017].
- Becerril, A. (2017). Encuesta sobre las mejores universidades de México. *El Economista*, 25 January. Available from <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2017/01/25/encuesta-sobre-las-mejores-universidades-mexico> [Accessed 7 March 2017].
- Berg, J.S. (2008). *Broadcasting on the short waves : 1945 to today*. Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Co.
- Berger, A. A. (2000) *Media and communication research methods : an introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.
- Binder, D. (1992). U.S. Broadcasting Outpost in Berlin Signs Off After 46 Years, *The New York Times*, 19 May. Available from <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/20/world/us-broadcasting-outpost-in-berlin-signs-off-after-46-years.html> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- Borchers, C. (2017). Voice of America says it won't become Trump TV. *The New York Times*, 26 January. Available from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/01/26/voice-of-america-says-it-wont-become-trump-tv> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- Boyd-Barrett, O. (2015). *Media Imperialism Redefining the Field*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Brennen, B. (2013) *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Burch, S. (2007). Telesur and the new agenda for Latin American integration. *Global Media and Communication*, 3 (2), 227–232.
- Cañizález, A. and Lugo-Ocando, J. (2008). Beyond National Media Systems: a Medium for Latin America and the Struggle for Integration. In: Lugo-Ocando, J. (ed.) *The Media in Latin America*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 209–225.
- CCTV (2007). Zhongyang dianshitai Xiyu, Fayu guoji pindao jiang yu shi yue yi ri kaibo 中央电视台西语、法语国际频道将于十月一日开播 (CCTV Spanish and French channel will start broadcasting on 1 October). *CCTV*, 27 September. Available from <http://news.cctv.com/science/20070927/105325.shtml> [Accessed 7 April 2017].

- CCTV (no date). Encuesta 2015 CCTV en Español - Resultados. *CCTV*. Available from <http://app1.vote.cntv.cn/viewResult.jsp?voteId=14720> [Accessed 7 April 2017].
- Cisneros, D. (2014). A 75 años de la Casa de España. *El Financiero*, 10 February. Available from <http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/after-office/a-75-anos-de-la-casa-de-espana.html> [Accessed 23 February 2017].
- CNN Chile (no date). Quienes somos. *CNN Chile*. Available from <http://www.cnnchile.com/paginacp/quienes-somos> [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- Conatel (2014). William Castillo: El espectro radioeléctrico no es propiedad privada. *Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones*, 17 February. Available from <http://www.conatel.gob.ve/william-castillo-el-espectro-radioelectrico-no-es-propiedad-privada> [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- Crettaz, J. (2013). Diarios de papel: la Argentina... ¿el último país en el que desaparecerán? *La Nación*, 14 August. Available from <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/1610446-diarios-de-papel-la-argentina-el-ultimo-pais-en-el-que-desapareceran> [Accessed 10 June 2017].
- Crettaz, J. (2015a). El Gobierno modificó la ley de medios y eliminó la Afsca con un DNU. *La Nación*, 31 December. Available from <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1858627-con-un-dnu-el-gobierno-disuelve-la-afscay-cambia-la-ley-de-medios> [Accessed 10 June 2017].
- Crettaz, J. (2015b). Tras tocar un piso, crece la confianza en los medios de comunicación. *La Nación*, 22 September. Available from <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1830222-tras-tocar-un-piso-crece-la-confianza-en-los-medios-de-comunicación> [Accessed 10 June 2017].
- CRI (2009). Sobre Dept. *CRI Online Português*, 16 April. Available from http://portuguese.cri.cn/623/2009/04/16/1s106060_1.htm [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- CRI (2010). CRI en español. *CRI Online Español*, 10 March. Available from <http://espanol.cri.cn/742/2009/03/10/1s174183.htm> [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- CRI (2017). History. *CRI English*, 16 February. Available from <http://english.cri.cn/12894/2015/01/19/2821s862289.htm> [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- Cueva, Á. (2016). Warner, el doblaje y las injusticias. *Milenio*, 18 March. Available from http://www.milenio.com/firmas/alvaro_cueva_elpozodelosdeseosreprimidos/Warner-doblaje-injusticias_18_703309713.html [Accessed 10 September 2017].
- Cushion, S. (2010). *The rise of 24-hour news television : global perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Dearing, J.W. and Rogers, E.M. (1996). *Agenda-Setting*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Delgado, Á. (2016). Margarita: La candidata de Televisa. *Proceso*, 21 November. Available from <http://www.proceso.com.mx/463407/margarita-la-candidata-televisa> [Accessed 1 September 2018].
- Delgado, C. (2015). Nueva imagen y más formatos en DW para mentes críticas. *Deutsche Welle*, 21 June. Available from <http://www.dw.com/es/nueva-imagen-y-más-formatos-en-dw-para-mentes-críticas/a-18530177> [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- Díez, P.M. (2008). La TV en español ya tiene canal propio en China. *ABC*, 7 January. Available from http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-07-01-2008/abc/TVyRadio/la-tv-en-español-ya-tiene-canal-propio-en-china_1641541184739.html [Accessed 7 April 2017].
- Doblaje* (2013). Decreto 933/2013. Ley N° 23.316. *InfoLEG*. Available from <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/215000-219999/217418/norma.htm> [Accessed 1 September 2018].
- Dolan, K.A. (2012). The World's Richest Man On Fixing The Global Economy. *Forbes*, 7 March. Available from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kerryadolan/2012/03/07/the-worlds-richest-man-on-fixing-the-global-economy/2/#729ce85f2c5b> [Accessed 23 February 2017].
- DW (2005). Deutsche Welle: Changes in radio broadcasts starting this summer. *Deutsche Welle*, 18 May. Available from <http://www.dw.com/en/deutsche-welle-changes-in-radio-broadcasts-starting-this-summer/a-6529299> [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- DW (2016). Grundlage für unabhängigen Journalismus. *Deutsche Welle*, 8 March. Available from <http://www.dw.com/downloads/26315376/dwgesetzneues-cd.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- DW (no date A). Debates del Bicentenario. *Deutsche Welle*. Available from <http://www.dw.com/es/debates-del-bicentenario/a-5626823> [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- DW (no date B). DW: informaciones generales. *Deutsche Welle*. Available from <http://web.archive.org/web/19990502190925/www.dwelle.de/castellano/info1.html> [Accessed 29 March 2017].
- DYN (2016). El Gobierno suspenderá la televisación de Russia Today y dará de baja Telesur de la grilla de TDA. *La Nación*, 9 June. Available from <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1907373-el-gobierno-suspendera-la-televisacion-de-russia-today-y-dara-de-baja-telesur-de-la-grilla-de-tda> [Accessed 29 March 2017].

- Ebrahimpour, H. and Sepehri, M.B. (2011). Cultural Factors and Their Effect in the Use of Overseas Media. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30 (2011), 17–22. Available from <http://www.scopus.com/inward/record.url?eid=2-s2.0-84855647129&partnerID=tZ0tx3y1> [Accessed 10 December 2015].
- Edelman (2017). *2017 Edelman TRUST BAROMETER - Global Report*. 66. Edelman. Available from <http://www.edelman.com/global-results> [Accessed 26 July 2017].
- EIU (2017). Democracy Index 2017. *The Economist*. Available from <https://infographics.economist.com/2017/DemocracyIndex> [Accessed 25 July 2018].
- El Colegio de México (2015). Informe Anual. *Colmex*. Available from https://www.colmex.mx/informacion_general/documentacion_institucional?locale=sp [Accessed 23 February 2017].
- El Colegio de México (no date). La Historia de El Colegio de México. *Colmex*. Available from https://www.colmex.mx/informacion_general/historia?locale=sp [Accessed 23 February 2017].
- El Universal (2014). Maduro: Sacar del aire a NTN24 fue una decisión de Estado. *El Universal*, 13 February. Available from <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/140213/maduro-sacar-del-aire-a-ntn24-fue-una-decision-de-estado> [Accessed 4 April 2017].
- Ellul, J. (1973). *Propaganda: the formation of men's attitudes*. New York: Vintage Books.
- El Universal/Efe (2012). Deutsche Welle-TV se dirige a Latinoamérica con 20 horas al día. *El Universal*, 31 January. Available from <http://www.eluniversal.com/arte-y-entretenimiento/television/120131/deutsche-welle-tv-se-dirige-a-latinoamerica-con-20-horas-al-dia> [Accessed 4 April 2017].
- Estevez, D. (2014). Mexico's Carlos Slim Reclaims World's Richest Man Title From Bill Gates. *Forbes*, 15 July. Available from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/doliaestevez/2014/07/15/mexicos-carlos-slim-reclaims-worlds-richest-man-title-from-bill-gates/#5b0fa71564de> [Accessed 25 February 2017].
- Europa Press (2013). Paralizada la emisión de Hispan TV porque su responsable viola los derechos humanos. *El Mundo*, 25 January. Available from <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2013/01/25/comunicacion/1359112896.html> [Accessed 1 April 2017].

- Falchi, F. (2016). La “grieta” argentina. *Los Andes*, 16 April. Available from <http://losandes.com.ar/article/la-grieta-argentina> [Accessed 1 June 2017].
- Fermo, G. (2017). Argentina 2017: la grieta es ética. *Infobae*, 5 January. Available from <http://www.infobae.com/economia/finanzas-y-negocios/2017/01/05/argentina-2017-la-grieta-es-etica> [Accessed 1 June 2017].
- Fierro, J.O. (2016). Dan a EL UNIVERSAL galardón por 100 años. *El Universal*, 17 March. Available from <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/sociedad/2016/03/17/dan-el-universal-galardon-por-100-anos> [Accessed 4 April 2017].
- Flaxman, S., Goel, S. and Rao, J.M. (2016). Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80 (S1), 298–320. Available from <https://academic.oup.com/poq/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/poq/nfw006> [Accessed 3 June 2017].
- Fu, W.W. (2012). National Audience Tastes in Hollywood Film Genres: Cultural Distance and Linguistic Affinity. *Communication Research*, 40 (6) 789-817. Available from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0093650212442085> [Accessed 29 March 2016]
- Fundación UNAM (2013). Diez curiosidades de la UNAM que te gustará saber. *Fundación UNAM*, 12 February. Available from http://www.fundacionunam.org.mx/de_la_unam/diez-curiosidades-de-la-unam-que-te-gustara-saber [Accessed 23 February 2017].
- Gaceta Mercantil (2013). Caen las ventas de todos los diarios de papel argentinos. *Gaceta Mercantil*, 17 June. Available from <http://www.gacetamercantil.com/notas/34202> [Accessed 10 June 2017].
- Galindo, C. et al. (2015). TeleKremlin se expande. *El País*, 25 January. Available from http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/01/23/actualidad/1422040595_307616.html [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- García Canclini, N. (1989) *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*. México: Grijalbo.
- García Canclini, N. (1995) *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- García-De-Torres, E. et al. (2011). Uso De Twiter Y Facebook Por Los Medios Iberoamericanos. *Profesional de la Información*, 20 (6), 611–620. Available from

- <https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/EPI/article/view/epi.2011.nov.02> [Accessed 10 June 2017].
- Gass, R.H. and Seiter, J.. (2009). Credibility and Public Diplomacy. In: Show, N., and Taylor, P. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. New York: Routledge, 154–165.
- Geniets, A. (2013). *The global news challenge: Market strategies of international broadcasting organizations in developing countries*. New York and London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Georgiou, M. (2012). Watching soap opera in the diaspora: cultural proximity or critical proximity? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35 (5), 868–88. Available from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01419870.2011.628040> [Accessed 15 April 2016].
- Gobat, M. (2013). The invention of Latin America: A transnational history of anti-imperialism, democracy, and race. *American Historical Review*, 118 (5), 1345–1375. Available from <https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/ahr/118.5.1345> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- Gómez Ángel, C. (2013). HispanTV: Irán, visto por ojos persas y contado en castellano. *El Tiempo*, 5 November. Available from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-13160255> [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Gorfinkel, L. et al. (2014). CCTV's global outreach: Examining the audiences of China's 'new voice' on Africa. *Media International Australia*,(151), 81–88.
- Granados, O. (2015). El legado del Colmex. *Milenio*, 21 September. Available from <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/otto-granados/columna-otto-granados/el-legado-del-colmex> [Accessed 24 February 2017]
- Greenslade, R. (2015). Chinese media in Africa illustrate difference from western media. *The Guardian*, 20 August. Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2015/aug/20/chinese-media-in-africa-illustrate-difference-from-western-media> [Accessed 20 September 2018]
- Groebel, J. (2000). *Die Rolle des Auslandsrundfunks : eine vergleichende Analyse der Erfahrungen und Trends in fünf Ländern: Gutachten*. Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Available from <http://sowiport.gesis.org/search/id/gesis-solis-00291363> [Accessed 29 March 2017].

- Grupo Expansión (no date). Nuestra Historia. *Grupo Expansión*. Available from <http://grupoexpansion.mx/nuestra-historia> [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- Guerrero, M.A. (2014). The 'Captured Liberal' Model of Media Systems in Latin America. In: Guerrero, M.A., and Márquez-Ramírez, M. (eds.) *Media Systems and Communication Policies in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 43–65.
- Guevara, A. (2013). *El Español Neutro: Realización hablada*. Buenos Aires: Iberoamericana Comunicación.
- Hammersley, M. (2013) What is qualitative research? London: Bloomsbury Academic. Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849666084> [Accessed 15 March 2017]
- Hargittai, E. and Litt, E. (2012). Becoming a tweep. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15 (5), 680–702. Available from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1369118X.2012.666256> [Accessed 3 June 2017].
- Hellmueller, L. and Trilling, D. (2012). The Credibility of Credibility Measures: A Meta-Analysis in Leading Communication Journals, 1951 to 2011. In: *WAPOR 65th Annual Conference*. Hong Kong, June 2012. Available from <http://wapor2012.hkpop.hk/doc/papers/ConcurrentSessionsV/VD/VD-3.pdf> [Accessed 20 September 2018].
- Hermida, A. et al. (2012). Share, Like, Recommend. *Journalism Studies*, 13 (5–6), 815–824. Available from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2012.664430> [Accessed 3 June 2017].
- Hintz, A. (McGill U. (2011). From Media Niche to Policy Spotlight: Mapping Community-Media Policy Change in Latin America. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 36 (1), 147–159.
- HispanTV (no date a). ¿Qué es Hispantv? *HispanTV*. Available from <http://www.hispantv.ir/nosotros> [Accessed 6 March 2017].
- HispanTV (no date b). About. *YouTube*. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/user/hispantv/about> [Accessed 7 April 2017].
- HispanTV (no date c). Cuestionario. *HispanTV*. Available from <https://www.hispantv.com/cuestionario> [Accessed 7 April 2017].
- Hoffmann, J. (2013a). Der Evaluationsbericht. *Deutsche Welle*, 27 June. Available from <http://www.dw.com/de/der-evaluationsbericht/a-16910881> [Accessed 5 April 2017].

- Hoffmann, J. (2013b). Drei Stunden via Kurzwelle – auf Deutsch. *Deutsche Welle*, 19 April. Available from <http://www.dw.com/de/drei-stunden-via-kurzwelle-auf-deutsch/a-16684103> [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- Hoffmann, J. (2013c). Internet, Satellitenfernsehen und Befreiung aus Kigali. *Deutsche Welle*, 8 April. Available from <http://www.dw.com/de/internet-satellitenfernsehen-und-befreiung-aus-kigali/a-16702686> [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- Hovland, C.I. and Weiss, W. (1952). American Association for Public Opinion Research The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15 (4), 635–650.
- Hughes, S. (2008). The Media in Mexico: From Authoritarian Institution to Hybrid System. In: Lugo-Ocando, J. (ed.) *The Media in Latin America*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 131–149.
- Hugues, S. and Prado, P. (2011). Media Diversity and Social Inequality in Latin America. In: Blofield, M. (ed.) *The great gap: inequality and the politics of redistribution in Latin America*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 109-146.
- Hürriyet (2006). French radio RFI cuts Turkish broadcasts. *Hürriyet*, 27 October. Available from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/french-radio-rfi-cuts-turkish-broadcasts-5328000> [Accessed 1 December 2015].
- IBA (2008). Highlights of the Overseas and Immigrant Radio Broadcasting Service. IBA, 11 June. Available from <http://www.iba.org.il/world/Reka.aspx?lang=&classto=allfortype&type=206&page=259> [Accessed 1 April 2017]
- IFT (2015). *Encuesta Nacional de Consumo de Contenidos Audiovisuales 2015*. CDMX: Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones. Available from http://www.ift.org.mx/sites/default/files/contenidogeneral/comunicacion-y-medios/encca2015-vf-compressed_2.pdf?platform=hootsuite [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- IFT (2016). *Cuarta Encuesta 2016 Usuarios de Servicios de Telecomunicaciones*. CDMX: Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones. Available from <http://www.ift.org.mx/sites/default/files/contenidogeneral/usuarios-y-audiencias/cuartaencuesta-acc.pdf> [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- Iglesias, F. (2013). La verdadera grieta argentina. *La Nación*, 18 October. Available from <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1630107-la-verdadera-grieta-argentina> [Accessed 1 June 2017].

- Infobae (2015). El Centro Simon Wiesenthal denuncia una campaña antisemita de HispanTV y Telesur. *Infobae*, 8 May. Available from <http://www.infobae.com/2015/05/08/1727483-el-centro-simon-wiesenthal-denuncia-una-campana-antisemita-hispanTV-y-telesur> [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Infobae (2016). Crisis presupuestaria en la UBA: los decanos dicen que viven 'al día' y los docentes están de paro. *Infobae*, 29 April. Available from <http://www.infobae.com/2016/04/29/1807897-crisis-presupuestaria-la-uba-los-decanos-dicen-que-viven-al-dia-y-los-docentes-estan-paro> [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Instituto Cervantes (2017). El español: una lengua viva. Informe 2017. *Centro virtual Cervantes*. Available from https://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/espanol_lengua_viva/pdf/espanol_lengua_viva_2017.pdf [Accessed 1 April 2018].
- IRIB (2010). IRIB World Service - Iran Spanish Radio - Redacción Española - Sobre Nosotros. *IRIB*, 15 May. Available from <http://spanish.irib.ir/noticias/politica2/el-oriente-medio/item/105154> [Accessed 7 April 2017].
- Jansson, A. and Lindell, J. (2015). News Media Consumption in the Transmedia Age. *Journalism Studies*, 16 (1), 79–96. Available from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2014.890337> [Accessed 3 June 2017].
- Jowett, G. and O'Donnell, V. (2012). *Propaganda and persuasion*. London: SAGE.
- KBS (no date). Sobre KBS WORLD Radio. *KBS World Radio*. Available from http://world.kbs.co.kr/spanish/about/about_kbsworld.htm [Accessed 4 April 2017].
- Krueger, R.A. and Casey, M.A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Ksiazek, T.B. and Webster, J.G. (2008). Cultural Proximity and Audience Behavior: The Role of Language in Patterns of Polarization and Multicultural Fluency. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52 (3), 485–503. Available from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/227293793?accountid=15533> [Accessed 1 April 2016].
- Laroche, M. et al. (2005). The influence of country image structure on consumer evaluations of foreign products. *International Marketing Review*, 22 (1), 96–115. Available from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/10.1108/02651330510581190> [Accessed 7 March 2018].

- Layton, M.L. (2012). ¿Quién confía en los medios masivos de comunicación en América Latina? *Perspectivas desde el Barómetro de las Américas: 2012*, 74 . Available from http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO874_es.pdf [Accessed 26 July 2017].
- Lee, S.J. and Melissen, J. (2011). *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power in East Asia*. New York, Palgrave Mcmillan. Available from <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/doi/10.1057/9780230118447> [Accessed 1 December 2015].
- Li, D. et al. (2014). The asymmetric influence of cognitive and affective country image on rational and experiential purchases. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48 (11/12), 2153–2175. Available from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/10.1108/EJM-09-2012-0505> [Accessed 7 March 2018].
- Liamputtong, P. (2011) *Focus group methodology: Principles and Practice*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Liotti, J. (2014). The Complex Relationship between the Media and the Political System in Argentina: From Co-option to Polarization. In: Guerrero, M.A., and Márquez-Ramírez, M. (eds.) *Media Systems and Communication Policies in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 100–121.
- Lozano, J. C. (2008) 'Consumo y apropiación de cine y TV extranjeros por audiencias en América Latina', *Comunicar*, 15 (30), 67–72. Available from <https://doi.org/10.3916/c30-2008-01-010> [Accessed 1 April 2019].
- Lugo-Ocando, J. (2008). *The Media in Latin America*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Maher, A.A. and Carter, L.L. (2011). The affective and cognitive components of country image. *International Marketing Review*, 28 (6), 559–580. Available from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/10.1108/02651331111181411> [Accessed 7 March 2018].
- Márquez-Ramírez, M. (2014). Post-authoritarian Politics in a Neoliberal Era: Revising Media and Journalism in Mexico. In: Guerrero, M.A., and Márquez-Ramírez, M. (eds.) *Media Systems and Communication Policies in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 272–292.
- Márquez-Ramírez, M. and Guerrero, M.A. (2014). Introduction: Media Systems in the Age of (Anti) Neoliberal Politics. In: Márquez-Ramírez, M., and Guerrero, M.A. (eds.) *Media Systems and Communication Policies in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–23.

- Martí Noticias (no date). Radio y TV Martí - Conócenos. *Radio Televisión Martí*. Available from <http://www.martinoticias.com/p/393.html> [Accessed 30 March 2017].
- Martín-Barbero, J. (1987). *De los medios a las mediaciones. Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.
- Martín-Barbero, J. (2006). A Latin American perspective on communication: cultural mediation — Global Media and Communication. *Global Media and Communication*, 2 (3), 279–297.
- Mattern, J.B. (2005). Why ‘Soft Power’ Isn’t So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 33 (3), 583–612.
- Maweu, J.M. (2016). Journalists’ and Public Perceptions of the Politics of China’s Soft Power in Kenya under the “Look East” Foreign Policy. In: Zhang, X., Wasserman, H., and Mano, W. (eds.) *China’s media and soft power in Africa : promotion and perceptions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 123–134.
- May, A.L. (2010). Who Tube? How YouTube’s News and Politics Space Is Going Mainstream. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 15 (4), 499–511. Available from <http://hij.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/1940161210382861> [Accessed 7 June 2017].
- McClory, J. (2013). The New Persuaders III: A 2012 Global Ranking of Soft Power. *Institute for Government*. Available from <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/new-persuaders-iii> [Accessed 1 April 2016]
- Mcgrath, K. and Gaziano, C. (1986). Measuring the Concept of Credibility. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 63 (3), 451–462.
- Meléndez, N. (2017). Méndez: En los próximos días se anunciará al país el dictamen final del caso de CNN. *Conatel*, 17 March. Available from <http://www.conatel.gob.ve/mendez-en-los-proximos-dias-se-anunciara-al-pais-el-dictamen-final-del-caso-de-cnn> [Accessed 6 April 2017].
- Melissen, J. (2013). Public Diplomacy. In: Cooper, A., Heine, J., and Thakur, R. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10948007.2014.898483> [Accessed 28 March 2016]
- Mikos, L. and Perrotta, M. (2012). Traveling style: Aesthetic differences and similarities in national adaptations of *Yo soy Betty, la fea*. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15 (1), 81–97.

- Miller, D. (2007). *Media pressure on foreign policy the evolving theoretical framework*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Minder, R. (2016). Voting Again, Spain Faces Threat to Two-Party System. *The New York Times*, 23 June. Available from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/24/world/europe/voting-again-spain-faces-threat-to-two-party-system.html?_r=1 [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Morales, P.S. (2018). Could Chinese News Channels Have a Future in Latin America? *Wesminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 13 (1), 60–80. Available from <https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.276> [Accessed 19 June 2018].
- Morgan, D.L. (1998). *The Focus Group Guidebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Mouffe, C. et al. (2016). An appeal for the release of Milagro Sala. *The Guardian*, 8 April. Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/08/an-appeal-for-the-release-of-milagro-sala> [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Murillo Sandoval, S. and Escala Rabadán, L. (2013). De Betty, la fea a Ugly Betty. Circulación y adaptación de narrativas televisivas. *Cuadernos.info*, 33, 99–112. Available from <http://cuadernos.uc.cl/uc/index.php/CDI/article/view/531> [Accessed 1 July 2017].
- Negre, J. (2016). El iraní que paga el 'Fort Apache' de Pablo Iglesias. *El Mundo*, 17 January. Available from <http://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2016/01/17/569a2b2fe2704e0d338b4618.html> [Accessed 27 February 2017]
- Nelepcu, R. (2011). Deutsche Welle reduziert UKW-Ausstrahlung. *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung für Romänien*, 2 July. Available from <http://www.adz.ro/artikel/artikel/deutsche-welle-reduziert-ukw-ausstrahlung> [Accessed 1 December 2015].
- NHK (no date A). Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). *NHK World - Japan*. Available from <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/faq> [Accessed 27 March 2017].
- NHK (no date B). Kokusai hōsō gan'nen 'harōfurendo' to yobikake 国際放送元年「ハローフレンド」と呼びかけ (The first years of international broadcasting "Hello Friend"). *NHK World - Japan*. Available from <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/ja/chronology/chrono/1935-1939.html> [Accessed 27 March 2017].

- Niblock, S. (2013). *Media professionalism and training*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Available from <https://he.palgrave.com/page/detail/Media-Professionalism-and-Training/?K=9780230292826> [Accessed 16 September 2017].
- Nordenstreng, K. and Thussu, D.K. (2015). Contextualizing the BRICS media. In: Nordenstreng, K., and Thussu, D.K. (eds.) *Mapping BRICS media*. London: Routledge.
- Noticias RCN (2014). NTN 24 va a seguir informando lo que sucede en Venezuela. *RCN*, 13 February. Available from <https://noticias.canalrcn.com/internacional-america/ntn-24-va-seguir-informando-lo-sucede-venezuela> [Accessed 1 March 2017]
- Notimex (2015). Ventas de periódicos se desploman 35% en México. *El Economista*, 27 March. Available from <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2015/03/27/ventas-periodicos-se-desploman-35-mexico> [Accessed 1 July 2017].
- NTN24 (2014). *¿Quiénes somos? NTN24*. Available from http://www.ntn24.com/sites/default/files/imce/u81/presentacion_ntn24_2014_espanol_full.pdf [Accessed 1 March 2017].
- Nye, J. (2004). *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Nye, J. (2011). *The future of power*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Oh Panel (2017). Día del periodista. Informe de resultados. *Oh Panel*. Available from http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6145df_612525907f264567af7966d754ed8760.pdf [Accessed 26 July 2017].
- Painter, J. (2008). *Counter-hegemonic news: A case study of Al-Jazeera English and Telesur*. Challenges. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available from <papers2://publication/uuid/1888F2CE-D7A4-4EAB-B953-AAAF6FE10D2F> [Accessed 1 March 2017].
- Papathanassopoulos, S. et al. (2013). Online Threat, But Television is Still Dominant. *Journalism Practice*, 7 (6), 690–704. Available from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17512786.2012.761324> [Accessed 1 July 2017].
- Parametría (no date). Cae confianza en medios tradicionales de comunicación. *Parametría*. Available from http://www.parametria.com.mx/carta_parametrica.php?cp=4946 [Accessed 26 July 2017].
- ParsToday (no date). About Us. *ParsToday*. Available from http://parstoday.com/en/about_us [Accessed 1 April 2017].

- Plunkett, J. (2011). BBC World Service cuts will cost it 30m listeners worldwide. *The Guardian*, 26 January. Available from <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jan/26/bbc-world-service-cuts> [Accessed 1 December 2015].
- Podesta, D. (2016). Media in Latin America: A Path Forward Media in Latin America. *Center for International Media Assistance*. Available from http://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CIMA-Media-in-Latin-America_the-Path-Forward.pdf [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Pohlmann, S. (2012). Neue deutsche Welle. *Tagesspiegel*, 31 January. Available from <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/medien/neuaustrichtung-neue-deutsche-welle/6133962.html> [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- PressTV (2016). Iran launches 'Pars Today' news outlet. *PressTV*, 5 July. Available from <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2016/07/05/473779/Iran-IRIB-Pars-Today-Abdolali-AliAskari-Mohammad-Akhgari> [Accessed 3 April 2017]
- Promaxbda (no date). Search Award Winners. *Promax*. Available from <https://promaxbda.org/awards/search-award-winners> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- QS (2016). QS World University Rankings. *QS Top Universities*. Available from <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2016> [Accessed 23 February 2017].
- Radio Cooperativa (2015). Warner: 'El público prefiere disfrutar series y películas en su idioma'. *Radio Cooperativa*, 4 November. Available from <http://www.cooperativa.cl/noticias/entretencion/television/series/warner-el-publico-prefiere-disfrutar-series-y-peliculas-en-su-idioma/2015-11-03/143049.html> [Accessed 20 September 2017].
- Radio Praha (no date). History of Radio Prague. *Radio Praha in English*. Available from <http://www.radio.cz/en/static/history-of-radio-prague/radio-prague-2006-2011> [Accessed 29 March 2017].
- RAE (no date). La 23.^a edición (2014). *Real Academia Española*. Available from <http://www.rae.es/diccionario-de-la-lengua-espanola/la-23a-edicion-2014> [Accessed 20 September 2017].
- Rawnsley, G.D. (2009). China Talks Back. Public Diplomacy and soft Power for the Chinese Century. In: Snow, N., and Taylor, P.M. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. London and New York: Routledge, 282–291.

- Rawnsley, G.D. (2015). To Know Us is to Love Us: Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting in Contemporary Russia and China. *Politics*, 35 (3–4), 273–286. Available from <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/1467-9256.12104> [Accessed 1 March 2016].
- RCI (no date). Acerca de RCI: Historia. *Radio Canadá Internacional*. Available from <http://www.rcinet.ca/es/a-propos> [Accessed 4 April 2017].
- Reisberg, L. (2011). The Enigma of the UBA. *Inside Higher Ed*, 16 May. Available from https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/the_world_view/the_enigma_of_the_uba [Accessed 10 March 2017].
- RFI (2010a). 1931/1939 : Naissance du Poste colonial. *RFI*, 26 January. Available from <http://www.rfi.fr/contenu/20100126-19311939-naissance-poste-colonial> [Accessed 31 March 2017].
- RFI (2010b). 1939/1944 : La guerre des ondes. *RFI*, 26 January. Available from <http://www.rfi.fr/contenu/20100126-19391944-guerre-ondes> [Accessed 31 March 2017].
- RFI (2010c). 1975: Radio France Internationale, la cinquième chaîne de Radio France. *RFI*, 27 January. Available from <http://www.rfi.fr/contenu/20100127-1975-radio-france-internationale-cinquieme-chaine-radio-france> [Accessed 31 March 2017].
- RFI (2014). Les chiffres clés de RFI. *RFI*, 16 January. Available from <http://www.rfi.fr/entreprise/chiffres-cles> [Accessed 31 March 2017].
- RFI (2017). 3ème édition du Prix RFI du Reportage en espagnol : Appel à candidature. *RFI*, 22 March. Available from <http://www.rfi.fr/com/20170322-3eme-edition-prix-rfi-reportage-espagnol-appel-candidature-0> [Accessed 31 March 2017].
- Ricco, D. (2012). *No News from Tehran: HispanTV First Voyage to Latin America*. Buenos Aires: Centro Argentino de Estudios Internacionales, Working paper #31, Programa Medio Oriente. Available from <http://www.caei.com.ar/working-paper/no-news-tehran-hispantv-first-voyage-latin-america> [Accessed 1 March 2016].
- Rincón, Ó. (2015). Telesur + NTN 24 / El otro lado. *El Tiempo*, 24 May. Available from <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-15816099> [Accessed 20 March 2017].
- RNW (no date). RNW Media history. *RNW*. Available from <https://www.rnw.org/rnw-history> [Accessed 29 March 2017].

- Rojas, E.F., Poveda, L. and Grimblatt, N. (2016). *Estado de la banda ancha en América Latina y el Caribe 2016*. Santiago: Cepal. Available from http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/40528/S1601049_es.pdf [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Roth, K.P. and Diamantopoulos, A. (2009). Advancing the country image construct. *Journal of Business Research*, 62 (7), 726–740. Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.05.014> [Accessed 1 November 2017].
- RPLM (no date). Programación de RADIOPALERMO 94.7. *Cien Radios: Radio Palermo*. Available from <http://palermo.cienradios.com/programacion> [Accessed 4 April 2017].
- RT (2016a). Argentina suspende la transmisión de RT en el país. *RT*, 10 June. Available from <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/209920-argentina-suspender-transmision-rt> [Accessed 1 March 2017].
- RT (2016b). Por tercer año consecutivo RT en Español gana el premio del Club de Periodistas de México. *RT*, 16 March. Available from <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/202212-rt-triunfa-premios-club-periodistas-mexico-tercera-vez> [Accessed 1 March 2017].
- RT (2016c). RT acuerda con autoridades argentinas la continuidad de la señal en ese país. *RT*, 18 July. Available from <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/213463-argentina-television-rusia-transmision-rt> [Accessed 1 March 2017].
- RT (2016d). RT comienza a emitir en México: ¿Por qué es importante? *RT*, 29 August. Available from <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/217387-rt-ampliar-presencia-mexico> [Accessed 1 March 2017].
- RT (no date). About RT. *RT*. Available from <https://www.rt.com/about-us> [Accessed 6 March 2017].
- RTVE (no date A). Canal Internacional de TVE: About us. *RTVE*. Available from <http://www.rtve.es/television/tve-internacional/en/about-us> [Accessed 6 March 2017].
- RTVE (no date B). Radio Exterior de España: 75 años de historia. *RTVE*. Available from <http://www.rtve.es/radio/20170315/radio-exterior-espana-75-anos-historia/1503126.shtml> [Accessed 28 March 2017].
- Rupprecht, T. (2015). *Soviet internationalism after Stalin: interaction and exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Ruz, C. (2015). Human rights: What is China accused of? *BBC News Magazine*, 21 October. Available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34592336> [Accessed 29 November 2017].
- Saul, H. (2016). Men in Iran are wearing hijabs in solidarity with their wives who are forced to cover their hair. *Independent*, 28 July. Available from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/men-in-iran-are-wearing-hijabs-in-solidarity-with-their-wives-a7160146.html#gallery> [Accessed 29 November 2017].
- Schiller, H.I. (1976). *Communication and Cultural Domination*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Scolari, C.A. (2015). From (new)media to (hyper)mediations. Recovering Jesús Martín-Barbero's mediation theory in the age of digital communication and cultural convergence. *Information Communication and Society*, 18 (9), 1092-1107. Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1018299> [Accessed 6 April 2019]
- Seib, P. (2008). *The Al Jazeera effect : how the new global media are reshaping world politics*. Washington D.C.: Potomac Books.
- Silva-ferrer, M. (2012). Para verte mejor, América Latina. *Nueva Sociedad*, 240, 41-52. Available from <http://nuso.org/articulo/para-verte-mejor-america-latina-las-mutaciones-en-la-geopolitica-del-poder-y-el-escenario-comunicacional-globalizado-de-habla-hispana> [Accessed 1 December 2015].
- SInCA (2013). Encuesta Nacional de Consumos Culturales. *Sistema de Información Cultural de la Argentina*. Available from <http://www.sinca.gob.ar/sic/encuestas> [Accessed 1 June 2017].
- Sinclair, J., Jacka, E. and Cunningham, S. (1996). *Peripheral Vision*. In: Sinclair, J., Jacka, E., and Cunningham, S. (eds.) *New Patterns in Global Television*, 1996th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Slim Helú, C. (2015). Carlos Slim narra su paso por la UNAM. *El Universal*, 28 August. Available from <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/sociedad/2015/08/28/carlos-slim-narra-su-paso-por-la-unam> [Accessed 15 March 2017].
- Snow, N. (2009). Rethinking Public Diplomacy. In: Snow, N., and Taylor, P.M. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. New York: Routledge, 3–11.
- Sparks, C. (2007). *Globalization, Development and the Mass Media*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Sparks, C. (2012). Media and cultural imperialism reconsidered. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 5 (3), 281–299.
- Sputniknews (2013). RIA Novosti to Be Liquidated in State-Owned Media Overhaul. *Sputnik International*, 9 December. Available from <http://sputniknews.com/russia/20131209/185390572/Russia-Announces-State-Owned-Media-Overhaul.html> [Accessed 15 April 2017].
- Sputniknews (2014). The Voice of Russia has changed its name and moved over to a new website. *Sputnik International*, 10 November. Available from http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2014_11_10/Voice-of-Russia-becomes-Sputnik-8149 [Accessed 15 April 2017].
- Sputniknews (no date). About Us. *Sputnik International*. Available from <http://sputniknews.com/docs/about/index.html> [Accessed 6 March 2017].
- Statista (2016). *Internet Usage in Latin America*. Statista. Available from <https://www-statista-com.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/study/14147/internet-usage-in-latin-america-statista-dossier> [Accessed 15 June 2017].
- Stenberg, J. (2015). An Overseas Orthodoxy? Shifting towards Pro-PRC media in Chinese-speaking Brazil. In: Sun, W., and Sinclair, J. (eds.) *Media and communication in the Chinese diaspora: rethinking transnationalism*. London: Routledge, 48–68.
- Straubhaar, J. (2007). *World Television: From Global to Local*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Straubhaar, J.D. (1991). Beyond media imperialism: Assymetrical interdependence and cultural proximity. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8 (1), 39–59.
- Sullivan, L.E. (2009). *Media Imperialism*. In: *The SAGE Glossary of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Los Angeles and London: SAGE, 316.
- Tandoc, E.C. and Johnson, E. (2016). Most students get breaking news first from Twitter. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 37 (2), 153–166. Available from <http://nrj.sagepub.com/lookup/doi/10.1177/0739532916648961> [Accessed 3 June 2017].
- Télam (2016). Relanzaron el canal ruso RT en la Argentina. *Télam*, 19 September. Available from <http://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201609/163657-pinedo-y-lombardi-destacaron-el-relanzamiento-del-canal-ruso-rt-en-la-argentina.html> [Accessed 1 April 2017].

- TeleSUR (no date). About Us. *TeleSUR*. Available from <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/pages/about.html> [Accessed 3 April 2017].
- The Economist (2007). Court TV. *The Economist*, 31 May. Available from <http://www.economist.com/node/9257810> [Accessed 12 April 2017].
- The Guardian / Televisa (2013). *The Guardian and Televisa Joint Statement*. Available from <https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2016/05/26/the-guardian-and-televisa-joint-statement.pdf> [Accessed 1 May 2017].
- The World Bank (2017). Latin America and Caribbean Overview: Results. *The World Bank*. Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/lac/overview#3> [Accessed 12 June 2017].
- The World Bank (no date). Gross domestic product 2014. *The World Bank*. Available from <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf> [Accessed 6 March 2016].
- Thussu, D. (2013). *Communicating India's soft power : Buddha to Bollywood*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Thussu, D.K. (2006). *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow*. London: Routledge.
- Total Medios (2017). Radiografía de la confianza de los argentinos en los medios de comunicación. *Total Medios*, 5 January. Available from <http://www.totalmedios.com/nota/30448/radiografia-de-la-confianza-de-los-argentinos-en-los-medios-de-comunicacion> [Accessed 12 December 2017].
- TRT (no date). Su 'La Radio di La Voce della Turchia'. *TRT*. Available from <http://www.trt.net.tr/italiano/content/Su-La-Radio-Di-La-Voce-Della-Turchia> [Accessed 1 April 2017].
- Tsfati, Y. and Ariely, G. (2014). Individual and Contextual Correlates of Trust in Media Across 44 Countries. *Communication Research*, 41 (6), 760–782.
- Tsfati, Y. and Cappella, J.N. (2003). Do People Watch What They Do Not Trust?: Exploring the Association Between News Media Skepticism and Exposure. *Communication Research*, 30 (5), 504–529.
- UNDP (2015). Human Development Statistical Tables. *United Nations Development Programme: Human Development Reports*. Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data> [Accessed 6 March 2016].
- Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (no date). *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana*. Available from <http://www.uam.mx> [Accessed 23 February 2017].

- Universidad de Congreso (no date). Institucional. *Universidad de Congreso*. Available from <http://www.ucongreso.edu.ar/paginastpl/institucional> [Accessed 25 February 2017].
- Universidad Torcuato di Tella (no date). Institucional. *Universidad Torcuato di Tella*. Available from http://www.utdt.edu/ver_contenido.php?id_contenido=1006&id_item_menu=140 [Accessed 23 February 2017].
- Viale, P., Belinche, M. and Tovar, C. (2008). The Media in Argentina: Democracy, Crisis and the Reconfiguration of Media Groups. In: Lugo-Ocando, J. (ed.) *The Media in Latin America*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 13–28.
- VOA (no date). Mission and Values. *Voice of America*. Available from <http://www.insidevoa.com/p/5831.html> [Accessed 31 March 2017].
- VOA (no date). VOA Broadcasting in Spanish to Latin America. *Voice of America*. Available from <http://www.insidevoa.com/p/voa-broadcasting-in-spanish.html> [Accessed 31 March 2017].
- Waisbord, S. (2014). Latin America Media and the Limitations of the Media ‘Globalization’ Paradigm. In: Guerrero, M.A., and Márquez-Ramírez, M. (eds.) *Media Systems and Communication Policies in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 24–42.
- Wang, C.L. et al. (2012). Country image, product image and consumer purchase intention: Evidence from an emerging economy. *International Business Review*, 21 (6), 1041–1051. Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2011.11.010> [Accessed 25 February 2018].
- Wang, M. (2016). CCTV to launch CGTN. *CGTN*, 30 December. Available from http://news.cgtn.com/news/3d4d6a4e3555544d/share_p.html [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- Wasserman, H. and Madrid-Morales, D. (2018). How Influential Are Chinese Media in Africa? An Audience Analysis in Kenya and South Africa. *International Journal of Communication*, 12 (93493), 2212–2231.
- Wekesa, B. and Yangqiu, Z. (2014). *Live, talk, faces: an analysis of CCTV’s adaptation to the African media market*. Stellenbosch: Universiteit Stellenbosch.
- Williams, A.E. (2012). Trust or Bust?: Questioning the Relationship Between Media Trust and News Attention. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 56 (1), 116–131.
- Wood, J. (1992). *History of international broadcasting*. London: P. Peregrinus Ltd. in association with the Science Museum.

World Bank (no date). World Bank Open Data. *Worldbank*. Available from <http://data.worldbank.org> [Accessed 6 March 2016]

Xiang, Y. (2018). *Ideological Sinicization of China Central Television in Africa A Reception Analysis of African Audiences*. [Phd Thesis] University of Westminster. Available from http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/21055/1/Xiang_Yu_thesis.pdf [Accessed 15 September 2018].

Xinhua (2018). Zhonggong Zhongyang yinfa 'Shenhua dang he guojia jigou gaige fang'an' 中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》 (The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issues a 'Plan to Deepen the Reform of the Party and State Institutions'). *Xinhuanet*, 21 March. Available from http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c_1122570517_3.htm [Accessed 15 August 2018].

Zhu, Y. (2012). *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*. New York: The New Press.