

Promotional Practices in News Programs: The Case of Spanish Public Television

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This article analyzes how promotional strategies impact the news programs on Spain's public television channel. It shows how promotional activity is often disguised as news, thus compromising journalistic work, and outlines how self-promoting practices originating in the private sector have been transferred to the state-owned audiovisual corporation.

Keywords: Spanish public television, news, journalism, promotional strategies

Introduction

In European countries, television came into being under state monopoly, a situation that remained generally unchanged until the 1980s. Striking a balance between sociocultural and economic interests was the defining aim of audiovisual policy-making in its early years in Europe. Today, neoliberal policies and technological advances have transformed the competitive environment, almost obliterating that original goal by leading European television toward a business model in which private operators coexist with state channels operating on ever-shrinking budgets in the face of declining viewer confidence.²In Spain, the state audiovisual model is undergoing a crisis that has compounded this hardship. Spanish Television (Televisión Española, TVE) was founded and developed during Franco's dictatorship. Since its inception, near-systematic accusations of bias have undermined its reputation as a public news broadcasting service.³ Indeed, TVE's own News Council (Consejo de Informativos⁴) has

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² The European public channel BBC experienced the largest crisis in its history in 2012; consequently, the corporation's management and even the very model of public television were called into question.

³ *Act 17/2006 of June 5 on State-Owned Radio and Television Services* decreed that public media must satisfy Spanish society's needs for information, education, and entertainment; promote its cultural identity and diversity; drive the information society; and promote pluralism, participation, and other constitutional values by ensuring access to social groups and important politicians.

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pointedly disagreed with certain reports that it found to be partial (Consejo de Informativos de TVE, 2013), and the Council of Europe has expressed doubts about TVE's political independence (Council of Europe, 2013). Meanwhile, since 2008, the financial crisis in Spain has had repercussions for the channel's funding model. Its state subsidy has been cut,⁵ even as the institution copes with a historical financial reform that ended commercial advertising on the channel.

In recent years, Spain's public television channel has therefore had to finance itself with diminishing resources while also increasing programming with editorial content to fill the time that advertisements used to occupy. Consequently, advertising has been replaced, as the expert Enrique Bustamante (2010a) put it, "by a seemingly never-ending barrage of self-promotion, which at times borders on self-glorification" (p. 5). This self-promotion not only replaces advertising but has also infiltrated editorial slots, transforming a public news service that traditionally held itself above pseudo-journalistic practices. Our work analyses the impact of this public entity's promotional strategy on television news content. As a communicative function, this strategy reveals how public television in Spain is creating its own identity and seeking legitimacy in the system where it has developed, funding these efforts with typical resources of a private audiovisual model.

One goal of the study was to examine these practices, ascertain whether they are justifiably part of news programs on a public television channel, and specify to what extent they might degrade the news reporting on TVE. Spanish public television's long-standing and important responsibility to report news cannot obscure more recent practices that some consider highly ethically questionable. According to Bustamante (2011), these practices "are unthinkable in a public service news show" (p. 25)—and all the more so in this case, as De Mateo and Bergés (2009) pointed out, because "TVE considers newscasts as one of the most significant components of the network's programming" (p. 11).

Self-Promotion Practices in Television: Concepts and Theoretical Framework

In the field of mass communication, media refer often to themselves or to their own communicative activity. In the advertising field, this phenomenon is termed *self-advertising* or *self-promotion*. From the journalistic viewpoint, it is called *self-coverage* (Turow, 1994), while the media also define it as *self-reference* or *self-reference news* (Nöth & Bishara, 2007; Santín, 2006), or even *promotional practices of news* (Coffey & Cleary, 2011). The last term operates at the level of information, designating a process in which the publicity part of promotional strategies is sometimes mixed up with the journalistic component, for instance in the news programming. At another level, self-promotion activities also help diversify revenue sources and thereby consolidate broadcasters' corporate image while expanding audiences. Indeed, "media are not just looking to 'monetize,' and thus promote, [sic] television programs because new technologies such as DVDs and other digital versions allow these programs to be more easily sold directly to the public than in the past" (Hardy, 2010, p. xii)

⁴ This professional and administrative body, created by Act 17/2006, consists of 13 members elected by all broadcasting professionals employed by TVE News Services.

⁵ In 2011, the corporation RTVE (Radio y Televisión Española) received €535 million directly from the national budget, plus €665 through tax income, reaching up to €1,200 million in total. In 2012, the fixed amount from the state budget fell by 38% to €331 million, and the total amount transferred was €996 million after tax income was added.

The study of self-referential messages in audiovisual publishing spaces has long been under way in the United States (Cleary & Coffey, 2009; Coffey & Cleary, 2011; Jung, 2001; McAllister, 2002, Price, 2003; Williams, 2002) but has less presence in Europe. The scarcity of Continental research on this matter (De Lara, Rodríguez, & Sánchez, 2013; Hardy, 2010; Ots, 2008; Santín, 2013, Siegert, 2008) is probably due to the European sector's more recent adoption of synergies and hybrid promotional strategies compared to the U.S. (Hendrickson & Wilkins, 2009, p. 379). The branding of a TV company is particularly complex, as its business sector requires it "to use differentiated strategies based on maintaining brand awareness for the channel (expressing its identity) and improving its reputation for quality and its goal of projecting a positive image in the eyes of the viewer" (González, 2009, p. 1136). From a self-reference perspective, management of a television network brand aims to strengthen a positive image of the institution among consumers as a strategy for achieving long-term audience loyalty. In this respect, it resembles corporate communication practices followed by other organizations, but in the case of television, the medium's function as both object and channel of promotion could have ethical implications, particularly when these practices feature in news shows and related programs. "By building brand awareness and brand knowledge, a brand image is created which leads to sympathy for the brand, brand preference and ultimately brand loyalty" (Siegert, 2008, p. 11).

Public television institutions build their identities on industrial, sociopolitical, and cultural arguments. In this regard, TV marketing has turned self-promotion into an essential communication tool. As Moreno (2007) points out, "with self reference promotion, a [*sic*] public television re-creates the values of that institution into two social systems: the market and the democratic scheme" (p. 14), dealing with both consumers and citizens. Such a self-promotion strategy features prominently in most studies conducted from an advertising perspective. This study will analyze the messages that are aired in news slots as what we call "self-referring news" because we regard them as a promotion strategy embedded in a journalistic discourse.

In Spain, the first studies of self-referential messages in audiovisual media appeared in the 1990s, when the commercial competition market staked out its place in the sector to usher in a new era of selling strategies that changed the way television was produced (Santín, 2013). The arrival of the private audiovisual model pushed Spanish media companies to implement a more comprehensive model of communication that increased marketing departments' consequence in the companies' structure. Marketing's new leading role triggered an increase in all aspects of promotion and, by extension, self-referential messages. In the Spanish case, "specific data on the relative presence of self-reference considering all types of broadcasts" (De Lara et al., 2013, p. 33) hardly exist because studies have not only focused primarily on qualitative analysis but have also often adopted an advertising perspective. However, one recent study (De Lara et al., 2013, p. 39) on content broadcast in 24 hours via the three major networks in Spain—La 1, Tele 5, and Antena 3—has revealed that self-reference today is more common within blocks of editorial content than in commercials.

"In self-promotion, the advertisers, advertising objects and advertising vehicles are one and the same and, in addition, the brand message can be integrated into the editorial content" (Siegert, 2008, p. 23). Thus, alongside a network's self-advertising or self-promotion, its televised discourse also conceals self-referential messages in the editorial content of its different channels, invading even newscasts (Santín, 2013). News stories are therefore constructed to feature information that casts the media themselves as protagonists. Their social role can make the media into central characters worthy of inclusion in daily

reports, but often there is no journalistic justification for giving them a leading role that responds only to a promotional strategy. Opposing views have arisen regarding the ethics behind such tactics, especially when it comes to journalistic practice: "Evidence is mixed as to whether publishing news programs compromise integrity for promotional gain" (Coffey & Cleary, 2011, p. 163). Media concentration has unquestionably worsened this situation, as not only one channel in a given corporate group but all its other media as well assume an auto-referential leading role in their own newscasts. This situation provokes discussion of synergies and the "benefits of mixed promotional strategies" (Gershon, 2000, p. 81) that have aroused controversy for decades (George, 2007, p. 243) by showing how corporate interests can insert bias into news coverage (Jung, 2001; McAllister, 2002; Williams, 2002).

The foregoing prompts us to define what we mean by "self-reference in the media." We use a definition of self-promotion adopted by several authors:

Self-promotion refers to the concept of a company advertising itself, that is, its brand(s), programs, titles or products within its own programs or titles. A single medium or a part of one is, at the same time, the advertiser, the advertising vehicle and the advertising object. (Karstens & Schütte, 1999, 2005, cited in Siegert, 2008, p. 16)

When talking about broadcasters advertising themselves, we include all types of promotion, including PR and publicity. Self-promotion can be informative or persuasive. "It is obvious that station promos and ads have a strong persuasive character, but the definition is quite unclear within various trailer and teaser formats which are quite similar to newspaper editorials" (Siegert, 2008, p. 16). A hybrid discourse that includes both information and promotion practices is present at many television networks nowadays.

This study assesses self-referential strategies present in the news editorial content of Spanish public television. We define editorial references as passages that "refer to a media organization and its brands in their own program or editorial content" (Siegert, 2008, p. 17). These references can inform, entertain, or persuade audiences to stay connected to a specific channel. They can also reinforce the corporate identity of the television channel or the media group it belongs to. We divide self-promotion strategies for television branding into two main types: those with and those without program reference (Siegert & Pühringer, 2001). In a highly competitive business environment, media companies clearly must do everything in their power to achieve their economic objectives. In the case of public television, however, this rationale cannot entirely justify the use of the same strategies, including infiltration of information sections with self-promotional practices.

Like other media businesses, of course, private and public broadcasters alike should highlight their value to obtain good audience ratings. Public television pursues this goal primarily to justify its own existence in the eyes of society, as well as the investment of tax monies that supports its operation, but the process also presents opportunities to improve the corporate image of public versus private broadcasters in a very competitive environment. It is also a chance to penetrate new Internet spaces to gain the youngest publics' favor, as "most Western European Governments have allowed their public service broadcasters to expand their activities on new digital platforms" (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2008), and Spain is no exception. Together with self-promotion and PR strategies, corporate marketing can effectively generate consumer demand and extra revenues in a context of budget shortenings.

Self-referential practices serve above all to reduce promotional expenses and optimize the use of television airtime. This kind of message can be repeated as often as desired and integrated into different types of content and programs, including the news. Media companies that produce their own programming can thus plan a promotional strategy of using different spaces, including newscasts, as vehicles devices for self-reaffirmation of their corporate identity.

Public Television in Spain: TVE

In Spain, as in the rest of Europe, television came about through public initiative. TVE was founded in 1956 as a governmental organ. Almost from its inception, it chose advertising—rather than financing models like those preferred in other European countries—as its main source of funding. Once democracy was established, its monopoly began to break up. Act 46/1983 of December 26 on Regulating a Third TV Channel, passed in 1983, allowed public television channels for autonomous communities onto the audiovisual scene. By the end of the decade, approval of Act 10/1988 of May 3 on Private Television (Televisión Privada) had made the private audiovisual sector a reality.

TVE's debt grew in tandem with the increase in audiovisual programming upon the arrival of new channels and digital television (DTT), since more channels on offer to the general public meant more competition for advertising revenue. These circumstances produced a need for reform in both the funding system and the group's internal functioning. Instituted in 2004, these reforms ended five years later with the passage of Act 8/2009 of August 28 on the Financing of Radio Televisión Española (RTVE), which scrapped advertising and stipulated two main sources for the corporation's financing: a fixed amount allotted from the Spanish national budget; and special taxes on other companies' revenues—0.9% for telephone companies, 3% for open private broadcasters, and 1.5% for subscription channels.

This reform was an attempt to weaken state television and benefit the private sector (Bustamante, 2010b, p. 8). RTVE is presently experiencing hardship due to lack of funding. Both its state budget funding and the private-sector contributions (via taxes) have shrunk. The share provided by telephone companies and private networks in 2012 dropped by 26.8% compared to the previous year, a loss equivalent to €217,356,305 (Comisión del Mercado de Telecomunicaciones, 2013). RTVE consists of two public institutions for television and radio, called TVE and RNE respectively, and two specialized centers, one for common services and another for corporate management (De Mateo & Bergés, 2009, p. 69). The group comprises five channels: two general channels (La 1 and La 2) and three theme channels—the news channel Canal 24 Horas, the sports channel Teledeporte (TDP), and the children's channel Clan.

Nowadays, all these channels and stations are integrated at www.rtve.es. The RTVE group did not seriously consider using the Internet as a communication platform until 2000, giving other public service television networks in Europe, such as the BBC, a head start in this medium. In 2005, the group decided to beef up the team in charge of the website, which focused on new content development and had attracted 16 million hits by the end of April, 2006. Since then, the group's presence on the Web has grown (Congreso de los Diputados, 2006, p. 53). At present, it is seen as exemplifying the symbiosis of traditional and new media in a public service television network.

Object and Methodology of the Study

The scope of our analysis is limited to self-reference in news programs on Spain's main public television channel La 1, the leading audiovisual medium on Spanish public television. Following the proposal of Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005), we limited the study to a five-week period.⁶ Specifically, for seven days a week over the five consecutive weeks from January 23 to February 26, 2012, this study covered the two highest-rated news programs: the lunchtime news, broadcast at 3 p.m.; and the evening news, broadcast at 9 p.m. (see Table 1). The resulting sample consisted of 70 news programs in all (50 on weekdays and 20 on weekends).

The whole sample was viewed, and all examples of self-reference information were detected ($N = 211$ units). This self-reference information formed the basis of the study's content analysis according to individually coded variables. The units of analysis considered in our research have been the pieces of news included in the shows.

Table 1. Cases of Self-Reference in the News.

	Newscast Edition (3 p.m.) ($N = 111$ pieces of news with self-reference discourse) Mean (%)	Newscast Edition (9 p.m.) ($N = 100$ pieces of news with self-reference discourse) Mean (%)
Weekdays	66 (59.5%)	53 (53%)
Weekends	45 (40.5%)	47 (47%)

The analysis protocol design (see Appendix) considers a self-referencing unit of information to be a reference, in an on-air news program, to (a) the news bulletin itself, (b) other programs on the same channel, (c) the channel itself, (d) other channels from the same group, and/or (e) other media from the same corporation (e.g., Radio Nacional de España [RNE]), as players in the news story. Following Santín's (2006) suggestion for analysis of self-references in the press, we categorize the first three cases as "absolute self-reference" (i.e., the medium refers to itself, the channel, or the corporation as a whole) and the other two as "relative self-reference." In the latter category, the broadcast medium and the subject of the news story are not one and the same but rather connected by a business link; such self-reference is explicable in terms of synergies. In cases of relative self-reference, the referred-to medium was coded. Other identifying references or mentions—such as the opening and closing sequence, corporate slides or channel logos appearing on the news program's set, or announcements of the next news broadcast—were not considered examples of self-reference.

⁶ Five weeks is also the span of Coffey and Cleary's (2011, p. 166) study of promotional practices in the news on cable news programs of major U.S. corporations.

We established three different categories of self-referencing news stories depending upon what audiovisual treatment the self-referencing message received from journalists and whether it was in a hard or soft news story. The news stories were also classified by news theme (sport, cinema, politics, etc.) and by specific issues that brought about self-references. Though the media have various reasons for deciding to refer to themselves and indeed, seem to find any excuse to broadcast self-referential news, some topics are reiterated more than others. Awareness of things that are more likely to generate self-referential stories gives the media recurring excuses to be protagonists in the stories they report. We performed exploratory analysis with an open repertoire of topics to obtain a compilation of these preferred issues, which are categorized below in terms of the goal served by the message's broadcast.

1. Audience: Media proliferation has resulted in fierce, industry-wide competition for the highest ratings, which are determined and controlled by specialized ratings companies. This category pertains to news that reports ratings data.
2. Awards, events, ceremonies: Prizes, parties, or other celebrations can involve media as organizers or winners. Any PR event that engages the media and is broadcast by them is included in this category.
3. Calls for audience participation: This category includes news pieces that demand opinions or collaboration from the audience to conduct some kind of mass media activity.
4. Strategies for obtaining information: In these pieces, the media direct the audience to a different station or outlet within the corporate group to enhance the information provided in the newscast.
5. Comments on current news shows: News snippets that call the audience's attention to other newscasts—for example, a comment on recently broadcast news program—make up this category.
6. Current non-news program references: Included here is all news commentary that directs the viewer to a program other than a newscast that is or shortly will be on the air.
7. Memoirs with symbolic function: These news items turn the audience's attention to television shows from the past, including shows that are no longer on the air.
8. Co-productions, project participation: This category contains news reports on RTVE's collaboration/participation in an audiovisual or similar project.
9. Other: This option was reserved for any other issues that could arise during analysis, such as sanctions or penalties on the media, agreements with other companies, corporate results, or business agreements.

The self-referencing news stories were also catalogued to accommodate some messages' double aspect as both a commercial reference to the content of the channel or the group, and a corporate/branding measure in which the self-reference aims to promote the group's brand. The purpose of this variable is to check whether parallels may be drawn with studies of the medium's self-promotion in actual self-advertising slots.

Finally, we assessed means of presenting these self-reference messages, establishing four non-exclusive possibilities:

- Anchor: Self-reference messages are presented in the studio by the anchor of the news show.
- Labels or crawls: Self-reference messages appear as text on the screen.
- VTR (video tape recorder): Self-reference messages appear in a video that combines previously produced images and sounds.
- Tails: The anchor voices self-reference messages as the show airs previously produced images and sounds.

Results

Programming as the Key of Self-Referring Messages

The tendency to understand news through its relation to the audience and to the rest of the programming schedule has made news bulletins into just another product. This new status of the news, in the competitive atmosphere of today's audiovisual world, has engendered a marketing strategy of using newscasts as vehicles for promotional messages. This strategy's efficacy has not been lost on Spain's public television channel. As Table 2 shows, it explains the spate of self-referencing news stories during these slots, which like any other form of promotion serve the purpose of increasing audience share and heightening brand awareness for TVE.

Self-referencing content has become the norm on news programs on Spain's public television, and different news editions broadcast at different times do not differ significantly in this regard. In the sample taken for this study, 96% of all news programs on La 1, the group's flagship channel, contain at least one such news item, and the average news bulletin holds three self-referencing stories. Moreover, though no explicit rule governs how and when a news program should make reference to its own news, certain established journalistic coverage norms do apply to the broadcast of self-referencing items, and with very clear aims. For example, whereas this type of message does not appear in coverage of some issues or news events, self-references are common in certain other news areas. Most notably, almost half (44.5%) of the self-references we found were in sports coverage, most of which is considered "soft news."

Table 2. Self-Reference Categories as Percent of Total, by News Topic.

	Culture/Film	Sport	Politics/Economy/ Justice	Society	Weather	Other	Total
Current non-news program references	7.6 (7.6 / -)	38.4	3.3 (0.5/ 1.4/1.4)	2.8	5.2	1.4	58.8
Audience	0.9(0.9 /-)	1.4	-	-	-	1.9	4.3
Memoirs with symbolic function	1.0 (0.5 / 0.5)	-	-	1.9	0.9	0.5	4.3
Comments on current news shows	- /-	2.4	9.5 (9.0/ - / 0.5)	-	-	-	11.8
Co-productions, project participation	3.8 (3.8 / -)	-	-	-	-	0.5	4.3
Calls for audience participation	0.5 (0.5/ -)	-	-	0.9	-	0.9	2.4
Strategies for obtaining information	1.4 (0.9 / 0.5)	1.4	0.9 (0.5/ 0.4 /-)	1.4	-	1.9	7.1
Awards, events, ceremonies	1.4 (0.5 / 0.9)	0.9	-	1.9	-	0.5	4.7
Other	0.9 (- /0.9)	-		0.5		0.9	2.4
Total	17.5 (14.7 / 2.8)	44.5	13.7 (10.9 / 0.9 / 0.9)	9.5	6.2	8.5	100

Analysis of these self-referencing messages shows that their main aim is to inform viewers about the programming schedule of the channel being watched or others in the same group. Most pointedly, 59% of all self-references remind viewers of the next edition of the news to encourage them to tune in.

Sports Programming

The broadcasting schedule relayed to the viewer most often concerns programs related to sport. Statistically, 60% of references that TVE news programs make to upcoming programs promote sports activities. Cases of self-referencing increase for major sports events, which themselves generate information that includes audience share. The channel knows that any important sporting event will reap a greater audience share and be the most viewed program of the day—which, our study suggests, is itself news that *must* be shared with news viewers. The audience share for a sports show is relevant for two major reasons. First, the lion's share of the group's budget for acquiring broadcasting rights and third-party productions goes toward sports events.⁷ Second, as Spanish law allows broadcasters to obtain sponsors for these events but bans advertising on public television, such sponsorship has become a fundraising strategy for RTVE—one that is of course more successful when its programming attracts a large audience.

The prevalence of self-referencing sports reports depends not only on the relevance of the sporting event itself, but also on whether the channel has broadcasting rights to it. A channel informs viewers about events that will air on one of its group's channels but never about events broadcast on rival channels outside the RTVE group. For example, La 1 may provide information on a minor sporting event to be covered on the group's sports channel, TDP, but makes no mention of where viewers can tune in to watch another, more important sporting event to be broadcast by the competition. In cases where TVE felt obliged to report on a particular sporting event for which it did not have broadcasting rights, it redirected viewers to the group's radio coverage.

One remarkable development is the group's increasing promotion of its radio channels as TVE's sports broadcasting rights erode. Undoubtedly, cuts in public spending and the reform of public channels' funding models have reduced the resources available to the medium of television⁸ to the point where it can no longer bid for the rights to broadcast major sporting events.⁹

As for the media to which reports on upcoming sports programs refer, the sports channel TDP is the most prominent. In news on La 1, almost 40% of references to the next broadcast of a sporting event direct viewers to this sports channel. Second to TDP is La 1 itself, the group's main channel for news reporting (23.1%), and the public radio channel comes third. This case most commonly concerns relative self-reference, in which the medium, as a broadcaster, refers to media from its own group, which permits interpretation in terms of synergy.

⁷ In 2012, TVE spent €239.9 million to acquire broadcasting rights and outside productions. Of that number, €169.176 million went toward sports events. The rest was spent as follows: €46.649 million for movies; €20.452 million for series; €3.705 million for Clan TVE and Canal Internacional; and €205.095 thousand for La 2 (Cortes Generales, 2012, p. 5)

⁸ In 2013, €215.3 million was allocated to TVE programming—€85.2 million less than in 2012 (Congreso de los Diputados, 2012, p. 38).

⁹ Act 8/2009 of August 28 on the Financing of Radio Televisión Española limited the budget for broadcasting rights to general interest sporting events—not including the Olympic Games—to 10% of the total annual budget.

Transmedia Strategy and the Use of Synergies in Self-Referencing Messages

Business synergy is evident in La 1's efforts to make all the group's products as profitable as possible. With a view to redirecting viewers to the channel's other programs at no extra cost, the length of a news program is complemented with several minutes of other, more expensive and emblematic programs such as *Informe Semanal*, a current affairs program with special reports inspired by the format of the U.S. show *60 Minutes* (García Matilla, 2013). Notably, the channel has slightly lengthened its news programs by introducing more news contents—which currently last over an hour—filling in the time once occupied by advertising. This is significant, given that Spanish public television news programs are considerably longer than their European counterparts.

Footage from other programs is also used when news programs remind viewers about shows that have already been aired. Normally, La 1 reminds viewers about a recently broadcast program either to use its content in a particular news story or to publish audience figures for that program. On other occasions, it recalls programs that no longer feature on a channel's schedule; such self-references are less closely linked to current affairs and more grounded in emotion or nostalgia. Here the medium is conceptualized as a tool for collective memory that expresses nostalgia for the past and strengthens common experiences as rooted in identity (Böhn, 2008, p. 144).

The news programs on public television in Spain also strive to exploit the Internet by using it as a parallel channel that audiences can access to obtain more information than was offered in the news bulletin. A channel's viewers are redirected to its Web page not only to find out more but also to express their opinions on current affairs. According to Álvarez (2011), "Viewers want to take part in the new media in whatever ways they can using all available technology" (p. 89). Public television and its news programs seek to fulfill this desire via facilities offered online. In doing so, they aim not only to give the impression of a more interactive medium but also to adhere to a clear transmedia strategy that positions the Internet as a parallel channel that must be promoted. Today RTVE has a strong presence on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tuenti, and RTVE.es hosts the world's largest online Spanish language audiovisual archive.

Through its self-referencing on television, La 1 not only shows and promotes itself but also makes reference to the media in its business group. The public channel is clearly using synergies when its news programs redirect viewers to the corporation's other channels and media. Indeed, half of all self-references on news programs were relative, revealing the group's active pursuit of business synergies. RTVE's flagship channel's news programs are clearly instrumental in the project of increasing the number of visitors to the group's webpage and improving audience figures for the other TVE and RNE channels. Irrespective of absolute self-referencing, the most frequently mentioned media are TDP, the TVE website, RNE, Canal 24 Horas, and La 2.

Designing the RTVE Brand through News Programs

The increased competition in Spain's audiovisual sector in recent years has led strategic management teams to "take more notice of intangible resources" (Baraybar, 2006, p. 13) such as the brand, the reputation of the products, and the image of the company itself. RTVE most notably

exemplifies this strategy in news programs that have no qualms about repeating information over and over to boost awareness and improve positive opinion of improve the RTVE group's brand and the products it offers. Ever more commonly, news reports serve to convey the idea that RTVE news programs are leaders. To sell themselves as such, public television news programs refer to themselves during news bulletins as the most thorough and impartial news sources.

The desire to discard the term "government-run television" has been a key element in how the news programs on a channel refer to the group. Very often TVE reminds viewers during a news bulletin that the channel's performance has been rewarded with a higher audience share, awards, or co-production of successful films. Such news messages tend toward the creation of pseudo-news stories that show a biased reality, offering an image of the medium that matches what the group wants to convey about itself—that is, an image built mostly by promotional spots.¹⁰ Only positive aspects of the network are highlighted. Messages in the study sample commonly referred to ratings showing La 1 as a leader; however, its loss of audience share the previous year was ignored. In 2011, La 1 lost 1.5% of audience share due to fragmentation of the audiovisual market but remained a leader with a 14.5% share. In January 2012, La 1 kept a 14.2% audience share, but that February it fell to 14.1%. By February 2013, it had slid to 10.2% and was no longer in first place (Barlovento Comunicación, 2013).

Hybridizing the Message: The Promotional Message of Journalism

Promotion and information always share space and strategic messages in news programs. Viewers would easily identify most of the self-referencing that we detected because self-references very seldom conceal the link between the medium and the subject of the news report, probably in view of the promotional aim of the self-referencing messages. In some cases, blatantly promotional news stories virtually swept aside any journalistic input, but in many more cases (20.4%) the technique involved a label—a graphic on the screen containing data with self-referencing content—to complement the news story itself. In other words, the self-referencing message was not an integral part of the news story but rather an optional extra. For example, a label in a report about a famous fashion parade advertised the channel's Web page as a site where viewers could read a more detailed article about the news piece but contained no audible self-reference. We call such cases of self-reference "not very distracting" for viewers.

On other occasions (9.5%) the self-referencing information that appeared on the label reinforced the audio message of the journalist or news presenter. Most commonly, though—in fact, in almost half the cases—the news presenter made the self-reference using what are known as tails. In addition, in a few cases the self-reference message is exactly the same as the one shown in the channel's advertising spot, with no editing whatsoever.

¹⁰ E.g., one 9 p.m. news report broadcast on February 2, 2012, (47 min., 15 sec.) stated that La 1 "has the recipe for success." The report's visual materials included several promotional spots containing messages on the network's newscasts; e.g., "They are the most complete and impartial" and "they have the best professionals."

Comments and Conclusions

Spain's public television currently does not have to compete to attract for commercial advertising. It does, however, compete for audience share and ratings, as is evident from the company's own promos and the persistent presence of news that leads the audience to other shows from the TV group. Moreover, the current economic crisis and the search for new and alternative ways of financing the group's activity without advertising, such as sponsorship, still lend the audience remarkable importance. Audience ratings are particularly essential for the most expensive shows the network now offers: sport events. As Díaz (2006) put it, TVE must keep its audience numbers "for greater prestige and because if it is not successful in attracting and keeping viewers, it would not fulfil its function and it would eventually be chastised by public budgets" (p. 81).

Though TVE no longer runs advertising, ratings are still vital as a metric of the global positive image the corporation must project to justify its own existence. Perhaps because of this need, the search for a larger audience is evident in the channel's promotional slots as well as in news programs that, judging by their audience share, appear to have become the ideal platform for self-referring news stories with clear corporative content. No longer free from market thinking, the news programs of public television have entered into "a dynamic of change brought on by the commercial nature of things" (Ortells, 2011, p. 36) in which self-reference messages, generally with promotional aims, have become a norm from which TVE news programs are not exempt.

Analysis of La 1 news programs' broadcasting of self-referencing news stories leads us to conclude that these stories do not fulfill a true journalistic function but rather serve as advertising tools. The self-referencing information in TVE news programs has clearly promotional goals that concern two aspects of the group: commercial and corporate. The group seeks to attract viewers or listeners for its programs and channels while also using news programs to build or improve the RTVE's image as a brand and reinforce the messages conveyed in advertising slots that promote the group.¹¹ This issue has elicited use of the term *hypercommercialism* (Hendrickson & Wilkins, 2009, p. 381), showing that self-referencing news stories on television work in much the same way as two types of self-promotion highlighted by Siegert and Pühringer (2001, p. 262): program promotion and brand promotion.

The use of synergies in the scheduling of news programs is manifested in the use of narrative journalistic techniques to promote the channel's programming and achievements during news programs—a morally dubious approach, since a public model in which news programs are the essence of the public function should be free of self-promotional slots. Public television, like general private channels, allocates most of its time to entertainment programs, a naturally more appropriate venue for promotional activity. The study finds that the private television model has polluted the public one as practices representative of private-sector television have been transferred to the public audiovisual corporation. In the news

¹¹ The self-promotional text for news programs in the season that began in September 2012 described TVE newscasts as the most pluralist and impartial, stating also that TVE reported on current affairs "with absolute rigour and credibility and reflecting all points of view." Finally, it reminded the viewers that the network's newscasts were the "information leaders."

programs of TVE, the goals of the audiovisual product are efficiency and profitability (in terms of audience). Hence, TVE engages in blatant promotional activity on programs that should be exclusively news-related.

News programs on La 1 develop their news discourse through use of their own programming, characters, and anecdotes, quite often making a news story out of the goings-on around them. And not only does La 1 show and promote itself in televised messages; it also refers to the other media of its group. In this public channel's news programs, promotional messages have apparently become an integral part of news stories. Viewers have probably grown accustomed to them and see them as merely an innocent game of the business interests that purvey information, one that private channels play too (Coffey & Cleary, 2011; Santín, 2013; Williams, 2002).

Our conclusion, then, is that news programs are victims of the competition among channels that is so prevalent nowadays. Giving in to commercial pressures, news programs on the public channel have adopted promotional strategies, just as private channels did before them. The result is self-referencing content disguised as news, whose main aim is to promote the channel's programs or the programming of other channels under to the same corporate umbrella. News programs remind the audience of upcoming broadcasts of new series, films, sporting events, or any other program coming soon. Further, they pursue transmedia strategies by calling on their viewers to follow other media of the same group.

The constant presence of self-referencing messages camouflaged as news lends the RTVE corporation an informative presence that is virtually infinite and not always justified. Its news programs' self-referencing news stories tend to create pseudo-events that offer an image of the channel and RTVE in line with its own strategic objectives. News stories linked to audience figures, celebrations, or awards ceremonies demonstrate the channel's search for legitimacy as a leader in viewers' eyes, while news reports that call for audience participation attempt to convey an image of a more interactive or democratic channel.

Although self-promotion is sometimes seen as relating only to commercialism and audience share, improving the brand's competitiveness was a goal public television could hardly ignore when part of its budget came from ads. This is not the case for Spanish public television now, but in a highly competitive environment, the network must pursue not only commercial goals but also a stronger social image in terms of social responsibility and utility, two qualities a nonprofit public broadcaster must cultivate even when it is financially supported through taxes.

The news programs on Spain's public television use commercial business synergies very similar to those used by private channels. This article's findings suggest a need to extend this line of investigation to other public channels to establish whether they have also taken on the function of promoting the channel and its products during news programs, and whether professional beliefs and routines play a role in this process. The finding that a public television station still operates with strategies pervasive in commercial television points to an increased need for ethical surveillance as vital to preserving the independence of public-service journalism.

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Acts

Act 8/2009 of August 28 on the Financing of Radio Televisión Española

Act 10/1988 of May 3 on Private Television (Televisión Privada)

Act 17/2006 of June 5 on State-Owned Radio and Television Services

Act 46/1983 of December 26 Regulating a Third TV Channel

Appendix

Table 3. Newscast Analysis Protocol.

Control Variables			
Date:	Number of self-references:	Newscast time <input type="checkbox"/> TD1 (3 p.m.) <input type="checkbox"/> TD2 (9 p.m.)	Newscast edition <input type="checkbox"/> Weekday <input type="checkbox"/> Weekend
News Analysis Variables			
Level of self-reference: <input type="checkbox"/> Absolute <input type="checkbox"/> Relative		Presentation: <input type="checkbox"/> Anchor <input type="checkbox"/> Tails <input type="checkbox"/> Video (VTR) <input type="checkbox"/> Labels or crawls	
Referred media: <input type="checkbox"/> TVE <input type="checkbox"/> La 1 <input type="checkbox"/> La 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Canal 24 Horas <input type="checkbox"/> Clan TV <input type="checkbox"/> TDP <input type="checkbox"/> RNE <input type="checkbox"/> tve.es <input type="checkbox"/> Other:		Nature: <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate/branding <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/> Undetermined	
Type of news: <input type="checkbox"/> Soft <input type="checkbox"/> Hard		News topic: <input type="checkbox"/> Culture <input type="checkbox"/> Cinema <input type="checkbox"/> Sport <input type="checkbox"/> Society <input type="checkbox"/> Economy <input type="checkbox"/> Justice <input type="checkbox"/> Politics <input type="checkbox"/> Weather <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
Self-reference topics: <input type="checkbox"/> Audience <input type="checkbox"/> Comments on current news shows <input type="checkbox"/> Memoirs of symbolic function <input type="checkbox"/> Calls for audience participation <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="checkbox"/> Present programs' references <input type="checkbox"/> Co-productions, participation in projects. <input type="checkbox"/> Awards, events, ceremonies <input type="checkbox"/> Strategies for obtaining information			