[en] People on Media Effects. An Exploratory Study of People's Theorization on the Influence of Mass Media

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Abstract. In the last sixty years there has been an accumulative theoretical progress on communication research, in particular on the effects of media on people (Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011). However, little attention has been paid to the evolution of the perceived influence of media on people, except in the case of the third-person effect (Davison, 1983). By means of focus group method, this study shows how people is capable to reflect on media effects and suggest theorizations that can be linked to almost all of the media effects theories (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). We observe how critical perspectives about media manipulation persist across generations. We also demonstrate that people are aware of some of the variables that can moderate the influence of media on people. However, the study also shows that despite being capable of theorizing, people are not aware of their own biases, and the third-person effect. emerges spontaneously.
Keywords: Media influence; perceptions; third-person effect; media manipulation.

[es] Sobre los efectos de los medios. Un estudio exploratorio de las teorizaciones de los ciudadanos sobre la influencia de los medios de comunicación de masas

Resumen. En los últimos sesenta años se ha producido un gran progreso teórico en la investigación de la comunicación, en particular de los efectos de los medios en la gente (Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011). Sin embargo, se ha prestado poca atención a la evolución de la influencia percibida de los medios sobre las personas, excepto en el caso del efecto de tercera persona (Davison, 1983). Este estudio muestra cómo la gente es capaz de reflexionar sobre los efectos mediáticos y sugerir teorizaciones que pueden estar vinculadas a casi todas las teorías de los efectos de los medios (Neuman y Guggenheim, 2011). Observamos cómo persisten las perspectivas críticas sobre la manipulación de los medios de comunicación entre generaciones. También se demuestra que las personas son conscientes de algunas de las variables que pueden moderar la influencia de los medios de comunicación sobre las personas. Sin embargo, el estudio también muestra que, a pesar de ser capaces de teorizar, las personas no son conscientes de sus propios sesgos, y el efecto de tercera persona surge de manera espontánea.

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1. Introduction

Media effects have been one of the core ideas of communication research since its beginning. The corpus in media effects research documents a wide range of influences, from limited to large effects (Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011). However, this research has become fragmented over time and there seems to be no common goals nor general theory that unite scholars in their efforts to analyse the impact of media messages (Craig, 1999). Among the previously mentioned range of influences, Neuman & Guggenheim (2011) identified 6 stages or clusters and 29 theories of communication.

The first stage included those theories that considered media as having an unmediated influence on people; the second stage was that of the active audience theories, where attention was only paid to individuals and the characteristics that could moderate the impact of media, but not to any characteristic of their role in the social structure; the third stage incorporated social context theories (knowledge gap and third-person effect, among others); the forth was that of societal and media theories and the accumulative effects over long periods of time (cultivation and media hegemony); the fifth was that of interpretative theories such as agenda-setting, framing and priming; and, finally, the last one was the still underdeveloped stage of new media theories. Types of effects have also been classified. Potter (2011) defines nine different issues of media effects research, i. e., type of effect, level of effect, change, influence, pervasiveness, type of media, intentionality, timing of effect and measurability. The same author tries to clarify what do we have to understand by media effect, since there are dozens and even hundreds of different definitions that can be found in the literature of communication research. For Potter (2011), a media effect is a change in an outcome, i.e., behaviour, attitude, belief, cognition —within an individual or a social entity— that is due to the influence following exposure to mass media messages. Potter links the issues of media effect with the theories on media effects. For instance, he states that theories such as cultivation, agenda-setting, priming or framing deal with long-term effects that shape people's behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, cognition; third-person effect deals with conflicting first person and third person beliefs developed over the long term.

Berger and Chaffee (1988) considered that all mass communication studies more or less explicitly try to explain the effects of the media in one form or

another, arguing that such concerns are the main driver in the development of the discipline. In fact, the discipline, in how it has traditionally been taught in most universities, is based on conceptions regarding media effects marking differences between theoretical perspectives and historical stages. The first pre-conceptions of a powerful and manipulative media — a hypodermic needle or magic bullet for the so-called society of the masses — came to be replaced by the paradigm of limited media effects, of which Lazarsfeld was the main exponent (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McFee, 1955). Mass communication research changed academic perceptions of media effects by emphasizing the role of primary groups and opinion leaders in opinion change and decision making processes (Katz, Lazarsfeld, 1956). Subsequently, new theories such as agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) and the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) called into question assumptions regarding limited media effects. The hegemony of television and its penetration in Western households, in parallel with the burgeoning literature on the long-term effects of media exposure, forced a rethinking of the Lazarsfeld paradigm. However, many scholars still discredited those who argued that media effects were large, since a vast majority of researches failed to show sizeball enough effects to reach the conventionally accepted level of significance (McGuire, 1986). Finally, technological change in the media, the consolidation of the Internet as a main channel of communication, individuals self-selective exposure to media messages, audience fragmentation and the resulting reinforcement of previous beliefs, attitudes and behaviours have led scholars to wonder whether we might be on the verge of a new era of limited media effects (Bennet and Iyengar, 2008). As already pointed out by Neuman and Guggenheim (2011), the continuous shift between minimal and significant effects approaches has functioned as an impediment for theorizing on communication research, despite its obvious narrative strength.

Despite the evolution observed in the theorization on media effects throughout history and the different perspectives and schools attuned to one or another version or paradigm, there is no evidence to indicate that changes in our understanding of media effects do affect the way people perceive these effects. Experience and, broadly speaking, the scientific literature indicate that a large proportion of the population considers the media to be manipulative; furthermore, estimates as to media effects reflect the hypothesis of a powerful media, in line with what has traditionally been referred to as the hypodermic needle theory.

Perhaps the theory that has most focused on this perception of media influence is the third-person effect, first described by Davison (1983). The third person effect uses variables of perception of the influence of media to explain certain behaviors, mostly aimed at correcting or restricting the alleged adverse effects of media messages on subjects (Sun, Shen and Pan, 2008; Guerrero-Solé, Besalú & López-González, 2014). According to Davison (1983), individuals tend to overestimate media influence on others, and, conversely, to underestimate media influence on themselves; furthermore, one of the first conclusions regarding the third person effect was that this difference in perceptions of the media is universal, that is, it is unaffected by the cultural affiliation of individuals. In general terms, academic research has shown that the perception gap in media effects occurs for content that is considered socially undesirable. Several factors moderate the intensity of the

third person effect. Leaving aside demographic variables, a key factor behind the distinction between perceptions of media influence on self and others is the very definition of the other — what is referred to as social distance. Different studies show that the greater the perceived social distance, the greater the difference in perceptions (Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber and McLeod, 1999; White, 1997; Brosius and Engel, 1996; Scharrer, 2002; Meirick, 2005a; Zhong, 2009). However, studies on the third-person effect are mostly based on surveys in which people is asked about the perceived influence of contents on others and on themselves, but do not care about other kind of perceptions related to media effects theorization.

This paper aims to analyse the emergence of media effects theories among people using focus groups as methodology and social distance between generations as a triggering factor. Following Neuman's and Guggenheim's (2011) classification of media effects theories, our objective is to show to what extent people are able to elaborate theorizations that explain the influence of media effects on people, and whether third-person effect perceptions emerge spontaneously.

2. Sample and Method

The research described here was part of a project that examined how the media influence the construction of meanings referring to culture and civilization. Eight focus groups organized for the project had the specific goal of analysing Spanish viewers' perceptions of their own and other cultures, interpretations of televised news stories and perceptions of the influence of news regarding meanings attached to culture and civilization.

The characteristics of the focus groups are summarized in Table 1. Discussions took place in July 2014 in sessions of about 2 hours. The young groups included people between 20 and 30 years old, and the adult groups were formed by people between 40 and 60 years old. All the participants were born in Spain, and so were their parents. 6% of them went to elementary school, 45,5% to secondary school, and 48,5% had higher education. We did no special differences in terms of other sociodemographic characteristics, and no other psychological or psychosocial traits were taken into account. None of the participants in the focus groups had any training or previous structured knowledge on the issues related to media influence on individuals.

Table 1. Focus group characteristics

Code	City	Profile	Women	Men
G01	Barcelona	Young people	5	5
G02	Barcelona	Adults	5	5
G03	Barcelona	Young people	5	1
G04	Madrid	Adults	4	5
G05	Madrid	Young people	3	5
G06	Barcelona	Adults	5	4
G07	Seville	Adults	5	3
G08	Seville	Young people	5	2

The focus groups had two parts: firstly, participants were exposed to three news stories and were impelled to debate about them; secondly, there were asked to analyze TV discourse and its influence on people. In particular, we asked the adults to talk about how media influences the young people and vice versa. The questions addressed to participants were the following:

— To what extent TV news have an impact on your perception of reality?
— To what extent TV news framing (we used the term focus) has an influence on your attitudes towards a given fact?
— What would be the influence of TV news on the others (young/adult group)?

The 3 news stories used as stimuli were about: (1) confrontations between the police and people selling goods in the street without a license, broadcast on Telecinco, one of the major private television networks in Spain; (2) an internal police notice forbidding the use of indiscriminate raids based on ethnicity or immigration status, broadcast on the First Public Channel, La 1; and (3) a story about a country-western festival that took place in Madrid. All three news stories depicted controversial situations related to interculturality.

Normally studies analysing perceptions use surveys asking participants about the perceived effects of exposure to certain content on themselves and on others. The survey methodology has been called into question, however, as some authors consider that it is the methodology itself that causes the effect to emerge due, among other reasons, to the vagueness of the definition of the other (Perloff, 1999).

3. Findings

Our study showed that the main hypothesis of the research was confirmed. People do not only expressed their opinions about media influence, but also tried to posit and suggest some theorization about the causes of this influence, in case it existed. Thus, participants supported their assertions on media influence with ad hoc theoretical constructs that can be equate to the main theories of media effects. In order to compare people's perceptions and theorization, we arranged participants contributions following Neuman's and Guggenheim's (2011) six-tage model.

3.1. Stage 1. Persuasion and Manipulation

The most generalized opinion of the participants was that the media had great power over individuals. This partly corroborates the conclusions of Perloff (1993) regarding media schemas: individuals tend to apply a kind of magic bullet theory according to which others are inevitably influenced by powerful and manipulative media (Perloff, 1993; Salwen, 1998). And also confirms McGuire's (1986) postulate about the persistence of the myth of sizable media impact. Thus, many of the participants posited that media strongly influential, and manipulative.

M1GD3: We are totally influenced. And this manipulation is what makes us like lambs, led here and there.

H1GD3: The media [...] impose opinions, I think this is their goal, in a very subtle way they create opinions, fashions and trends. The view that the media converts people into passive individuals (lambs) was complemented by a view of pernicious manipulation by the media. Some of the participants believed that the media corrupted and transmitted negative values, in consonance with the old mass society theory (Chakhotin, 1971 [1932]).

H1GD5: The media corrupt us, they distort positive values, I think, they transmit countervalues. This was especially the case of trash television content, which has a soporific effect similar to drugs —the narcotizing dysfunction (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2000 [1957])— and encourages apathy and conformism. People describe themselves as idiots and addicts when exposed to TV contents, and appeal to the common place of describing television as the idiot box:

M3GD5: [These are programmes that] contribute nothing. There are no values, nothing, they're just a waste of time... I mean, braindead, you're there watching them like an idiot...

H2GD5: Some people are very addicted to this kind of thing.

M3GD5: Because you come from work [...] and you think to yourself, let watch it!

H1GD5: The idiot box. We may note that participants do not only pointed at the others when qualifying people as addicts and passive, but also to themselves. However, adults tended to express the opinion that young people were brainwashed by the media and that this would affect their voting choices. The adults believed that media influence on young people endangered society, since they would be unable to take autonomous decisions.

M3GD5: But it's scary, because a generation of voters is coming up that have been brainwashed with a lot of things. Along with this this, adults perceived a soporific effect on young people accompanied by their distancing from what is considered reality, an argument that could be linked to Tönnies theories about the consequences of the changes in the social structure in modern societies (Tönnies, 2001 [1887]).

H1GD5: You ask a child of today where supermarket steaks come from and they will tell you that they come from the supermarket.

M1GD5: They are a little stupefied by the media and social networks and I think they aren't really aware of anything.

3.2. Stage 2. Individual and Limited Effects Paradigm. Selective Exposure

However, the all-powerful media effects was not the only theorization about the influence of media contents posited by participants. While acknowledging that the influence of the media is pervasive, other participants qualified this influence by defending their beneficial effects and neutrality.

H1GD4: Media influence is huge, nobody here knew what the single premium insurance was and they were even talking about it at the market.. there is

influence, but it's also extremely positive, because people are also educated by the media, that's clear. This perspective is opposed to that of mass media theories and expresses a still surviving hope in the positive effects of media. Besides this, participants also elaborated some theoritzation about the factors that can moderate the influence of media, in accordance to the limited effects paradigm (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1956). Among these factors, people claimed that the access to various information sources for fact-checking purposes would allow them to obtain a better idea of events and developments.

H2GD2: If you view different channels and read newspapers of different leanings you can compare and draw conclusions. The credibility of the TV channel was also considered a moderator of the process of influence.

M1GD7: Television influences you when you listen to news, but I think, depending on the channel you watch cast serious doubts on what it is said. Thus, audience is also considered by some of the participants as taking an active role in the process of communication. People check, compare and belief or not the contents of media. And people also selects what they want to watch, depending on the necessities they want to satisfy, in accordance with the theory of uses and gratifications (Katz, Blumler & Guretvich, 1974). Thus, adults stereotypical images of young people based on their apathy, disinterest and lack of awareness, are balanced with other perspectives that consider that they watch what they want to watch, despite not having a critical view of things.

H4GD5: Children and teenagers obviously seek out what interests them — their bands, their fashions, their football team. They are extremely aware of what matters to them but do not have a critical view of society.

H2GD4: They are living their own reality. These dramatic events come on television and naturally they don't want to see them, there's no good news. If it was us though, if we were 17 again, we wouldn't dream of turning on the news either.

M3GD4: I have a son of 16 and the news is the last thing he'll watch. For him what happens in the world is of no importance. He has other interests… sports on Cuatro [channel]... he soaks it all up and knows all there is to know. Thus, people perceive the others as active individuals in selecting the contents they want to be exposed to, but still consider that the outcome of the exposition is negative, in particular among young people.

3.3. Stage 3. Social Context Theories. Age and Education. The emergence of the third-person effect

The moderating factor most pointed to by the participants —both young people and adults— was age. Both groups agreed that children and elderly people were both greatly influenced by the media and that the latter tended to consider news programmes to be absolutely credible. Some participants —adopting a paternalistic mode of behaviour (Rojas, 2010; Guerrero-Solé, Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths, 2017)— even said that they warned their older relatives not to believe what they heard and saw.

M2GD3: My grandmother believes everything, everything. I have to be the one to tell her not to. The situation was similar regarding children and their ability to discern what was real from what was not real.

M3GD3: Just like children and teenagers, crazy about bands... maybe that's not life and Justin Bieber is not as cool as they think. Even more elaborate theories emerged, suggesting the existence of manipulated individuals according to age brackets.

H2GD2: I think there are three groups that can be manipulated: the very young, the very old, and then, perhaps, us in the middle. In the group of adults, experience was considered an essential factor in handling manipulation, as it made a person more critical and selective.

H3GD2: I don't think the same way about certain things as 15 years ago. When you are 20, you soak up everything and don't question much. Now you have more experience and see things with more perspective, more calmly. You become more selective. But perhaps the moderating factor that most focus group participants insisted on was education. Older people believed that younger people were inexperienced and lacked cultural baggage, and, as individuals without critical capacity, were susceptible.

M1GD2: They watch other stuff, whereas we already have a background that we relate to, but they go for other stories [...]. Young people are more easily influenced (...) Most do not have critical or analytical capacities.

M2GD4: But I think it also has a lot to do with their education. [...] My son is a NEET [not in education, employment or training] [...] So how discerning can he be if he knows nothing. There it depends on the person, if they're at university or already working, there's a great difference. Linked to this perception, knowledge gap theory (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1970; Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1975) is also proposed. Knowledge gap theory states that the social structure determines the knowedge people extract from media. Education is one of the determinants and one of the most common variables studied within the knowledge gap theory (Liu & Eveland, 2005) of the gap. In this sense, some adults consider that their children's education and environment enable them to be critical of the media.

H1GD7: In my case, with children of 23 and 27, I don't know, I discuss things with them, my daughter is at university, she has other issues, she sees inequalities... Are all young people the same? No, it depends on their environment... my daughter's friends see things differently. Finally, a two-step flow-like theory is also proposed by the participants. The theory first introduced by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) stated that personal contacts had a greater influence than media on the process of decision making (Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999). The theory was later complemente by Rogers' (1976) diffusion of innovations theory. Thus, participants relativize the direct influence of media contents, and stress the fact the people is mostly influenced by people.

H3GD1: I think it does have an influence, but not just on you directly, but through the person who mediates [...] who is also influenced by the culture imposed by television.

However, people that influence people are considered to be also influenced by the media. This perspective links to the next stage in Neuman's and Guggenheim's classification.

3.4. Stage 4. Societal and Media Theories

Long-term effects are also considered by participants. The influence of the media over time is also seen as an obstacle to any change in perspective over time, given that — in line with the cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998) — stereotypes and prejudices shaped in the past tend to persist.

> M1GD1: We've watched television since we were small, and even without you knowing it, things are put in your head, long before we have the ability to think, when we are like animals [...]. As you age you'll go on changing, but the prejudices remain, and many people accept things unquestioningly … sectors of society that do not have the opportunity because they have not studied [...].

> M1GD1: It does have an influence. When you are born, you are like a straight line. And you have baggage where you put things. Television partly fills your baggage. [...] It is a common place that when you grow up your mind changes, but there are people who do not change because they always move in the same contexts and always think the same. I really do think that television influences people. And even though news may be mediated, for instance, by parents, there is no escape since they are also influenced by the media, as already mentioned in the previous section. It links to cultivation research and media contribution to people's conceptions of social reality (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

> M2GD1: Parents also have influence, but parents are themselves influenced by television. The type of media was also revealed to be a key factor in the manipulation process. Participants generally believed that the influence of the different media varied, and also the trust that could be placed in them. Television was considered the most manipulative medium, for a wide range of reasons, with individuals proffering various pseudo-theories, such as that television did not offer the same choice as the press:

> M3GD2: I think television is one of the most influential media. But when you buy press, you choose what to buy according to its social and political bent. Other theories focus more on the emotional aspects or on media bias. A certain sympathy for the radio is evident, despite it being marked ideologically. Radio is considered to be the most honest medium and, therefore, the least manipulative. This aspect is related to the impact of the media in terms of the perceived influence of content (Guerrero-Solé, 2016; Guerrero-Solé & López-González, 2016)

> M3GD5: Radio seems more personal; I think it reflects personal experiences more.

> M1GD5: I just adore radio.

> H4GD5: It seems to me that the most marked is the press, then radio, then television. Because with radio, you know exactly what you'll hear when you

choose to tune in. You know the day's news and how it will be related on each station.

Cantril and Allport (1935) made the first contribution to media comparison. Despite being an underexplored field in communication research, this approach was later followed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet (1948). They concluded that radio was more influential than newspapers during political campaigns. Other works (McClure & Patterson 1976; Katz, Adoni, & Parness 1977; DeFleur, Davenport, Cronin, & DeFleur 1992; Wanta, 1997; Tewksbury & Althaus 2000; Eveland & Dunwoody 2002; Eveland, Seo & Marton, 2002) have also found different effects across diferent media types.

Another factor proposed to explain the behaviour of older individuals was the context in which they were raised. For one thing, the past tends to be idealized and perspectives on the capacity and intention of media manipulation are naive. The past is also viewed as less corrupt and media discourse as neutral and truthful, despite the fact that Spain was under a severe dictatorship.

> H2GD5: Maybe they come from the past, where not all was so corrupt, and maybe they still think that television does tell the truth.
> M4GD3: It also depends on life experiences and the time period you live. It's not the same to have lived in a democracy as during a dictatorship.
> These last considerations links with the current perception that, despite living under dictatorships or authoritarian regimes, in the past media explained the truth, while we nowadays live in post-truth societies (Harsin, 2015). However, people tend to consider elder people as being captive of the past, in particular because of their trust in the state-owned TV newscasts:
> M3GD4: Yes, when I'm at my mother's — she'll be 92 years old soon — when we're watching another channel, when the news is due to come on she asks me to switch to TVE1 [Spain's oldest public television channel].
> H2GD4: For my mother it's always the same channel, even if I'm watching something else, if it's 3 pm [news time] I have to change.
> This habit is interpreted almost as an addiction of which the person is unaware. People tend to consider these newscast as being the most marked ideologically and therefore the most manipulative, and qualify its information as a dispatch.
> M2GD4: My mother has watched the news on TVE1 all her life. That's not a news broadcast, that's just a dispatch. And... quiet everybody! It's news time, switch over to TVE1, huh? They insist on switching to TVE1 and are very loyal to it.
> M1GD4: As if time had stopped and everything remained the same.

3.5. Stage 5. Interpretative Effects Theory. Framing

The aforementioned post-truth concept is also linked to the interpretative effects of media. Some of the participants consider that media does not depict reality as it is. Personal experience and contact with reality are considered to be crucial factors in

dealing with media influence, since the disparity between what is shown and what is seen in reality can serve as a protection form this influence.

> H2GD1: I'm a staunch defender of the idea that television has no influence. [...] A childhood experience made me realize early on that reality was not as represented by the media. People are generally aware of the agenda-setting function of media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), the process of information framing and the fact that mass media coverage depend on their editorial lines (Larcinese, Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; Kepplinger & Lemke, 2016). In line with the post-truth paradigm, they consider that these editorial lines deprive media of objectivity.
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> H4GD5: The problem is that the media have marked editorial lines. Objective journalism does not exist.
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> H1GD5: Spanish press looks like a comic. If you buy ABC (right-winged) you think you live in one country, and if you read El País (left-winged) you think you are living in another one.
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> M2GD5. I happens the same in TV. On the contrary, other participants emphasized the credibility of, and their affinity with, the source — as more important than the channel transmitting the message.
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> H2GD5: I think we need to focus more on who's speaking rather than the channel, because you might be watching a television channel where there's dialogue, a talk show with several guests, and you might very much like how one of them thinks, but may not agree with the ideology of the channel… and this happens a lot. In general, people considered that media only show what they want to show and their depiction of reality is highly conditioned by their interests.
>
> M2GD1. What news do they show? They just take 5 seconds, they say just one thing, they do not entirely describe the situation, and they even don't care about that.
>
> H1GD7. It's not the same to listen to SER (left-wing radio station) that to listen to COPE (right-wing). For instance, COPE has a program on economy, and they say that the labor reform is perfect… while SER is more critical… Finally, some of the participants express their desire of having neutral, non-biased media.
>
> H2GD1. I don't like that people think that media are neutral. [...] What bothers me is that there is always a double message, and I would like the news to be neutral, well written, well done, but neutral.
>
> H1GD1. I think that this is impossible.

3.6. Stage 6. New Media Theories

Some participants made the opposite point. Belying the alleged neutrality of the media in the past, the contemporary diversity of channels was, in fact, a guarantee of credibility.

> M1GD6: For years people were totally manipulated, now thankfully there's the Internet, where you can check many things. There are sites where people

explain that what's been said is a lie. Here again is yet another factor that helps explain why media context is considered more harmful today than in the past: the quality of content. One participant suggested that contemporary cartoons did not have the quality of before So, despite having a greater choice, the choice was simply one between different kinds of junk content.

M2GD4: Young people now have so much to choose from.

M3GD4: But what cartoons are there that are nice to look at? Sponge Bob? Shin Chan? Doraemon? While trust was considered fundamental when it came to television for children, there was an absolute distrust of current children's content, despite some confidence in the specialized channels.

M1GD5: There are specialized channels that only have children's programme from start to end and there your children are safe.

H3GD5: But the generation that counts is our own, the one that will be able to change existing structures a little. The pattern is repeated here of individuals overestimating the importance of their own generation.

4. Discussion

Although there is a common agreement about the fact that people negotiates the meanings of the media messages (Hall, 1980; McLeod & Shah, 2015), scholars have paid little attention to the analysis of to what extent people are able to elaborate theories on media effects. In this sense, our work goes beyond classical approaches to media literacy. Media literacy is understood as the ability to access, produce and critically analyze media messages (Aufderheide, 1993; Hobbs, 1998). Media literacy works have been mainly focused on how audiences negotiate meanings of media messages in relation to socioeconomic statuses and cultural contexts (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Participants are in general aware of the fact that media messages are constructions (Thoman & Jolls, 2003). We were not only interested on people's critical reading of media, but mainly in the effects they perceived from media contents. Since media literacy is an important question in our societies (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000), the intersection between media literacy and media effects can contribute to a refinement of our knowledge about the cognitive processes of active audiences.

Almost all the participants were able to recognize that media depictions of reality highly depend on their editorial line, and that people who watch different channels are exposed to different constructions of reality. Thus, when watching TV news, people are aware of media ideological biases, at least to those related to politics. Inoculation theory (McGuire, 1964) could partially explain some of the critical appointments done by participants about the reduction of the influence of media messages on themselves. However, inoculation theory is also associated with powerful effects theorizations and the hypodermic-needle model (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015).

Scholars interested on the process of negotiation of the meanings conveyed by media need to take into account how audiences select, interpret, accept or reject, critisize or disseminate media messages (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012). People's perception of the effects of media would also need to be considered if we want to

better and deeper understand this process. Thus, people's perception of the influence of media should move from the specific frame and the often to narrow questions of the third-person effect, and be extended to those perceptions related to any of the media effects theorizations we know.

Our study also shows that Neuman & Guggenheim's (2011) classification of media effects can be useful to establish what are the different perceptions of people on the influences of media on the others, on themselves and on individuals in general. We may acknowledge that the perception of media as manipulative and cancerous is still the main media schema (Perloff, 1999) people use to evaluate the impact of media, but the conception of media as powerful and manipulative tools has been also a constant in the discipline (Noelle-Neumann, 1973; Hall, 1982; Peter, 2004; Couldry, 2012;)

The focus groups also show that people are capable of constructing other theorizations that induce other people to reflection. Thus, a collaborative knowledge emerge on the effects of media. We have shown that people are able to introduce nuances in their perceptions of media effects and elaborate scientific-like explanations of the way media work and influences society.

However, one of the most relevant results of our research is that, despite people may be capable of theorizing about media effects, third-person effect and the biases associated to it emerge espontanously and inveterately in almost all the focus groups. Corroborating most studies on perceptions of media influence, participants in our focus groups tended to overestimate media influence on others while underestimating, or even ignoring, media influence in themselves. We observed that participants, integrated within their own age group, tended to argue that other age groups were more influenced by the media than their own age group. However, they proposed different factors that explained the disparity between perceived influences. Adults perceived younger people to be inexperienced and older people to be vulnerable to media influence. According to Weinstein (1980), experience is a factor that influences people's beliefs about the likelihood of a particular event happening (if negative, the probability decreases, and if positive, the probability increases). This observation can also be applied to the influence of the media. If this influence is considered to be negative, adults tend to believe that they are less affected, thereby enhancing the third person effect. However, if the influence is seen as positive, the opposite happens and the first person effect emerges.

Our study would indicate that this trend was reversed when it came to elderly people, who were viewed as slaves to custom and as unwary of the pitfalls of the media. Young people considered themselves to be much more expert than adults and suggested that this made them less vulnerable to media effects. Young people believe adults to lack critical capacity because they have insufficient knowledge to develop the kind of objective attitude that would be informed by data obtained and compared from a variety of sources. On the other hand, adults believe that young people do not have a critical capacity because, despite having the education and knowledge to be able to access various sources through the new media, they lack experience. We may note that fact that young people are attributed with a lack of interest in the news is not prejudice, but a corroborated fact (Rauch, 2010).

Despite the obvious stereotypes and perceptions in both adults and young people, the arguments regarding reasons for affirming one's own invulnerability

and the vulnerability of others are far more complex. Tsfati and Cohen (2004) consider that individuals do not make simplistic use of a magic bullet type theory regarding media influence but rely on complex models based on intuition. Individuals are intuitive regarding circumstances in which others may or may not be manipulated, such as exposure to different sources of information and experience of or exposure to certain content as described above.

In particular, people think that others are more easily influenced if the information relates to issues that are alien to their reality (Tsfati and Cohen, 2004). According to the media dependency theory, individuals with intimate knowledge or direct influence on an issue tend to be less influenced by media content related to this issue (Tsfati, 2013).

Other proposals have been put forward to explain the hypothesis of the vulnerability of others. For young people, the vulnerability of adults can be explained, first, by the lack of education and knowledge, and second, by previous generations having lived the oppression and repression of a dictatorship (an experience not perceived as ideal from the point of view of developing a critical vision of the world and the media). Thus, older adults have little education and what little they have renders them incapable of developing a critical attitude. This stereotypical view of parents needs to be addressed by communication studies, which generally focuses on stereotypes of young people (Chia, 2010). Adults tend to view the vulnerability of young people as attributable to context and environment, with the loss of values and the lack of quality media content viewed as particular reasons for this vulnerability.

Finally, we may note that both adults and young people propose corrective strategies (Rojas, 2010; Tsfati, Ribak and Cohen, 2005; Sun, Shen and Pan, 2008) to compensate for the influence of the media. Adults propose accompanying and guiding children in interpreting media messages — and propose the same solution for their own parents, whom they also see as vulnerable. Parents tend to believe that this guidance makes their children less vulnerable to the influence of the media than other people's children (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2002).

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