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Personalization, emotion and closeness. A strategy to catch women's vote during an electoral year

Abstract

Facing the growth of an emotional culture that puts into practice new ways of communication, the leaders of the main political parties approve the reinforcement of the personalization through empathy to sway the undecided votes. According to the surveys by the Sociological Studies' Center (CIS, by its initials in Spanish), women are the largest undecided voter bloc and because of this, new strategies to convince these voters, supposedly less attracted to politics, are being developed. In the current setting, this research focuses on the information from interviews of Spanish Presidential candidates published in four of the five most published highestend female magazines between 2011 and 2015: Glamour, Telva, Elle and Vogue. The goal is to find out what issues candidates are talking about to try and reach this diverse target audience that, at the same time, is already so well defined. Additionally, through the analysis of twelve interviews accompanied by 49 pictures, it's inferred that values and interests traditionally linked to women (feminine issues) are the ones that have more presence in the speech. However, if we pay attention to professional and electoral messages, the most present issues are the ones included in the category of soft politics.

Keywords

Political communication, segmentation, gender, framing, soft politics, feminine issues

1. Introduction

With the enforcement of the 3/2007 Constitutional Law concerning effective equality between women and men in Spain, the presence of women has increased in both Houses of the General Courts. In the last twenty years, between 1995 and 2015, according to the report written by the Inter-parliament Union (IPU), the presence of women in the Congress and Senate has increased from 16 to 41.1%, placing Spain in an average position of countries in regards to female representation. However, concerning the other issues linked to gender, there are still

multiple factors that show bigger differences in other areas such as undecided voters.

Political parties are aware of this big difference between the number of undecided female voters and male voters, demonstrated by both the numbers of the Center of Sociological Studies (CIS) and the different surveys carried by polling companies, that's why they've opted to put more effort into innovative actions and strengthen their strategies to attract more female voters.

32,5 26, 19,5 13, 6,5 0, jan-2011 jan-2012 oct-12 jul-13 apr-2014 jan-2015 oct-15

Chart I. Political indecision of men and women between 2011 and 2015 in Spain

Source: Own chart, based on data from CIS

On the graphic representation that shows the number of undecided voters (those who answer "I don't know" to a direct question about their political preferences¹), the crowd shows more reception to a series of feminization techniques. Lovenduski (2005), McKay and Mcallister (2012) and Childs and Murray (2014) suggest in their research that this comes from the continuing inclusion of women in the government, as well as from the inclusion of communication and practice of certain values considered to be linked to women (Adam & Derber, 2016: 15–18). Thus, during elections, the perception of the male leader would evoke competitiveness and determination (Eagly, 2000; Holmes, 2006), while the perception of the female leader would evoke interaction, closeness and feeling (Cuadrado, 2004; Burrel, 2004, Childs, 2004). In the 21st century, this last ideal aims to drive the bloc of undecided voters to a firm decision.

At this point, the theory of a definite yet small shift in gender roles concerning the image, action and political message, would stand up in the academy field in an interest essentially focused on the speech (Parry-Giles, S.J. & Parry-Giles, T., 1996; Mayhead & DeVore, 2005), as well as the conviction that female leaders would present different characteristics than their male counterparts (Blankenship & Robson, 1995; Ross, 2002; Cuadrado, 2003) and that their growing presence in government organizations would drift towards a "feminization of the agenda" (Grey, 2002: 28), in which issues concerning conciliation, social welfare and equal opportunities take the lead role. Taking this into account, when sociologists and political scientists talk about the "feminized majority" (Adam

¹ The referred question is normally asked in the CIS polls as following: "If tomorrow there would be parliamentary elections, what party would you vote for?" Spontaneous answers are allowed.

& Derber, 2008: 96), what they are referring to is the amount of voters that, independent of their gender, share concerns and see the political practices as something inclusive versus the unchangeable and strict practices. In other words: it gets back the prediction of Drude Dahlerup in 1988 about the beginning of a new conciliatory model of common concerns and of those considered, for a long time, distant from men.

Out of the two aspects of the feminization process that Lovenduski (2005: 9) addresses, the participation of more women in institutions is subject of quantitative analysis, whereas the introduction of a gender perspective in politics frequently leads to fewer qualitative proposals. For the British researcher, the approach to this last dimension should start by observing the male leader's understanding of the sort of linguistic issues and subjects that show women and appeal, at the same time, reasoning and connecting emotionally to the voters. Thus, in a second step, the interest is focused on checking if that approach helps implement a change in attitude: presidential candidates put into practice new political communication strategies and vote requests, trying to be closer to particular feelings depending on the time and location, as well as to achieve a gender affinity effect on female voters (Plutzer & Zipp, 1996; Banducci & Karp, 2000; Smith & Fox, 2001; Brians, 2005; Dolan, 2008).

Studies about gender affinity effect justify the analytical effort leading to the conclusion that, on electoral times, women would trend more towards other women because of the influence of the "caring vote" (Cáceres, 2010: 44), as well as a personal identification that is able to create some kind of group consciousness that would be, depending on when, non related to the gender variable (Gurin & Gurin, 1980). Concerning Duch and Stevenson (2008:48), this evaluation should not be interpreted as undervaluing the featuring factors of voter behavior, but as a call to take into account certain images and speech use regardless of any biological conditioning. Such is the case that these factors contribute to create empathy between a candidate and the citizens, as well as spread feelings of compromise in defending certain interests, such as the female voters'.

Concerning what was previously presented, it can be deduced that current electoral campaigns seek to convince indecisive women and so, politicians need to update their form and content strategies. From the moment it is accepted that the importance of using emotions (Bennet, 1977; Bertoldi, 2009; Bas & Grabe, 2013), new ways of notoriety pave the way, as well as, taking advantage of the difference from the other candidates and, very importantly, the disclosure of personality details as a resource to gain trust (Costa Bonino, 1994: 70). To this, Jerit (2004: 563–564) adds that the stimulation of emotions energizes the message, as you get to project images perceived globally as positive, to stress on values identified as common to the group of electoral voters and to support personal attributes (Maarek, 2014; Vázquez Sande, 2016).

On the other side of the "emotional democracy" (Arias Maldonado, 2016), some critics see emotivity as an obstacle that limits political knowledge (Genova & Greenberg, 1979; Gilens, 2001; Miller, 2005) and others see it as a type of communication leading to a participation of apathetic sectors (Marcus, Neuman & MacKuen, 2000; Barbalet, 2002; Brader, 2005; Bas & Grabe, 2016). The importance of those affections in processes of cognition and decision is a growing movement, and consequently there is a need for tools that would allow leaders to combine both professional and personal issues more naturally.

The current research supports the seeking of product characteristics that answer the previous strategy: the soft interviews (Berrocal & Quevedo, 2014), different from soft news (Tuchman, 1972; Patterson, 2000; Baum, 2003) due to the distinctive features of journalistic genres. As far as the context and assumption are concerned, a progressive feminization agenda and the indecision of women in politics (resulting in a big attraction for electoral candidates to get their votes) is accepted. Also, it is stressed what Poindexter (2008) states about the lack of reception of *hard news* and, consequently, the better predisposition to

journalism formats that insist on affective dimensions with a positive approach (Kamhawi & Grabe, 2008: 34–37). Based on this, and according to the lack of work that strictly addresses the relationship between the exposed concepts and the persuasion of the undecided voters, it is interesting to go deeper in the nature of the soft interviews and, especially, in those linked to the press media geared towards a female audience: high-end female magazines, known as RFAG (by its Spanish initials).

2. Context

Political interviews have been for decades "mainly factual, focused on facts, specific moments and statements and, only on a second level, on considerations" (Halperín, 1995: 42). However, in the time of the *talk show* that type of conversation, typical of the written press, has begun to share the media space with the type of a public figure's interview on a show and television media. As a result, according to Leonor Arfuch (1995: 109–110), political communication has found in the personalization phenomenon its main promoter to work in two directions: show the attributes, values and feelings from the leader; and to humanize the political content to make them more approachable to those groups of citizens that have, traditionally, being approached in a broad way.

Nowadays, even though it varies depending on the country and the party being examined, the disinterest in identifying groups of voters based on common features is being transformed into a great receptivity towards micro-segmentation techniques, in order to maximize the chances to affect specific groups (Mark Penn & Kinney Zalesne, 2007). In other words, they go for a greater message directionality that allow more to gather around the candidates. This seeks a similar reaction as a gender affinity effect when a woman is the candidate.

Proof of the usefulness of segmentation during an electoral campaign is the case of "soccer moms": stereotype conceived as suburbs medium class women that put family before anything else and work around their kid's activity schedule (normally sport activities) (Penn & Zalesne, 2007: 138). In 1996, the ex-president Bill Clinton, thanks to Penn's advises, addressed them. In short, Clinton and his team understood that if they could connect with the concerns of group that represented more than 1% of the U.S. voting-age population, they could conquer the new voter niche that would be decisive for the Presidential election.

That strategy focused on targeting and also used in campaigns for George Bush with "nascar dads" and "security moms" (Elder & Greene, 2007: 2) is directly linked to the goal of this study, as the RFAG in Spain constitute a self-segmented space and big enough -over two million monthly readers- to be attractive for seeking the vote among the consumers of these products.

Particularly, RFAG readers come mainly from middle to upper middle class groups that are prone to spend more money on services or products that suggest exclusivity and luxury (Plaza, 2005: 97). This type of elements encompass the entire advertisement net of *Glamour*, *Telva*, *Elle* and *Vogue*, encouraging to be part of an universe that buyers desire to be informed, motivated, challenged and included.

According to the specialized researchers Juana Gallego (1990, 2013) and Maria Garrido (2012), the headlines of the previous quotes try to fill a specific gap and address a classifiable reader, based on characteristics, such as age (between 20 and 45 years old) and socioeconomical status. As a result, over the course of years, the different profiles linked to RFAG seem to have unified a large group that, even though not representative of the whole female universe, combines a lot of people interested in leisure, fashion and beauty articles.

Apart from this last observation, which is too general, it is fair to say that the publications that this research point out are also responsible for the inclusion in the agenda of "all those issues and life aspects that have concerned and concern women and that they

should also concern men" (Gallego, 2013: 129). Those are, among others, questions related to the family, domestic and personal affairs, which fit inside the group of issues that over the past decades have been pushed aside by the political and journalism field as supposedly not important in public speech.

In that scenario, the prejudices of male-focused short-sightedness tend to underestimate the influence of magazines (Moreno Sardá, 2002:203). It is worth mentioning the controversy generated in 2004, when seven female ministers and the Vice-president of the Government appeared in the pages of *Vogue*. This represented the direct precedent of *soft interviews* studied for this article. What they did resulted in being a focus for critics based on a supposed depoliticization of the message (Bernárdez, 2010: 197) which, several years after, and as this research confirms, many other leaders imitate. The continuous repetition of history (overcoming the differences of the interviewee profile) is what has been made possible the emergence of a new type of content called "soft interviewes" (Quevedo, 2016: 100).

3. From "soft news" to "soft interviews"

Addressing the reasons of political behavior, Valdez and Huerta (2011: 25) explain that in order to have a relational vote, the elector needs to establish a positive cognitive relationship with the candidate. To that effect, it needs to work on feelings of harmony, affability and compromise, "based on responsibility, service, fondness, work, interests understanding and closeness".

In this context it might seem hard to identify what is complex versus what is basic, but in reality, the goal is the same: create trust. The voter needs to trust the politician as a person and for that, he lets them guide him through the feelings the candidate communicates. This communication should not only give off competitiveness and honesty but invite empathy (Rico Camps, 2009: 140–143).

Campaign after campaign, it is an innate desire for the human being to try to discover in the candidates the reflection of their own routines and desires. Ultimately, some sort of everyday nature to humanize the candidate and show him as a citizen.

Through the popular technique of storytelling, for example, the 21st century candidate wagers on a blend of professional and personal questions, a blend of hard news and soft news enacted by infotainment. Relative to this and according to authors such as McLachlan and Golding (2000) or Lehman-Wilzing and Seletzky (2010), it's important to specify not only the choice of issues and how they are addressed which are key to be considered soft, but also by the type of media, style and language.

Concerning the limited and limiting category of content, Nir (1984) and Paletz (2002) focus on the segmentation of videos, texts and audios about current political situation, economics and national security (hard news), and those subjects centered on human stories, people's character or gossip to have emotional appeal (soft news). This way, having all the previous information of what can be understood as "soft", it can be considered that interviews of political figures in women's magazines constitute a pattern of how the features of soft news can be extrapolated to discursive practice, in order to exploit the influence of emotion in attracting voters.

4. Methodology

In order to know what the distinctive features of the soft news that was presented to presidential candidates during the last two electoral years (2011 and 2015), the methodology of content analysis was used as it's very useful to process important information concerning "the conditions a text is produced" (Piñuel, 2002: 2) and this technique is very effective to distance oneself from the risks of emotion and feeling during scientific procedure (Bardin, 2002: 21).

Once the method and a time limit has been decided to address recent elections and thanks to the data published by the Office of Broadcasting Diffusion² (OJD, by its Spanish initials), the main five distributed magazines of 2015 have been selected: *Telva*, *Glamour*, *Elle*, *Woman* and *Vogue*.

Table I. Average of edition and diffusion of the main RFAG in 2015

HEADLINE	AVERAGE OF EDITION	AVERAGE OF SPREAD
TELVA	231.111	141.925
GLAMOUR	278.078	128.824
ELLE	181.151	116.298
WOMAN MADAME FIGARO	229.327	106.433
VOGUE	155.471	76.468

Source: Data taken from the OJD

All in all, the examination of the headlines turned out to be in 120 different hard copies and the later gathering of twelve interviews granted by Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba (PSOE), Mariano Rajoy (PP), Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) and Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos).

Table II. List of candidates, party, magazine, month and year of the interview

CANDIDATE	PARTY	MAGAZINE	MONTH	YEAR
Mariano Rajoy	PP	Telva	November	2011
Alfredo Pérez-Rubalcaba	PSOE	Telva	November	2011
Mariano Rajoy	PP	Elle	November	2011
Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba	PSOE	Elle	November	2011
Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba	PSOE	Vogue	November	2011
Albert Rivera	Ciudadanos	Glamour	March	2015
Albert Rivera	Ciudadanos	Telva	April	2015
Albert Rivera	Ciudadanos	Elle	December	2015
Albert Rivera	Ciudadanos	Glamour	December	2015
Pedro Sánchez	PSOE	Vogue	December	2015
Pablo Iglesias	Podemos	Vogue	December	2015
Albert Rivera	Ciudadanos	Vogue	December	2015

Source: Own report

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² The last published information by the OJD belong to the whole year of 2015.

As it can be seen on the index II, none of the politicians were interviewed for *Woman*, which focused the readers' attention on the famous trinomial Beauty-Love-Home (Gallego, 1990), as well as other proposals and articles about sexuality and life style. Concerning the rest of the magazines and in order to inquire about the framing and sources applied to every case, a phase destined to register frames was developed. Also, a template was used taking into account the qualities considered desirable for the methodology and technique chosen: uniformity among the different sections, propriety, impartiality, loyalty to the text and results productivity (Bardin, 2002), minimizing the risk of bias through the involvement in the process of interjudge reliability (Igartua, 2006) of two professors of the University of Valladolid. Their involvement revealed the high consistency of the codification tool, because each item exceeded 0.7 for Cronbach's alpha value.

The main goal of the analysis was to puzzle out the approach of the opening paragraph or the introduction of the interviewee (Quesada, 1984: 156), where it's feasible to discern a positive (kind portrait), negative (unfavorable portrait) or neutral intention by the tone and language used by the editor. Additionally, in the analysis was also considered the courtesy treatment (the professional courtesy against the first-name basis) and the political questions versus the personal questions, as well as the pictures' analysis (N=49). Not for nothing the visual component is key in a media where image is, more than an entertainment, a show that refers to its hedonistic and aesthetic characters (Garrido, 2012: 39).

Among the variables chosen to interpret the 49 pictures of the candidates, the pictures related to clothes and scenes stand out, according to what experts in non-verbal language affirm: the power of attire in the creation of captivating casing (Squicciarino, 1990: 185).

5. Results

The most basic identification data from the collection of writings analyzed shows the following first conclusion: although *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *Telva* and *Elle* publish twelve issues annually, the interviews with candidates are published at the same electoral month, which demonstrates that the interviewees are just trying to gain the vote instead of connecting to new voters. In this sense, it would have been convenient to contact the publishing and supervising magazine teams so the voice is not solely limited to the researcher. This way, it would have been possible to delve into reasonings (ideological slants or other types) that have an influence on the treatment of the interviewer to the interviewee, in addition to finding out the media impact and motivations.

Under the promise of this continuing to research the subject, the interest of what it has been researched links to the first claim, which in turn aim at the predictable strategies to reach the undecided voter or a non one-party voter take places in the days before the election. The rest of the results are stated next.

5.1 Tone and ways of personal treatment

Since sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1983) adapted from the work *Goffman* the *frame* concept to refer to a productive journalism process, it is now normal to find in news and report analysis a description of the selections or *frames* that are part of that subject production, distribution and cataloging process. As a result, there's almost no doubt that it is the journalist who frames the publicized reality in the media by their own perspective, depending on the age, gender or ideology (Sádaba, 2008:68). Under this assumption, the reader's perception about the interviewee may be conditioned by the tone of a headline or head paragraph. Therefore, the interpretation of the content has a big impact.

In the event of twelve of the texts, categories offered by Scharrer (2002) and Fernández (2013) are taken as a reference when coding the introduction of a personality as positive

(when including sentences that form a favorable portrait), neutral (when there is a lack of both criticism and flattery) and negative (if the writer expresses disapproval).

As expected in a media that not only informs but mostly entertains and comforts, the usual tone in political interviews is positive (58.3%) and this can be seen in sentences such as "Good Galician and family enthusiast". However, neutral tones can also be seen (33.4%) in sentences such as "Pedro, Albert and Pablo. New Politics"⁴, and even some attempt to project mistrust (8.3%) such as "The night before this interview at home, warned by the intriguing and mystical aura surrounding the character, I was reminded of the part of the Jungle Book where Kaa wants to trick Mowgli"⁵.

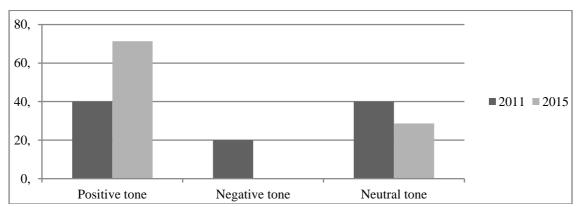


Chart II. Tone of media coverage

Source: Own report

Besides the qualitative approach observing these sentences, it is very interesting to take into account the quantity approach between 2011 and 2015. Analyzing this, it can be observed that as time goes by, a negative tone sees a total rejection (present in one of the five interviews during 2011) as praise and a more personal treatment of the interviewee gains ground. As for the more personal treatment and approach to the interviewee, encompasses about the 25% during the second term, which shows a tendency to express more spontaneity and closeness.

5.2. Professional/ Electoral coverage

The thematic variety to which a voter associates with a candidate can be modified depending on multiple factors besides framing by the media, such as and including gender. This category not only has an influence on the speaker's study but also on the characteristics of the readers, and in this specific proposal, on the RFAG's *target group*.

If there is something that connects the audience of *Glamour*, *Elle*, *Telva* and *Vogue* together, first of all, it is their biological condition (gender), and as a consequence, everything related to it. That's why, in this research analysis the category of the issues candidates talked about held up. The goal of this was to find out if the election's coverage offered in interviews with professional questions was focused on *soft politics* (as Luis Felipe

⁴ This headline is from the issue of December 2015 of *Vogue* and shows the readers Sanchez (PSOE), Iglesias (Podemos) and Rivera (Ciudadanos) in the same month.

³ This sentence appeared as a caption in Rajoy's interview for *Elle* (2011).

⁵ Part of the head paragraph that introduces the interview of Pérez-Rubalcaba, issue of November 2011, *Telva* magazine.

Miguel [2012:109] calls it), alluding to the same classification of the issues to whom Krook and O'Brien (2012) refer to those Ministry departments traditionally occupied by women: Culture, Education, Social Welfare and Health (including Equality).

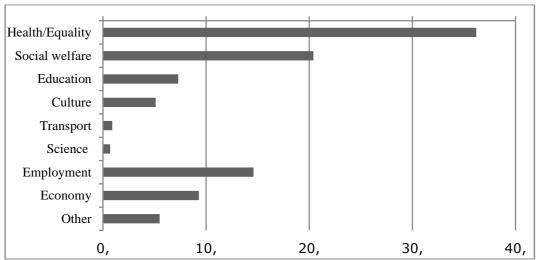


Chart III. Distribution of professional/electoral issues

Source: Own report

Results reveal a segmentation that answers stereotypical ideas such as the Transportation and Science Field, which is linked to the males' scope, which only include 1.6% of all questions in the twelve interviews. On the other hand, 20.4% of the questions were related to the problem of family and work balance (Health, Social Services and Equality Ministry). In the meantime, 14.6% of the questions were focused on proposals to increase the number of jobs or to fight the salary gap (Ministry of Labour). Furthermore, the straight vote petition was only included in the category "Others" with a 5.5% of the overall interviews, which represented a subtle management of the interview as an electoral tool.

5.3 Personal coverage

The candidate's intention when they're in a RFAG magazine is just to attract the undecided voter using humanizing strategies and by showing their values in new scenarios. Under this assumption, the completion of the content analysis was oriented to reveal what importance is given to issues that are stereotypically just for women *-feminine issues-* and, most precisely, to four of them: child care (17.6% of coverage); personal and family relationships (25.1%); health habits and image (27.2%) and, at last, personality stories behavior (30.1%).

Dealing with this distribution, it is necessary to explain that those questions focused on family and work-life balance went up in 2015, whereas those related to hobbies and leisure were more common in 2011. As a consequence, candidates rely increasingly on connect with one of the most common concerns among women: work-life balance.

5.4 Image and attire

Concerning the candidates image, it was studied taking into account the expression and pose, the color, the picture's angle and the attire of the candidates in 49 pictures. The conclusions are: there was a limited use of black and white colors (28.6%) and a medium range shot (50.3%). The informality of the candidates would clash with the conditions of the

scenario (more than 25% of the pictures were in an office) or it would go with a more casual setting where the pictures were taken (for example, a restaurant patio⁶).

Likewise, although informal attire such as leather clothes or jeans were not usual during 2011 (18.6%), Sánchez, Rivera and Iglesias expressed a preference for not wearing suit and tie as from 2015. This demonstrates a nod to a more casual style, a symbol of the new politics.

6. Conclusions

The goal of this article was to examine the mediation of the political speech focused on a mainly feminine audience. In order to do this, an analysis of the contents allow us to see how the characteristics of the RFAG shine through what it could be considered another tool to attract voters.

The interest of personalization this way, whose practice is controversial, dwells on the new ways of communication thought to connect values, concerns and latent tastes, especially among women. Moving towards that goal, it can be seen how presidential candidates don't commit themselves to just talking about government proposals. Now, they also opt to exhibit their personal lives and image to satisfy the curiosity that fame generates in the rest of the population, as well as to motivate potential female voters.

The exposed considerations, together with the exhaustive bibliographic review, have made possible a series of conclusions that happen to meet the distinctive features of the analyzed sample. Specifically, it is worth mentioning the positive tone used by the interviewer to build a friendly profile for the interviewee; the tendency of replacing the courtesy treatment to provide homogenization and evoke the image of friendly chats instead of dialogs; the importance given to personal questions in order to discover the candidates' hobbies, story and the impact of the position on their personal lives; the preeminence of frames linking to *feminine issues* and *soft politics* categories; the greater weight on work and family balance questions and, at last, the importance of photography and its huge power of persuasion. Everything, ultimately, to combine three elements of conviction: personalization, emotion and closeness. A strategy to gain the feminine vote in an electoral year.

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⁶This example belongs to one of the pictures where Albert Rivera appeared. *Telva*, issue of April 2015.

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