Transparency and Audience Participation: A View From Media Directors and Editors in Chile

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Abstract

Today, audiences have different platforms to debate about journalism, in which media accountability begins with citizens publicly assessing it. Transparency becomes relevant as a normative construct that is linked to social responsibility and journalism's social validation. Instruments for audience participation have been established to show and explain the norms and values that underpin journalistic coverage.

Audience participation plays a key role in the process of media accountability in listening and giving voice to citizens. However, it has implications in the context of transparency, immediacy, global access, and interactivity, presenting significant challenges for the media in fulfilling their accountability to the public.

This research seeks to show, from the standpoint of media directors and editors in Chile, how they perceive media accountability instruments in order to describe and characterize transparency as well as audience participation in the country. Based on an exploratory study of qualitative methodology, 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with directors from television, newspaper, radio, and digital media.

These issues have been little explored as objects of study in Chile, and there is limited research in this field, coinciding with a decline in citizens' trust in the media. For this reason, investigating and analyzing the instruments of transparency and audience participation within the framework of media accountability can open new perspectives of analysis to understand the current situation of the media in Chile and its relationship with audiences.

Keywords

media accountability, media transparency, audience participation, ethics, journalism

Transparência e Participação das Audiências: Uma Perspetiva dos Diretores e Editores de Média no Chile

Resumo

Atualmente, as audiências dispõem de diversas plataformas para debater sobre jornalismo, onde a responsabilização dos média se inicia com a avaliação pública por parte dos cidadãos. A transparência emerge como uma construção normativa, intimamente ligada à responsabilidade social e à validação do jornalismo. Para alcançar esse objetivo, foram desenvolvidos instrumentos de participação das audiências que visam mostrar e explicar as normas e valores subjacentes à cobertura jornalística.

A participação das audiências desempenha um papel fundamental no processo de responsabilização dos média, ouvindo e dando voz aos cidadãos. Contudo, essa participação tem implicações no contexto da transparência, do imediatismo, do acesso global e da interatividade, apresentando desafios significativos para os média na sua responsabilidade para com o público.

Este artigo visa revelar a perceção dos diretores e editores de média no Chile sobre os instrumentos de responsabilização dos média, para descrever e caracterizar a transparência e a participação das audiências no país. Com base num estudo exploratório de metodologia qualitativa, foram realizadas 11 entrevistas semiestruturadas com diretores de televisão, jornais, rádio e média digitais.

Estes temas têm sido pouco explorados como objetos de estudo no Chile, e a investigação neste campo é limitada, coincidindo com uma diminuição da confiança dos cidadãos nos média. Assim, investigar e analisar os instrumentos de transparência e participação das audiências no contexto da responsabilização dos média pode abrir novas perspetivas de análise para compreender a situação atual dos média no Chile e a sua relação com o público.

Palavras-chave
responsabilização dos média, transparência dos média, participação das audiências, ética, jornalismo

1. Introduction

Despite the high concentration of its ownership, linked to elite groups, the Chilean media was perceived as a trusted institution until the social uprising in October 2019 (Luna et al., 2022). These massive demonstrations revealed a loss of trust towards key institutions in a democracy (Morales Quiroga, 2020), where the press was not exempt and "as a knowledge-producing institution was scrutinized and openly questioned" (Orchard & Fergnani, 2023, p. 1683).

This social crisis had negative repercussions on the audiences' perception of the media by questioning the veracity and reliability of the news, as well as their social role and ability to contribute to managing this social crisis (Grassau et al., 2019).

In this context, the discussion about the media's role, their rights, freedom, and mainly their responsibilities becomes relevant. This is where the concept of "media accountability" emerges, emphasizing the media's responsibility to the audience and the mechanisms and tools to hold them accountable to the public (Bertrand, 2000).

Understanding the unique role of the press in democratic societies, the literature on media accountability has established instruments that contribute to showing and explaining to the public the standards and values underlying its journalistic coverage. These instruments aim to increase the press' credibility and legitimacy (Koliska, 2022) by promoting transparency in information processes as a tool to strengthen and restore confidence in journalism in response to unethical behavior (Bastian, 2019).

The above, added to the fact that audiences are no longer the only receivers of information; they also debate, interact, create, communicate, and share, generating an influential role to hold the media accountable if they do not comply with ethical standards (Pérez Díaz et al., 2020).

According to López-López et al. (2019), in Chile, public television has a higher and better quality of transparency indicators for citizens, mainly in the production of information and access to content, unlike private television, which has little information that is mainly oriented to programming and advertising. However, in both cases, the information they make transparent does not allow for the identification of who is responsible at the time of accountability and also does not generate "clear rules that allow citizens to be involved in the processes for effective governance" (p. 73).

Media accountability in Chile has been barely explored in academic research. However, it unfolds a challenging opportunity for journalists and media outlets, particularly during periods of social uprising related to misinformation and declining public trust in the media (Núñez-Mussa et al., 2024). These contexts of protests and social unrest challenge authority and journalistic practices (Orchard & Fergnani, 2023).

This research seeks to describe the state of media accountability in Chile from the standpoint of one of its players: the media.

For this study, we gathered the perspectives of press directors and editors on how they perceive the media accountability instruments within their work environment, specifically regarding transparency and audience participation. In this way, we seek to investigate elements that influence the establishment and development of these instruments in the local press.

The type of research is exploratory due to the scarcity of studies on the subject, which are more developed in Europe. Those that focus on Latin America highlight the need to address this issue from the Chilean media context (Gutiérrez & Hormazábal, 2022) and underscore the obligation to generate new findings in a largely unexplored field, particularly in relation to citizens' trust in the media (Hormazabal, 2024).

Based on what is mentioned above, the interviewees' perceptions regarding transparency and audience participation are described, and the connection with the public's lack of trust in the media is explored. Through confidential semi-structured interviews, the visions of 11 media directors and editors are analyzed, recognizing that they bear primary responsibility for delivering information. The editor, in particular, plays a key role in making epistemological evaluations to determine the relationship between events and the way in which they report them, thereby ensuring the validity of the journalistic process (Duffy, 2021).

The obtained data allow us to conclude that in terms of transparency, there is broad consensus on the need for public disclosure of media ownership so that audiences have a clear knowledge of who is behind the news. However, the same emphasis is not evident at the time of publicly reporting their editorial processes. In relation to audience participation, several challenges are identified that must be addressed to ensure effective engagement rather than being heard.

Considering the decline in the levels of public trust in the press in Chile since 2019 (Centro de Estudios Públicos, 2023; Grassau et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2023), this study can pave the way for new research avenues on underexplored for topics. These insights could guide and contribute to studies about the role and responsibilities of the press in a democratic society.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Media Accountability: Transparency and Audience Participation

Bertrand (2000) mentions that media accountability is "any non-state means of making media responsible towards the public" (p. 107). However, McQuail (2003) broadens the scope and defines it as "any voluntary or involuntary process by which the media are directly or indirectly accountable to society and those immediately affected by the quality and/or publication consequences" (p. 206).

To the above, Fengler et al. (2021) state that the concept is rooted in two relevant aspects that are interrelated: first, the function of journalism by observing actions within social systems to serve audiences through the selection and dissemination of news that are imperative for active participation in social life; and second, the relationship between democracy and the indispensable conditions that allow the media to carry out this role responsibly and free from external constraints. As such, the authors argue that the need for effective methods to evaluate and safeguard the quality of journalistic performance is indisputable. However, the kind of instruments and mechanisms that can ensure a sustainable impact in achieving this goal remains uncertain. One of them is self-regulation, which is considered an important pillar for media accountability (Bastian, 2019), whose study is previous to the concept of "media accountability". To the latter concept, the literature has added transparency and audience participation.

Transparency, for Meier and Trappel (2022), "creates an improved basis for decision-making through the accumulation of information, and controls seemingly powerful elites in their attempt to assert their own agendas at the expense of the general public" (p, 257). For this reason, transparency in media ownership is important in this debate since it involves identifying and assessing who speaks through the media, how they make decisions, what interests they represent, and how those interests influence society. By making ownership visible, the public can make well-informed decisions about how to respond to that content (Picard & Pickard, 2017). According to Bleyer-Simon et al. (2023), ownership transparency "is essential in order to measure, and to tackle, the risks that arise from ownership concentration" and "can help to make media pluralism effective by bringing ownership structures behind the media" (p. 59).

The concept of "media transparency" has gained interest by establishing a series of instruments, especially at the level of the media organization, to help preserve and regain trust in journalism through reporting its information processes (Fengler et al., 2021). To reinforce the latter, Meier and Reimer (2011) posit that transparency is "a normative construct that is inextricably linked to accountability and public justification of journalistic practice" (p. 135). This transparency contributes to showing and explaining to the public the norms and values on which journalistic coverage is based, along with increasing the audiences' perception of credibility, legitimacy, and trust in the press (Koliska, 2022).

Based on the above, Domingo and Heikkilä (2012) propose a series of practices that can be implemented by the media, such as profiles of journalists, published mission statements, newsroom blogs, and links to primary sources, among others. These tools would allow for demonstrating how the media develops its work, enabling audiences to participate actively (Bastian, 2019).

Audience participation in the context of media accountability has been perceived as a means to strengthen journalists' professional awareness and as an opportunity to increase the media literacy of the audience. According to van der Wurff and Schönbach (2014), who also establish the relationship between transparency and audience, as the media declared or explained the principles in their newsroom and their daily work, audiences would understand the journalistic practice better, and they would choose media outlets they consider to be of better quality. Diakopoulos and Koliska (2017) reinforce the above by positing that transparency in the media allows audiences to observe the news production process and the journalists behind the news.

In the relationship between transparency and audience, Karlsson (2013) suggests that while there is transparency in the media's disclosure about their journalistic routines, enabling audiences to know them, it does not facilitate their participation and is largely unidirectional. On the other hand, there is participatory transparency that invites and involves audiences in the news selection and production process. For Karlsson (2013), if these rituals of disclosure and participation are incorporated into journalistic routines' transparency, they can serve "as a system of accountability and a way of increasing legitimacy with citizens" (p. 537).

Pritchard (2000) highlights audience participation in the process of media accountability, emphasizing that the process starts with the citizens. If they are not critical of the media, the media will never identify the root of the problem. Moreover, the context of immediacy, transparency, global access, and interactivity presents challenges in relation to professional standards and the interests of audiences at large (Ward & Wasserman, 2010). In that line, criticism in journalism is a fundamental instrument of accountability, not only to comply with the principles and values of their journalistic cultures but also as a crucial space for the public contribution to improving the information quality (Rodríguez-Martínez et al., 2017).

In this way, newsrooms have included new and diverse instruments that open spaces for audiences to contribute, create, or review content. These instruments make it possible to identify how a media outlet is accountable, such as, for example, user comments and news evaluation on the web, error correction buttons, digital meetings with readers, and user contributions in creating and reviewing content (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022).

For the audience, the press's priority and responsibility to the citizenry lies in the fact that they feel journalists are accountable to them since "without truthful, independent information in the public interest, the very essence of democracy is questioned" (Chaparro-Domínguez et al., 2020, p. 822).

2.2. Media Landscape in Chile

The media system in Chile has characteristics that align with trends observed across Latin America. After the democratization of the political systems in the region, a free market system was consolidated, which has generated a phenomenon of media concentration in the dynamics of the media operation (Guerrero & Ramírez, 2015; Hallin & Mancini, 2004/2008; Waisbord, 2010) and information pluralism issues (Monckeberg, 2011; Montt, 2017; Orellana & González-Bustamante, 2018).

According to Gronemeyer et al. (2020), the criticism of the media system in Chile is not only due to its concentration on a few owners "but also because it is accused of serving interests linked to political rights" (p. 955), which weakens the journalism contribution to public debate and delegitimizes its role in public interest issues, affecting democratic development.

Although, with the return to democracy, mainly during the first decade, there has been progress in terms of State restrictions on freedom of speech and media concentration, particularly in the print media, according to Couso (2011), excessive ties to the business sector would have excluded significant issues from the democratic debate that erupt "in violent events [that] usually end up stigmatizing groups — mostly disadvantaged — that for years experienced a silencing of their demands and concerns" (p. 3).

Part of the latter is what was evidenced by the social uprising in October 2019, which led to massive protests due to a growing social discontent over cases of corporate collusion and irregular political financings involving elites, a crisis of confidence towards law enforcement institutions, and a representation crisis that manifested in a lower adherence to parties and a loss of confidence towards key institutions in democracy such as Government, courts and Congress (Morales Quiroga, 2020).

The political and social crisis that sparked a series of massive protests revealed discontent not only towards the political and economic elites but also against the media elites represented by the traditional media, mostly conservative, which supported the neoliberal policies that the protesters were pleading (Luna et al., 2022).

A relevant aspect of the media landscape in Chile in recent years is related to the low evaluation and the audience's loss of trust in the media after the social uprising in 2019. Television was the worst evaluated, and although it had the highest frequency, it obtained a score of 3 (on a scale of 1 to 7) as opposed to radios (4.7) and newspapers (4.5; Grassau et al., 2019).

Regarding trust in the media, the Centro de Estudios Públicos (2023) ranks television among the least trusting institutions, as opposed to newspapers (position 6 out of 20) and radio (position 5). For its part, the *Reuters Digital News Report* has tracked trust towards news since 2017, revealing that this indicator has not recovered to levels seen prior to the social uprising of 2019. On the contrary, the 32% recorded in 2024 is close to the lowest indicator it has ever had in the past seven years (Newman et al., 2024).

A different situation occurred with alternative media, which gained prominence and increased their interaction after the social uprising after producing politically adverse news and circulating evidence that was not covered by traditional media (Luna et al., 2022).

These aspects are relevant to the Chilean context, as the media has been challenged by a series of political events, including the social uprising in 2019, the subsequent referendum for a new Political Constitution, presidential elections, and natural disasters. These circumstances have placed the press under public scrutiny, with audiences voicing their perceptions of the media, mainly through social networks (Fernández Medina & Núñez-Mussa, 2023).

3. Methodology

From the perspective of media directors and editors, the study poses the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: how do media directors and editors in Chile describe and characterize the transparency instruments and audience participation according to media accountability?

RQ2: what are the perceptions of transparency and instruments for audience participation in the media outlets where directors and editors work?

RQ3: are there structural or organizational conditions that influence the establishment and development of these media accountability instruments in Chilean media?

The chosen method is qualitative because it allows an understanding of the meaning people give to social issues, and its emphasis is on words rather than quantification (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2017), aspects that are fundamental to grasping the perception of directors and editors on the investigated phenomenon. Through semi-structured interviews, media directors and editors were challenged to share their experiences based on their perceptions and points of view.

The sample is non-probabilistic, as it allows for the strategic selection of participants who are relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012). This criterion was considered to establish the participants intentionally and to ensure a diverse selection of media in Chile in terms of format, trajectory, editorial line, and target audience. In these media outlets, interviews were conducted with individuals holding the positions of director or editor-in-chief. Although these roles involve different functions, they are considered similar for this research due to the shared levels of responsibility in the workflow necessary for the press to fulfill its informative function. These individuals are also responsible for hiring journalists who are well-suited to the organization and have skills or talents for their respective media outlets, ensuring that these journalists adhere to and comply with the media outlet policies (Hollifield et al., 2001).

The sample considered, firstly, the Chilean media outlets in the metropolitan region, based on national coverage, affiliated with the Federation of Social Communication Media of Chile (Asociación de Radiodifusores de Chile, Asociación Nacional de la Prensa, and Asociación Nacional de Televisión de Chile) that have a press department and, as a second factor, the Reuters ranking of digital news consumption in Chile (Newman et al., 2023).

Researching from the point of view of media directors and editors was extremely challenging and complex since the questions required delving not only into the praxis of a newsroom but also into the inner workings of daily discussions and decision-making

— aspects that are not publicly disclosed, even when subject to a self-regulatory or regulatory body. For this reason, the interviews were conducted anonymously, allowing participants to speak freely and comfortably.

Table 1 details the participants and identifies their general characteristics. The selection considered private, public, nationally owned, foreign conglomerate, and non-profit media outlets, including nationally distributed newspapers, free newspapers, and mainly informative radio stations. The years in their current position and their overall work experience were included to demonstrate that the interviewees are seasoned professionals with extensive experience in the media industry.

Identification	Position	Platform	Years of experience in the press	Years in office	Number of journalists overseen
Interviewee 1	Editor	Television	15	2	40
Interviewee 2	Director	Radio	13	3	27
Interviewee 3	Editor	Newspaper	27	8	30
Interviewee 4	Director	Radio	25	1	22
Interviewee 5	Director	Digital	35	3	10
Interviewee 6	Director	Radio - digital	30	5	23
Interviewee 7	Editor	Newspaper - digital	28	2	10
Interviewee 8	Editor	Television	17	3	150
Interviewee 9	Director	Newspaper	27	4	167
Interviewee 10	Director	Digital	20	8	45
Interviewee 11	Director	Newspaper - digital	14	4	70

Table 1. *Participating directors and editors*

The interviews were conducted in person (eight) and online (three), primarily due to the teleworking arrangements still in place at some media outlets or the specific request of the interviewees.

Regarding the ethical considerations of the research, each participant signed an informed consent form. The fieldwork was conducted between July 27 and November 15, 2022, with interviews lasting between 28 minutes and 1 hour and 26 minutes. Among the interviewees, nine are men, and two are women.

The data analysis followed Creswell's (2017) contributions to interpreting meaning from data, moving from particular observations to general insights. The analysis focused on the different pre-defined media accountability instruments to draw conclusions about the established dimensions, ensuring coherence with the bibliography.

Specifically, the conversation analysis approach proposed by Bryman (2012) was used, emphasizing the analysis of conversations as they naturally occur. A sociologist transcribed all the interviews, and the data analysis was conducted manually by identifying experiences, statements, or examples in the interviewees' accounts that addressed each question in the guideline. This process enabled the categorization of topics discussed and the identification of emerging areas. The areas developed in the questionnaire, on which the presented results are based, are as follows:

- perception of public information of a media outlet
- existence and assessment of transparency instruments (ownership, journalist profiles published mission statements, newsroom blogs, links to primary sources) in the media where you currently work
- existence and evaluation of audience participation instruments (user comments and evaluation of news on the web, error correction buttons, digital meetings with readers, user contributions in the creation and content review)
- audience participation and perception in news production processes
- evaluation of the relationship between audiences and media regarding trust in the press.

4. Findings

4.1. Media Public Information

There is both agreement and disagreement about the information that should be disclosed publicly, which varies depending on the specific topic to be made transparent. In the case of media ownership, there is a strong prevailing tendency to disclose who owns the media, mainly due to the social role played by the press (I3, newspaper; I5, digital; I7, newspaper - digital; and I8, television). Additionally, there is an emphasis on identifying the information provider (I1, television; I2, radio; I3, newspaper; I6, radio - digital; I9, newspaper; and I11, newspaper - digital).

For example, some interviewees mention that this transparency is necessary: "given the public role played by the media, it would be healthy for them to have this type of transparency" (I3, newspaper). Other reasons they point out are related to the legitimate right of media owners to have interest agendas. However, they acknowledge "that due to the responsibility and role played by the media in society for the development of a country's democracy, it is essential to be transparent" (I8, television). Additionally, they emphasize the importance of knowing the source of funding since "people tend to think that the one who provides the money sets the rules, and that also happens in journalism" (I5, digital).

From another point of view, transparency regarding ownership and the editorial line is deemed essential, recognizing the responsibility that the media hold towards public opinion (I7, newspaper - digital; and I8, television) and the audience "because that person must have the right to know that this information is treated with an editorial vision" (I8, television).

Regarding media ownership, some interviewees highlight the need to make the connections between media outlets and the companies associated with the same owner transparent (I1, television; I4, radio; and I5, digital). They emphasize that this relationship between media owners who are also companies' owners is significant, with one stating, "I think it is fair that the public knows that there is a link between the parties" (I3, newspaper).

4.2. Existence and Evaluation of Transparency Instruments

The media transparency instruments, according to the interviewees, differ in terms of what they communicate publicly, regardless of the media format.

The media ownership and its origin is an aspect that the interviewees recognize as available information (I1, television; I2, radio; I5, digital; I6, radio - digital; I7, newspaper - digital; I8, television; and I11, newspaper - digital). However, some interviewees emphasize the existence of greater detail of the owners and associated companies (I6, radio - digital; and I11, newspaper - digital), funding formulas (I5, digital), and economic groups on which they depend (I2, radio; and I7, newspaper - digital).

In the specific media case whose owner is related to the news events coverage, some interviewees mention that the transparency link is established as a policy (I6, radio - digital; and I11, newspaper - digital). For example, when a news item of a company related to the ownership of the media outlet is published, "it has to be in the first paragraph, always, not in the fifth or last one" (I11, newspaper - digital).

Information about journalists and editorial profiles is made more transparent by some media outlets than by others: "we believe that anyone should be able, for example, to communicate with a journalist, to know where that journalist is from" (I2, radio). In some cases, more than being explicitly disseminated in a specific space, this information is made available by the media itself: "the whole editorial team, which is large and is safeguarding the information, appears every day, in all the news" (I1, television).

Making news production processes publicly known presents varying perceptions, regardless of the type of media. Some interviewees do not dismiss if the audience wants to know it (I1, television), while others argue that it is not possible due to the routines in the news production process (I6, radio - digital; and I9, newspaper). On the other hand, some mention that making these processes transparent would not be feasible when there is confidential handling of sources (I2, radio; and I6, radio - digital) "because it could jeopardize the secrecy of the source" (I5, digital). Furthermore, they assert that "what matters is the quality of the journalistic piece offered to the public" and whether "it is well done according to technical and ethical standards" (I5, digital).

Other reasons cited by the interviewees for opposing the disclosure of news production processes are related to the unique identity of each media outlet, which corresponds to their specific approach or formula for news coverage: "for some, it is the secret of their success, and for others, it is the evidence of their failure, regarding how they do things" (I4, radio). In addition, making these processes known has some implications "because it involves sensitive information regarding how, for example, you filter, check or select the information" (I6, radio - digital). However, communicating decisions made in these processes requires a significant involvement at the corporate level because "in today's times of instant scrutiny, you would have to defend or justify your decisions at every moment, and I am not sure if there is enough time for that" (I3, newspaper).

Some interviewees also highlight the challenges of making the news production processes transparent due to the fast-paced nature and rhythms of the media because "this can hinder the immediacy and fast operation that enable a media outlet like this

work and go on air without interruption every day" (I8, television). Likewise, another interviewee remarked that "these things may sound good, but if you work in the media, you realize that they are impossible to implement" (I9, newspaper).

Only one of the interviewees shared his experience regarding the public disclosure of his news production processes, which he described as a space for dialogue and transparency with the audience "because many times people wonder why you include this and not that and behind that there is a decision related to what we consider important" (I11, newspaper - digital).

4.3. Existence and Assessment of Audience Participation Instruments

There is a rather transversal incorporation of audience participation instruments on the web, social networks, and even telephone lines in all media formats. The radios coincide in social network use such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and even some on YouTube and telephone lines (I2, radio; I4, radio; and I6, radio - digital).

These channels for gathering audience participation are used to allow individuals to express their opinions, which implies a process of selection and filtering to determine what gets aired (I4, radio). This approach is perceived positively, as one interviewee noted, "to the extent that people have more possibilities to express themselves regarding what we do, it is evident that there is a mutual enrichment (…). People will feel closer to the media; they feel that their concerns are welcomed" (I4, radio). However, this type of instrument could be improved, given that "communication here is one-sided: we listen to the audience, but we do not respond to the audience" (I4, radio).

The spaces for web comments serve as another instrument for collecting audience participation (I5, digital; I6, radio - digital; I7, newspaper - digital; and I10, digital). Audience feedback can assist the media in correcting errors: "at the end, there is always a button that says 'if you find a mistake, write to us here', and we receive an email" (I10, digital). Another space identified to report errors, for example, in television, is the use of social networks. When a mistake is made on air, "you will be confronted with the fact that you will have to respond (…) and the audience will tell you immediately" (I1, television).

Another prominent space for audience participation is the letters to the editor: "we receive a lot of that and, with much criticism regarding what we publish, if we make a mistake in some data or something, it gets pointed out" (I3, newspaper). Letters to the editor are considered a space for participation because "we try to engage with these individuals, recognizing that they form a community, that it is our readers' community which we must welcome, empathize with, no matter how challenging the letters may sometimes be" (I9, newspaper).

The ability to improve the process of gathering audience opinions is perceived as an area for improvement since it would be beneficial to have "someone exclusively dedicated to requesting audiences feedback on what we did and did not do, channeling that information, and every so often providing me with feedback" (I9, newspaper).

4.4. Audience Participation in News Production Processes

Audience participation in news production processes shows different perspectives among the interviewees. For some, it is already an integral part of the media guidelines (I1, television; I7, newspaper - digital; I11, newspaper - digital). Others view it as a space to be considered depending on the circumstances (I8, television), while some believe that audience participation should not be considered at all (I3, newspaper; and I4, radio).

Those who indicate that the audience is already inserted into the process argue, "when you look at the audience ratings for the newscast, you see the audience in the decision-making processes (...) they participate in our decision-making by rewarding or critiquing some of our content" (I1, television). Moreover, open channels on social networks are viewed as a platform "where the audience can not only express their opinions but also bring to light specific facts they want us to cover" during editorial meetings (I1, television). In the case of radio, for instance, "it would be impossible for us not to consider our audiences as the primary reference when making editorial decisions" (I2, radio).

However, some interviewees believe that this participation does not alter the role of the editorial teams. As one stated, "we are still the specialists; we are still the communication professionals. We must manage and treat that information appropriately" (I7, newspaper - digital), also considering that "we create the news while also gathering a significant amount of insight from the vision and opinion of the audiences (...). Ultimately, there is an editorial team for a reason" (I10, digital).

Among those who are not inclined to involve the audience in the news production processes, there is still an openness to listening to them: "one thing is listening to the audience, and another thing is letting the audience make decisions (...) I always place the decision-making responsibility on our side" (I4, radio). In this sense, these concerns do not dismiss the audience's right to be heard: "but granting them a space to influence editorial decisions; I do not think so (...) today's audiences are so radicalized that opening that door could be quite complex" (I3, newspaper).

In this context, it is ultimately up to each media outlet to decide based on its organizational structure "and the objectives it pursues. Of course, some media outlets are far more open to interacting with the public, which is very good, positive, but others do not, they do not see it as necessary" (I5, digital).

4.5. Relationship Between Audiences and the Media Regarding Trust in the Press

Following the decline in trust towards the media among citizens after the social uprising in 2019, the interviewees discuss the reasons behind it and reflect on the press's position vis-à-vis the audiences.

One explanation for this situation is related to a broader crisis of trust in institutions, with the press being one of them: "it responded to a perception of a country in crisis and, therefore, and as part of those institutions — if I may say so — the press fell victim to that crisis" (I1, television). Consequently, it is noted that "the more institutional features a media outlet or an industry has, the more it is affected by the general crisis of confidence in institutions" (I9, newspaper).

The connection between the press and the crisis of confidence in institutions reveals certain characteristics, considering that "we report daily on these events that make people lose faith in the political system, the economic system, the judiciary (…) somehow, we thought that magically it would not happen to us" (I11, newspaper - digital).

It is suggested that audiences perceive the media as part of an elite, "citizens have a great distrust towards the elite. (…) People see journalists as members of an elite who talks to itself rather than addressing the problems faced by ordinary people" (I5, digital). Additionally, it was noted that in the news coverage, "they provided a platform and predominantly replicated the elites' perspectives" (I6, radio - digital).

Closeness, empathy, and heightened sensitivity are critical factors contributing to the erosion of trust in the media. That not only stems from the events themselves but also the coverage of previous events: "we have long erred believing we were the owners of the truth, not understanding and perhaps not being tough enough, which is also tied to journalism's capabilities" (I2, radio). Besides, some interviewees noted that during the social uprising, the news coverage "showed the media's occasional lack of empathy regarding the daily lives of Chileans (…) I think we, as media in general, lacked greater sensitivity, and that is my self-criticism" (I2, radio).

Specifically, regarding the lack of trust and closeness with the citizens outlined by some interviewees, reasons are provided to understand shortcomings in the construction of a relationship between media and its audiences:

> the entire establishment, and we, the media, as part of it, realized that we were all out of date, existing in a reality that is not reality (…) in fact, it makes perfect sense that people lack trust in the media because there is no closeness because there is no empathy (…). We believe that trust, closeness, and empathy with people are things you have to show each day. (I7, newspaper - digital)

From the interviewees' point of view, the dissemination of false information on social networks made it necessary to clarify the journalistic work routines to explain the information they were reporting: "I received many messages, suddenly 'hey, but how isn't the newspaper reporting this', then you have to say 'because it is not true because it was not like that because this other thing is missing" (I9, newspaper). Similarly, some interviewees noted that they had to explain journalistic routines about how a piece of news is constructed and why they decided which news content is published: "not only me, many other colleagues and friends were confronted with their own familiar realities and labeled as the enemies because they were liars" (I4, radio).

The approach to coverage and the absence of a space for reflection to assess alternative ways to report the facts are identified as a reason to evaluate the media's performance:

> I think that the media did not handle it well (…) what was happening was addressed as it has always been done: vandalism, delinquency (…) maybe

there was not enough time to pause, sit down and say "look, something more important is happening here than what we are transmitting" (...) I think that the criticism of the media is appropriate, legitimate and valid, and I think that we have to learn lessons from it. (I8, television)

5. Conclusions

This research has explored how media directors and editors in Chile perceive accountability instruments, specifically focusing on transparency and audience participation. Through an exploratory study, interviewees described and characterized some instruments in ways that align closely with how they are established in the literature. The primary instrument identified is ownership transparency, underscoring the press's role in serving the public and its audiences (Picard & Pickard, 2017). However, it is not necessarily linked to ownership concentration and pluralism (Bleyer-Simon et al., 2023), which are critical aspects of Chile's current media system (Monckeberg, 2011; Montt, 2017; Orellana & González-Bustamante, 2018).

Audience participation is characterized by instruments to allow them to be heard, though they provide limited feedback and tend to lack interactivity or reconnection with the public (Camaj, 2023; Ward & Wasserman, 2010), resulting in largely unidirectional participation (Karlsson, 2013). Nevertheless, there is an intention to incorporate criticism in journalism (Rodríguez-Martínez et al., 2017) when a media outlet makes a mistake that the audience identifies and communicates (Pritchard, 2000).

The perception of media directors and editors regarding transparency in their workplace tends to be favorable toward making ownership transparent, but it is deemed to be insufficient regarding the owner's links and the need for transparency in the news content (Meier & Trappel, 2022). The latter is viewed as beneficial, yet no specific methods for its implementation are clearly outlined. Transparency instruments described in the literature, such as newsroom blogs and links to primary sources (Domingo & Heikkilä, 2012), are not identified or recognized by the interviewees. By contrast, journalist profiles are seen in some cases as a necessary aspect of transparency.

Audience engagement instruments intended to show and explain the rules governing news coverage and to strengthen and regain trust with audiences (Bastian, 2019; Koliska, 2022) are notably absent in practice and even face objections from interviewees. The scarcity of instruments, such as digital encounters with readers, user contribution, or content review (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022), further reinforces the tendency towards a unidirectional relationship.

Regarding the conditions that would influence the establishment and development of instruments, such as news production processes, there is a tendency to consider them unviable due to the media's operational dynamics, timings, and routines. Moreover, the interviewees do not perceive these instruments as effective means for audiences to select content that they consider to be of higher quality (Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2017).

In light of the current decline in trust in the media since 2019, interviewees tend to agree with the reasons outlined in the literature (Luna et al., 2022; Morales Quiroga, 2020; Orchard & Fergnani, 2023). However, they have not established mechanisms or actions to address this situation.

Therefore, investigating the relationship between trust in the media and media accountability presents an opportunity for future studies, considering the current media system in Chile and the challenges of pluralism. Likewise, examining the relationship between journalistic routines and instruments of transparency and audience participation emerges as a possibility to contribute to this field.

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