

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The relationship between media and news sources: A content analysis of Argentine telephone service privatization in August to October 1990

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**This study analyzed the media coverage of the process for the privatization of Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (ENTel), the Argentine state-owned telephone company provided by the Argentine printing press during the last stage of the company's state management (August to October 1990). Results showed that the media were prone to publish the information as disclosed by official entities. Thus, among primary sources, in almost two out of three articles (68.4%) journalists resorted to official sources (members of the Executive and the Legislature), while in a fourth part of the coverage (24.7%) they quoted non-official sources (telephone employees and private consortiums). Also, the capacity of the actors to influence media agenda was conditioned upon their political, socio-cultural and economical level. Those standing nearest to the political power, having a higher institutional framework, accessed the press in more stable circumstances whereas powerless actors may barely have an efficient influence on news coverage.**

**Key words:** New sources, Argentine printing press, Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones the Argentine state-owned telephone company, agenda-building, framing, indexing.

## INTRODUCTION

This study analyzed the media coverage of the process for the privatization of Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (ENTel) the Argentine state-owned telephone company provided by five national newspapers from Argentine during the last stage of the company's state management (August to October 1990), taking into account the articulation existing between media and news sources. The relationship between news sources and media has been studied from different theoretical approaches. The empirical study is a content analysis of the news messages based on the theorists agenda-building, indexing and framing. Results showed that the media were prone to publish the information as disclosed by official entities. Also, the capacity of the actors to influence media agenda was conditioned upon their political, socio-cultural and economical level.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### The relationship between media and news sources

News sources are a basic key raw material for the news production process. Journalists depend on their sources to produce information (VanSlyke, 1986), while these "supply background information or story suggestions" (Gans, 1979). They are "external suppliers of raw material" by ways of interviews, speeches, hearings or corporate reports (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Yet, this is not a simple linear relationship but a circular process, resembling a pull-the-string system rather than an interrelated functional body. A process always resolved with force. The relationship between news sources and media has been studied from different

theoretical approaches. This work delves into such interaction as focused by Agenda-building, indexing and framing.

### **Agenda-building**

The study of agenda-building, an integral part of the Agenda-setting theory is focused on an analysis of the process to build the media agenda and the factors that have an impact on it. These mechanisms explain “the process of news selection and news production” (Brandenburg, 2002). For Brandenburg, a key feature of the agenda-building process is the relationship between information entities and their news sources. The author studied “the ability of political actors to influence the distribution of news coverage” (Brandenburg, 2002), during the 1997 campaign for general elections in Great Britain.

And he showed that the major political parties, conservatives and labour had an impact on the attention drawn to the issues by electronic media, while neither the television nor the printing press seemed to have influenced on the decision of political parties agendas. Media do not work on an autonomous basis. The way they cover facts is related to the political development where the press is one of the movers (Lang and Lang, 1981). In the context of the Agenda-setting theory, the determinants of the process for the production of media agendas were embodied in the “peeling a sweet onion” metaphor (McCombs, 1992). Moving inwards, on the most external layer stand newsmakers, lying outside the information entity: presidents, political parties, official institutions or companies’ public relations offices. In the second place there are the mass media proper which influence one another, thus triggering the intermedia agenda-setting mechanism.

Thirdly, technical supports become significant conditioning factors of media production. The fourth layer includes the restrictions imposed by the organizational culture. The fifth relates to journalists’ individual preferences and their ideological standpoint. Lastly, in the heart of the onion there are the journalistic styles or genres embodying professional work. When events occur due to the involvement of human beings (whether individual or collective, ordinary or public persons, entities, governments or sets of them), the media should look for, negotiate, interpret and verify that sources are unbiased because on getting across the scope of power there is a broader margin for data manipulation.

### **Framing**

Advances in the investigation of media effects have been a challenge to the initial assumptions of the agenda-setting prospect, focused on the media capacity to set the

public agenda. This review embodies the theoretical developments of ‘framing’. A key dimension incorporated by this theory is the role of power for setting certain news frames to the detriment of others. Since the first few attempts to apply this perspective to communications studies, it has been implicitly assumed that the production of news frames arose from media routines whose logics was favorable to certain sources that were influenceable on news frames. “The production of frames now is much more explicitly seen and studied as a contested area between sources, other sources and media workers” (Roefs, 1998). Framing plays a fundamental role in the political game and news frames are the imprint of the exercise of power over texts: “It registers the identity of actors or interest that competed to dominate the text” (Entman, 1993). Under this premise, a study has been done of the capacity of élite sources to influence the production of news frames which later have an effect on the audience. Researchers such as Gitlin (1980) and Tuchman (1978) have studied professional logics and media routines, media’s use of sources and sources’ subsequent influence on news. They showed how certain frames become salient in news coverage and concluded that media routines facilitate the appearance of élite sources and their opinion, providing the ideological nature of news contents. Frame-building studies cover the dynamics produced by the involvement of these external factors into journalistic routines and into the frames included by journalists in their texts. In de Vreese’s (2005) words, “the frame-building process takes place in a continuous interaction between journalists and élites and social movements”.

Apart from élite sources and media professionals, social movements are also recognized to be frame producers. “The attention for social movements as producers of frames made it clear that media frames have multiple sponsors beyond the media and society’s élites” (Roefs, 1998). The use of collective-action frames by social organizations makes them more appealing to other activities and potential sympathizers that share their same objectives (Carragee, 1997). “The increased appeal of social movement organizations also makes them potentially stronger players in the battle for media frames” (Roefs, 1998: 10).

### **Indexing**

News sources “are not all the same nor are they all equally important” (Wolf, 1991). Likewise, access to sources by journalists and vice versa is not distributed on an even basis. Official sources usually provide a great deal of information from the media agenda, the verisimilitude of which is not questioned as such sources are involved with an “authority factor” (Wolf, 1991). The information they generate is embedded with newsworthiness no matter their content. Bennett (1990)

calls “indexing” the act of providing an index to the sources of news coverage. From this perspective, his work proposes to analyze how journalists establish the range of news sources to be positive, legitimate and/or credible. Media resorting to official information convey it almost literally and give issues the same priority as that given by the official agency (VanSlyke, 1986). Being a product of this dynamics, non-official voices get to be included in the journalistic version either occasionally or when they express opinions already emerging in official circles. When they are admitted in is, in general, because they are involved in civil disobedience, protests or lawless acts, thus establishing negative interpretative contexts for those voices (Gitlin, 1980). In the United States of America, public officials are the sources for most of the news informed. Also in Argentina, there is a corroborated trend to appeal to official sources for the production of news. Rey Lennon’s analysis of the coverage of 1997 legislative elections in Argentina showed that governmental bodies, off-the-record sources, presidential officials and politicians prevailed as the sources used by newspapers (Rey, 1998). Monteiro and Vera (2006) revealed that more than half of the sources consulted by Puntal newspaper in the City of Río Cuarto, Province of Córdoba, Argentina, about facts related to the Municipal Government were “officials closely related to the political power”. Now then, the manner and degree of using official sources depend on the phenomenon analyzed and on its surrounding situation. When controversial issues are addressed, where there is a debate over different viewpoints, more sources are consulted and more importance is given to them in the media (Bennett, 1996). If the official opinion is in disarray for any variety of reasons, the journalistic process may become relatively chaotic, bringing about a decline in the official narrative structure and opening the way for anomalous news narratives which may include disparate social voices (Bennett, 1990). Amadeo (1999) contributed an eloquent case study. In his research on news treatment of political corruption in Argentina, the authoress proved that media showed the information as released by official sources. However, in cases of political corruption, the credibility of official sources is contested.

In an increasingly powerful scenario held by media conglomerates, it is reasonable that journalists vest power-related actors with a privileged voice for the news, unless the status of official debate about a certain issue excludes the stable word uttered by a majority of society or unless official actions arouse doubts about political property. On the basis of the aforementioned three-approach premise, this work aims to study the journalistic coverage of the process for the privatization of Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones, in particular, over the three months prior to its transfer to private capital ownership, taking into account the mode of articulation existing between the different media and their news sources.

## CONTEXT OF ANALYSIS

### ENTel privatization

The privatization of public services was one of the main structural reforms promoted during the administration of former president Carlos Menem (1989 to 1999). Among these reforms, the case of ENTel was referred to as the “prow figurehead” of privatizations (Abeles, 2001), as it came to be an experience to be emulated in other sectors. For the supply of basic telephone service, the country was divided into two areas and provision was made that the award was to be granted to two consortiums of different companies which would operate on a monopoly basis in their respective areas. Such “exclusive” supply period would be enforceable for seven years and extendable for other three years as long as the objectives established in the bidding terms were met. Upon such exclusive period were over, the telecommunications market would be open to competition. The terms and conditions stated for ENTel transfer and the future structure of the telecommunications market were the result of a discretionary negotiation entered into by a few officials under the Executive, who privileged celerity and enforceability (Margheritis, 1999). The objective of political power was to win over the confidence of transnational capital owners, international financial entities, domestic economic groups and suppliers, while renegotiating the Argentine foreign debt. A year before its transfer, the telephone company was placed under control of the Government who appointed Engineer María Julia Alsogaray to act as Comptroller between November 1989 and 1990. Alsogaray’s style, her high degree of autonomy and the fact that she belonged to Unión del Centro Democrático (UCeDe) —a right wing political party— were all key elements for the Government’s objective.

The policies adopted during Alsogaray’s term of office were fundamental to pave the way for a sale alluring to foreign capital owners (Abeles, 2001), as evidenced by the decline in service quality, the poor performance of the company in terms of expansion and maintenance, the high level of indebtedness reached during her administration (Celani, 1998), the significant telephone rate increase (in one year, the pulse price, measured in US dollars, increased 711%), and the reduction in workforce (Aruguete and Duarte, 2006).

### Actors related to ENTel’s privatization

One of the outstanding aspects of ENTel’s privatization modality is that it revealed the correlation of forces between the interests and demands of the actors involved. In the first place, the personalistic and discretionary procedures conducted by several

government officials resulted in disputes within the Executive sphere. Officials who felt their interests threatened “drove negotiations to the point of breaking, with an aim to maximizing their relative profits” (Margheritis, 1999).

Meanwhile, President Menem “remained resolute about not altering the conditions again while clinging to the ambiguous wording of the bidding terms, confident that he was the one who had the last word in any controversy” (Margheritis, 1999).

In the second place, the opposition represented by the deputies (representatives) and senators for UCR, criticized privatization harshly but could not stop it. In the third place, the consortiums Telefónica de Argentina S. A. and Telecom Argentina S. A. had access to the regional monopolistic provision of a market with a high level of unsatisfactory demand, in a global technological changing setting. In the fourth place, telephone workers perceived that the privatization of ENTEL would result in a gradual steady reduction of workplaces. For trade unions this meant, also, being excluded from discussing sectoral policies, a right which so far the “single company – single union” model had facilitated them.

Consequently, FOETRA-Sindicato Buenos Aires, that is, the telephone employees’ trade union for the city of Buenos Aires began a strike in August 1990, in response to the lack of agreement on a salary restructuring and as a way of opposing to the sale of the company. The “telephone conflict”, as dubbed by several Argentine newspapers lasted until mid September. The result of such a process was the failure of force measures, the weakening of the Buenos Aires trade union and the dismissal of more than 400 employees particularly union delegates (Aruguete and Duarte, 2006).

In the fifth place, for suppliers and contractors to continue with a state-owned company would not seem to entail the same benefits. Above all, because when the invitation to bid for ENTEL was made of flexible access, they were able to become members of the consortiums that took part in the privatization process. Lastly, public acceptance of privatization was promoted by the Argentine macroeconomic crisis and the decline suffered by the state-owned telephone company in the 1980s.

A poll commissioned to Instituto Guillermo Bravo y Asociados Consulting Firm in 1985 revealed that 83.5% of participants stated that “telephone service should somehow be privatized”, 66.9% upheld that the service would work “better if privatized” and 28.2% proposed “to wholly privatize the company” (Siete Días, 1985). According to another study conducted by G. Bravo and Pessah Consulting Firm in 1987, 55 to 59% of participants supported a partial privatization of ENTEL (Hill and Abdala, 1993).

While over 1990, the year when the transfer of the telephone company took place, IPSOS – Mora y Araujo Consulting Firm proved that the opinion that favored service privatization was maintained at 63.9 to 66.9%

(Mora y Araujo, 1993).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two reasons motivated this work. One was related to the capacity of the actors related to this company and its privatization by officials, interested companies and telephone service employees, among others, to have access to the media agenda. The other referred to the news context in which the actors were quoted as news sources. From such concerns, there arose a series of questions which have guided this paper:

- 1) Which actors related to ENTEL’s privatization process became news sources to cover this case?
- 2) How close to the official power were the sources most frequently quoted?
- 3) In what news context were the various actors quoted as news sources?

## METHODS

### Unit of analysis

It comprises the news articles published in the selected five Argentine newspapers during the last three months in which ENTEL was under State control prior to its transfer to the private sector. It is a collection of news, interviews, editorials and analysis or opinion articles, columns, readers’ letters. All of these media sections are codified; the analysis does not include the “Sports” and “International news” sections or special supplements.

### Universe of analysis

It comprises the information published over the final stage of ENTEL privatization process, that is, August to October 1990, in the newspaper *Ámbito Financiero*, *Clarín*, *Crónica*, *La Nación* and *Página/12*, the main Argentine newspapers. The decision to tackle the August to October 1990 period lies on the fact that during those months certain events took place which gathered the most outstanding aspects of this privatization.

### Sample

In the first place, a stratified sample was generated by differentiating the various newspapers and then, exploring into the inside of each newspaper, a distinction was drawn of the months and weeks of publication. Once these strata were established, two business days were randomly selected and all articles published in each newspaper in those days were collected. Selection of two business days lies on the fact that *Ámbito Financiero* is not published on Saturdays and Sundays as it is a financial newspaper. Thus a 292 unit sample was generated and analyzed in the course of this study.

### Coding book

#### *Formal information guidelines*

Firstly, a code is provided to the newspaper publishing the article (1

= *Ámbito Financiero*, 2 = *Clarín*, 3 = *Crónica*, 4 = *La Nación* and 5 = *Página/12*). Secondly, a number is given to each business day (1 = Monday, 2 = Tuesday, 3 = Wednesday, 4 = Thursday and 5 = Friday) and the date of news publication is indicated. Thirdly, a numeric value is given to the various formats (1 = news item, 2 = interview, 3 = editorial, 4 = analysis or opinion article, 5 = column, 6 = readers' letters and 7 = other formats). Lastly, the section where articles appear is computed (1 = economics, 2 = politics, 3 = general information, 4 = back cover, 5 = others).

#### **Access of news sources to media agenda**

Sources were classified into primary and secondary and codified separately, though both of them were defined following the same system of categories: 0 = no sources quoted, 1 = President Carlos Menem, 2 = ENTel Comptroller María Julia Alsogaray, 3 = Minister of Public Works and Services Roberto Dromi, 4 = other governmental officials, 5 = employees, 6 = consortiums, 7 = the legislature, 8 = others. In addition, a code was provided depending on whether such sources were: 1 = official or 2 = non-official.

#### **Relevant information issues**

To group into issues the various events appearing as the news event of each article, a reference is made to the definition of "issue" given by Shaw (1977), as a series of events which, given the link and convergence of their features are grouped into a wider category (Dader, 1992). Based on such criterion, four issues were determined based on the systematization, categorization and codification of the events covered by newspapers: 1 = corporate (ENTel's) management and service quality (it includes news of inconveniences -and possible interruptions- or improvements in the provision of service), 2 = telephone rate issue (it includes news of rate increases or reductions either applied or announced by the government, as well as the negotiations conducted between consortiums and the government in connection with the price of telephone pulse), 3 = telephone conflict (it includes news of the events which took place in connection with telephone employees' claims, mainly, the force measures taken by employees and the disputes among the trade union sector and ENTel's and the executive's officials), 4 = privatization features (it includes news of the administrative measures and decisions adopted by the government to sell the state-owned telephone company, the disagreements between officials reporting to the 'executive' and the 'legislature', and between the government and consortiums regarding the privatization design and the possibilities and difficulties for consortiums to become ENTel's awardees).

#### **Coding and reliability**

Upon performing data coding, a new data survey process was conducted over a sample of 20% of the units (N = 58), for purposes of assessing the intercoder reliability. This instance was made by three codifiers. Such reliability was computed by calculating the percentage in line with that obtained by the judges in each of the variables under study. The average value in line with the codified variables was 85.3%, a percentage showing that reliability was acceptable (Neuendorf, 2002).

### **EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

An outstanding aspect is that broadcast news coverage of the privatization of ENTel showed the correlation of

forces between the interests and demands of the actors involved who had access to the media agenda.

#### **Formal guidelines for ENTel news coverage**

The sample's predominant format was the 'news' (90.4%). The remaining 10% fell into 'analysis and opinion articles' (3.8%), 'interviews' (2.1%) and 'readers' letters' (2.1%), the latter published solely by *La Nación*. Lastly, the 'columns' written by non-staff individuals or entities had a minimal frequency (1%) and 'editorials' written by the newspaper chief editor or senior executives reached just 0.7% of publications. A majority fell into the 'economics' (49%) and the 'political' (40.8%) sections. Articles published under 'general information' (1.7%) were quite fewer. With respect to newspapers under study, *Ámbito Financiero* (23.3%) and *Clarín* (21.6%) offered the widest coverage of this issue, representing almost half the publications of the sample (44.9%). The remaining 55.1% was divided among *La Nación* (19.1%), *Crónica* (18.5%) and *Página/12* (17.5%) newspapers.

#### **Access of sources to media agenda**

This work had been structured into three layers of analysis. The first one comprised the degree of appearance of official and non-official sources to cover ENTel case. Based on Steel (1997), this work computed as official sources those speaking from a public office or position or from any of the three governmental powers: The Executive, the Legislature or the Judiciary. The second one dealt with the frequency with which the different relevant actors had been quoted in the news. Lastly, the news contexts that required the use of the various news sources. This is to say, what issues related to ENTel privatization were being covered at the time of quoting the involved actors' statements. Does the 'indexing hypothesis' apply to the coverage by the Argentine press of ENTel case? To corroborate this, the first two sources quoted in the articles -primary and secondary sources- were computed and analyzed so as to verify whether they were official or non-official, depending on the institution they belonged to. As noted, in a significant number of cases, no reference was made to either 'primary sources' (29.5%) or 'secondary sources' (60.3%). Among primary sources, in almost two out of three articles (68.4%) journalists resorted to official sources (members of the executive and the legislature), while in a fourth part of the coverage (24.7%) they quoted non-official sources (telephone employees and private consortiums). As concerns secondary sources (those quoted in the second place), something similar happened: officials were quoted in 59.4% of the cases and non-official sources, in 23.3%. A disaggregated analysis of sources access to the media agenda showed a different trend. Among primary sources, 'employees'

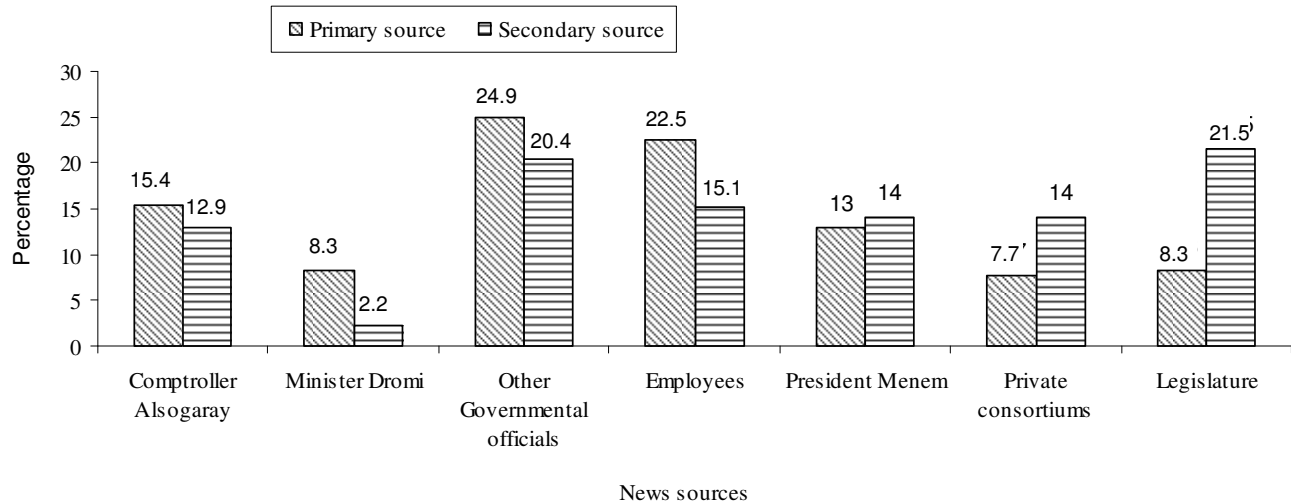


Figure 1. Primary and secondary sources of information. August to October 1990.

(22.5%) had one of the highest levels of occurrence in articles, just below ‘other governmental officials’ (24.9%) which included officials from various Ministries and State instrumentalities. In comparative terms, the three state actors who played a fundamental role in this process - ‘ENTel’s Comptroller María Julia Alsogaray’ (15.4%), ‘President Carlos Menem’ and ‘Minister of Public Works and Services Roberto Dromi’ (8.3%)- were less quoted in the news than employees. Though it was noted that they are individual and not collective actors, and thus, their media appearance was not easily comparable to telephone employees or private consortiums (7.7%), who were mentioned as a collective unit. Lastly, the least quoted participants were ‘private consortiums’ (Figure 1).

Among secondary sources, ‘the legislature’ was top (21.5%), followed by ‘other governmental officials’ (20.4%), ‘employees’ (15.1%), ‘President Menem’, ‘consortiums’ (both 14%) and ‘Comptroller Alsogaray’ (12.9%). While in turn, ‘Minister Dromi’ was practically not quoted (2.2%) except when he appeared as the leading character of the reported episode. The case of the ‘legislature’ showed a feature that deserves mentioning. In fact, ‘legislators’ (8.3%) had little presence as a primary source. Instead, they were significantly quoted as a secondary source. That revealed that their media exposure had been outshined by Menem’s or Alsogaray’s high profile. The personalistic imprint of these officials was embodied in the privatization design and also shown in the coverage of events proper.

**News context and news sources**

In connection with what issues covered by newspapers did actors play a most significant role as news sources? To understand this concern, the analysis was structured

into two stages. The first stage described the relevance of ENTel news issue measured in terms of frequency of occurrence. For an analysis of ENTel coverage, four issues were categorized: ‘corporate management and service quality’, ‘telephone rate issue’, ‘telephone conflict’, ‘privatization features’. A first approach to information showed the pre-eminence of the ‘phone conflict’ (38.6%), with articles mainly referring to force measures adopted by ENTel employees claiming a wage restructuring and the rehiring of dismissed employees. The second issue with the widest coverage was “privatization features” (35%) which includes mainly information on the privatization design negotiated by the government and the consortiums, the difficulties encountered by private investors to become awardees, and the actions conducted by the different officials to realize the sale of the company. Far away on the third place was the ‘telephone rate issue’ (17.5%), focused on rate increases applied by the ‘executive’s’ and on the discussions with the consortiums about the price of telephone pulse. Lastly, the information published on events related to ‘corporate management and service quality’ (8.9%) -that is, inefficiencies in corporate management entailing poor service provision, lack of financing, ENTel debts and cases of corruption- had a low presence in newspapers. After describing the frequency of occurrence of issues, an observation was made as to whether there was a relationship between such concerns and access to the Argentine printing press agenda by actors related to ENTel as primary sources of information. Indeed, it was statistically tested ( $\chi^2 (18) = 112.092, p < 0.05, PHI = 0.824$ ) that the salient news issue affected media’s recurrence to different sources (Figure 2). The appearance of ‘employees’ and ‘other governmental officials’ -the two actors most quoted in the articles- presented a high degree of disparity, although

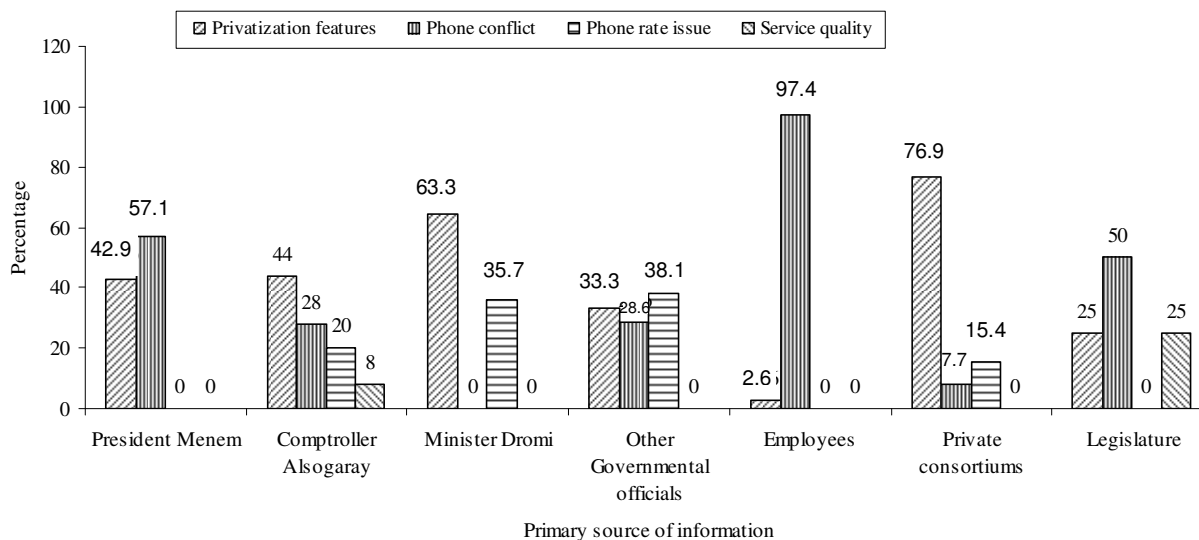


Figure 2. Primary source of information by issues. August to October 1990.

that did not fail to unveil a clear behavior of the press with respect to the way they manage sources.

'Employees' statements were clustered in news referring to the 'telephone conflict' (97.4%); they even succeed in appearing in some article headlines. But they had little appearance in articles on 'privatization features' (2.6%) and none in the remaining issues. With respect to the other actors involved in the ENTel case, results showed that 'other governmental officials' had appeared more frequently in information referring to the 'telephone rate issue' (38.1%), followed by articles focused on 'privatization features' (33.3%) and the 'telephone conflict' (28.6%). ENTel's Comptroller, María Julia Alsogaray was presented in all the issues related to this case as a primary source, but she was most salient in issues concerning 'privatization features' (44%). In line with her personalistic features, her actions and statements reached a high degree of protagonism within this issue. Instead, she had a lower profile for the 'telephone conflict' (28%) and the 'telephone rate issue' (20%) and practically did not appear in articles about 'corporate management and service quality' (8%). Minister Dromi's appearances in the press during that period were subtler than those the other two 'executive officials' -President Menem and Comptroller Alsogaray-who were more involved with the design for the privatization of ENTel. His statements were only quoted in connection with events associated to 'privatization features' (64.3%), and mainly during the interpellations made to him by legislators and in incidents disclosing the financial difficulties of consortiums to become awardees. In both scenarios, this official acquired increasing power for decision-making. In the articles where the 'telephone rate issue' was salient, Minister Dromi was less often quoted (35.7%). And his statements mostly dealt with

discussions with consortiums and with other officials in connection with the pulse rate. In the case of President Carlos Menem, over half of their public pronouncements were made during the 'telephone conflict' (57.1%). While his other statements fell into several facts grouped under 'privatization features' (42.9%). Members of the 'Legislature' were quoted, in half the cases, at the toughest time of the 'telephone conflict' (50%), for instance when ENTel came under the control of the Armed Forces and the claims posed by the Legislature to the Executive to settle the controversial situation with telephone employees.

In the remaining 50% of cases, statements made by legislators were divided between articles about 'service quality' and 'privatization features'. Lastly, members of 'private consortiums' were predominantly present as sources in articles relating to 'privatization features' (76.9%). Less frequently, they appeared in discussions held over rates (15.4%) and with a mere 7.7%, in articles dealing with ENTel employees' claim.

## DISCUSSION

For covering public affairs, the link established between journalistic entities and their news sources is a key aspect to building the media agenda (Brandenburg, 2002). Results show that in a significant number of cases, no reference was made to any sources. A possible explanation is that information had come from the so called off the record sources. Off-the-record sources usually come from governmental or close-to-government sources, and in general this means that the information furnished is confidential and not subject to publication. That may be due to the fact that the

information on ENTel privatization was governed by political issues and that in such cases journalists need to resort to not always quotable sources. The capacity of the actors involved in this process to influence the Argentine media agenda was conditioned upon their political, socio-cultural and business level and their closeness to the official power. Those standing nearest to the political power, having a higher institutional framework, accessed the press in more stable circumstances. Conversely, those most vulnerable who were illegitimated and had no institutional framework were subject to a somewhat careless exposure and their opinions, in general, were included on the agenda under conflictive circumstances and in dramatic situations. This trend is supplemented by their media image in the news context where different actors became salient. On the one hand, private investors were situated in a demanding rather than in a negotiating position, making more powerful demands of the government than before. On the other hand, the media perception of ENTel employees and their claims varied according to the stage covered by the media and according to the news event in focus. The significant association between the appearances of telephone employees and the coverage salience of the telephone conflict corroborates Bennett's statement (1990), that is, in controversial cases, where official opinion is in disarray, the journalist process may become relatively chaotic, leading to the inclusion of disparate social voices. However, it is important to make clear that non-official voices are most often admitted when they are involved in civil disobedience, protests or lawless acts, which end up by establishing negative interpretative contexts for those voices (Gitlin, 1980). This example confirms what has been evidenced (Bleyer, 2000), that is, that news routines force social organizations to justify why they consider certain issues should receive attention by the media. To be journalistically attractive, their claims are often presented in a tragic or controversial way.

Lastly, the Government's media image was disparate. It triumphed in the dispute with the most combative unions during the "telephone conflict". Conversely, as regards negotiation with consortiums, the 'executive' prioritized the objective to send a political signal and gave in to private demands, for purposes of implementing privatization. For example, Alsogaray's strategy towards the press is eloquent to exemplify the margin of maneuver of the various actors to access media agenda and produce news, in terms of their closeness to power and institutional framework. This officer stands out in the coverage of issues relating to the design of privatization, negotiation with private investors and procedures in furtherance of the sale of the company. In turn, she looks more cautious in her pronouncements regarding discussions with employees, even when she was a top decision-maker in the labor policy designed and carried out under her management, and a significant protagonist in actions seeking to weaken trade union

resistance. Menem's treatment of the news is another significant case. The President has the greatest number of appearances in a controversial matter, as was the case with the 'telephone conflict'. This does not suggest, however, that he has had little capacity to decide in what news contexts his statements should be quoted. As seen from various examples, Menem made an effort to look intransigent whatever the confrontation. Such attitude was revealed on the occasion of the escalation of force measures by telephone employees, as well as in connection with any potential changes on privatization terms and conditions. Media perception of the former President is an example of his management style, that is, power concentration and decisionism under any circumstances, confident that only he was the one who had the last word in any controversy. Also, the arm wrestling contest between the President and employees revealed an aspect studied in 'framing theory', that is, the capacity of elite sources to influence the production of news frames. News frames are the imprint of the identity of actors and their interests and, therefore, of the very exercise of power over news texts (Entman, 1993). This is consistent with the fact that corporate interests underlying editorial decisions on what to publish and how to cover events are intimately linked to ideological factors and organizational procedures that benefit public authorities, as well as other actors standing close to power, as primary news sources. Instead, those who do not hold power will be hardly sought out by journalists unless their actions produce noticeable events because of their moral or socially negative nature (Gans, 1979).

In sum, the coverage of the last three months of ENTel state-run administration is an illustrative example of the fact that news flows and the type of coverage or omission of certain events expresses the capacity of the various social actors to produce news and access the media agenda, with the resulting reproduction of power relationships. The network of stable sources supplying news channels reveals, in part, the existing social and power structure. Powerless actors may barely have an efficient influence on news coverage.

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