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# Consumers' Paying Intent for Public Service Media in Spain: The Effect of RTVE Service Quality, Citizens' Expenditure, and the Moderating Role of Age<sup>\*</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Due to significant transformations in citizens' news consumption habits and the arrival of on-demand multi-platform services, today's public service media (PSM) face substantial challenges to endure their core public principles. Moreover, PSMs' need and legitimacy are being questioned from both a liberal and a populist standpoint, opening up discussions about its sustainability. However, little academic attention has been paid to citizens' paying intent in the context of PSM. To mend this gap in the literature, this study examines expenditure on news and entertainment services and Spain's public television (RTVE) service quality as two potential direct predictors of paying intent for public service media, as well as the moderating role of citizens' age. Findings indicate that higher expenditure on news and entertainment services is associated with lower paying intent for public service media, while higher perceptions of RTVE service quality positively influence paying intent. Finally, challenging prior literature, our findings revealed that the younger generations are the most likely to economically support PSM at all levels of RTVE service quality. This study emphasizes the need for PSMs to reinforce their quality offer and uniqueness and theorizes about different ways to achieve this goal in today's multi-platform environment.

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## KEYWORDS

Public service media; paying intent; sustainability; service quality; public media consumption; willingness to pay

## Introduction

It has been long since public service broadcasters first set out to support a set of key democratic values during the arrival of mass-broadcast technologies in the early twentieth century: fostering public and civic values of universality (Martin 2021), warranting citizens access to verified information (Scannell 2005; Túñez-López, Vaz-Álvarez, and Feiras-

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Ceide 2020), and maintaining the common culture and welfare of societies (Arriaza Ibarra and Nord. 2014; Jõesaar 2011; Túñez-López, Vaz-Álvarez, and Fieiras-Ceide 2020). However, due to some major transformations of the prevalent societal and market environment, today's Public Service Media (PSM) are increasingly challenged by the imminent need to adapt to the competition of multi-platform companies and the shifting demands and consumption habits of their audience (Enli et al. 2019; Iosifidis 2007; 2011; Jakubowicz 2013; Túñez-López, Vaz-Álvarez, and Fieiras-Ceide 2020). Propelled by growing competition, PSMs are typically confronted with a lack of funding to achieve their remit, raising growing concerns about how to financially sustain the normative objectives PSM services ought to play in today's sutured media ecologies (Sehl et al. 2020).

In this context, little academic attention has been paid to citizens' paying intent to sustain the PSM system (Reiter et al. 2018), and virtually no studies examined such intention in the case of the Spanish case, RTVE. Despite that direct payment is not being discussed today in Spain, citizens' intention to pay for PSM is a robust indicator of how far they are ready to go to sustain PSM in a high-choice media environment. Particularly in a context where, with arguments from both a market failure and a populist perspective, politicians and partisan media question if funding PSM is a good use of taxpayers' money (Sehl et al. 2020). Accordingly, our analysis considers both the perception of service quality and the expenditure on commercial competition as potential factors affecting paying intent. In addition, we examine the moderation role of age with regard to these two factors.

Our findings indicate that consumers with higher expenditure on news and entertainment services have lower intentions to sustain the Spanish PSM economically. In contrast, higher perceptions of RTVE's service quality were associated with higher paying intent. Furthermore, young consumers with high RTVE service quality perceptions were the most likely to pay for PSM, while older generations' paying intent for PSM was generally low, regardless of their perceptions of RTVE quality. The current study contributes to the scarce body of literature concerning consumers' paying intent for PSM, highlighting the goodwill of younger generations toward PSM, which hints at an understanding of its societal role and need. Results also emphasize the need for PSMs to embrace a solid commitment to quality and engage with citizens by providing a differential value that sets them apart from commercial offers.

## Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

One often highlighted worry for PSM is rooted in the apparent financial constraints faced by most public television services on the one hand and the growing multi-platform competence that limits and potentially obscures their audience reach on the other (Goyanes, Costa-Sánchez, and Demeter 2021). As Martin (Martin 2021, 1–2) notes, "audiences are increasingly reached via online intermediary platforms managed by a relatively small number of U.S.-based online platform companies" (e.g., Facebook, Netflix, Amazon, and Apple), a dynamic, "which has restructured much of the media landscape just in the past two decades." Several reports by Newman et al. (2020) indicated that news consumption increasingly unfolds via intermediary platforms of social media (Facebook, Twitter) and search engines (Google, Youtube) instead of directly through the news publishers.

In the field of entertainment, audiences are also migrating from linear broadcasting services towards subscription-based on-demand platforms (European Audiovisual Observatory 2020). These shifting dynamics are even more pronounced among younger audiences. Schulz, Levy, and Nielsen (2019), drawing on 2019 Reuters data on eight different European PSMs, conclude that the audience for public service news is old, and the reach of public service news is heavily reliant on declining offline broadcast offers. Moreover, BBC's (2020, 43) 2020–2021 annual plan reports these rapid changes to affect all PSMs as “over the last 12 months, Netflix overtook the BBC and ITV to become the biggest video provider for 16–34s.”

Under such circumstances, PSMs are facing a challenge with extreme duplicity. On the one hand, as universality is one of the defining principles of public service broadcasting (Tracey 2013), PSMs are becoming reliant on these platform giants dominating the market to reach a close to a universal audience. Furthermore, the imminent threat of losing universal reach also has severe consequences in the long run, specifically when considering younger demographics. As the developing consumption habits of young audiences are most likely to become common patterns of use later (Lowe and Maijanen 2019; Reiter et al. 2018), “if PSM does not reach young audiences when they are configuring their own media consumption habits, they might risk losing them for good” (Rodríguez-Castro, Campos-Freire, and Túnñez-López 2021, 6).

On the other hand, PSMs' claim of warranting credible information to all as public goods becomes problematic when the control of their content and its monetization is lost to privately owned platforms. Although intermediary platforms often present themselves as neutral ground for content creators and consumers to interact upon, “setting the rules in any context is itself a political act reflecting a set of values and establishing a power structure, and the structure of private platforms, by and large, prioritizes commercial viability and efficiency” (Martin 2021, 2). This prevailing market logic fundamentally repels that of PSM: while the former speaks of *consumers*, the latter aims to inform, educate, and entertain (the Reithian triad; Rodríguez-Castro, Campos-Freire, and Túnñez-López 2021) citizens.

Consequently, PSMs are prompted to carry out a careful balancing act between maintaining relative control of their content yet embracing the opportunity to reach wider audiences, especially among the younger demographics, before being rendered completely irrelevant. PSM's current efforts, however, seem to be mostly insufficient regarding the latter (Donders 2019).

### ***The Case of the Spanish RTVE***

Similar trends seem to arise in the context of Spain's PSM, with multi-platform companies increasingly becoming the shapers of the local media landscape (García Leiva 2019; 2020). Organized since 2006 as a state-owned corporation and known as Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española, Sociedad Anónima, S. M. E (RTVE), Spain's PSM carry a historical burden of political dependence rooted in its role as a propaganda tool for Franco's dictatorship (García-de-Madariaga, Moreno, and López 2020; Lozano 2012; López-Cepeda 2012). The transition to democracy brought positive changes (see Palacio, Villaluenga, and Roldán 2012). To begin with, the 1978 constitution guaranteed freedom of expression and specifically refers to PSM dictating that their

functioning should be subject to parliamentary control and guarantees pluralism and linguistic diversity (B.O.E 1978). Despite this declaration of principles, from a regulatory perspective, PSM remained under governmental control. The 2006 law that reorganized Spain's PSM changed this by requiring the President of RTVE to be elected by two-thirds of the Chamber of Deputies (B.O.E 2006). But the law has gone through various changes and counter-changes, and to date, RTVE's full independence is still an outstanding account (Bustamante 2006). Notwithstanding, when in the 1990s, new commercial networks entered the market Spain's National Television (TVE) stood strong against its competitors, namely A3Media and Mediaset (Goyanes, Costa-Sánchez, and Demeter 2021).

However, this previously stable oligopolistic market structure seems to be substantially changing, with multi-platform companies gaining ground in Spain. In 2020, more than half of Spanish households with Internet access were consuming audiovisual media content via paid online platforms, with especially high subscription rates to Netflix, Amazon's Prime Video, HBO GO, and Disney+ (Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia 2020); with Netflix and Amazon's Prime Video being the leading platform (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación 2021); while Disney+ seems to be the fastest growing one (Geca 2021). According to Barlovento (2020), over 23 million people use subscription-based streaming services, which accounts for 57% of all Spanish consumers.

At the same time, RTVE is facing the problems of declining audiences, especially among the youth, and low funding. A recent analysis by Schulz, Levy, and Nielsen (2019) reveals that although RTVE's offline reach is relatively high when compared to the leading private broadcasters, its online reach is low. This is especially problematic concerning RTVE's growing disconnection with the younger generations (Azurmendi 2018; Guerrero Pérez 2018; Izquierdo-Castillo and Miguel-De-Bustos 2021; Navarro Robles and Vázquez-Barrio 2020). Furthermore, RTVE is hampered by the fact that it is massively underfunded (its total revenue per capita is 19€) as compared to other well-performing PSMs (e.g., BBC/UK, 102€; yle/Finland, 86€).

### ***Paying Intent for Public Media***

Consumers' paying intent (PI; in terms of "Yes"/"No" or a rating scale) and willingness to pay (WTP; "how much"/quantitative amount) have been extensively studied in economics and marketing (e.g., Breidert, Hahsler, and Reutterer 2006; Homburg, Koschate, and Hoyer 2005; Wertenbroch and Skiera 2002). However, little academic attention has been paid to paying intent and willingness to pay in the context of PSM, likely because the funding system of most public broadcasters seldom relies on direct and optional payments. Notwithstanding, as we indicated, once PSMs enter the free market, their value is also being increasingly assessed along economic terms, and so, applying economic value measures becomes justified. As Reiter et al. (2018, 213–214) note, research needs to employ a broader empirical perspective "to develop a useful picture of the complex and dynamic contours of PSM's personal and social value, as well as its monetary value." This study addresses this gap in the literature by systematically analyzing two potential predictors of paying for public service media: expenditure on news and entertainment services and public service quality.

To the best of our knowledge, only a handful of studies (e.g., Grammel and Gründl 2018; Ichikawa and Tsuji 2016; Lin et al. 2013; Poort and Baarsma 2016; Reiter et al. 2018) investigate consumers' paying intent/willingness to pay in the context of PSMs and their commercial competition, while no research on paying intent/willingness to pay is available for the Spanish RTVE's case. Most of these studies apply the contingent valuation method (CVM) to measure stated preference and elicit respondents' valuations of nonmarket goods (Chyi 2005; Noonan 2003; Papandrea 1999; Santagata and Signorello 2000; Throsby 2003).

Conceptually, willingness to pay—that is, the maximum amount of money people are inclined to pay for a product or service—for PSM is the economic benefit of public broadcasting services (Lin et al. 2013). Studies applying CVM measured willingness to pay for public broadcasting in Ireland (Delaney and O'Toole 2004), the UK (BBC 2004), and Japan (Masatsugu 2007). More recently, Lin et al. (2013) measured consumers' willingness to pay for the PSM in Taiwan (PTS) to provide evidence and help policymakers pinpoint a reasonable funding level. Grammel and Gründl (2018), in the context of Austria and Germany, investigated if consumers' willingness to pay for PSM is higher once their awareness of PSM's online services is raised. However, their results suggest that online services do not play an important role in predicting willingness to pay.

Considering standard economic theory, within the context of online media, where substitutes for most content are available (cross-price elasticity is high), and there is an extremely fast-growing supply while demand remains largely stable, we would expect to see a general unwillingness to pay for media services (Doyle 2013; Picard 2009). Specifically, a number of studies confirmed the existence of online consumers' *free mentality* (Dou 2004; Niemand et al. 2019)—that is, internet users' lack of willingness to pay for online content. As O'Brien (2022, 29) notes, "the ideal of the Internet as a disseminator of free ideas has a strong indirect effect on paying intent." However, even within this prevalent culture of free (Goyanes, Demeter, and de Grado 2020), the picture is far more complex. Fletcher and Nielsen (2017) investigated consumer-level relations between public service/private and offline/online news consumption preferences (including paying intent) in Spain, amongst other countries (i.e., Japan, the US, France, Germany, UK). Their results indicate a positive association between public service news access and paying intention for online news. In other words, regular consumers of public service news seem more willing to pay for online news in general. Furthermore—somewhat counterintuitively—they found a significant positive association between paying for offline newspapers and paying intention for online news content: paying for offline news, in fact, increases the likelihood of paying for online content because it helps create a reference price above zero (Fletcher and Nielsen 2017).

Similar results are suggested by Chyi's (2005) analysis of survey data from 853 Hong Kong residents, where more time spent reading traditional newspapers was associated with higher paying intent for online news content. In a later study (Chyi 2012), she also found Internet users to be more willing to pay for print media. Moreover, Goyanes found a positive effect of moderate platform use (Twitter) on paying intent for online news (Goyanes 2014) and of media use on paying intent for local digital journalistic content (Goyanes 2015). In fact, throughout the admittedly scarce literature on past payment, paying intent, and willingness to pay for digital journalistic content, all three appear to be positively related to the use of other media products (O'Brien, Wellbrock,

and Kleer 2020). Therefore, scholars argue that although the Internet seems to be displacing traditional media on many accounts, it can also be seen as pushing traditional media into new niches that are more difficult to substitute (e.g., local news; Goyanes 2015; Martin 2021).

At the same time, we cannot neglect the fact that everyday consumers are limited by financial/economic constraints, especially in today's inflationary economy. The standard economic theory of scarcity suggests that consumers' monetary resources are finite, and expenditure on services and products is a zero-sum game: what we pay for a product is subsequently subtracted from the potential purchase of another (Hamilton et al. 2019; Robbins 1935). Once considered, it comes as no surprise that income is one of the key factors influencing consumers' paying intent/willingness to pay for journalistic content (O'Brien, Wellbrock, and Kleer 2020): media consumption is limited by the individual consumers' monetary resources that they are willing to allocate on such activities.

Consequently, we see two opposing lines of theoretical thought, both well-founded in prior literature. On the one hand, studies suggest that there is a positive association between past payments for news and entertainment media services and paying intent for similar products, as paying for media content helps to create a reference price above zero (Fletcher and Nielsen 2017). On the other hand, the standard economic theory of scarcity suggests that economic constraints—as well as money allocated to complementary hedonic products and multi-platform services—may jeopardize the intent of investment and sustainability of PSM. This second line of argument is reinforced both by the high levels of current economic inflation and the fact that credible news provided by PSMs are widely considered to be basic democratic goods and thus should be provided for free in a non-exclusive manner (Martin 2021; Reiter et al. 2018). Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

(H1) Higher expenditure on news and entertainment services (pay TV, music, multi-platform services) is negatively associated with citizens' intentions to pay for public service media.

### ***Perceived Quality and Paying Intent for Public Media***

A long line of marketing research indicates high perceptions of service quality to be a key antecedent for paying and paying intent (Baker and Crompton 2000; Cronin, Brady, and Hult 2000; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996). For instance, O'Brien, Wellbrock, and Kleer (2020) indicate perceived quality to have a consistently positive impact on paying intent (e.g., Goyanes, Artero, and Zapata 2018; Himma-Kadakas and Köuts 2015) and past payment (e.g., Wang et al. 2005) throughout the literature of digital journalism. However, it is also clear that these studies oftentimes give vague definitions to the concept of quality (O'Brien, Wellbrock, and Kleer 2020). In marketing studies, the empirical literature supports the application of performance perception measures when operationalizing service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1994; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996). Notwithstanding, the effect of service quality on behavioral intentions (that is, paying intent) is often debated. It seems to be the case that service quality has both direct as well as indirect effects on paying intent—the latter being moderated by service value and/or satisfaction measures (Cronin, Brady, and Hult 2000). That is, a high level of perceived service quality seems to promote higher levels of customer

satisfaction, as well as higher perceptions of service value which, in turn, facilitate paying intent for the service.

In general, we know little about how perceived quality influences paying intent and willingness to pay for public media. It is important to note that when we move into the analysis of the public viewpoint in the case of PSMs, the quality perceptions of consumers are neither to be confused with the normative, democratic quality standards of PSM, nor quality in terms of market success based on popularity (Goyanes 2021). The former can, of course, approximate the latter concepts on the individual level; however, it is at least questionable if that is the case in general (Leroch and Wellbrock 2011; in O'Brien, Wellbrock, and Kleer 2020).

Moreover, paying intent/willingness to pay measures for PSMs are hampered by the fact that in terms of public broadcasting's own merits, credible (i.e., good quality) news are basic public goods that support a healthy democracy and must be provided in a perfect non-exclusive manner (for free). Therefore, consumers sharing this view might find paying for such public goods problematic at best. It is noteworthy that the low economic valuation does not necessarily align with low journalistic or information valuation:

audiences may simultaneously hold the views that, on the one hand, news is a public good and should be provided free of charge (especially on the Internet), while also maintaining, on the other hand, that the news content they actually consume is quality journalism. (Goyanes, Demeter, and de Grado 2020, 15)

Notwithstanding, considering the extant literature on marketing studies and digital journalism (O'Brien, Wellbrock, and Kleer 2020), we presume that quality perceptions may increase citizens' paying intention. In a more formal hypothesis:

(H2) Higher perceptions of RTVE service quality are associated with higher intentions to pay for public service media

Finally, this study seeks to explore whether the effects of the interaction between (a) citizens' expenditure on news and entertainment services (pay TV, music, multi-platform services), (b) quality perceptions on RTVE (both as independent variables), and age (moderator), predict paying intent for public service media (dependent variable). Specifically, we are interested in examining whether citizens' age reduces or increases the levels of paying intent. Understanding the attitudes and preferences of younger audiences is crucial for the future of PSM, as the developing consumption habits of these groups are most likely to become common patterns of use in the future (Lowe and Maijanen 2019; Reiter et al. 2018). Considering the declining audiences of RTVE, especially amongst the youth, and the imminent need to engage this group of consumers for PSM (including RTVE) to survive in the long run, we thus explore the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the nature of the moderation that stems from the introduction of age in the relationship between citizens' expenditure on multi-platform services and paying intent for PSM?

RQ2. What is the nature of the moderation that stems from the introduction of age in the relationship between the perceived quality of public service media and paying intent for PSM?

## Method

Our sample ( $N = 1,717$ ) was fielded during May and June 2021 and selected through a quota-based online survey representative of the Spanish population in terms of gender (50.1% female), age ( $M = 45.2$  yrs.;  $SD = 14.2$ ), and education. It was conducted via an online access panel between May and June 2021 (Qualtrics). Responses were screened for speeding, and we also excluded systematic answers. The questionnaire achieved a 35% response rate. Individuals were compensated for their participation. Data was processed using SPSS V.27. The proposed model is based on a hierarchical regression that analyzes the associations of media expenditure and quality perceptions with respondents' paying intent for PSM as the dependent variable. The moderating role of age in both these associations was also tested following a regression-based approach using Process for SPSS Statistics 3.4 (Hayes 2018). The controls and variables of interest were introduced in different hierarchical blocks to examine their incremental explanatory power: demographics, media orientations, political orientations, variables of interest, and the moderation term. Beta coefficients of the last block were reported. Zero-order correlations are reported in Table 1.

### *Measurements: Dependent and Independent Variables*

#### *Expenditure on News and Entertainment Services*

This construct was measured through participants' estimations of their monthly expenditure on subscriptions to "Newspapers (print and online), Music Platforms (Spotify, Apple, Music, etc.), Pay Tv (Movistar, Orange, etc.), and Video Streaming Platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Filmin, HBO, Disney Plus, etc.)." Five possible answers were provided: 5–15€; 16–25€; 26–35€; 36–50€; 51+€ ( $M = 3.05$ ;  $SD = 1.68$ ).

#### *TVE Service Quality*

Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of RTVE's quality regarding its "news services," "fiction production," and "general programming." Responses were coded using a 10-point scale where 1 stood for complete disagreement and 10 for complete agreement. Items were averaged to create a construct of RTVE service quality (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ;  $M = 5.14$ ;  $SD = 2.41$ ).

#### *Paying Intent*

Our dependent variable was computed through a two-item average scale that captured respondents' levels of agreement with the following statements: "I would be willing to pay for the services of public media, that is, RTVE and public regional radios and television" and "I would be willing to sustain the public media system through a direct payment" (Spearman-Brown = .95;  $M = 3.22$ ;  $SD = 2.43$ ).

#### *Controls*

To minimize confounding effects, our model controls the influence of demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, education, and income) plus two sets of variables related to media and political orientations. Our selected controls have been chosen following previous

**Table 1.** Zero-order correlations.

	PSM consumption	Need of public media	Trust RTVE	Political interest	Political trust	Ideology	Expenditure	TVE service quality	Paying intent
PSM consumption	–								
Need of public media	.177***	–							
Trust RTVE	.388***	.448***	–						
Political interest	.134***	.131***	.089***	–					
Political trust	.354***	.233***	.489***	.142***	–				
Ideology	.144***	–.232***	–.057*	.043	–.011	–			
Expenditure	.118***	.033	.096***	.139***	.069**	.088***	–		
Perception of quality	.378***	.440***	.734***	.059*	.438***	–.072**	.060*	–	
Paying intent	.367***	.078***	.354***	–.005	.357***	.053*	.030	.350***	–

Note. Sample size = 1,717. Cell entries are two-tailed zero-order correlations coefficients.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

literature that suggests their association with one or more of our variables of interest (Spector 2021).

### *Media Orientations*

Considering extant literature supports associations between levels of consumption and trust in media with its perceptions and evaluations, and particularly PSM consumption with the willingness to pay for content (Fletcher and Nielsen 2017; Goyanes 2015), these variables form our first control block:

**PSM Consumption.** This construct was measured by asking participants how often they consumed seven different PSM outlets on a 10-point scale (1 = Never; 10 = Several times a day). The items presented included online offline, national, and local offerings (“La Primera de TVE,” “La 2,” “Noticias 24 hrs,” “Local Public Service TV,” “Clan TV,” “PlayZ,” “Tel-eportes”). Items were averaged to create a construct of PSM consumption (Cronbach’s alpha = .84;  $M = 3.54$ ;  $SD = 1.83$ )

**Need of Public Service Media.** Individuals’ levels of agreement with three statements were used to measure their perceptions of the need for PSM “in general” and specifically for “information” and “entertainment” purposes. Items were averaged to create a construct of need for public service media (Cronbach’s alpha = .73;  $M = 6.21$ ;  $SD = 2.06$ ).

**TVE Trust.** Following previous work (Fawzi and Mothes 2020; Kohring and Matthes 2007), we used a 5-item average scale to measure perceptions of RTVE’s trust. Respondents were asked to express their levels of agreement (1 = Complete Disagreement; 10 = Complete Agreement) with the following statements: “In general, RTVE’s reporting is true to facts”; “relevant topics receive the necessary attention”; “all important information regarding relevant topics is provided”; “journalist’s opinions are well-founded”; “different points of view are included” (Cronbach’s alpha = .96;  $M = 5.16$ ;  $SD = 2.30$ ). To test whether our scales of RTVE trust and RTVE service quality assess distinct—but correlated—constructs, a principal axis factoring with Oblimin rotation was conducted, and results are reported in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Maximum likelihood Varimax factoring of RTVE trust and RTVE service quality.

	TVE trust	TVE service quality
RTVE service quality		
RTVE fiction productions are of quality	.148	<b>.784</b>
RTVE’s programming stands out by its quality	–.051	<b>.989</b>
RTVE’s news services are of quality	–.014	<b>.860</b>
RTVE trust		
Relevant topics receive necessary attention	<b>.867</b>	–.014
All important information regarding relevant topics is provided	<b>.956</b>	–.070
Reporting includes different points of view	<b>.855</b>	.024
The reports recount the facts truthfully	<b>.883</b>	.042
The journalists’ opinions are well formed	<b>.829</b>	.073

Note. Values are pattern loadings from the pattern matrix of the direct Oblimin rotation (fixed number of factors = 2). Primary loadings of a variable on a factor are indicated by boldface type. Eigenvalues cumulative variance explained by the two factors = 84.65%. Factor 1 = 73.90%, Factor 2 = 10.74%. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = .920; Bartlett’s test of sphericity,  $\chi^2(28) = 14025.021$ ,  $p < .001$ .  $N = 1,717$ .

## **Political Orientations**

Based on studies that show associations between political attitudes and ideology with media use, perceptions, and evaluations (Morris 2007; Tsfati and Ariely 2014; Tsfati and Cappella 2003), we included the following controls:

### **Political Interest**

On a scale from 1 to 10, respondents were asked to assess “their interest” and “level of attention” in regard to news about public affairs and politics (Spearman-Brown = .95;  $M = 6.56$ ;  $SD = 2.45$ ).

### **Political Trust**

A ten-point scale (1 = No trust; 10 = Strong trust) was used to capture respondents’ levels of trust in “Spain’s political system,” “its Government,” and “judiciary” (Cronbach’s alpha = .81;  $M = 4.11$ ;  $SD = 2.19$ ).

### **Political Ideology**

To tap into respondents’ political Ideology, we used a 3-item average scale to reflect their “general,” “social,” and “economic” views. Answer options ranged from 1 strongly to the left to 10 strongly to the right (Cronbach’s alpha = .93;  $M = 4.98$ ;  $SD = 2.24$ ).

## **Results**

Hypothesis 1 predicts a negative association between expenditure on news and entertainment services and paying intent for public service media. Consistent with our expectation, the results in Table 3 reveal that expenditure on subscription-based services is negatively related to paying intent for public service media ( $\beta = -.064$ ,  $p = .047$ ). Accordingly, citizens’ higher expenditure on multi-platform services such as Netflix, HBO or music applications such as Spotify, lead to less intention to pay for public media services. Hence, H1 was empirically supported.

The next hypothesis tested the association between citizens’ perception of the quality of the Spanish public service media and intentions to pay for such service. As shown in Table 3, results indicate that perceptions of RTVE service quality is positively associated with intentions to pay for public service media ( $\beta = .154$ ,  $p = .000$ ). These results suggest that citizens who value the service quality of RTVE are more prone to pay for public service media, even after controlling for demographics, media and political orientations. Therefore, H2 was empirically supported.

Beyond the variables of interest, income ( $\beta = .099$ ,  $p < .003$ ), PSM consumption ( $\beta = .306$ ,  $p = .000$ ), RTVE trust ( $\beta = .125$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and political trust ( $\beta = .198$ ,  $p = .000$ ), were factors positively associated with paying intent for PSM, while age ( $\beta = .161$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and need of public media ( $\beta = -.113$ ,  $p = .000$ ), were negative predictors of paying intent for PSM. The variables of interest accounted for  $\Delta R^2 = 1.1\%$  of paying intent variance, while the whole model of direct effects explained a total of 29% of variance.

Finally, we asked whether there is a moderation effect between (1) expenditure and age and (2) quality perceptions and age over paying intent for PSM. Regarding the first

**Table 3.** OLS-Regression predicting paying intent for PSM.

Predictors	Paying intent		
	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Block 1: Demographics</i>			
Age	-.042 (.004)	-10.94	<b>.000</b>
Gender	-.161 (.109)	-1.47	.141
Ethnic	.343 (.230)	1.49	.136
Education	.001 (.022)	0.04	.966
Income	.099 (.033)	2.95	<b>.003</b>
$\Delta R^2$	7.5%		
<i>Block 2: Media orientations</i>			
PSM consumption	.306 (.033)	9.40	<b>.000</b>
Need of public media	-.113 (.030)	-3.82	<b>.000</b>
TVE trust	.125 (.036)	3.50	<b>.000</b>
$\Delta R^2$	17.8%		
<i>Block 3: Political orientations</i>			
Political interest	-.044 (.023)	-1.92	.055
Political trust	.198 (.028)	7.08	<b>.000</b>
Political ideology	.013 (.024)	0.54	.584
$\Delta R^2$	2.6%		
<i>Block 4: Variables of interest</i>			
Expenditure	-.064 (.032)	-1.98	<b>.047</b>
TVE service quality	.154 (.033)	4.72	<b>.000</b>
$\Delta R^2$	1.1%		
Total $R^2$	29%		

Note. Sample size = 1,717. Unstandardized beta coefficients are reported with standard errors in brackets. Statistically significant *p* values in bold.

moderation, results reported in Table 4 revealed that there is no significant moderation effect of age over the relationship between expenditure and paying intent for PSM ( $\beta = .000$ ,  $p = .779$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = 0\%$ ).

**Table 4.** Moderation effect of age over the association between expenditure and paying intent for PSM.

	Paying intent for PSM	<i>p</i>
<i>Block 1: All prior blocks Table 2</i>		
$\Delta R^2$	29%	
<i>Block 2: Moderation/interaction</i>		
Expenditure * Age	.000(.002)	.779
$\Delta R^2$	0%	
Total $R^2$	29%	

Note. The point estimate for the moderating effect is an unstandardized coefficient. Standardized error between brackets. Moderation effects based on bootstrapping to 5,000 samples with biased corrected confidence intervals set at 95%. All prior five blocks were entered as covariates in the macro-PROCESS for SPSS.

However, when it comes to RTVE service quality perceptions, the moderation analysis revealed a statistically significant and negative moderation effect of age over the relationship between RTVE service quality perceptions and paying behavior (see Table 5).

To probe the interaction, Table 6 reports the conditional effects of RTVE service quality over paying intent at different values of age ( $\pm$  SD from the mean), and Figure 1 plots the moderation effect. As reflected in Figure 1, younger citizens are more likely to pay for PSM than older ones at all levels of RTVE service quality perceptions. Citizens that are the most likely to pay for PSM are those younger generations that have high RTVE service quality perceptions. Older generations are barely inclined to pay for PSM, no matter the levels of perceptions of RTVE service quality.

## Discussion and Conclusions

As a public good, PSM should be available to all beyond their ability or willingness to pay (Garnham 1990). However, the current multi-platform, highly concentrated media market is shaped by a highly commercial logic that pushes PSM to either play by its rules or relegates it to the margins of the media system as a service with an abstract and difficult-to-grasp value (Donders 2021). Against this backdrop, developing a complex and dynamic picture of PSM's social value includes exploring monetary measures, such as paying intent and willingness to pay. So far, little academic attention has been paid to citizens' paying intent in the context of PSM (Reiter et al. 2018), and virtually no studies examined these measures in the case of the Spanish PSM, RTVE. To mend this gap in the literature, we analyzed expenditure on news and entertainment services and public service quality as two potential predictors of paying intent for public service media, as well as the moderation effect of age with regards to these factors.

With respect to our first hypothesis, we found that higher expenditure on multi-platform services (e.g., Netflix, HBO, Spotify) was negatively associated with citizens'

**Table 5.** Moderation effect of age over the association between RTVE service quality and paying intent for PSM.

	Paying intent for PSM	<i>p</i>
<i>Block 1: All prior blocks Table 2</i>		
$\Delta R^2$	29%	
<i>Block 2: Moderation/interaction</i>		
TVE service quality * Age	-.009 (.001)	<b>.000</b>
$\Delta R^2$	1.6%	
Total $R^2$	30.6%	

Note. The point estimate for the moderating effect is an unstandardized coefficient. Standardized error between brackets. Moderation effects based on bootstrapping to 5,000 samples with biased corrected confidence intervals set at 95%. All prior five blocks were entered as covariates in the macro-PROCESS for SPSS. Statistically significant *p* value in bold.

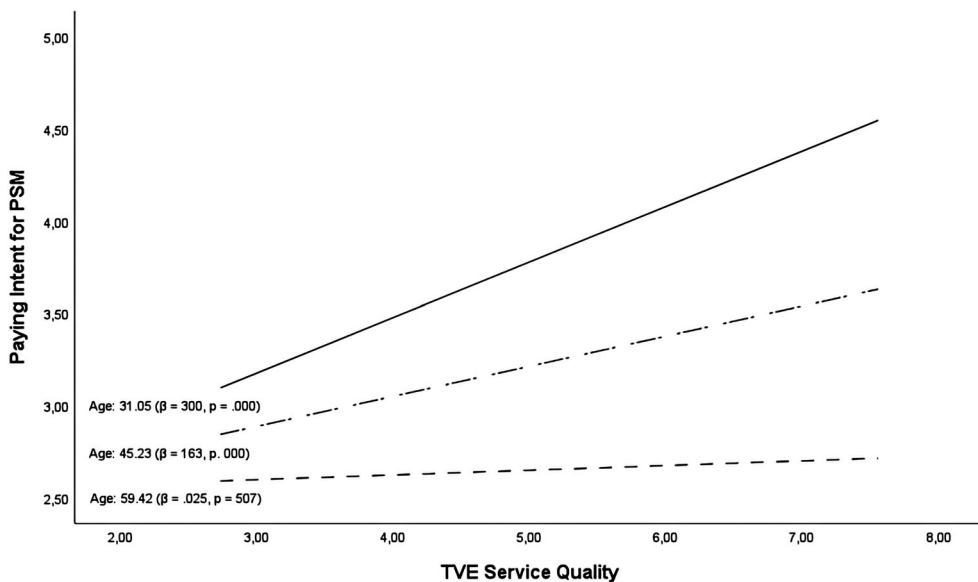
**Table 6.** Conditional effects of RTVE service quality over paying intent at values of citizens' age.

Age	Effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
31.05	.300	.04	7.55	<b>.000</b>	.222	.378
45.23	.163	.03	5.04	<b>.000</b>	.099	.226
59.42	.025	.03	0.66	.507	-.049	.100

Note. The moderator variable (age) is the mean and  $\pm$  SD from the mean. Statistically significant *p* values in bold.

general intentions to pay for and sustain public service media. When considering the standard economic theory of scarcity (Hamilton et al. 2019; Robbins 1935), these findings are admittedly not surprising. As everyday consumers are limited by individual financial/economic constraints, their media consumption is also limited by the monetary resources that they are willing/able to allocate to such activities. At the same time, our results do challenge previous empirical findings regarding the facilitating effect of paying for multiple outlets of news and entertainment services. That is, a positive association has been reported to be found between public service news access and paying intent for online news (Fletcher and Nielsen 2017), paying intent for digital journalistic content, and the use of other media products in general (O'Brien, Wellbrock, and Kleer 2020). After that, our findings are relevant as they explore where PSMs stand in citizens' consideration if subjected to a more market-like logic, presenting an evidence-based counter-narrative to those that attack PSM by arguing that individuals see no value in it.

With regards to our second hypothesis, we found that consumers' higher perceptions of RTVE service quality are associated with higher intentions to pay for public service media after controlling for demographics, as well as media, and political orientations. It is important to note that our measurement of service quality captures citizens' evaluations of PSM content output. With this, we applied a perspective that bypasses both normative, democratic quality standards of public service broadcasting, as well as quality in terms of success based on popularity within the market. By providing a notion of service quality that is based on the public's viewpoint (Goyanes 2021), this study aims to assess consumer-based evaluations of quality. Findings show that when citizens perceive PSMs fulfill their quality expectations, they are ready to sustain them to the point of directly paying for their service. When contrasting these results to previous findings, we find that, on the consumer level, PSM is being evaluated similarly to non-PSM digital



**Figure 1.** Moderation effect of age over the association between RTVE service quality and paying intent for PSM.

journalistic products and services (Goyanes, Artero, and Zapata 2018; Himma-Kadakas and Kouts 2015). That is, perceived quality has a consistently positive impact on paying intent. Consequently, our work reaffirms quality and distinctiveness as key factors for PSM to thrive in a high-choice competitive environment.

Finally, our results were somewhat mixed when addressing the moderating role of age. On the one hand, we found no significant moderation effect of age over the relationship between expenditure on multi-platform services and paying intent for PSM. Consequently, our results indicate higher expenditure on multi-platform services to be negatively associated with consumers' intentions to pay for public service media hold constant regardless of age. On the other hand, age seems to be a significant factor when it comes to addressing the relationship between perceived quality and paying intent for PSM. In fact, younger citizens are more likely to intend to pay for public service media than older ones at all levels of service quality perceptions. On top of that, young consumers with high RTVE service quality perceptions are the most likely to pay for PSM, while older generations' paying intent for PSM is generally low regardless of service quality. One plausible explanation is that younger generations are more used to paying for media products and services (specifically with respect to PSM's competitors, e.g., Netflix, HBO), and this may facilitate their understanding of high-quality media products would require payment on the consumers' side.

Understanding the attitudes and preferences of younger audiences is crucial for the future of PSM (Lowe and Maijanen 2019; Reiter et al. 2018). In previous studies focusing on the economics of news, age tends to be a key predictor. In general, young people show greater WTP/PI for online news in general (Chyi 2005; Goyanes 2014; Newman 2012). However, as Goyanes (2015) indicated, when it comes to local news—which is undoubtedly a traditional public service content—age positively affects paying intention. His results simultaneously provide an explanation for the current state of many local newspapers and raise concerns about the future of these organizations online: the influence of local news on older people is much greater than its effect on young people. It seems to be the case then that WTP/PI measures for different age groups might heavily depend on the nature of the outlet as well as the type of content the outlet provides. Understanding different age groups' economic valuation concerning PSMs' quality and position within the multi-platform environment is therefore crucial. In this regard, our study adds more nuance suggesting that as in the case of general newspapers paying intent (Chyi 2005; Goyanes 2014; Newman 2012), younger consumers are also more likely to sustain the PSM. Furthermore, our results also admittedly paint a somewhat optimistic picture by indicating that younger audiences are generally more willing to pay for PSM at all levels of service quality. The fact that this age group shows a very low consumption of PSM (Schulz, Levy, and Nielsen 2019) also raises the question of how this attitude relates to a normative vision and challenges PSM to sustain this vision by delivering its remit on point.

In general, all our findings promote adherence to PSM core values and principles as they adapt to the constantly changing media environment. This requires innovation at many different levels and constant listening and decoding of citizens emerging needs. This is even more relevant following the recent disruptions of traditional social interactions and the major collateral increases in media consumption. In Europe, during the peak days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the reach of public media evening news

doubled (Cimino and Besson 2020), while the reach of evening news among young audiences increased by 20% (Newman et al. 2020; Túnuez-López, Vaz-Álvarez, and Feiras-Ceide 2020). As a recent article (Martin 2021, 7) notes:

[There is a question as to] whether the effort will prevail, or whether history will show that PSM was a creature of the 20th century that could not live within the new social and cultural ecology of the 21st, and thus became extinct.

As PSMs' short-term popularity is currently rising, it is arguably high time for public service media to try and keep and attract new audiences, specifically amongst the youth.

## Limitations and Future Research

Our study carries some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, due to the cross-sectional nature of our data, we can only present associations and in no way imply causality. New studies using panel data or an experimental design could further explain the relations discussed. Second, our study is limited to the Spanish PSM and its particular history. Third, our study does not delve into the motivations behind the paying intent of younger generations. Future studies could shed light on whether this predisposition is mainly rooted in support of the PSM system or consumption habits.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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