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POLITICAL ADVERTISING AND ITS EFFECTS ON A PLURALIST ELECTORAL COVERAGE

A CASE STUDY OF THE 2009
CHILEAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

PUBLICIDAD POLÍTICA Y SUS EFECTOS
EN UNA COBERTURA
ELECTORAL PLURALISTA

EL CASO DE LAS ELECCIONES
PRESIDENCIALES DE 2009 EN CHILE

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RESUMEN

Esta investigación examina el fenómeno del “PRización”, una tendencia donde el proceso de construcción de la agenda pública y el poder discrecional de los medios aparece dominado por ciertas élites a través del uso de recursos y técnicas asociadas a la comunicación y relaciones públicas. Dicha ocurrencia es identificada a través de un análisis del espacio y tratamiento que la prensa chilena otorgó a los candidatos durante las elecciones presidenciales de 2009. La cobertura mediática se compara con el monto invertido en aviso publicitario en dicha prensa por los candidatos en competencia, con el fin de determinar si los medios actúan de forma pluralista y con independencia de presiones comerciales. Los resultados demuestran un tratamiento más positivo a aquellos candidatos que presentan un nivel de inversión más alto. Pero, no se observa el mismo patrón al evaluar la relación entre espacio asignado e inversión. Tal evidencia no implica que los medios estén actuando de forma pluralista, sino que las presiones comerciales a las que están expuestos podrían explicar un sesgo editorial hacia aquellos candidatos y coaliciones que dan mayores garantías de controversia y lectoría.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Cobertura de prensa; PRización; comunicación; elecciones presidenciales; publicidad política pagada; pluralismo en los medios; agenda pública.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ‘PRisation’ phenomena, a trend where the agenda building process and the discretionary power of media appears to be constrained by certain elites through communication and public relation resources and techniques. Such occurrence is identified through the analysis of space and treatment given to candidates by Chilean newspapers during the presidential election of 2009. News coverage is compared with the amount invested in advertisement by each of the competing candidates in order to determine whether the media is acting on a pluralistic basis, apart from commercial pressures. Results show an expected increase in positive treatment to those candidates who invest more, but with no clear pattern regarding the space-investment relationship. However, such evidence does not necessarily mean that the media is acting on a pluralistic basis. Indeed, and as proposed in the study, the need to give into some commercial demands may explain an editorial bias towards the candidates and coalitions which, at the time of publication, offered a promise of controversy and readership.

KEYWORDS

Press coverage; PRization; communication; presidential elections; paid-for political advertising; media pluralism; agenda building.

1. INTRODUCTION

Taking into account that journalism appears increasingly limited by economic interests (Semetko et al., 1991; Louw, 2005; Mönckeberg, 2010; Gray, 2015), this research aims to study a relationship between advertisement investment in national print media by the candidacies of the 2009 presidential election in Chile, and their presence-influence in each of these media, regarding coverage and treatment. The objective is to either prove or refute the hypothesis that poses that the agenda building process and the discretionary power of media to secure a fair and pluralist coverage of public issues appears to be constrained by certain elites through communication and public relation resources and techniques (Cabalin-Quijada & Lagos-Lira, 2009; Vergara, Garrido, Santibañez & Vera, 2012).

The concept of "pluralism" – taken from the definitional framework developed in the most recent study of the area in Chile (CAIP, 2014) – refers both to a democratic value (tolerance), and a verifiable fact (diversity). In that sense, the same study shows that one of the components of pluralism (in addition to the unrestricted validity of the value of tolerance), is diversity, i.e. the existence of heterogeneity of content, including the available positions in the media ecosystem and considering the ownership of these media.

By this token, informational pluralism and its expression, diversity, are constrained by the commercialization of the media (Freedman, 2005) in terms of the "subtle" influence of advertisers on the work of journalists. This is evidenced in local level studies by Cabalín-Quijada and Lagos-Lira (2009) and Vergara et al.(2012).

If to that financial power the use of tools and own resources of the kingdom of marketing and public relations are added to start a particular agenda from the media platform, it converges toward what Eric Louw denominates a more global process of "PRization" of the political process (Louw, 2005). This then means certain actors outside the media (be they private or the campaigns and actions of certain leaders or political institutions with economic power), tend to dominate the process of constructing the public agenda ("agenda building").

The weight of economic power impedes not only the possibilities of a heterogeneous, diverse news coverage, in qualitative and quantitative terms, but also affects the need for homogeneity or the imperative to give fair treatment and report on all views present in a presidential election. The criterion of "open diversity" proposed by Van Cuilenberg (2000), implies the need to present all points of view irrespective of their level of representation, which is precisely what an election process seeks to determine.

1.1. General Research Framework: The "PRization" of the Political Process and its Impact on Informative Pluralism

In recent years, in the majority of Western societies, the consolidation of a process of reflexive modernization with a de-ideologization and erosion of the credibility of values and modern institutions is evidently rolling on (Beck et al., 1997; McAllister, 2005). In such phenomena, a system of commercialized mass media that must deal with the need to attract increasingly fragmented audiences in a context of growing commercial and competitive pressures would have great responsibility (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Such "mediatization" of the political process would operate as a prelude to a process of "PRization", and according to many authors is bringing a degradation of the political debate (Thompson 1995; Patterson 2000; Gunther & Mughan 2000; Entman 2008). While acknowledging a first stage of political mediation, today the very physiognomy and ultra-competitive dynamics of the medial theater would determine the emergence of what Herman and Chomsky (1988) called the "propaganda model".

Both authors, as well as Louw (2005), subscribe to the view that the political and economic elite would be moving toward a "media capture" under a commercial label. Media managers as well as communicators recur to ratings, readers and popularity expressed in polls (as message validation mechanisms), pointed to the level of dependency of certain resources that encourage them before the watchful eye of the financial elites. Moreover, and in a political-electoral context, such dependence can determine the prevalence of news coverage of certain political options with major likelihood of success, and stories and characters that draw greater audiences, ratings and, ultimately, enjoyment (Lees-Marshment, 2004).

This situation poses direct detriment to an informative political pluralism conceptualized by UNESCO (2008) via concrete measurement indicators. This is, established or self-managed "media codes" that procure rules holding that each political party or candidacy may obtain equitable coverage by mass media during electoral periods. Even more so, a political pluralism that blankets "the respect for principles of justice, balance and impartiality during the elections. For example, the allocation of equitable space to the candidate(s), reports about opinion polls, political advertisement quotas, or the prevention of an illegal

coverage for pro-government public authorities that could benefit one or another candidate".

1.2. The "PRization" of the Political Process in Chile

In Chile a mediatization process was fostered by the privatization and commercialization of mass media from before and throughout the dictatorship (Moke, 2004). A media system that was strongly involved with the political parties and ideologized even before the dicta-

torship then transitioned to a clearly de-politicized one during and after the military regime. The mass media have since operated commercially and privileged a picture of the most digestible and attractive politics for the new de-ideologized audiences, where controversy and candidates' privacy seem to prevail over the battle of ideas (Tironi & Agüero, 1999).

The development of new and different media platforms and the diversification of interests of the Chilean audience determine that the proprietor, publisher or journalist - in their day-to-day practice - align publishing criteria to the commercial interests of their advertiser and indirectly to those socio-demographic segments they aim to conquer and maintain. In that context, the ethical commitment and social responsibility of the journalists toward values like informative pluralism and a specific form of equitable coverage during electoral periods (UNESCO, 2008), would run the serious danger to become subdued to commercial criteria.

Such danger is reinforced when local political actors, specifically the representatives of the so-called "duopoly" (present coalitions of the center-right ("Chile Vamos") and center-left ("Nueva Mayoría")), sophisticate their tools and resources to influence, if not to drive, the expectations and personal and political aspects to be portrayed through the media (Moke, 2006). To these elements other signals are added, like the influence that can be reached in pressrooms via paid-for political advertisement, and which actors seem to be consolidating in a process of "PRization" of Chilean politics. With respect to this problem, no systematic studies that conceptualize and delve deeper into the occurrence and dynamics of the phenomenon of "PRization" exist at the local level, nor do studies with respect to the relation of the media and paid-for political advertisement, like the one arising from political candidacies.

2. OBJECTIVES E HYPOTHESES

2.1. Objectives

The general objective is to determine the existence of a correlation between the advertising investments made by the candidacies of the presidential election in 2009 in Chile's print media of national reach, and the presence of candidates in each one of those media in terms of space assigned as well as positive treatment-valuation. This way it is attempted to establish if the Chilean print media exerts a pluralist political-electoral coverage in its dimension of diversity (or the existence of heterogeneity concerning the contents and positions present in the political ecosystem), or if, on the contrary, the media are conditioned by the economic power of the candidacies that invest in print advertising (PRization).

Additional Specific Objectives

1. Expose the rise of antecedents associated with the investment in paid-for political advertisement in the national print media on the part of the presidential candidacies in the election year 2009.
2. Identify the political affiliation of the presidential candidacies that invest most in the national print media.
3. Analyze and describe from content analysis of the electoral coverage of the presidential campaign 2009 by national print media where the candidacies invested in paid-for publicity, the space and positive treatment-valuation given by these media to the totality of candidacies in competition, and identify differences in level of informative pluralism.
4. Identify, in temporary terms and during the coverage of electoral year 2009, if greater investment in paid-for publicity on the part of a candidacy in a certain media, correlated with greater space and a more positive treatment given to that candidacy in this media, and so prove or reject the development of a general process of "political PRization".

2.2. Hypotheses

It is necessary to emphasize that, for effects of the present study, two preliminary hypotheses are posed:

- *H1: There is a correlation between the investment in paid-for political advertisement which the national print media receive from a candidacy and the coverage in terms of space assigned to this candidacy.*
- *H2: There is a correlation between the investment in paid-for political advertisement which the national print media receive from a candidacy and the coverage in terms of positive treatment-valuation assigned to this candidacy.*

3. METHODOLOGY

We approached our study object first by determining the advertising investment by the four presidential candidacies in 2009 (Sebastián Piñera, Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, Marco Enríquez-Ominami and Jorge Arrate) in four print media of greater net national circulation¹, according to the ranking corresponding to the first semester of 2010 in the segment “newspapers”. This ranking was derived from the System of Validation of Circulation and Readership of the National Press Association².

The newspapers belong to two enterprise groups that dominate the Chilean press market (Valida, 2009): *La Tercera* and *La Cuarta* (Journalistic Consortium Group of Chile - COPE-SA), and *El Mercurio* and *Las Últimas Noticias* (El Mercurio SAP Group). All of them differ in their public objective. *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio*, represent the media of reference at national level. The former is a newspaper of the educated middle class, traditionally bound to ideological positions of the right (Navia et al., 2013, pp. 40-41). *El Mercurio*, on the other hand, is a newspaper of the upper middle-class³ and has often been accused of being a “propagator” for the neoliberal economic model defended by the right-wing political and business class of Chile (Soto, 2003). Then, *Las Últimas Noticias* and *La Cuarta*, are daily tabloids of “popular” fashion, directed at the lower middle-class. Thus, we are using different media, many operating under dissimilar principles with each other, owed to the very complexity of the Chilean informative media system (publishing, entrepreneurial and socio-economically speaking).

To determine coverage in terms of space and treatment of these candidacies in selected media, a content analysis was carried out, comparing the informative and editorial material of the presidential campaign of 2009. The last electoral year (considering presidential elections), that is 2013, was not considered for the moment, as there are still formal investigations from local Justice regarding the amount and accuracy of the advertising investment declared by one of the main presidential candidates to the Chilean Electoral Service⁴. As

1 Advertising investment in those media was considered; reported as electoral expense to the Electoral Service of Chile. The data with respect to this investment was retrieved from <http://www.serve.cl>

2 <http://www.achap.cl/estudios.php>. An audit by KPMG for the period between the January 01 and of June 31, 2010, on the basis of typical week methodology. The results show like average examples of an entire week: *El Mercurio*, 155,877; *La Tercera*, 112,583; *Las Últimas Noticias*, 142,013; *La Cuarta*, 124,547; *La Nación*, 10,881; *La Segunda*, 30,021.

3 Kantar Media Research (KMS) carries out an annual ground survey based on the memory method that includes different communities located in Greater Santiago. The 2008 survey considered 11,397 interviews selected from the sample frame created by the National Institute of Statistics (INE).

4 The presidential candidate from the Progressive Party, Marco Enríquez Ominami, is being investigated by the Public Prosecutor’s Office since 2015, for suspected irregularities in his public declaration to SERVEL regarding the campaign spendings during the 2013 presidential election. More details can be retrieved from

soon as the data at disposal of the Chilean Electoral Service is clarified, content analysis comparing different elections will be held in order to establish whether there can be identified a correlation pattern between news coverage of presidential campaigns and the amount invested in advertisement by each of the competing candidates in such media. To narrow the amount of information obtained, the sample consisted of 49 days in electoral year 2009, using the method of "Consecutive Running Weeks or Days".

This method is suggested in the literature for this type of analysis (Stempel, 1989), because it allows to select an important sample of media editions, considering a significant period of time and thus avoiding distortions of certain reduced informative moments (for example, landmarks or events with noticeable protagonism for a certain candidacy that occurred over several days), and at the same time conserves the particularities of the cycle that constitute distinct days of the week (Riffe et al., 1993).

In this study, seven "running weeks" were selected from October 23 to December 10, 2009, to complete 49 days. This way, it was possible to answer the research questions that refer to the coverage of all presidential candidacies by the national print media, in terms of the space and journalistic treatment assigned to each of them in the period from the subsequent campaign to the proclamation of all the competing candidates, and up to three days before the celebration of the president's election.

3.1. Unit of Analysis, Records and Study Categories

The unit of analysis is the journalistic article under the following forms: news, chronicle, interview, editorial, opinion column or letters to the editor. Articles that mentioned some of the presidential candidates were chosen. Diversity, specificity and antiquity of press articles that compile a national character and to which the public has online access through the various media studied, do not guarantee obtaining all required articles. This is why the services of the consultancy Conecta Media Research were contracted. The search terms for the harvesting of articles were the last names or abbreviations of the names of the candidates: 2009: Frei, Piñera, Enríquez-Ominami (plus ME-O y Enríquez Ominami), Arrate.

3.2 Coding Processes

The process of signing up to this research was carried out by a team of coders independent of the project researcher and followed standard procedures regarding coding, error test according to the code book and confidentiality tests of the inter-encoder, as suggested by Krippendorff (1990, pp.102-104). They formed part of the research staff at Conecta

<https://www.cooperativa.cl/noticias/pais/politica/marco-enriquez-ominami/revelan-nueva-investigacion-contra-marco-enriquez-ominami/2016-10-06/174027.html>

Media Research. Entering data into the analysis matrix was conducted using MS Excel, but for the final statistical analyses, SPSS, a standard program for these kinds of analyses, was used.

The aspects of coding sought to answer the question how the media contemplated in the sample exposed all the candidates, correlating the advertising investment with the following variables:

a) Coverage regarding space: according to similar measurements and with a framework of agenda setting (McCombs and Valenzuela, 2007). The **total number of mentions of the candidate** was identified in relation to the variable:

-Total number of appearances: mentions, images and number of news the candidate made a statement in.

b) Coverage in positive treatment: this study, considering the relation between advertising investment and political candidacies, adds the treatment level that - in line with the studies on schematic perception by Miller et al.(1986) like the idea of agenda framing (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007)- considers the variables which frame the image of the candidate in positive affective terms; i.e. the valuation of the candidate or their personal characteristics in a positive dimension (Conecta Media Research, 2010) . More specifically, a positive or favorable treatment is conceptualized by Conecta Media Research as follows: "the evaluation of judgements, views or predominant contextual elements (whether implicit or explicit), expressed in the article and related to each character that is mentioned (and the actions, opinions or characteristics defining he/she), that enables the interpretation of such mention as a positive one for him/her".

Finally, and after coding, the variable 'advertising investment' was added and used according to the following criterion:

- **High Investment:** The candidate accounted for more than 35% of total advertising investment that a media received that year in the matter of electoral publicity of all the competing candidacies.
- **Average Investment:** The candidate accounted for between 15% and 34.9% of total advertising investment that a media received that year in the matter of electoral publicity of all the competing candidacies.
- **Low Investment:** The candidate accounted for between 0.1% and 14.9% of total advertising investment that a media received that year in the matter of electoral publicity of all the competing candidacies.
- **No Investment:** The candidate did not invest in that media that year in the matter of electoral publicity.

This way the hypotheses were evaluated with respect to a *correlation between: the investment in paid advertisement which the print national media received by segments of the candidacy and the space assigned to this candidacy; between the investment in paid-for advertising which the national print media received by segments of the candidacy and the positive treatment-valuation assigned to this candidacy.*

The correlation was estimated using suitable coefficients of correlation by virtue of the characteristics of cross-variables, such as from Pearson (Stempel, 1989).

3.3. Considerations on the Focus of the Presidential Election

The investigation was centered around media coverage of these elections, because the Chilean political system is characterized by strong presidentialism, where power radiates through the figure of the president and executive authority (Siavelis, 2012), and because presidential elections resemble a “battlefield” where the influence and unfolding of resources that the traditional candidacies and coalitions seek to deploy can be clearly observed. This was reflected in the 2009 election, where the main historical political blocks arising after the return to democracy in 1990, the pro-government center-left coalition “Concertación” with its sidekick, Christian Democracy, and their candidate Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, and their opponents from center-right congregated in the “Coalition for Change” (later termed “Alliance for Chile”) and represented by the entrepreneur Sebastián Piñera of National Renovation, were defied by an outsider from the left of the Concertación, the ex-Socialist Marco Enríquez-Ominami. Another ex-member of the Concertación now representing the extra-parliamentarian left, Jorge Arrate, appeared like the fourth contender although with less possibilities than all others.

Thus, with the worn down and pro-government candidate defied in the media, the electorate, and by other renegades of his own coalition, the victory in the first round went to Sebastián Piñera. He obtained 44.1% of the votes, Eduardo Frei with its 29.66%, confirmed the allegations of a candidate and coalition in several decline, affected by the “shadow of status quo and past events of corruption” (Portales, 2009; Tironi, 2010), and the young surprise candidate, Marco Enríquez-Ominami, got a historical 20.1% (hitherto unseen for a third contender since the return to democracy). Jorge Arrate, exited the contest with 6.2%. The presidential race was eventually decided via ballot voting, in which Piñera won with 51.6%.

The new political landscape that emerged with the 2009 election turned it interesting to investigate how the media has valued the candidates. First, regarding the amounts of their advertising expenses spent in the national print media, and second for the relation that arises from this expense and the media coverage of the candidacies.

3.4. Considerations on the Focus of the Print Media

The reason for selecting the print media is that local literature suggests that the print media of reference (*El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*), have shown greater capacity to fix the agenda to the topics of public interest when compared to radio, television and alternative media (Dusaillant, 2005; Porath, 2007). Thus the relevance to state a correlation between the amount of investment by the candidates and “favorability” in these media equipped with “major discretionary power”, covering those campaigns with greater institutional and economic might.

4. CONTENT ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Verifying the hypotheses advanced, it was first proceeded to associate the rise of antecedents to investment in advertisement paid for by the presidential candidacies in the national print media during 2009. It was sought to determine the amount and the advertising relevance of the expense of each candidacy in relation to the total investment that various print media received from all the candidacies. The results show:

- **Sebastián Piñera:** His total investment in national print media reached \$29,452,500 pesos. In disaggregated terms his investment concentrated in *El Mercurio* SAP-*El Mercurio* and LUN-(\$2,082,500); and *COPESA - La Tercera* and *La Cuarta* (\$27,370,000).
- **Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle:** His total investment in national print media was \$0.
- **Marco Enríquez-Ominami:** His total investment in national print media reached \$2,261,000 pesos. In disaggregated terms his investment concentrated in *COPESA-La Tercera* and *La Cuarta* (\$2,261,000).
- **Jorge Arrate:** His total investment in national print media was \$0.

From these data and according to the level of advertising investment registered by the candidates in the national print media indicated, it was possible to establish the following media-candidate relationship:

- **COPESA (*La Tercera* and *La Cuarta*):** Sebastián Piñera was a major investor, with more than 35% of total advertising investment that this media received that year in the matter of election advertisement coming from all the candidacies. Marco Enríquez-Ominami followed Piñera with a much lower level of investment (between 0.1% and 14.9% of total media advertising investment). Eduardo Frei R. and Jorge Arrate did not register investment.
- **EL MERCURIO SAP (*El Mercurio* and *Las Últimas Noticias*):** Sebastián Piñera was a major investor, with more than 35% of total advertising investment that this media received

that year in the matter of election advertisement coming from all the candidacies in competition. Other candidates did not register investment.

With those antecedents it was then possible to determine the existence of favourability in space and positive treatment of these media for the only candidacies that appear having invested in them, i.e. Sebastián Piñera (major investor) and Marco Enríquez-Ominami (minority and only in COPESA).

In terms of the space given to candidates, content analysis of media coverage of the 2009 campaign does not prove a higher frequency of mentions, images and statements of spokespeople of Sebastián Piñera, who appears to lead spending on advertising investment (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of Mentions of Candidates in the 2009 Presidential Election in National Print Media

Frequency of Mentions of Candidates in the 2009 Presidential Election in National Print Media				
	Jorge Arrate	Marco Enríquez-Ominami	Eduardo Frei Ruíz-Tagle	Sebastián Piñera
El Mercurio	79	201	248	225
La Tercera	82	171	233	210
Las Últimas Noticias	31	70	100	81
La Cuarta	15	35	67	30
Valid Cases	207	477	648	546
Note: The number of valid cases equals the number of articles analysed. Source: Own preparation				

Source: Own preparation

The same trend is observed when analyzing a correlation between the total amount of mentions in the four media associated with each candidacy and the advertising investment made by each candidate (Pearson $r = .29$; see Boxe 1).

Boxe 1

Correlation between the total amount of mentions in the four media associated with each candidacy and the advertising investment made by each candidate	
Multiple Correlation Coefficient	0.29048538
Coefficient of Determination (R ²)	0.08438176
R ² Adjusted	-0.3734274
Typical error	220.992542
Observations	4

Source: Own preparation

While the number of mentions obtained by Arrate, Enriquez-Ominami and Piñera could be consistent with their level of advertising investment, in the case of Frei a correlation with this item is absent. The candidate of the "Concertación" consistently appears with the highest number of mentions by media and aggregate level. However, the predominance of this candidacy at mentions level, despite not having invested in direct advertising in the media studied, does not necessarily mean that the media is acting on a discretionary basis, independent, pluralistic and apart from commercial pressures. Precisely, and as Herman and Chomsky (1988) and Louw (2005) maintain, the need to land a news hit for commercial purposes, could explain a shift of both media of reference as well as tabloids, to give greater space to the candidacy of the ruling party. Then, both options of the Chilean political "duopoly" work to the detriment of outsiders like Arrate (the latter tripled in mentions by the nomination of Frei).

The attention and space given to the candidacy of Frei as a probable editorial and commercial focus on controversy, expression of a 'concertacionista' in decline (Tironi, 2010), in a dynamic of "horse race journalism" (Sabato & Ernst, 2006) along with a favourability in terms of positive treatment to those who invested in advertising, seems to reveal in an exploratory form, the correlation proposed in Hypothesis 2. This is apparent in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency Treatment (positive) of Candidates in the 2009 Presidential Election in the National Print Media				
	Jorge Arrate	Marco Enríquez-Ominami	Eduardo Frei Ruíz-Tagle	Sebastián Piñera
	+ Framing-Treatment			
	2	22	10	45
El Mercurio	6	38	5	50
La Tercera	2	12	5	9
Las Últimas Noticias	0	12	3	13
La Cuarta	10	84	23	117
Valid Cases	10	84	23	117
Note: The number of valid cases equals the number of articles analysed.				

Source: Own preparation

The above table makes clear first, those candidates who registered advertising investment in the media studied, gained more favourable or positive treatment framing. The candidate of the “Alliance for Chile” who recorded the largest media investment received better treatment. Despite having less coverage in space in relation to the ruling party candidate, he gained five times more positives in appearances (117 against Frei 23). Next in investment and favourability was Marco Enríquez-Ominami with 84 positive articles. On the other side, and like Frei, Arrate had also not invested in the media studied, and only obtained 10 positive articles. The level of coverage in terms of positive treatment of candidates, considered as percentage in relation to the level of coverage in terms of space received by each candidate is as follows:

- **Jorge Arrate (N: 207 valid cases):** Got 4.8% positive treatment articles.
- **Marco Enríquez-Ominami (N: 477 valid cases):** Got 17.66% positive treatment articles.
- **Eduardo Frei (N: 648 valid cases):** Got 3.5% positive treatment articles.
- **Sebastian Piñera (N: 546 valid cases):** Got 21.4% positive treatment articles.

Same trend is verified when establishing an statistical correlation between the percentage of positive treatment given to each candidate in the four media set analyzed, and level (percentage) of the total advertising investment in those media ($r=.88$; see Boxe 2).

Boxe 2

Correlation between the percentage of positive treatment given to each candidate in the four media set analyzed, and level (percentage) of the total advertising investment in those media by each candidate.	
Multiple Correlation Coefficient	0.88592451
Coefficient of Determination (R ²)	0.78486224
R ² Adjusted	0.67729337
Typical error	28.7518143
Observations	4

Source: Own preparation

Now, if analyzed in a more disaggregated form the treatment given by each of the newspaper holdings (COPESA and El Mercurio SAP) to candidates who invested in them, and the amount invested, the following relationship can be analyzed in Table 3:

Table 3

Frequency Treatment (positive) by Journalistic Holdings (COPESA and EL Mercurio SAP) of the Candidates Piñera and Enríquez-Ominami, according to Investment made by these Candidates in their Media		
	Marco Enríquez-Ominami	Sebastián Piñera
	+Framing-Treatment	
El Mercurio SAP	34	54
COPESA	50	63
Valid Cases	84	117
Note: The number of valid cases equals the number of articles analysed.		

Source: Own preparation

From Table 3 it is possible to discern that in the case of Marco Enríquez-Ominami 59.53% of the articles in which he appears with a positive treatment are in media of COPESA, the sole recipient of his investment. Only 40.47% correspond to those of the El Mercurio SAP group.

The case of Sebastián Piñera is similar. 53.84% of positive items come from COPESA where the candidate of the Alliance for Chile had the largest investment, and 46.16% are from the El Mercurio SAP media group. Also a statistically significant correlation was obtained between the percentage of positive treatment given to each candidate in media of COPESA and the percentage of investment each candidate did there ($r=.94$; see Boxe 3).

Boxe 3

Correlation between the percentage of positive treatment given to each candidate in media of COPESA and the percentage of investment each candidate did there.	
Multiple Correlation Coefficient	0.94430267
Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	0.89170754
R^2 Adjusted	0.83756131
Typical error	11.7198741
Observations	4

Source: Own preparation

Same pattern was found between the percentage of positive treatment given to each candidate in media of El Mercurio SAP and the percentage of investment each candidate did there ($r=.82$; see Boxe 4).

Boxe 4

Correlation between the percentage of positive treatment given to each candidate in media of El Mercurio SAP and the percentage of investment each candidate did there	
Multiple Correlation Coefficient	0.82611325
Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	0.68246309
R^2 Adjusted	0.52369464
Typical error	15.1767366
Observations	4

Source: Own preparation

With these antecedents a correlation, if statistically not very significant in terms of space allocated by the media to the candidates, is proven at least at exploratory level in terms of positive treatment-framing that the same media provided to candidates regarding their level of advertisement spending during campaign season.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our findings seem to support Louw's (2005) thesis about the presence in several Western societies, including Chile, of a phenomenon of "PRization" of politics and its threat for purposes of the existence and / or receipt of the principle of political pluralism. This principle is already categorized by UNESCO (2008), which conceptualizes and relieves the need for a fair, balanced and impartial political-electoral coverage in quantitative and qualitative terms.

A "PRization" process that in the case of Chilean elections and following trends in other western societies, appears to be replacing a media logic, as statistically significant correlation (coefficient r) was found between the percentage of positive treatment given to each candidate in the four media set analyzed, and the level (percentage) of the total advertising investment in such media. In other words, those candidates spending more money in political advertising (Sebastián Piñera and Marco Enríquez-Ominami), seemed to have received a more favorable treatment along the campaign. Same pattern can be identified in recent U.S presidential elections. In such case the democrat candidate, Hillary Clinton, not only appeared to have quadrupled the amount of media investment reported on the campaign when compared to her republican contender, Donald Trump (Allison et al., 2016). But according to a The Data Face report (which studied 21,981 articles in several online media outlets responding to different political bias such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Wall Street Journal, Slate, Politico, Fox News and the Weekly Standard), Clinton also obtained a better "positive treatment" by some of the same media beneficiary of the reported spending.⁵

Nevertheless, the exploratory and limited design of this study to a single electoral period, did not allowed to reach very conclusive results regarding a relationship between candidates' advertising spending and a bias in the amount of space allocated by the media. However, such evidence does not necessarily mean that the media is acting on a pluralistic basis. Indeed, and as proposed in the study, the need to give into some commercial demands may explain an editorial bias towards the candidates and coalitions which, at the time of publication, offered a promise of controversy and readership. This entails a complex scenario for the Chilean media system, as it's reference media (*El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*), by

⁵ The sample was drawn from the websites of eight major media outlets (The New York Times, The Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Wall Street Journal, Slate, Politico, Fox News and the Weekly Standard), and runs from July 1, 2015 through September 13, 2016.

virtue of their high degree of proprietary concentration (Sunkel & Geoffroy, 2001; Mönckeberg, 2010; Navia et al., 2013), tend to show greater ability to act independently of political or commercial pressures and set the agenda on issues of public interest, compared to radio, television and alternative media (Dusaillant, 2005; Porath, 2007).

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, the evidence from this research should be tested and validated through longitudinal studies that include other electoral processes in order to establish more accurately the prevalence of a propaganda model in Chile and other Western democracies.

In addition to the indicated projection, the study further contributes to rectify the lack of special studies (not only in Chile but in most Western democracies), to verify the influence of paid-for political advertising on the news agenda generated by the media.

Finally, the study helps improve our democratic systems, to the extent that allows us to understand and relate patterns and changes in the behaviour of players, and develop future political practices and editorials that encourage political participation of the citizenry.

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