

Framing *Sálvame*: Public debates on taste, quality and television in Spain

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Abstract

*The main aim of this article is to analyze the social circulation of discourses on non-hegemonic cultural practices, in particular on what is called “trash TV”, and how they are connected to struggles over cultural and social hierarchies. To do so, it takes a specific event as starting point: the injunction that the CNMC (the Spanish broadcasting regulatory body) filed against Mediaset (a commercial TV operator) to adjust the contents of *Sálvame Diario* (a celebrity gossip program frequently associated with “trash TV”) to the requirements of what is known as the “child protection time slot”. This paper uses constructionist framing to analyze how this event was discussed by different social actors. Our analysis shows that while the CNMC and the press painted the conflict as a legal issue, *Sálvame* and social media users focused their discussion on the social acceptability of celebrity gossip media and their viewers (specifically working-class women).*

Keywords: framing analysis, trash TV, television quality, taste, cultural studies, working-class women

Introduction

In Spain, *Sálvame* (‘Save me’, La Fábrica de la Tele/Telecinco, 2009-present) has been perceived as the paradigmatic example of trash TV for the last few years and has been the target of a great deal of criticism in academic, media and popular discourses (Guerrero-Solé, Besalú, and López-González, 2014; Oliva, 2014). *Sálvame* is a celebrity gossip program that is broadcast daily from 4:15 to 8:15 pm and has an average rating of 4.3% and an average share of 17.9%.¹ *Sálvame* is characterized by its ironic, harsh treatment of celebrity culture, and it regularly mocks and attacks both “deserving” and “undeserving” celebrities (Oliva, 2014). Its hosts are Jorge Javier Vázquez, a well-known Spanish TV host, and Paz Padilla, a former comedian. Celebrity gossip journalists and D-list celebrities, such as former reality TV contestants and celebrities’ relatives, make regular guest appearances on the show. Their role in the program is to discuss celebrity news as well as tell about their own private lives, thus blurring the distinction between journalists and celebrities.

On 17 December 2014, the National Markets and Competition Commission (Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia, CNMC), the regulatory body for the broadcasting industry in Spain, filed an injunction against Mediaset, the parent company of Telecinco, urging Mediaset to fit *Sálvame*’s contents to the requirements of the “enhanced child protection time slot” during which it was broadcast. The injunction was issued after several complaints from the Media Users Association (Asociación de Usuarios de la Comunicación, AUC), and it warned of possible sanctions if Mediaset failed to comply.

This injunction stirred up an intense social debate that went beyond the specific fact that sparked it. On the one hand, the Media Users Association, which had denounced the program, issued a press release expressing its delight. On the other hand, Mediaset and *Sálvame* made public statements expressing outrage at CNMC’s decision. *Sálvame* even urged its audience to publicly show their support for the program. The press also covered this incident, and newspapers’ comments sections and the social media were inundated with hundreds of comments arguing both for and against *Sálvame*.

We contend that these debates are expressions of a continuous struggle around cultural (and social) hierarchies and the legitimacy of non-hegemonic cultural practices. In Spain, these struggles are condensed around the concept of ‘telebasura’ (trash TV) and are related to longstanding discussions on the quality and power of television (Brunsdon, 1990; Corner,

¹ Data refer to the 2013-14 season (Kantar Media).

1994). In this paper, rather than focusing on the legal implications of this conflict, we aim to study the social circulation of discourses around it and how they connect with wider struggles over the legitimacy of the taste and cultural practices of subordinate social groups, working-class women in particular. In order to fulfil this aim, this paper analyzes how different actors (CNMC, AUC, Mediaset, *Sálvame*, the press and social media users) framed this debate and its implications in terms of social and cultural inequality.

***Sálvame* and trash TV in Spain**

Since the 1990s, the public debate on the perceived lack of quality in Spanish television has revolved around the concept of trash TV. This term first appeared in Spain in 1993 to describe the effects on the TV programming that emerged from the end of the public broadcasting monopoly and the establishment of a highly competitive multi-channel broadcasting system (Palacio, 2007). Since then, this concept has dominated the discourses on broadcasting quality in the press (Martín Sánchez, 2011), the political arena (Gutiérrez David, 2007; Martín Sánchez, 2012) and even academic research (Aznar Gómez, 2005; Fuentes Romero, 2005). In these discourses and documents, there seems to be consensus on what trash TV is. For example, the Catalan Audiovisual Council (Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya, CAC)² argues that although it is difficult to define, “everyone generally understands this expression adequately enough” (CAC, 2006, p. 3). Trash TV is often linked to reality TV, infotainment and celebrity gossip programs that reward “tastelessness, outrageousness, personal confrontation, insults and disparagement of the participants” (AUC, 2004, p. 3; see also CAC, 2006, pp. 4-5; Martín Sánchez, 2012, p. 164) and “unashamedly [show] the intimate and private sphere of the people involved in it” (Sánchez, 2015), as well as “unsuitable material for children at all hours of the day, capitalizing on scandal and violence” (Pérez de Albéniz, 2011).

In Spain, the concern with trash TV has also been examined by a rich tradition of media literacy research which seeks to turn citizens into “creative producers and critical receivers of messages” (Orozco, Navarro, and García-Matilla, 2012, p. 72; see also Aguaded, 1999). This research has focused on defining media-literacy *skills* – which include dimensions that implicitly point to the idea of quality, such as ideology and aesthetics – and then evaluating these skills in Spanish citizens (Ferrés, Aguaded, and García, 2012; Ferrés and Piscitelli, 2012; García-Ruiz, González Pérez, and Aguaded Gómez, 2014).

Nevertheless, definitions of trash TV are not neutral. They are based on dichotomies such as highbrow and lowbrow culture or masculine and feminine. Thus, in order to fully understand this concept, we must turn to Bourdieu's work on taste (1984), which claims that social classes have unequal economic, cultural³ and symbolic capital. Cultural capital is dependent on cultural hierarchies, since not all dispositions (tastes) and cultural goods count as *capital*. Thus, not only is cultural capital unevenly distributed, but not all social groups have “the symbolic power to make their judgements and definitions legitimate” (Skeggs, 2004, p. 107). As Bourdieu explains in his later work, the field of cultural production is contained within the fields of power and class relations (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 37-38), which means that the hierarchical structure of the cultural field (in which the media are contained) mirrors social (as well as gender) hierarchies (p. 44). Consequently, definitions of quality are related to inequality and power relations in the culture (Corner, 1994, p. 141). Nevertheless, legitimized taste is universalized and objectivized, and quality is viewed as the result of *inherent qualities* (Storey, 2009, pp. 214-215).

Moreover, cultural hierarchies maintain, explain and justify social inequality, since aesthetic evaluation is linked to social evaluation by transferring traits assigned to cultural

² The CAC is the Catalan regulatory body for the broadcasting industry.

³ Cultural capital refers to educational level, cultural goods, knowledge and taste (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47).

products to their audience (see Alters, 2003; Mittell, 2003; Schneider, 2011). Likewise, individuals that have accrued cultural capital are attributed the “monopoly of humanity” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 491). Consequently, discussions about quality should be understood as an expression of the social and political struggles around the role and value assigned to different social groups (defined by class, gender, race and age).

In this regard, British authors such as Skeggs (2004), Lawler (2004, 2005) and Tyler (2008) have studied the widespread expressions of disgust that “work to produce working-class people as abhorrent and as foundationally ‘other’ to a middle-class existence that is silently marked as normal and desirable” (Lawler, 2005, p. 431). Working-class women are the target of most of these expressions, which portray them as uneducated, unruly, tasteless and *abject* (Tyler, 2008). These stereotypes have also been identified in other cultural contexts, such as Spain (Oliva, 2014).

Likewise, cultural studies has long been interested in the relationship between culture and power, that is, the role culture plays in the production and reproduction of social relations and inequalities (Fiske, 1992, pp. 284-286). Strongly influenced by Bourdieu, cultural studies has focused on traditionally derided and ignored popular culture texts, especially ‘feminine’ genres such as soap operas (Allen, 1985; Ang, 1985; Brunson, 1981), romantic novels (Modleski, 2007; Radway, 1991), women’s magazines (Hermes, 1995) and, more recently, reality TV (Allen and Mendick, 2012; Hill, 2005).

From this perspective, popular culture is viewed as a site where social tensions and debates are represented and condensed. Popular texts are seen as contradictory, conveying both dominant and resistant values and thus offering tools for emancipation through productive readings (Fiske, 1989; Hall, 1980; Kellner, 1995; Morley, 1992). However, contemporary cultural studies is more interested in how different social groups find pleasure and make sense of popular culture and the social values it conveys, but without claiming that their readings are necessarily progressive or creative (Allen and Mendick, 2012; Hill, 2005; Skeggs, Thumim, and Wood, 2008). Nevertheless, the relationship between culture and inequality is still a core concern of cultural studies.

Our analysis builds upon this previous research, since class and gender inequalities permeate discussions around *Sálvame* and its place in the cultural hierarchy. First, *Sálvame* is considered to be at the bottom of the cultural hierarchies, in part because it is a celebrity gossip program. Secondly, celebrity gossip is a profoundly gendered genre in Spain: For example, in Spanish it is called *prensa rosa* (pink press), which clearly connotes femininity. Finally, *Sálvame*’s audience is mainly made up of elderly working-class women.⁴ As we shall see, all these elements will appear in the discussions around CNMC’s decision regarding *Sálvame*.

Additionally, regulation should be understood as a site by which definitions of quality are institutionalized and naturalized (Brunson, 1990, p. 76). In Spain, debates around trash TV have blended with political debates related to media regulation and the protection of minors, with quality defined primarily in moral terms (Brunson, 1990, p. 79). Thus, the social and political outrage against the presence of “trash TV” led to the enactment of Law 7/2010, the General Audiovisual Communication Law (General de Comunicación Audiovisual) in 2010. This law introduced what is called the “enhanced protection time slot”, which prohibits contents recommended for ages 13 and up from being broadcast weekdays from 5 pm to 8 pm.

In this context, in December 2014, the CNMC issued the injunction urging Mediaset to change *Sálvame*’s contents, arguing that the program did not respect the enhanced child protection regulation. According to the injunction, *Sálvame* explicitly presented deep emotional conflicts without a positive resolution (for example, vengeance, hatred within a family, or sexual identity problems); intolerant, racist, sexist, violent, and competitive attitudes

⁴ *Sálvame*’s actual audience (as measured by peplemeters) is made up of 71% women, 42% working and lower-middle classes, and 39% people aged 64 years or older (01/09/2014 – 19/12/2014, Kantar Media).

with no educational or informative purposes; denigrating situations and expressions; distressful scenes not mitigated by humor; moral dilemmas with no positive outcome; and coarse language from the program's host and guests expressed in an offensive or a violent way (CNMC, 2014, pp. 8-11). This event marks the starting point of this paper.

Methodology

In its inductive and constructionist approach (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; D'Angelo, 2002; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2007), framing analysis seems like a good way to analyze the discourses of the political, social and media agents involved in the case, including newspapers and social media users. Although it can be understood in many ways, to frame could be defined as "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 5). Frames are a "central organizing idea (...) for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue" (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p. 3), and they influence how audiences think about issues "by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information" (Scheufele, 2000, p. 309). Since different agents and institutions compete with each other to impose their frames on the media and society, frames in the media can be created by the media themselves (journalistic frames) or can merely be a reproduction of previous frames created by a news source (advocacy frames) (de Vreese, 2012; Van Gorp, 2007).

The constructionist perspective on framing is usually associated with qualitative methodologies (Just, 2009; Van Gorp and Vercruyssen, 2012; Valtysson, 2014). Van Gorp (2007) uses the notion of "frame package" to refer to the three constituent elements of a frame (see also Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). The first, called *manifest framing devices*, comprises all the elements in a text that help shape a particular view on a subject (vocabulary, metaphors, images, etc.). The second is an implicit *central theme* that designates the frame and relates it to a cultural phenomenon (such as archetypes, myths, values, etc.). Finally, *reasoning devices*, which can be either manifest or latent, relate the theme with certain causes and consequences. Implicit moral values and possible solutions to the problem are other reasoning devices that help place the frame within a given social and cultural context. Based on these premises, framing analysis must work inductively: Frames should first be constructed by identifying certain framing devices located in the corpus being analyzed, and then their prevalence should be determined.

Since cultural studies' concerns and assumptions connect and are coherent with the constructionist framing approach (Blood and Pirkis, 2001), in this paper we suggest merging framing with cultural studies. Cultural studies emphasizes how popular culture is a field in which symbolic power struggles to legitimize meanings (and cultural practices) among social groups take place, and constructionist framing believes that frames are the tools used in these power struggles by imposing and naturalizing certain ideological views about reality (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Van Gorp, 2007, p. 63). In fact, there is a body of research within the cultural studies perspective which has adopted framing as a methodology for studying popular culture (Eck, 2001; Schneider, 2011; Shaw, et al., 2001; Stevens and Bell, 2012).

Thus, in order to better understand the Spanish debates on trash TV and the legitimacy of non-hegemonic cultural practices, first we inductively identified what frame packages were used in the discourses included in our sample, then we studied how the advocacy and journalistic frames interact in the news about *Sálvame* and which actors are better able to impose their frames on the online comments. The sample included contributions from all the main actors who took part in the debate starting from when the CNMC's injunction was made public: a) CNMC's (2014) decision, which explains and justifies the injunction; b) press releases from Mediaset (2014) and the AUC (2014); c) verbal statements on this issue by

Sálvame's hosts (programs broadcast on 17, 18 and 19 December 2014); d) articles published in the five general-interest Spanish newspapers with the highest readership, both paper and digital: *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, *ABC* and *El Periódico* (a total of eleven press articles, see Table 1, in the Appendix); and e) online comments posted on the websites and Facebook pages of *Sálvame* and the newspapers (a total of 3,496 comments, see Table 1, in the Appendix).

Analysis and discussion

Our analysis detected ten frames which are related to the general issue of taste hierarchies in different ways. Four of them show a negative attitude towards the program, while six are used in discourses with favorable attitudes. All frames are explained in detail in the Appendix (Tables 2 and 3).

Frames with a negative view towards *Sálvame* include those that focus on regulation and offer aseptic explanations which are apparently far removed from social conflict: "The law is the law" and "Social demand". These frames naturalize regulation as something pre-established and apolitical and do not discuss its consequences. Conversely, other frames point directly to definitions of quality and cultural hierarchies, expressing disgust for the program's contents or viewers ("Trash TV" and "A country of uncultured people"). These frames connect with modernist values and take cultural hierarchies as self-evident and dependent on the inherent qualities of texts.

Among the frames showing a positive view of the program, only "Sálvame is the wrong man" sees the problem in legal terms, as it is clearly constructed as a counter-frame to "The law is the law". "Arbitrariness" and "Censorship" expose the program and viewers' defenselessness against a partisan and biased regulatory body, questioning the naturalization and apolitical nature of regulation in previous frames. "Market democracy" presents the problem as a matter of freedom, personal choice and relativism of taste in the context of a wide range of programs, thus individualizing the problem and denying cultural hierarchies. Finally, "Entertainment is also a public service" and "Just entertainment" focus on entertainment by either valuing it – thus questioning established cultural hierarchies – or denying its negative social effects.

Advocacy frames

a) The CNMC's decision

The CNMC's injunction mainly addresses the issue as "just" a legal problem: There is a rule and it must be obeyed ("The law is the law" frame). In this regard, both the structure and the content of the decision adopt linguistic forms typical of legal discourses, so the injunction appears to be a technical analysis of the problem with no moral judgment. The injunction also refers to repeated complaints from viewers' associations using the "Social demand" frame (i.e., the political authorities' regulation and actions should reflect social demands).

Interestingly, the CNMC's decision also contains several expressions that contradict the generally aseptic tone of the text and activate the "trash TV" frame, which locates the problem within the context of quality and taste hierarchies (i.e., *Sálvame* as a low-quality TV program that is harmful to society). Thus, the definition of the program and its celebrities is pejorative and not very thorough, and it uses quotation marks for certain expressions such as "celebrities" or "gossip topics", which indicates the CNMC's ironic distance from the program. At the same time, the decision makes clear that the main reasons for considering *Sálvame*'s contents inappropriate have to do with moral issues related to the family, sex and infidelity.

Of course, the formal norms of any legal injunction shape this document's format and language. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that regulation is one of the sites in which cultural hierarchies are sustained and objectivized through rules such as the protection of minors. In fact, the CNMC implicitly invokes universal and absolutist criteria through which value is attributed to cultural works.

b) The AUC's press release

The AUC issued a short press release in which it expressed its delight with the CNMC's intervention. The press release combines two frames: "The law is the law" (stating that "the AUC believes that due to the subjects addressed and the way it treats them, *Sálvame* is one of the clearest examples of inadequate contents for minors in child protection time slots") and "Social demand", as it criticizes the regulatory body's inactivity until then.

c) Mediaset's press release

Mediaset's short press release, in which it expresses its disagreement with the CNMC's decision, includes different frames, some of which reveal certain inconsistencies in their reasoning. Most of the press release is based on the "Arbitrariness" frame, stating that "it [*the CNMC's injunction*] does not say anything about the soap operas broadcast in the same time slot by [*Telecinco's*] main competitor". Thus, Mediaset stresses the idea that the regulatory body creates threats selectively to promote or damage commercial media actors.

The press release also uses the frame of "The wrong man" as it casts doubt on whether or not *Sálvame's* contents are harmful ("it [*the CNMC's injunction*] describes in detail a series of passages [...] that presumably harm minors"). However, this contradicts the "Arbitrariness" frame, which implies that Mediaset also infringes on the child protection time slots. Finally, there is also the "Market democracy" frame (which argues that audience ratings legitimize a program's existence), as the press release stresses the program's "absolute leadership" in the afternoons.

d) *Sálvame's* response

Sálvame also replied to the CNMC's injunction: Its host (Jorge Javier Vázquez) discussed this issue during the program's broadcasts on 17, 18 and 19 December. Vázquez employs a different strategy than Mediaset's press release. In his response, he does not use "The law is the law" frame, nor does he refer to the injunction, the CNMC or the "child protection time slot". Thus, *Sálvame* avoids using counter-frames that define the problem under the same terms as those used by CNMC and AUC. Instead, it uses ambiguous argumentation that defends market liberalization through a populist discourse that challenges culture hierarchies, highlights the power struggles and inequalities behind legitimate taste, and exploits the unrest of subordinate social groups (especially working-class women).

Vázquez presents the situation as "a threat to *Sálvame's* continuation" triggered by "some viewers' associations" who are "ultraconservative" and have a hidden agenda (17 December). Thus, Vázquez uses the "Censorship" frame, which views media regulation as an attack on the principle of freedom of speech:

Not only is the cancellation of a program at stake, keep this in mind. There are many more things at stake as well and tomorrow it could be us, the day after tomorrow it could be others, but if things keep going like this the time will come that no one will be left to speak out and complain about this situation (18 December).

Vázquez also uses the “Market democracy” frame which is “based on consumer power and committed to relativizing taste in relation to consumer demand (implicitly classifying all objections to this as ‘elitist’)” (Corner, 1994, p. 145). This frame is normally used to defend deregulation of broadcasting by highlighting “freedom of choice” and claiming that everybody is responsible for their own actions and audience ratings legitimize a program’s existence:

[*In television*] (t)here is room for everyone if it is clear that the most important thing is to respect the viewer. And when it comes to choosing between *Salvame* and all the other options, you choose us. If we are gone one day, it should be because you no longer watch us (17 December).

Thus, content regulation is presented as a paternalistic measure: “You [*the audience*] have good judgment and do not need to be told what is right and what is wrong, what you can and cannot watch” (17 December). *Salvame* also argues that this debate is a matter of one social group trying to impose their taste on another (19 December). According to the program, the best solution is to change the channel; in other words, regulation is not necessary in an environment with a multi-channel system.

Concurring with Mediaset’s press release, the program also appeals to the “Arbitrariness” frame, noting that other channels also broadcast harmful contents during the same time slot when *Salvame* is broadcast, including violence, family conflicts and political debates that “can cause dismay in youngsters and arguments in families” (*Salvame*, 17 December). Interestingly, Vázquez identifies political programs as harmful, a direct challenge to taste hierarchies.

In addition, Vázquez’s discourse indirectly addresses one of the arguments contained in the CNMC’s injunction. While the CNMC stressed that *Salvame* was not suitable for children under the age of 13 because of its “explicit representation of deep emotional conflicts without a positive resolution (...)” (CNMC, 2014, pp. 6-9), Vázquez claims: “We have been together for a very long time and, like any other family, conflicts, arguments and moments of tension arise which we endure the best we can and which are always, and I stress always, solved” (17 December). Clearly, on the one hand the program justifies the conflicts and arguments through the metaphor of family, while on the other it uses the “Public service” frame to present itself as serving an educational purpose, since it teaches the audience how to resolve conflicts and manage social diversity. *Salvame* also claims a second social purpose: “Keeping the audience company”. Thus, *Salvame* puts forward the elderly’s right not to feel lonely as an implicit response to the CNMC’s complaint about the program’s violation of children’s rights. Nevertheless, its public service claim is contradicted by the assertion that *Salvame* is “just entertainment” and thus harmless.

Frames in press discourses

The analysis of the frames used by the main Spanish newspapers shows that no journalistic frame of the issue was constructed. The newspapers simply reproduced the advocacy frames proposed by other actors without providing an interpretation of their own. Generally speaking, the Spanish press favored the frames constructed by the CNMC and the AUC as opposed to those posed by Mediaset and *Salvame*. Most journalistic pieces use “The law is the law” frame, painting the issue as a legal conflict, in other words, as *Salvame*’s failure to comply with a rule, which must be amended. Moreover, passages related to “The law is the law” frame are better developed, contain textual quotes from the original sources, occupy a large amount of space, and are located in prominent positions.

A second frame, “Trash TV”, comes from the CNMC’s decision as well. It is also found in all the newspapers, albeit less prominently. Most of the news reports, especially those with a more opinionated tone in *El Mundo* and *El Periódico*, implicitly define *Salvame* as a

low-quality program: “gossip program about celebrities’ lives” (EPA1⁵); “Vázquez defended himself from those who believed he was doing pure trash TV” (EPE2).

Nearly all the newspapers reproduced the “Social demand” frame, which they mainly used in the same way as the AUC: They suggested that the CNMC’s action was a social claim from citizens who believe that *Sálvame* is harmful for minors, and they also added implicit criticism of the regulatory body for having acted late and only after the viewers’ association complained: “(S)ince it was created a couple of years ago, the CNMC had not touched *Sálvame*, though industry sources point out that this was due to the fact that ‘during this time they have been gathering arguments’” (EPE2).

Exceptionally, *La Vanguardia* clearly kept away from the frames proposed by the CNMC and stressed two frames established by the program. For example, one of the headlines literally quotes Vázquez saying “certain associations that have increased the pressure on us today” (LV4, “Censorship” frame), while another reports that “Mediaset criticizes the CNMC’s warning to *Sálvame* but not to soap operas” (LV1, “Arbitrariness” frame). By contrast, the remaining newspapers just outlined some of the counterarguments proffered by the program without providing them with the same coverage as those of the CNMC or the AUC.

Thus, our analysis shows the CNMC’s power to impose its frames on the press. This stems not only from its status as an official source (see Bennett, 1990) but also from the modernist discourse of the Spanish newspapers, which tend to legitimize, reinforce and naturalize cultural hierarchies (see Martín Sánchez, 2011).

Online comments

A total of 3,496 comments were posted on the newspapers’ and *Sálvame*’s websites and Facebook pages devoted to this news story. As we shall see, CNMC and the press had little impact on shaping social debate in the social media: Almost no comments framed the conflict as a legal one using “The law is the law” frame, and they rarely mentioned the “child protection time slot”. Instead, the debate was often reduced to a discussion between “*Sálvame* yes” or “*Sálvame* no”, showing irreconcilable positions based on opposing reasoning devices. Moreover, while the CNMC, AUC and most of the press tried to void the conflict of emotion, online debates tended to use a highly emotional tone.

Comments against the program usually show a disgusted attitude and use an outraged tone through capital letters or many exclamation marks. “Trash TV”, the most frequent frame, is based on the idea that there is a cultural hierarchy that must be respected and that low-quality TV programs are harmful to society. The comments that use this frame usually contain scatological metaphors, speaking of the program in terms of “shit” or “trash”, as well as words and expressions that connote tastelessness: “*Sálvame* is not suitable for anybody; it fries brains; it oozes vulgarity and a lack of values” (MEPP, EM1). These comments regularly use impersonal sentence structures referring to consensual and shared values. By doing so, they naturalize the reasoning devices on which their argumentation is based. Moreover, most of the comments using this frame are built upon implied arguments: They do not explain why *Sálvame* is trash TV because it is obvious to them. This is a common feature of the comments that show negative attitudes toward the program. For example, a number of comments that use the “Social demand” frame just say “Finally!” or “It was about time!”

There are relatively few comments that refer directly to *Sálvame*’s audience within the “Country of uncultured people” frame. According to this frame, cultural consumption is a proof of a person’s values and morality. Like the “Trash TV” frame, it takes cultural hierarchies for granted, but it focuses its attention on the audience, who is blamed for the

⁵ All newspaper articles and comments are identified with a source code. See Appendix.

existence of *Sálvame*. Despite the scarcity of these comments, it is interesting to analyze them because they show strong disgust towards the program's imagined viewers:

(...) What can we do [regarding the existence of *Sálvame*] when there is a mass of almost retarded hicks who watch their tracksuit and slum heroes daily??? (...) (Luigi Castagnola Angulo, EPE2-Facebook)

Elderly people, many “tías Marías” [*literally ‘aunt Mary’, a pejorative way of referring to a housewife*], their daughters [*who are*] “ninis and Jessicas” [*nini stands for “ni estudia ni trabaja”, referring to someone who ‘neither works nor studies’; Jessica in Spain is a name associated with working-class girls*], their friends [*who are*] “chonis” [*the equivalent to chav*], and their boyfriends [*who are*] “dealers and gang members” make up the intellectual bulk of this program [*audience*] and of Spain. (lapatata, ABC1)

As seen in these examples, *Sálvame*'s audience is identified as female, working class and elderly, and portrayed as tasteless, uneducated and amoral. Regardless of their social class, the authors of these comments express a middle-class discourse that constructs working classes as “abject” (Tyler, 2008). They distance themselves from these viewers and paint themselves as members of a minority opposed to (and disgusted by) what is imagined to be the ‘mass’. Moreover, *Sálvame*'s viewers are portrayed not only as tasteless individuals but also as bad citizens who are responsible for all the country's problems (see Oliva, 2014):

I think that if these programs had no audience, we [*Spain*] would not have so much unemployment, the percentage spent on R&D would be much higher, and many of the problems that we have would not exist. Okay, there would be other problems, but they would not be third-world problems. (Vicente Martín, EPE1)

I think that garbage of that caliber should be vetoed in any media ... or at least if someone watches it, they should automatically lose their voting rights. (Jorge Padilla, EPE1)

As for the comments that show positive attitudes towards *Sálvame*, they tend to reproduce the frames used by the program. The most common frame is “Market democracy”, which implies that there is no one single criterion for assessing television quality and that choice among the available programs is precisely what guarantees that everyone can watch what they want. These comments frame criticisms and possible legal actions against *Sálvame* in terms of personal taste. They claim that the real reason *Sálvame* is in danger is because there is a group of people who do not like the program and want to impose their taste on others. This frame is built upon reasoning devices that are very different to the ones postulated by the “Trash TV” frame, since the latter views the debate as a matter of respecting the taste hierarchies and socially agreed-upon moral values, appealing not to personal opinions and tastes but to collective aims that are understood to be unquestionable and non-negotiable.

Please don't! Do not remove the program. Because of it, many people have been able to keep on going, even when depressed. They take our jobs, they take our money, they take the roof over our heads, what else ... *Sálvame* is an incentive, at least for me. They want me to watch the news? Nope! LONG LIVE SALVAME. (Inmaculada Collado Hernandez, *Sálvame*'s Facebook page)

As seen in this comment, *Sálvame*'s viewers often see themselves as victims of an unequal society, portraying the hypothetical loss of the program as a new form of impoverishment.

Moreover, they contrast the pleasure of watching the program with the displeasure of watching the news. This opposition is interesting, because news is a socially legitimized genre (it is a “masculine” genre that represents public-sphere issues perceived as socially “relevant”), whereas celebrity gossip programs are not (they are a “feminine” genre that represents private-sphere issues that are socially perceived as “trivial”). This kind of comment can be understood as a challenge to taste hierarchies, a challenge that is also present in the comments whose authors simply claim that they watch *Salvame* (following a campaign promoted by the program: #yoveosalvame [#IwatchSalvame]). These comments make visible something that is socially perceived as shameful and usually hidden. By doing this, they break with the idea that “to have preferences which run against the hierarchy involves people in endless self-justification (‘I know this is rubbish but ...’)” (Brunsdon, 1990, p. 75; see also Ang, 1985).

The authors of the comments defending *Salvame* also paint themselves as victims of an imposition by political authorities. The government and politicians are represented either as paternalistic, violating individual freedom and the principles of democracy, or as wanting to censor contents that run counter to their interests (e.g., denouncing political corruption). Moreover, according to these comments, elites and public authorities do not take into account the benefits and pleasure *Salvame*’s viewers get from watching the program (comments within the “Public service” frame): “What is at stake is the happiness that you [*Salvame*] give us, especially those of us who are sick, and you show us such a good time” (Ana Morales Serrano, *Salvame*’s Facebook Page).

Thus, after analyzing online comments, it is clear that *Salvame* is much more successful than the other actors in imposing its frames and shaping the debate.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed how non-hegemonic cultural practices, in this case viewing celebrity gossip media, are discussed, and has analyzed the social struggles involved in the processes of policing and maintaining cultural hierarchies. Taking a public debate generated by what initially seemed ‘just’ a legal decision as a case study, this article makes a contribution to current research on the relationship between culture and inequality.

The approach adopted in this paper differs from, and complements, the media literacy research approach that is predominant in Spain. Without denying its significance and relevance, we wanted to focus on other complementary aspects, which has allowed us to construct the problem in new and different terms and has also contributed to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, from a methodological standpoint, this study shows how constructionist framing analysis can enrich cultural studies research. Framing adds rigor and systematization to the analysis and helps us better understand and identify the existing power struggles behind debates about television quality and trash TV. In this respect, our analysis “brings back power to framing”, as Carragee and Roefs (2004) claimed.

As we have seen in the analysis, while the media regulatory body and the Spanish press represented the conflict mainly as ‘just’ a legal issue, *Salvame* and social media discussions clearly exposed the connections between regulation, cultural hierarchies and social struggles. These conflicts were the most visible in the social media discussion. On the one hand, the majority of the citizens commenting on the issue in the social media strongly tried to reinforce established cultural hierarchies, using the “Trash TV” frame. In this sense, social media and comments sections are a stage where class and gender stereotypes are re-enacted and reinforced, showing the connections between the cultural and social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 44). On the other hand, *Salvame*’s viewers saw social media as a platform to express their point of view and defend their cultural practices. Nevertheless, they did not make an alternative reading or interpretation of the frames proposed by the program. In their comments, there is no adaptation of meanings to the viewers’ social position but instead a reproduction of *Salvame*’s discourse celebrating cultural relativism.

Sálvame's success in imposing its frames may have to do with the program's strategy of highlighting the social implications of the debates around quality (in contrast with other actors such as CNMC and the press). By doing this, it stirs up (and exploits) the unrest of a social group (working-class women) who know they are looked upon in contempt by hegemonic groups. Thirty years ago, Ang (1985) claimed in *Watching Dallas* that "the stricter the standards of the ideology of mass culture are, the more they will be felt as oppressive and the more attractive the populist positions will become" (p. 115). We should question whether the success of *Sálvame*'s populist discourse is connected to the hegemony of the "Trash TV" and "Country of uncultured people" frames.

The ambiguous position of the program is also worth noting. On the one hand, *Sálvame* has a subordinate position within the media (at the bottom of the cultural hierarchies) and presents itself as an advocate of subordinate social groups (elderly working-class women) by challenging the authority of dominant classes and 'denouncing' cultural impositions. On the other hand, *Sálvame* (and Mediaset) is a powerful media actor that defends a neoliberal agenda (deregulation, privatization, individualization) through the "Market democracy" frame. By doing this, *Sálvame*'s neoliberal discourse hijacks the progressive and emancipating potential of denouncing the relationship between cultural and social hierarchies. Ultimately, the program's discourse does not help empower its audience but instead contributes to locking them into a subordinate position by failing to call for the redistribution of cultural capital.

Regarding the limitations of this research, the sample is not exhaustive because it comes from the social media (Facebook) and newspapers' comments section. This has conditioned the results, as social media discussions tend towards polarization and negativity (del Vicario, Zollo, Caldarelli, Scala, and Quattrociocchi, 2017; Williams, McMurray, Kurz, and Hugo Lambert, 2015). Nevertheless, the comments analyzed are indeed valuable, since they contain opinions from people who were interested enough in the issue to comment on it. In this regard, we did not find two segregated communities ("echo chambers") because comments both for and against *Sálvame* were found in all sources ("open forum"). In this case, polarization, emotionality and negativity may be a consequence of the interaction between already polarized individuals. In any case, all of these aspects need further research.

Finally, our article connects with several dilemmas that have always surrounded cultural studies (Corner, 1994; Storey, 2009, pp. 213-235). We are aware that questioning and denouncing taste hierarchies as socially-constructed power mechanisms can easily lead to absolute relativism and cultural populism. Our aim is not to uncritically celebrate *Sálvame* or deny the necessity of media regulation but instead to prove how arguments on cultural hierarchies often pervade the political field in a naturalized way. As we have observed, people with "bad taste" are equated with bad citizens, so cultural capital is used to legitimize social and political inequalities and even to question whether these people should have the right to vote. We think it is important to emphasize these transference mechanisms from the cultural to the political field at a time when events such as the triumph of Brexit in the UK or Trump in the USA are bringing these issues to the forefront. In this sense, *Sálvame*'s case is a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon in Spain.

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Appendix

Table 1: Sample of newspapers and online comments.

Newspaper	Article	Date	No. Comments	Website
<i>El País</i>	Competencia pide que Sálvame Diario se adapte al horario infantil. (EPA1)	17 Dec 14	85	http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/12/17/actualidad/1418813623896678.html

Newspaper	Article	Date	No. Comments	Website
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	Mediaset reprocha a CNMC el aviso a Sálvame y no a los “culebrones” de la competencia. (LV1)	17 Dec 14	1	http://www.lavanguardia.com/television/20141217/54421927658/mediaset-reprocha-a-cnmc-el-aviso-a-salvame-y-no-a-culebrones-competencia.html
	Usuarios de la Comunicación aplauden al requerimiento de la CNMC a Mediaset. (LV2)	17 Dec 14	0	http://www.lavanguardia.com/television/20141217/54421546863/usuarios-de-la-comunicacion-aplauden-el-requerimiento-de-la-cnmc-a-mediaset.html
	Padres Católicos, satisfechos con el requerimiento de la CNMC a Mediaset. (LV3)	19 Dec 14	0	http://www.lavanguardia.com/television/20141219/54421997219/padres-catolicos-satisfechos-por-el-requerimiento-de-la-cnmc-a-mediaset.html
	Jorge Javier Vázquez: Asociaciones ultraconservadoras quieren destruir Sálvame Diario. (LV4)	17 Dec 14	201	http://www.lavanguardia.com/television/programas/20141217/54421553065/jorge-javier-vazquez-salvame-ataque-destruir.html
<i>El Periódico</i>	Toque de atención a Mediaset por Sálvame. (EPE1)	17 Dec 14	11	http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/tele/toque-atencion-mediaset-por-salvame-3778622
			219 (Facebook)	http://es-es.facebook.com/elperiodico.catalunya/posts/10152858296271544?comment_id=10152866279881544&offset=50&total_comments=276
	Sálvame ya no se salva. (EPE2)	19 Dec 14	29	http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/tele/salvame-salva-3784192
470 (Facebook)			http://es-es.facebook.com/elperiodico.catalunya/posts/10152861343226544?comment_id=10152875806696544&offset=200&t	

Newspaper	Article	Date	No. Comments	Website
				<u>otal_comments=680</u>
	Sálvame con las redes. (EPE3)	1 Jan 15	19	http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/tele/salvame-con-las-redes-3829822
<i>ABC</i>	Competencia da a “Sálvame” un ultimátum de diez días. (ABC1)	17 Dec 14	14	
<i>El Mundo</i>	Sálvame tampoco es adecuado para niños mayores de 7 años. (EM1)	17 Dec 14	83	http://www.elmundo.es/television/2014/12/17/549136cfca4741fc448b456e.html
	Jorge Javier tras el serio aviso de Competencia a Sálvame: “Quieren destruir nuestra familia”. (EM2)	17 Dec 14	208	http://www.elmundo.es/television/2014/12/17/5491cad7e2704e55088b456c.html
<i>Sálvame's Facebook</i>				
<i>Sálvame</i>	Jorge Javier Vázquez: “No solo está en juego la desaparición de un programa, ténganlo claro, en estos momentos están en juego muchas más cosas.”	18 Dec 14	2,156	http://es-la.facebook.com/salvame.programa/posts/1010655952294231?comment_id=1010659652293861&offset=0&total_comments=2172

Table 2: Frames showing a negative attitude towards *Sálvame*.

Frame package	Cultural theme	Reasoning devices					Examples of framing devices
		Problem definition	Causal interpretation	Consequences	Moral values involved	Possible solutions	
1. The law is the law	There is a rule and it must be obeyed.	<i>Sálvame</i> does not abide by the legal regulations on child protection.	<i>Sálvame</i> 's age rating does not follow the criteria specified in the law.	<i>Sálvame</i> has broken the law.	Legality must be respected.	Change <i>Sálvame</i> 's age rating and consequently change the program's broadcasting time slot / Change <i>Sálvame</i> 's contents.	<i>Child protection time slot, legalese.</i>
2. Social demand	Regulation and the actions by the political authorities reflect social demands.	The regulatory body did not act against <i>Sálvame</i> until society had been calling for action for some time.	There is fear of acting against Mediaset. The public authorities either do not do their job properly or they do it too late.	Society is at last satisfied / Society remains disappointed because the regulatory body has intervened too little too late.	Cowardice. Public authorities must respond to social demands.	Exemplary punishment for the program. Very high fines. Dare to eliminate the program.	<i>It was about time. Finally!</i>
3. Trash TV	There are low-quality TV programs that are harmful to society.	<i>Sálvame</i> is trash TV.	<i>Sálvame</i> 's contents are distasteful, it has Z-list celebrities, insults, bad manners, immorality...	It harms people, especially the less educated and children.	Taste hierarchies and TV quality. Regulation as protection of children linked to education.	Eliminate the program, change the program's time slot, enact laws that prevent vulnerable people from being exposed	<i>Trash, shit, recycle, bad taste, gaudy, stupefies, harmful program.</i>

						to <i>Sálvame</i> .	
4. A country of uncultured people	Cultural consumption is a proof of a person's values and morality.	A lot of people watch <i>Sálvame</i> and like it.	Lack of education: viewers are responsible for the program's existence.	Third world, unworthy society: corruption, poor-quality democracy... We are getting further away from Europe.	Culture, good taste, respect for cultural hierarchies.	More education.	<i>Gossipy housewives, chavs, ignorant people, mass, uncultured, hicks, That's how it is with Spain.</i>

Table 3: Frames showing a positive attitude towards *Sálvame*.

Frame package	Cultural theme	Reasoning devices					Examples of framing devices
		Problem definition	Causal interpretation	Consequences	Moral values involved	Possible solutions	
5. <i>Sálvame</i> is “the wrong man”	Respect for legality.	<i>Sálvame</i> has received an injunction even though it abides by the laws.	The regulatory body has it in for <i>Sálvame</i> .	Mediaset will prove that it follows the law.	Legality.	Reconsider the injunction.	<i>Legal regularity. Accuse. They are not true. Allegedly.</i>
6. Arbitrariness	Law / quality criteria are not applied the same way for everybody.	Mediaset has received criticism and an injunction from the CNMC, but A3Media, violent films and cartoons, bullfighting and	Desire to harm Mediaset / People's hypocrisy / Jealousy of other TV stations.	Mediaset is suffering from unfair treatment by both the CNMC and the people compared to A3Media and other programs.	Impartiality.	Penalize the others as well or do not penalize Mediaset / Get rid of a regulatory body that is not impartial.	<i>Nothing is said about soap operas. There are programs that are much more harmful than <i>Sálvame</i>. Coherence.</i>

		TV news have not.					
7. Censorship	Ideological social control.	<i>Salvame</i> is a victim of ultraconservative censorship and power abuse.	The regulatory body is influenced by ultraconservative viewers' associations which dislike <i>Salvame</i> for its progressive values / <i>Salvame</i> criticizes the government.	A broad swath of Spanish society could become "orphaned" because of a minority. First <i>Salvame</i> is persecuted and then what?	Ultraconservatism of complainant associations that have links with power, vs. progressivism and freedom of expression.	Reduce the power of viewers' associations / Do not regulate.	<i>Ultraconservative associations. Hidden interests. Dictatorship. Censorship. Freedom of expression.</i>
8. Market Democracy	The diversity of television channels makes content regulation unnecessary. Audience ratings legitimize a program's existence and all cultural tastes are acceptable.	There are people who do not like the program and they are trying to impose their taste. <i>Salvame</i> is just one of many options.	Elitism.	Going against the majority is undemocratic.	Market diversity and choice. Everybody is responsible for their own actions. Denial of cultural hierarchies.	Respect others. Keep the program and do not regulate TV contents.	<i>You don't need to be told what you can and cannot watch. Respect. If you don't like it, don't watch it. If you don't like it, change the channel. Absolute leadership.</i>
9. Entertainment is also a public service	TV should provide society with a good service.	<i>Salvame</i> entertains many people who live alone and have	<i>Salvame</i> is humor and entertainment.	<i>Salvame</i> contributes to the well-being of many people.	Well-being, entertainment.	Do not eliminate the program.	<i>It keeps many old and ill people company.</i>

		problems.					
10. Just entertainment	TV has no effects on the audience because it is just entertainment.	Some people take TV too seriously.	Some people wrongly think that television is more than entertainment.	It is unnecessary to regulate <i>Sálvame</i> .	TV is nothing more than entertainment. Social functions should not be expected from it.	Do not waste time regulating <i>Sálvame</i> .	<i>Pure entertainment.</i>