

# Political Discussion on Television in Times of Elections: A Promise of Pluralism Social Media Users Hardly Recognize\*

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## Abstract

In this research, we set out to analyze, on the one hand, the promises of pluralism of four television channels in the months before the referendum of October 25th, 2020, in Chile, and on the other hand, how YouTube and Twitter audiences reacted to them. Through a mixed method of content analysis and qualitative analysis, we found that pluralism was not one of the most mentioned aspects by the public in these social media. When there were allusions to it, the assessment was negative. This article seeks to contribute

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to studies on pluralism not only in Chile but also at a more general level, focusing on a global phenomenon, such as the possibilities of participation that social media provide to audiences who consume journalistic content.

**Keywords (Source: Unesco Thesaurus)**

Pluralism; televised political programs; election period; reactions in social media.

# El debate político en televisión en tiempos de elecciones: una promesa de pluralismo que a los usuarios de las redes sociales les cuesta reconocer\*

## Resumen

Esta investigación se propuso analizar, por un lado, las promesas de pluralismo de cuatro canales de televisión en los meses previos al referéndum del 25 de octubre de 2020 en Chile y, por otro lado, cómo reaccionó el público de YouTube y Twitter a ellas. Mediante un método mixto de análisis de contenido y análisis cualitativo, se encontró que el pluralismo no era uno de los aspectos más mencionados por el público en estas redes sociales y, cuando hubo alusiones a ello, la valoración fue negativa. Este artículo busca contribuir a los estudios sobre el pluralismo no solo en Chile sino a un nivel más general al centrarse en un fenómeno global, como son las posibilidades de participación que las redes sociales brindan a las audiencias que consumen contenidos periodísticos.

## Palabras clave (Fuente: Tesauro de la Unesco)

Pluralismo; programas políticos televisados; período electoral; reacciones en las redes sociales.

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# O debate político em televisão em tempos de eleições: uma promessa de pluralismo que os usuários das redes sociais costumam reconhecer\*

## Resumo

Esta pesquisa se propôs analisar, por um lado, as promessas de pluralismo de quatro canais de televisão nos meses prévios às eleições de 25 de outubro de 2020 no Chile e, por outro, como o público do YouTube e do Twitter reagiu a elas. Mediante um método misto de análise de conteúdo e análise qualitativa, constatou-se que o pluralismo não era um dos aspectos mais mencionados pelo público nessas redes sociais e, quando houve alusões a ele, a avaliação foi negativa. Este artigo pretende contribuir para os estudos sobre o pluralismo não somente no Chile, mas também num nível mais geral, ao focar-se num fenômeno global, como são as possibilidades de participação que as redes sociais oferecem ao público que consome conteúdos jornalísticos.

## Palavras-chave

Pluralismo; programas políticos televisivos; período eleitoral; reações nas redes sociais.

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# Introduction

In times of increasing polarization of audiences, televised political debates have become a crucial body for understanding different democratic decision-making exercises (Jenkins et al., 2001). As a result, research on this type of program has increased considerably in recent years. Although the existing literature has focused on presidential debates (see McKinney & Carlin, 2004; Turcotte & Goidel, 2014; Van der Meer et al., 2016), a growing interest in understanding the role of audiences in this new media-political scenario has been observed thanks to the irruption of social media. Information and communication technologies (ICT) have put into play the validity of the unidirectional sender-receiver model (Castillo, 2014).

In this context, audiences have taken a more active role. As a result, the media have had to open their “doors” to citizen participation (Masip, 2014), giving rise to a new, more interactive (Fenoll, 2011), accountable (Hasebrink, 2011) communication model committed to providing space for recipients to monitor both the media and journalists (Masip, 2014). This change would not only be presented as a paradigm shift but also have an irreversible impact in the sense of informative pluralism (Picard, 2014) since it allows for interaction spaces that enrich public debate (Suárez-Villegas et al., 2020).

Despite the above, few studies (see Anstead & O’Loughlin, 2011; Santander et al., 2020) have effectively examined how audiences monitor the work and commitments of deliberative programs on television. Therefore, this research seeks to continue the line of studies on journalistic practice and the social responsibility of media communication as a guarantor and promoter of freedom of speech and information. The present research work aims, then, to size and evaluate the level of coincidence between the purposes declared by the media about TV shows that focus on political debates and the perceptions of viewers who comment on them on social media within the context of the Chilean referendum of 2020.

Specifically, to achieve the proposed objective, the promises of pluralism of four political discussion programs on four television channels

were compared—*Tolerancia cero* (CNN Chile), *Pauta libre* (La Red), *Estado nacional* (TVN), and *A esta hora se improvisa* (Canal 13)—with the reactions of the public on YouTube and Twitter. For this, a mixed methodological approach of content analysis and qualitative analysis was adopted to observe a scarcity of references to pluralism in the audience's comments and a mostly negative assessment of the offer of pluralism when there were mentions about it.

With this article, we hope to contribute to the discussion about pluralism in the media and how the audience evaluates compliance through digital platforms such as Twitter and YouTube. For this research, we focus on the Chilean reality due to contingency. However, it is an empirical case that can undoubtedly dialogue with other studies worldwide that address the phenomenon of social media, the forms of participation they allow for, and to what extent the audience plays a supervisory role in the work of the traditional media.

## Theoretical framework

### 1. Role of audiences in a digital media context

With the breakdown of unidirectional communication, the relationship between the media and the audience has moved towards a more horizontal, collaborative, accessible, and decentralized format (Del Valle, 2018). Thanks to tools and settings such as blogs, chats, forums of opinion, emails, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, among others, new actors have had the opportunity to make themselves heard, engaging in new behaviors outside the patterns imposed by the traditional media (Anderson, 2011; Hallvard & Ytre-Arne, 2021).<sup>4</sup>

Although authors such as MacGregor et al. (2011), Nielsen (2014), and Peters and Witschge (2015) have argued that traditional media continue to control public discussion, Suárez-Villegas et al. (2020), Loosen et al.

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4 If we focus this perspective on political participation, various studies have given a significant role to social media (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Keane & Feenstra, 2014; Saldaña et al., 2015; Valenzuela et al., 2012), although they warn that sociocultural factors, news consumption habits, etc. influence the intensity of participation.

(2020), and Hermida (2014) highlight that these online spaces effectively promote spontaneous and organized debates on matters of public interest and allow for active citizen participation, furthering the proper functioning of democracy (Chirinos & Torres Salas, 2015). Likewise, these spaces—especially social media, such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook—can promote a plural dialogue by facilitating citizen-citizen and media-citizen interactions.

Beyond what one might think about the impact of audiences, the influential work of Henry Jenkins (1992) already highlighted—decades ago—the existence of a ‘participatory culture’ regarding television products. Indeed, the massification of the internet provided more tools to this audience that wanted to play a more central role in communication. The emergence of digital platforms in recent decades has not only facilitated access to more tools to share, publish, recommend or comment on content but also implied a change in the audience’s expectations, which now demands greater transparency and dialogue (Loosen et al., 2020).

The first aspect, the demand for transparency, goes hand in hand with the monitoring role that the audience can have regarding the media, even when it comes to criticizing when they do not fulfill their ethical commitments (Mauri-Ríos & Ramon-Vegas, 2015). The second is the possibility of a dialogue in the second-screen television phenomenon (Quintas-Froufe & González-Neira, 2014), where social media and television converge, allowing the audience to comment in real time while consuming television products.

One of the first studies that sought to analyze this practice was that of Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011). They investigated reactions on Twitter to political debates on the BBC’s Question Time program in the United Kingdom. They suggested that the comments of the audience challenge media and political institutions in terms of integrating these forms of participation. The same platform was studied by Santander et al. (2020) in the context of the presidential elections in Chile in 2017: the authors reported a mutual influence between the media and the audience. Rodríguez Fernández and Saavedra Llamas also studied audience engagement on Twitter but with a focus on how political parties and audiences interact, as well as the

strategies employed online by local TV networks, in the context of a political debate in Spain (Rodríguez Fernández & Saavedra Llamas, 2018; Saavedra-Llamas & Rodríguez Fernández, 2018). Similarly, González Neira et al. (2020) examined the role different social media platforms, including Twitter, played during televised debates in Spain. More recently, Acosta (2022) observed how Twitter worked as a tool that increased political polarization in the 2019 presidential debate in Argentina.

These transformations driven by the internet involve changes in the possibilities of participation and the nature of the journalistic exercise. As Del Valle and Carreño (2020) state, digital communication is currently one of the main formats for accessing public information; thus, it is connected to the concept of informative pluralism, which, at the same time, is related to central aspects of journalism such as freedom of speech and the press.

## **2. Importance of the audience's supervision of the development and promotion of media pluralism**

In theoretical discourses, pluralism is often understood as a highly abstract value whose meaning is continuously debated and discussed without trying to give it some empirical form (Karppinen, 2013). In this sense, pluralism is similar to freedom since it is valued as an abstract principle and is best conceived when understood as a general intellectual orientation (McLennan, 1995). Most of the discussion about the concept has been around two approaches from which this term has been conceptualized.

The first approach, known as the pluralism of the market of ideas, understands pluralism as a normative value that acts as a necessary condition for human progress (Keane, 1991). In contrast, the second approach understands pluralism as an agency of deliberation and public debate, replacing the market metaphor with the public forum by emphasizing the role of dialogue as the encounter and interaction of different perspectives (Karppinen, 2013).

The approaches described have been considered in most attempts to define the concept of media pluralism. Although there are other approaches when seeking to systematize this term, it is usual to work with those men-

tioned. An example of the above is the definition by Gillian Doyle (2002) and the European Commission (1999). They understand pluralism as the presence of various independent voices and media, making it possible to get different political opinions and representations of culture.

Similarly, Raeijmaekers and Maesele (2015) have understood pluralism as any difference in ideologies, practices, and discursive strategies that occurs in the (re)production of identities and concerns. Hallin and Mancini (2004) focused on the concept of political parallelism and have understood it as how media content reflects different political tendencies and the degree and nature of the relationships established by the media with political parties and other social organizations (Humanes et al., 2013).

Other authors, in turn, have tried to deconstruct and classify what media pluralism means. For example, Denis McQuail (2007) proposed four normative frameworks: reflection, where the media are expected to proportionally reflect the political, cultural, and social variations existing in society; equality, meaning that the media should strive to give equal access to any point of view or any group in society, regardless of their popularity; the option that conceptualizes diversity from the perspective of an individual consumer (among channels, programs); and finally, openness, which emphasizes innovation and difference, valuing new ideas and voices for their own good.

Based on this proposal, several authors have tried to clarify the concept, even more, coming to understand pluralism as 1) **the offer of messages** of a particular medium, both in its informative and editorial offer (internal pluralism) (Zárate, 2016), 2) **the diversity of information sources** and a plurality of actors related to the media producers, editors, and owners (external pluralism) (Gibbons, 2015), and 3) **the organization of the set of actors**, (structural pluralism) (Zárate, 2016).

Nevertheless, despite the efforts to clarify this concept, there needs to be more clarity about what this element implies. It is remarkable how pluralism has been used as a buzzword or decontextualized concept taken for granted (Raeijmaekers & Maesele, 2015) and more so in a context where

exercise and control are essential for the development of democratic processes (Mendel, 2014).

### **3. The Chilean case: An example to understand the role of televised political programs in promoting more active audiences**

Chile, because of its history, has a particular practice of journalism. After the military dictatorship in 1990,

Chilean journalists began to professionalize within a typically Western media system with constitutional protection focused on freedom of speech and in the promotion of pluralistic practices that favor the expression of the country's social, cultural, political, and regional diversity (Law 19,733). (Mellado, 2012)

For this reason, televised political communication programs acquire a unique role as democratization promoters when electoral processes occur, such as elections or referendums.

It was the case during the months before the 2020 referendum for a new Constitution. During this period, national television channels broadcasted a series of political discussion programs where the referendum was one of the central issues. Their main objective was to provide plural spaces of expression while providing information on this electoral process (see Domínguez Cortina, 2011, who elaborates on this purpose in political communication programs). To achieve this, the four political discussion programs with the highest ratings—*Tolerancia cero*, *Pauta libre*, *Estado nacional*, and *A esta hora se improvisa*—committed to:

1. Analyze the different perspectives.
2. Achieve reflections like those that “occur in a press room, but with cameras” that show this process.
3. Broadcast diverse programs with free panelists who raise the level of political debate.

Thus, in making political life visible, these deliberative programs on television have positioned themselves as privileged spaces for the practice of

political-electoral discussion to settle, share and compare the projects of different political actors (Domínguez Cortina, 2011; Waldvogel, 2020). Likewise, both in Chile and in the world, these programs, as part of what is understood as confrontational televised broadcasts, allow the discourse and counter-discourse-controversially or cooperatively-to be oriented towards the construction of social consensus, conflict reduction, and greater tolerance to opposing points of view (Camaj, 2021; Plantin, 2005).

To this, we might add the possibility that audiences have today of interacting with the participants in televised political programs through social media because this type of broadcast also acquires new roles, such as political efficacy, the promotion of political participation in public life, or the mere creation of spaces for interactive and reciprocal conversation. Deliberation theorists and practitioners try to find more inclusive ways of deliberating because they have established that broad participation facilitates deliberative legitimacy (Maddux, 2021).

Maddux (2021) collects evidence that, in modern democracies, the media are the communicative space par excellence for public deliberation on a broad scale and that citizens are exposed to these deliberative offers, especially on television, to receive the more significant portion of their political information, during or between electoral periods.

In their research on presidential debates, Porath et al. (2019) highlight the ability of these broadcasts to generate greater citizen involvement in limited periods and easy consumption by viewers. The public expects broadcasts with regular and invited panelists, such as the programs considered in this research, that give them access to political pluralism, which, according to Stange et al. (2018, p.1826), “is a value recognized as essential for the development of political debate in contemporary societies and, therefore, an attribute of the journalistic discourses produced within these political regimes.”

Accordingly, our research questions are as follows:

- To what extent do the purposes declared by the media about these debates match the audiences’ perceptions expressed during their broadcast on social media?

- Do audiences act in social media as inspectors of the media's promises and claimants of their fulfillment?

## Method

This research was exploratory with a mixed design. A quantitative phase was carried out, followed by a qualitative phase, to answer the research questions.

The intentions publicly expressed by the television channels for the broadcast of the political deliberation programs that we analyzed served as the basis for the construction of the variables of the quantitative study. In summary, it was determined that the channels wanted to summon relevant actors—permanent and guest panelists—to a pluralistic and open dialogue on national issues, legitimize the democratic system through deliberation, and increase public trust in a context of social crisis and ad portas of a constitutional referendum process.

From this, a sample of 2,130 posts was classified to first empirically establish relevant features of Twitter and YouTube users during the broadcast of political programs before the October 2020 referendum and analyze the function and focus of their comments and their assessment of the pluralistic or diverse quality of these transmissions. These corresponded to the approximately 100 first chronological posts on the two platforms with the official hashtag of each of the 12 programs aired between the following dates: August 23 and 24, September 20 and 21, and October 25 and 26, 2020. Regarding data collection, Python was used for Twitter comments, and in the case of YouTube, the comments were downloaded directly from the comments section.

Each textual comment on the two social media platforms constituted an overt or explicit content observation unit. A tested codebook guided the training and work of a group of codifiers under the supervision of the researchers. Four political discussion programs from four television channels, three private and one public, were considered: *Tolerancia cero*, from CNN Chile; *Pauta Libre*, from La Red; *A esta hora se improvisa*, from Channel 13, and *Estado Nacional*, from the public channel Televisión Nacional de Chile, TVN.

A subsample of 213 cases (10 % of the total) underwent an intercoder reliability test. The results of the test yielded a coincidence index of .965 for the type variable “Account identification” (average Kappa = .928), .968 (average Kappa = .941) for “Gender,” .987 (average Kappa average of .709) for “Function of the comment,” .982 (average Kappa of 0.572) for “Approach of the comment,” and .993 (average Kappa of .829) for “Pluralism” and “Assessment of pluralism.” Once the material was classified, we conducted the content analysis, including the above variables.

For the general analysis of the qualitative data, axial coding was carried out on the 2,082 tweets that did not explicitly mention pluralism using the Atlas.ti program (version 8.4.4) in three analysis phases. Based on open coding, 648 units of analysis related to programs and participants were identified in the first phase. Subsequently, after a selective coding process, a constant comparison was made among the leading emerging conceptual frameworks, which allowed us to find six general thematic units.

Finally, a qualitative analysis of the 48 posts coded explicitly as those that mention ideological pluralism/diversity was carried out to observe specific patterns that the content analysis does not necessarily detect in detail.

## Results

In this section, we will show the findings of the study. As already detailed in the Method section, the analysis will begin with the quantitative and then the qualitative phases.

### Quantitative Phase Findings

#### Elements of the profile of social media users

Two characteristics stood out regarding the profile of Twitter and YouTube users who commented on televised political discussions during their viewing. One is the probability of identifying them, and the other is related to the gender variable. Regular anonymity prevents the commenter from taking responsibility for the opinions, data, or ideas shared in these public forums (Table 1). However, there is a noticeable difference between Twitter

and YouTube users. Those who identified themselves on YouTube more than doubled those on Twitter; conversely, anonymous Twitter users accounted for 76.5 % of all unidentifiable commenters in the sample. This circumstance prevents a complete knowledge of the audiences of political discussion programs willing to take responsibility for their opinions. However, it is crucial to remember that, as researchers, we must take these details at face value since any of these profiles could be fake. In other words, although we considered this issue throughout the analysis, it still seems relevant to point out how users identified themselves.

**Table 1. Identification of social media users commenting on televised debates.  $N = 2,130$**

Program	Identified user			Anonymous user			Total
	Twitter	YouTube	Subtotal	Twitter	YouTube	Subtotal	
<i>Tolerancia cero</i>	77	185	262	223	114	337	599
<i>A esta hora se improvisa</i>	61	67	128	239	31	270	398
<i>Pauta libre</i>	76	216	292	223	61	284	576
<i>Estado nacional</i>	72	181	253	229	75	304	557
Total	286	649	935	914	281	1195	2,130

Source: Own elaboration.

The distribution of users according to gender, where this variable could be established from the account's name, matters in analyzing the diversity of those who publicly express their opinion or share political or social information. To this, we should add that there is an underrepresentation of women in different areas of Chilean reality, including politics.

This low female participation was also observed in this research, where women who commented during the political programs were practically half compared to men (Table 2). However, this result should be interpreted with caution due to the high percentage of users with undetermined gender (56 %). This lower female participation in politics on Twitter and YouTube also challenges the media to seek to increase their contribution to diversify the voices in socially relevant matters.

**Table 2. Gender of social media users commenting on televised debates. *N* = 2,130**

Program	Female	Male	Undetermined	Total
<i>Tolerancia cero</i>	79	183	337	599
<i>A esta hora se improvisa</i>	37	91	270	398
<i>Pauta libre</i>	136	156	284	576
<i>Estado nacional</i>	71	182	304	557
Total	323	612	1,195	2,130

Source: Own elaboration.

### Function and focus of interest of the comments on social media

The comments of the sample related to the programs being watched or that included opinions or provided information unrelated to them revealed their function (Table 3). Only 2.3 % of the posts referred to the format of the political discussion program itself. Of all the comments on matters other than the program format itself, several were unrelated to the discussion. Twitter and YouTube users behaved similarly: During political programs, users do not lean toward giving their opinion on the contents of the discussions but rather on related or unrelated topics.

**Table 3. The function of comments on televised debates by program and social medium. *N* = 2,130**

Program	Allusive to the debate format			Not allusive to the debate format			Total
	Twitter	YouTube	Subtotal	Twitter	YouTube	Subtotal	
<i>Tolerancia cero</i>	1	10	11	299	289	588	599
<i>A esta hora se improvisa</i>	11	2	13	289	96	385	398
<i>Pauta libre</i>	3	10	13	296	267	563	576
<i>Estado nacional</i>	11	2	13	290	254	544	557
Total	26	24	50	1,174	906	2,080	2,130

\*The difference with the total of 2,130 cases is due to records classified as "not applicable," which were not considered in the analysis.

Source: Own elaboration.

This analysis was deepened by observing the comment's focus of interest (Table 4). Once again, there was minimal reference to the programs

and their protagonists. The minimal interest from YouTube users in referring to the guests was striking, and it was non-existent on Twitter. The protagonists were the panelists. This finding matters since the interest of the TV channels was to offer diverse voices, which had to be ensured by the panelists and guests. The comments on social media do not reveal that these guests captured the viewers' interest, which, in turn, would have contributed to a pluralist or open discussion.

**Table 4. The focus of comments on televised debates by program and social medium.  $N = 2,130$**

Program	Program as a whole			Journalists or panelists			Guests			Total
	Twitter	YouTube	Subtotal	Twitter	YouTube	Subtotal	Twitter	YouTube	Subtotal	
<i>Tolerancia cero</i>	0	6	6	1	2	3	0	2	2	11
<i>A esta hora se improvisa</i>	6	2	8	5	0	5	0	0	0	13
<i>Pauta libre</i>	2	3	5	2	6	8	0	1	1	14
<i>Estado nacional</i>	6	0	6	5	0	5	0	2	2	13
Total	14	11	25	13	8	21	0	5	5	51

\* The difference with the total of 2,130 cases is due to records classified as "not applicable," which were not considered in the analysis.

Source: Own elaboration.

### References to pluralism

A final look at the positive or negative manifestations of Twitter and YouTube users to pluralism—in its dimensions of political pluralism and ideological diversity—that the deliberation programs proposed showed that this was practically not a topic. In the cases concerning it, its assessment was 87.5 % negative (Table 5).

The few allusions to pluralism in the political discussion programs established in this exploratory phase raise several questions that deserve to be deepened with a qualitative observation. For example, what users express

when they refer to this topic, how they express their assessment of pluralism or its absence, and whether users express themselves in explicit or latent terms about pluralism in these broadcasts.

**Table 5. Presence and positive or negative assessment of pluralism/diversity in political programs on TV**

Program	Positive	Negative	Total
<i>Tolerancia cero</i>	1	10	11
<i>A esta hora se improvisa</i>	0	11	11
<i>Pauta libre</i>	3	10	13
<i>Estado nacional</i>	2	11	13
Total	6	42	48

Source: Own elaboration.

## Findings of the qualitative analysis

When analyzing all the comments in which no direct allusion to media pluralism was made, we observed that, regardless of whether they were posts made on YouTube or Twitter, users focused their interventions on the program (as infrastructure), participants, and other topics that were related to national events. Therefore, it was not considered in the analysis since they are not linked to the project's objectives.

The comments that alluded to the program were positive (67 mentions) or negative (334 mentions). In the case of the former, they were divided into two types: **evaluations** (26 mentions), which were all the posts mentioning why users believed they were good programs that promoted discussion and expression of diverse voices, and **opinions** (41 mentions), simpler comments, where through brief phrases, a program was congratulated or praised without explaining the reason for this assessment.

The negative comments could be classified into three types: the first was **evaluations** (112 mentions), which were mainly critical of the execution and dynamics of the program. In these comments, users expressed dissatisfaction when the program format did not promote the discussion

of ideas among the participants. In fact, among all the types of comments, this was one of the few where the audiences showed a more inspective attitude by expressing that things were not being done as they should meet the promised objectives. On the other hand, the **opinions** (148 mentions)—as in the case of the positive comments—were also short and simple phrases that showed the users' dissatisfaction with the content they were consuming. Finally, concerning the third type of comment, classified as **intention** (74 mentions), it was possible to see that, unlike the two types above, these had a different focus. Here, the program was not criticized, but the intentions that they could have regarding how their political position would affect the development of a pluralistic debate were denounced.

Now, regarding the comments that alluded to participants (50 mentions) (regardless of the platform where the post came from), the vast majority of the posts questioned the lack of diversity and performance of those who attended the programs for not deepening the topics discussed.

In the case of the journalists/panelists (272 mentions), they were criticized for not being incisive enough in uttering their personal opinions. In this sense, a paradox could be observed when users refer to their actions. On the one hand, they were criticized for being very “soft and permissive” with the interviewees since they allowed them to express themselves regardless of their position or gender. On the other, they were reproached for attacking and not letting these people make their points of view known.

As for the positive comments, even though they were the fewest, they could be seen when the person moderating promoted a discussion with high-mindedness. For users, it was imperative that the participants—especially journalists and panelists—could participate and develop an environment where ideas could be debated. For this reason, when this did not happen, the moderator's political position, performance, and moral quality were criticized.

Finally, about guests (113 mentions), they have alluded to the lack of diversity and representation in the debate along with the constant criticism of the program and its developers for inviting “the same people as always.”

### **Qualitative analysis of the 48 references to pluralism/diversity**

We focus on the 48 posts coded “Pluralism/diversity” for this analysis. It should be remembered that this category corresponds to comments alluding to the inclusion in the debate program of people, groups, or segments of different political currents or an explicit allusion to the expression of various discourses, showing conflicting ideas or perspectives regarding facts.

First, we will analyze those instances in which users used the words “pluralism” or “diversity” and whether their allusion to these concepts was positive or negative. Then, we will delve into the posts where there was an evaluation of the presence or absence of diversity/pluralism, but without using those terms specifically.

Of the 48 posts already mentioned, 38 included implicit references, which suggests a tendency on the part of users to opt for non-direct ways to assess the absence/presence of pluralism/diversity.

### **Explicit references to pluralism/diversity**

Users on both YouTube and Twitter seemed to invoke the concepts of pluralism and diversity to highlight how little the different programs are offering.

An example of the above is this tweet about *Estado nacional* (see Example 1), which allows us to appreciate a trend in this program, but also in *Pauta libre* and *Tolerancia cero*: the audience’s criticism of a left-wing bias.

#### **Example 1 (Twitter)**

#enacional where is the plurality when everyone on the panel thinks the same and goes for the opposition “I approve,” @CNTVChile please regulate.

This tweet included a question about the place of plurality in a panel where all the participants supposedly supported the Approval option in the National Referendum of October 25th, 2020. As already mentioned, since it was broadcast before the campaign with views on the referendum, TVN did not issue statements promoting what *Estado nacional* would contribute to the public discussion. However, this post illustrates how audience

members did not seem to have perceived pluralism in the panel's structure, which gains more relevance if we consider that it is a debate program on the public channel whose editorial mandate is to be plural.

There were also posts in which a direct reference to pluralism/diversity was combined with, for example, puns (see Example 2). In this comment on YouTube about *Tolerancia cero*, we are again faced with criticism of a left-wing bias during the broadcast. In this way, the lack of diversity of this version of the program compared to previous iterations was specifically and directly denounced, but “team apruebonao” was also mentioned: The option to vote for Approval in the National referendum seems to be mixed with the insult “ahuevonado” (from Chilean Spanish “ahuevonado,” meaning “dumbass”) or, its even more informal version, “ahueonao.”

**Example 2 (YouTube)**

What a crap of a show, nothing like it once was when there was a diversity of thought on the panel and topics were discussed without involving propaganda. I can't get over the fact that the entire anti-police “team apruebonao” is acting like anti-system supporters when this is the system, the message that CNN transmits is the system, the propaganda made by the media is the system, Piñera and Lavín approve, they are the system!!!! Wake up and REJECT the destabilization of Chile.

In terms of CNN Chile's promises about what they wanted to offer with the return of *Tolerancia cero*, comments like this reflect not only the aforementioned unfavorable comparison with previous versions of the program but also a hostile reception of the mixture sought among journalists and academics, in addition to the guests.

In the next section, we will analyze how Twitter and YouTube users reacted to the programs' offer of pluralism/diversity without explicitly referring to these concepts.

**Implicit references to pluralism/diversity**

A linguistic resource repeated to criticize the lack of pluralism indirectly was the idea of “lefties” and its variations to highlight a left-wing bias.

In the case of *Estado nacional* (see Example 3), the mocking or angry tone of the tweet can be appreciated from the beginning, with the use of “wuaaajjaaa” (a mocking Chilean onomatopoeia) and the subsequent qualification of those who participate in the program as a “nest of lefty rats,” announcing the change of channel and the conclusion that they are not only “lefties,” but also “boring.” In addition to the use above of “lefty” as something eminently pejorative—doubly, in this case—here we can observe the allusion to a “nest of rats,” a mammal that tends to be associated with dirt and the underground or something hidden.

**Example 3 (Twitter)**

#EstadoNacional wuaaajjaaa nest of lefty rats. I change the channel because, besides being lefties, they are boring

On the other hand, *A esta hora se improvisa* was the program that gathered the most complaints for a right-wing bias. One of them (see Example 4) appears in the form of a rhetorical question on Twitter, where it is stated that the three communes that voted for Rejection in the National Referendum—Vitacura, Las Condes, and Lo Barnechea—are represented in the panel of *A esta hora se improvisa*, which suggests an overrepresentation, considering that the program has four panelists. Beyond the vote in the referendum, these three communes, in particular, carry a substantial social burden: the east side, mentioned in the tweet, is the wealthiest in Santiago, making the notion of “the three communes” encompass precisely the people with higher incomes or at least most of them.

**Example 4 (Twitter)**

#AEstaHoraSeImprovisa is it me, or those 3 communes of the east side that voted for Rejection are represented on the panel?

Channel 13’s promises before the launch of this new version of *A esta hora se improvisa* referred to open and pluralistic dialogue without dogmatic positions from different perspectives. In addition, they sought to distance themselves from the usual politicians and highlight young figures who found common ground through conversation. As shown in this example, the audience’s reactions refer precisely to the opposite: a notion of homogeneity, of participants from the same socioeconomic sector.

The complaints of a right-wing bias involved, as might be supposed, the ideological, but they incorporated a critical vision about people who live or work in sectors with particular characteristics: those usually associated with the right-wing world, wealthy neighborhoods, and entrepreneurship. In the case of “lefty” and its derivatives, this pejorative adjective does not seem to be necessarily connected to social classes and neighborhoods in particular; it seems to be, instead, a criticism that remains strictly political.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Social interaction platforms have contributed to a two-way relationship between audiences and the media (del Valle, 2018). For the same reason, today, there is an implicit commitment to exercising a journalistic practice that allows receivers to inspect both the media and journalists (Masip, 2014). This research compared the promises of pluralism of four televised political discussion programs (*A esta hora se improvisa*, *Pauta libre*, *Estado nacional*, and *Tolerancia cero*) with the perception of Twitter and YouTube audiences. Thus, we sought to measure and evaluate the coincidence between the media’s purposes and the perceptions of viewers who comment on them on social media and to what extent the audience plays a monitoring role on those platforms.

Both analyses show that the audiences’ references to fulfilling the pluralism offers were scarce. Also, it should be noted that the audience’s comments contradict the media’s promises. If the television channels announced, in general, a diversity of voices, the criticism of the public points to an absence of that diversity, which allows us to assert that the media’s purposes do not match the perceptions of those commenting on digital platforms. Two of the chief complaints about a lack of pluralism mentioned by the audience have to do with a perceived absence of ideological diversity within the TV shows and also regarding the characteristics of the people that participate in them (their socioeconomic background, for instance).

To this, we must add that the data show the audience’s tendency to give an opinion on the exercise of journalism, either positively or negatively. So, we could speak of the fulfillment of an inspector role that goes beyond the offer of pluralism but applies to the evaluation of media work more broad-

ly, which goes hand in hand—in a certain way—with what was proposed by Suárez et al. (2020), Loosen et al. (2020), Hermida (2014), and Chirinos and Torres Salas (2015). Although the focus of the inspection was not the promised pluralism, spontaneous and organized debates on matters of public interest were sparked. In this way, this paper aligns with studies that have concentrated on how audiences react to political content on social media (Twitter, mostly) and play a part in shaping the content that emerges from what is broadcasted on TV (Acosta, 2022; Anstead & O’Loughlin, 2011; González Neira et al., 2020; Rodríguez Fernández & Saavedra Llamas, 2018; Saavedra-Llamas & Rodríguez Fernández, 2018; Santander et al., 2020).

Although, as stated, the references to pluralism are few compared to the total sample, this result is consistent with the literature in that there currently needs to be more clarity regarding what pluralism means. If it is already complex to materialize it into something that goes beyond raising “pluralistic discussions,” it is even more complicated for audiences to identify it. Nevertheless, despite the above, it is still inspected. Therefore, it is necessary to continue investigating perceptions of pluralism in journalism in, for example, other platforms where information is delivered and different social media.

There is still much to be studied about the effects of televised political discussions on the audience and the media themselves. In this sense, future research could interview media executives and investigate how they evaluate the public’s reactions on digital platforms and if it is something that somehow determines the aired content. Also, due to the focus of this project on textual reactions to pluralism offerings, we did not cover visual content, such as memes, but that is undoubtedly a promising possibility for future studies.

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