

# The RTVE audience Ombudsman as a mediator in the resolution of complaints about the children's channel Clan (2010-2015)

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## Abstract

Television is one of the agents in children's informal education. The child audience is one of the most vulnerable targets to the impacts of television, hence the family is key to their protection. Parents intervene in educating their children as television viewers and therefore exercise their right to complain to the media Ombudsman. The aim of this article is to analyse the assessments made by RTVE public service's Interactive Media Viewer, Listener and User Ombudsman in response to the complaints lodged about the children's channel Clan.

## Keywords

Television; media ombudsman; children's audiences; audiovisual content; children; RTVE.

## Resum

La televisió és un dels agents de l'educació informal dels menors d'edat. L'audiència infantil és un dels targets més vulnerables als impactes televisius; per aquest motiu, la família és clau en la seva protecció. Els progenitors intervenen en la formació dels fills i les filles com a teleespectadors i teleespectadores i per això exerceixen el seu dret a reclamar davant el Defensor o la Defensora de l'audiència d'un mitjà. L'objectiu d'aquest article és analitzar les valoracions que el Defensor o Defensora de l'Espectador, de l'Oient, de l'Usuari de Mitjans Interactius del servei públic RTVE realitza davant les reclamacions presentades sobre el canal infantil Clan.

## Paraules clau

Televisió, Defensor/a de l'audiència, audiències infantils, continguts audiovisuals, menors d'edat, RTVE.

## 1. Introduction

Television is the medium most consumed by the Spanish population as a whole and the one with the highest penetration in Spanish society (AIMC - SPANISH MEDIA RESEARCH ASSOCIATION 2020). In the case of children's audiences, "it continues to be the medium with which children at an early age share the most leisure time" (MARTA-LAZO 2008a) which has led to a significant increase in the total amount of the television offer aimed at children (BUCKINGHAM 2000). 99% of children watch television content and 80% watch it daily (AIMC 2018). Specifically, the latest *Kids TV Report* (2019) states that in Great Britain, Italy, Spain, France and Italy average daily consumption is 1 hour and 39 minutes for children under 15. It should be noted that the children's audience is a very demanding and selective target that seeks interesting content, regardless of the channel that broadcasts it (GÓMEZ-AMIGO 2015), but it is also more vulnerable to the media impacts coming from television, as it is a trainee

and evolving audience whose personality is yet to be shaped (LÓPEZ-SÁNCHEZ *et al.* 2010).

Today, the relevance of television as a representation of cultural products, values and patterns of behaviour adopted by society is undeniable (DE CASAS-MORENO *et al.* 2016) and, above all, in children. However, although scholars of childhood seem to have forgotten the role of the media in the lives of children and adolescents (CASAS *et al.* 2007), there has been a dramatic increase in research on the effects of television on children (DEL RÍO 1997).

Most of this early research came from the Anglo-Saxon world where the relationship between television and children was addressed in depth. In the Spanish and Latin American sphere, the contributions of Gallardo-Camacho *et al.* (2020), Feijoo-Fernández and García-González (2016), Gómez-Amigo (2015), Marta-Lazo *et al.* (2015), Paz-Rebollo and Martínez-Valero (2014), Ortiz *et al.* (2013), Fernández-Gómez (2012), Mateos-Pérez (2012), Fernández-Martínez and López de

Ayala (2011), Callejo (2008, 2004), García-Galera (2008), Núñez-Ladeveze (2007), Pérez-Ornia and Núñez-Ladeveze (2006), Marta-Lazo (2005, 2007, 2008a, 2008b), García-Matilla *et al.* (2005), Poyatos-Fernández and Tur-Viñes (2005), García-Matilla (2003), Buckingham (2000), Bringué and De los Ángeles (2000), Del Río (1997), Orozco-Gómez (1996, 1993), among many others.

Television, like other media, is an agent children's informal education because it influences what children learn and how they learn (Licerias 2014). Children and young people are one of the most sensitive and vulnerable audiences to the influence of television content and therefore need tools that increase their critical capacity when dealing with such media messages. Critical thinking should be encouraged in these first stages of learning, since children are not passive receivers, but the stage of activity they show is related to their degree of 'audiovisual competence' or the learning they have received to know the languages of the medium, the essential meanings of the messages, the values and counter-values they hide and the real purpose they intend to achieve (MARTA-LAZO 2008b).

In this context, the family is the natural group to watch television (OROZCO-GÓMEZ 1996) and "becomes recognised as one of the main institutions of mediation in the action of children's television consumption" (BRINGUÉ & DE LOS ÁNGELES 2000: 42). Apart from other members of the family environment, parents will have a privileged place in the context of children's television reception. The parent-child-television relationship, as well as the modes of mediation (patterns of interrelation between parents and children on television) have been analysed in depth in previous studies (LLOPIS 2004; TORRECILLAS-LACAVE 2013, 2012).

Regarding the role that parents should play, Ferrés (2005) considers that they should take responsibility and assume the role they should play in training their children as television viewers and, to this end, they should denounce and demand those who hold and exercise authority. Therefore, this research is directed towards studying how parents exercise their right to complain to the media ombudsman, one of the mechanisms that, through their actions, contributes to making audiences literate (HERRERA 2005, 2008; MACÍA-BARBER 2006).

## 2. The figure of the media ombudsman

Media ombudsmen intervene in the critical formation of the media by explaining the ethical obligations of the media, the rights of the audience and by exposing the media's performance on issues that may conflict with some of their ethical duties (Villanueva 2011).

The background to the figure of the ombudsman can be found in the Swedish word, a term which referred to a representative, mediator or public prosecutor and which is now used internationally. The birth of the figure of media ombudsmen, in the current sense, is linked to the written media, specifically the

American press (*The Courier Journal* and *The Louisville Times*) and the Japanese press (*Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*) (Villanueva 2011; Herrera 2005; Dvorkin 2005).

In Spain, it was the newspaper *El País* that appointed the first reader's ombudsman in 1985 (González-Esteban *et al.* 2011). Worth mentioning is the initiative of the appointment of a viewer's ombudsman by Canal Sur Televisión in 1995, as it was the first and only European initiative of self-regulation of a television channel that existed up to that moment (SÁNCHEZ-APELLÁNIZ 1996).

In general, the ombudsman's main function is to ensure the correct deontological functioning of the activity of a medium in order to serve as an intermediary between receivers and broadcasters (HERRERA 2008). It is a unipersonal self-regulation mechanism of the media.

The ombudsman also has a twofold training task: on the one hand, he or she must educate the audience on critical media consumption and, on the other, he or she must also contribute to the training of journalists, so that their products are of increasingly higher quality (HERRERA 2008). In this way, it establishes a two-way dialogue, with the audience and with the media itself, facilitating feedback between the two. In the exercise of his or her function, he or she allows the public to know the point of view of his or her receivers and to improve communication practices and processes developed daily (VELÁSQUEZ-OSSA & CADAVIZ-ÁLVAREZ 2002).

Although each media ombudsman establishes his or her own working dynamics depending on the medium, they all agree that their fundamental tasks are to receive complaints and to be a channel for dialogue (AZNAR 1999). The duration of the position, the origin, the assignment system, the dedication, the way of working, the activity record and the proximity to the rest of the journalists vary (HERRERA & ZETA 2005).

In the Spanish environment, which we are dealing with here, scientific literature has analysed the creation of this figure (SÁNCHEZ-APELLÁNIZ 1996; HERRERA 2008) and the requirements that he or she should fulfil (MACÍA-BARBER 2006). Research has also been carried out on the performance of the ombudsmen in the international environment (HERRERA 2005), the case of Latin America (HERRERA & ZETA 2005) or countries such as Portugal (OLIVEIRA 2005, 2017), Peru (ZETA 2005), Brazil (BERABA 2005); comparative studies: Portugal and Brazil (PEREIRA *et al.* 2016; OLIVEIRA & OLIVEIRA 2014) or among the public broadcasting services of Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Austria, Ireland, Switzerland and Italy (PALAU-SAMPÍO 2017); and in the experiences of specific channels such as the cases of the Caracol channel (PÉREZ 2005) or the RCN channel (CEPEDA 2005) in Colombia.

## 3. Research objectives and methodology

This article is aimed at analysing the assessments made by RTVE's Interactive Media Viewer, Listener and User Ombudsman

in response to the complaints and claims made by the parents of children regarding the children's channel Clan.

Clan, created in 2005, is the thematic channel for children and young people on Spanish public television with "a wide range of education for pre-school children, reduced for schoolchildren and lacking for adolescents" (FERNÁNDEZ-GÓMEZ 2012). It was the first thematic channel exclusively for children that emerged on the Spanish television scene as a free children's channel (MORENO-RODRÍGUEZ 2009). Among its television programming, entertainment stands out (it broadcasts 63.33% cartoons and 20% fiction series) (MELGAREJO & RODRÍGUEZ 2011). The choice of the Clan channel was determined by the fact that it was the children's thematic channel with the highest screen share in Spain during the period studied, as can be seen in Table 1.

We selected the Corporación RTVE because it is where the most research initiatives have emerged for the construction of television discourses, in favour of children, which allow for establishing action guidelines for child television consumption, detecting screen risks for children and constructing a positive discourse on childhood (ORTIZ *et al.* 2013). These initiatives were reflected in the organisation of various forums (National Forum "Family Environment, Children, Education and Television" 2004; National Forum "Children, Television and Education" 2005, among others) and various publications (Children's Television Programming: Priority Orientations and Contents or Educating the Look, published by the Official Institute of Radio and Television and Grupo Comunicar). On the other hand, on 21 July 2010 the Board of Directors of RTVE approved the 'Code of self-regulation for the defence of the rights of children in audiovisual, related, interactive and online information contents of the RTVE Corporation', in line with the 'Code of self-regulation of television contents and children', approved by TVE and other commercial channels (Antena 3 TV, Telecinco and Canal Plus) on 9 December 2004 and signed in collaboration with the Government. The aim was to reflect a greater commitment on the part of television channels to comply with current regulations and to promote an audiovisual offer that is suitable for children (GARCÍA-GALERA 2008).<sup>1</sup> The

Ombudsman's office is responsible for monitoring compliance with the Code.

In this research, of a descriptive-exploratory nature, a quantitative and qualitative analysis will be made of the resolution of the complaints and suggestions presented in this office during the period 2010-2015, based on the quarterly reports published by RTVE on its website. This article is the beginning of a research with a longer timespan that covers up to the present time. The period 2010-2015 was analysed in this first phase, while in a second phase, still in progress, the period 2016-2020 is dealt with. 2010 was selected because it was the date when the analogue switch-off took place and with it multiplication of channels and fragmentation of the audience, derived from the first year of digital television in Spain and because, as a consequence of DTT, the children's audience was again an interesting target (MARTA-LAZO *et al.* 2015). The consolidation of DTT in 2010 meant a shift in children's content to thematic channels although, as Feijoo and Garcia (2016) point out after analysing forty years (1970-2010) of children's television<sup>2</sup> in Spain, children's programming already had a declining presence in the programming grids of generalist channels, with series and cartoons (mainly foreign production), the main products programmed. Consequently, the main contents of children's media consumption are television fiction (cartoons, series and films) and, more specifically, cartoons (AIERBE-BARANDIARAN & OREGUI-GONZÁLEZ 2016).

The time frame of the first phase is triggered by the arrival of Netflix in Spain. This produced a new break in how we understand and consume television, since it "cancels out one of the premises of traditional television, which consists of the seriality of content, to encourage audience loyalty and thus obtain stability in advertising or subscription income" (IZQUIERDO-CASTILLO 2015: 822). In addition, the possibility of consuming without scheduled times and in a safe environment, due to parental control, is one of the great demands for family consumption of audiovisual content.

From a quantitative perspective, all the complaints filed in the office were recorded, selecting only those linked to the contents of

**Table 1. Screen share of the main children's thematic channels in Spain during the period 2010-2015**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Boing (Mediaset España)	0,2%	1,1%	1,7%	1,7%	1,7%	1,6%
Clan (RTVE)	3,2%	3,2%	2,5%	2,4%	2,3%	2,4%
Disney Channel (Net TV)	2,1%	1,7%	1,6%	1,5%	1,5%	1,4%

Source: Barlovento Comunicación. In-house document.

the Clan channel, while from the qualitative dimension the facts claimed were identified and categorised thematically according to the main fields of action of the ombudsman. The categories were created based on the previous theoretical research framework from the previous studies, the Self-Regulation Code itself and also based on the thematic similarities of the claims presented.

The main material for this research was, first, the quarterly reports published by the ombudsman's office on compliance with the Code for the Protection of Children and Young People and, secondly, the Corporation's annual reports on fulfilment of its function as a public service, which are available on the RTVE website. An analysis table was created to process the data, which included the category, the event claimed, the date of the claim, the ombudsman's response and the corrective measures (if any).

#### 4. The creation of the figure of the media ombudsman in RTVE

On 2 February 2006, the Television Viewer and Radio Listener Ombudsman office was created<sup>3</sup> by resolution of the General Directorate, under the direction of Carmen Caffarel. The implementation of this figure, as stated by Macía-Barber (2006: 48), had a twofold objective: "on the one hand, to contribute to achieving the public service goals that the Group has been entrusted with and, on the other, to serve the citizen, as a television viewer or radio listener, with greater levels of attention, transparency and efficiency". On 10 February, the office began operating and in the first week received 200 complaints (GONZÁLEZ & TENREIRO 2006). The journalist and professor, Manuel Alonso Erasquin, held the position during the first two years.

The following year, on 29 November 2007, the Board of Directors of Corporación RTVE agreed to create the institution of RTVE's Interactive Media Viewer, Listener and User Ombudsman and to approve its statute. This statute states that its function "consists of defending the right of citizens to truthful, independent and plural information and to dignified and participative entertainment, in accordance with the public service function that Law 17/2006 of 5 June entrusts to RTVE" (RTVE 2007). Among its main objectives was to promote awareness of the rights of citizens as users of the media and to stimulate a critical attitude towards them. The statute explains that the appointment of the ombudsman is made by the President of RTVE, from among professionals of the public corporation, for a period of three years, renewable for one more term. The ombudsman organically reports to the President of the corporation, although the statute states that he does not receive any internal or external guidelines on his or her work.

The job of media ombudsman of a public service<sup>4</sup> such as RTVE makes the creation of its figure more relevant by contributing to one of the two main purposes of any public television service, as stated by Ortiz *et al.* (2013): education and training of critical citizenship.

##### 4.1. Way of working and channels of participation

As stated in its statute, the ombudsman's main job is to receive complaints, claims or suggestions from television viewers, radio listeners and users of interactive media for processing by the responsible departments or areas and to provide a response within a maximum of thirty days. This activity is carried out at the request of such complaints, although the ombudsman may also intervene *ex officio* if he or she deems it appropriate.

Any citizen, indicating his or her name, surname(s), ID card number and address or telephone number, may make claims, complaints and suggestions (via e-mail, ordinary mail, fax or the form on the *rtve.es* website itself) within one month of the

**Table 2. Names of RTVE media ombudsmen from the creation of the office to the present**

Name	Mandate	Name of the figure	Director of the Public Entity/ President of the Corporation
Manuel Alonso Erasquin	February 2006- March 2008	Television Viewer and Radio Listener Ombudsman	Carmen Caffarel
Elena Sánchez Caballero	March 2008- April 2014	RTVE's Interactive Media Viewer, Listener and User Ombudsman	Luis Fernández Fernández Alberto Oliart Saussol Leopoldo González-Echenique
Carmen Sastre Bellas	Abril 2014- November 2014		Leopoldo González-Echenique José Antonio Sánchez Domínguez
Ángel Nodal	November 2014- Now		José Antonio Sánchez Domínguez Rosa María Mateo

Source: RTVE. In-house document.

issue of the programme that is the subject of the claim. All complaints and suggestions are acknowledged, but only those that fall within the competence of the viewer’s ombudsman are processed.

The ombudsman also has his or her own monthly slot, lasting thirty minutes, broadcast on channel La 2 on the last Sunday of each month and available on the RTVE website. In the programme RTVE *responde* the ombudsman tries to respond to some of the audience’s concerns and questions, resolves some complaints and attempts to bring the Corporation closer to the viewers by broadcasting videos about the different divisions of the Corporation. In addition, viewers can also send their video complaints to the programme by recording their own videos with the complaints they consider.

Every three months, the Ombudsman’s office publishes a report on its performance on the Corporation’s website and, on an annual basis, submits a report to the General Directorate. However, not all complaints made by the public are available or accessible, only those included in the report.

The procedure for receiving a complaint or claim is to contact the relevant responsible division or the channel manager to pass on the claim. From this higher level, the content is assessed again and, subsequently, a decision is made on the content that is sent to the ombudsman’s office, which will communicate it to the hearing.

**5. Analysis of the results**

Table 3 shows all the complaints received on compliance with the Child and Youth Protection Code at the Ombudsman’s office during the period in question. From there, those that referred exclusively to the Clan channel have been selected.

Depending on the number of complaints and the relevance given to some of them by the office, several categories have been established in relation to the main thematic areas of action of the Ombudsman: a) children’s content, b) recommended viewing ages and c) surreptitious advertising, d) time distribution of content and e) social behaviour.

Although they do not affect the Clan channel it is worth noting the increase in complaints experienced in 2012 and 2013 about the same content: the broadcasting of bullfights by channel TVE-1 in the afternoon.

**a. The contents**

The violent nature of the content broadcast is the main reason for the complaints received during the six years analysed.

In the vast majority of cases, parents rate certain cartoon series as violent (inciting quarrelling or fighting), an assessment that is not shared by the ombudsman’s office. *Marco Antonio, Cachorros, Gormiti* or *Código Lyoko* are some of the audiovisual products that receive the most complaints due to their excessive violence when considered to be in breach of the self-regulation code. However, the ombudsman does not find violent indicators, that is, the set of actions carried out by characters that imply physical or psychological damage and that lead them to be removed from their programming. The office explains that all the products broadcast on this channel are selected for the final viewer (the child) and are endorsed by pedagogues and educational researchers.

These cartoon series are considered to have rhythm, action, adventure and music, but not violence. On many occasions it is argued that parents, by viewing only a fragment of the content and not the entire episode, do not know how to interpret the true meaning or the codes used when preparing such content, hence they may be confused with violent content.

We also note the difficulty of quantifying the elements qualified by the parents as violent, since most of the complaints are too generic to specify particular elements to be assessed by the office. That is why they continually ask for greater specificity in the complaints in order to improve reflection and analysis. This can happen because, as Aran-Ramspott and Rodrigo-Alsina (2012) point out, the study of violence in the media arises from an initial difficulty: the delimitation of the very notion of violence.

The *SpongeBob* series is noteworthy for its relevance to the set of claims and for the relevance given to it by the ombudsmen themselves. Multiple complaints have been received about

**Table 3. Complaints about the Child and Youth Protection Code received by the ombudsman’s office (2010-2015)**

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	TC	CC	TC	CC	TC	CC	TT	CC	TC	CC	TC	CC
1st Quarter			49	32	72	16	102	NA	42	10	63	28
2nd Quarter	14	8	36	25	240	22	436	NA	54	11	48	N.D.
3rd Quarter			29	23	1.340	12	55	NA	223	15	N.D.	N.D.
4th Quarter	36	22	37	18	29	6	64	NA	118	13	N.D.	3

TC: total claims *eclamaciones totales*; CC:Clan-related claims; NA: not available)

Source: RTVE. In-house document.

this series because of the shouting of the characters and the violence that emanates from the series. For example, in 2011, a viewer asked for the series to be withdrawn for reasons against public health outlined in an investigative article. The article he mentioned, signed by Lillard & Peterson, was entitled “The Immediate Impact of Different Types of Television on Young Children’s Executive Function” and was published in *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

In this article, a comparative experiment was carried out on how three activities (1) viewing *SpongeBob* as an example of content with movement; (2) viewing the *Caillou* series as slower content; (3) drawing, influenced the executive functions (self-regulation or memory) of four-year-olds. The experiment was conducted with a group of 60 children, divided into three groups, who were assigned one of the three activities. The findings showed that children who watched the fast-paced cartoons performed significantly worse on executive function tasks than children in the other two groups. It was concluded that nine minutes of watching this content had an immediate negative effect on the executive function of the four-year-olds.

The ombudsman, at the time Elena Sánchez, considered that *SpongeBob* had been used “as an example of dynamic and fast content (like many other cartoons), as it is well known for its great international diffusion, to compare the effects produced by the exhibition in some functions such as self-regulation and memory, with respect to slower content such as *Caillou* or the activity of drawing” (RTVE 2011). According to the ombudsman, the aim of the experiment was not to carry out an analysis of the potential effects of *SpongeBob*, but of a dynamic content versus a calmer one. She also pointed out that the size of the sample made it impossible to extrapolate the data or make generalisations. In any case, the ombudsman said that the series was viewed again and no harmful elements were found, but only ‘friendship, action, rhythm, music and a lot of humour’ (RTVE 2011).

Another concern that emerges from the complaints submitted by parents shows a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, some complaints call for more informative content, and on the other hand, the lack of educational content in the channel is pointed out. In order to respond to both demands, the office requested the assessment of the Clan Director, who explained that the main objective of the channel was that “children have fun and at the same time learn social behaviour, values and habits with their favourite characters” (RTVE 2010), and therefore chose to programme educational and entertainment content. *Los Lunnis* and *Pocoyó* were mentioned as products that entertained children in the pre-school stage but also educated them by transmitting values of respect, equality or justice; *Caillou* or *Enermanos* as products that promoted care for the environment or *El mundo de Pocoyó* with its section *Let’s go Pocoyó* or *Dora la Exploradora* to promote learning English.

#### b. Recommended viewing ages

Corporación RTVE’s<sup>5</sup> age classification of content is based on analysing the following four parameters: 1) social behaviour, 2) violence, 3) conflict and 4) sex. To which two more variables are added (social portrait and artistic integration and expression) for the classification of contents as especially recommended for children and for all audiences.

Some complaints requested a change in the classification of the contents according to the recommended ages.

Clan is a children’s channel with content aimed at different age groups (children and adolescents), which is why there are complaints about the broadcasting of content that is inappropriate for certain ages. Several complaints suggested the possibility of creating a new channel, so that one channel would be dedicated to children up to seven and another from seven onwards, imitating the BBC model with two channels: one for children under six (Cbeebies) and another for children from six to twelve (Cbbc). The office acknowledged that the BBC was a reference and that the channel aimed only at pre-school audience broadcast some series such as *Todo es Rosi*, *Peppa Pig* or *Pat the Postman*. However, the people in charge of the channel indicated that the multiplexes granted by the Ministry of Industry did not have space to offer two channels dedicated to children. This scenario is one of the reasons for offering programming aimed at all ages. For this reason, some parents proposed that all the channel’s content should be accompanied by a label indicating the age rating to prevent children from viewing content that is inappropriate for their age.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, many complaints insisted on pointing out the continuous repetition of the channel’s contents and the absence of new products. From the office it was highlighted that Clan is a thematic channel that continuously repeats content because it does not have enough television slots to cover all the hours of programming. The programming grid is configured according to the channel’s programming strategies but, usually, releases are scheduled for the afternoon and then repeated continuously.

#### c. Stealth advertising

Several complaints insisted that certain self-promotions (e.g. the *Gormiti* series of self-promotions with real images of toys) could be classified as stealth advertising. As recognised by the Ombudsman’s office, viewers “are not and do not have to be experts in advertising, so the presence of toys on the screen is automatically associated with conventional advertising insertion” (RTVE 2011). Despite eliminating broadcasting of commercial advertising derived from Law 8/2009, dated 28 August, on the financing of the Spanish Radio and Television Corporation, self-promotions of series and products derived from it are allowed, but it is recognized that they can generate confusion, especially in a particularly sensitive audience such as children.

The recommendation made by the channel is that the messages “should be clearly differentiated, either through image or through storytelling, from advertising to the use of commercial media, so that no confusion can arise in the viewer” (RTVE 2011).

#### d. Hourly distribution of contents

Some of the complaints filed showed disagreement with the time schedule of the contents, either because they were broadcast at a late hour or inappropriate for children. However, the office indicated that the people in charge of programming were those in charge of preparing the programming grids, to which the complaints submitted were referred. It is explained that they distribute the contents according to the audience and acceptance rates together with the uses of time of the Spanish population in order to satisfy the great majority.

#### e. Social behaviour

Several claims focused on the social behaviours of the characters in the *Winx Club* series. According to the claimants in this series they showed stereotypical female characters, misogynist behaviours, as well as the macho roles of some characters. The aesthetics and physiques of the protagonists were also considered “a model that can lead to anorexia” (RTVE 2011). The ombudsman’s response indicated that, on the one hand, positive elements (effort, friendship, achievement of collective objectives, etc.) were more important in this series than the presence of stereotypes. On the other hand, in relation to the physicality of the protagonists, it was stated that they are very stylised but that “the story makes it clear that it is a fantasy not a reality” (RTVE 2011).

The complaints also include concern about the language used by certain characters, which is inappropriate for children.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

After analysing the complaints submitted to the RTVE’s interactive media viewer, listener and user ombudsman’s office, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, worthy of mention is parents’ constant concern about the violence observed in the audiovisual content consumed by their children. The potential negative uses of the viewing of television content considered as violent is the main reason for complaint, far beyond complaints about the inadequate vocabulary or the sexist roles adopted by some of the characters in the cartoon series.

Secondly, both parents and the office itself continually point to the BBC as a model for selecting and programming content for children. The division of children’s programming into two channels is highly rated by parents to ensure that children see content appropriate to their age. In this regard, and with a view to future research, it would be interesting to analyse the role

that the BBC, together with the regulator Ofcom, plays in the literacy of British children’s audiences.

Thirdly, the set of complaints received allows, from the figure of the ombudsman, to reflect on their content, attempting to make a criticism and internal dialogue. Furthermore, the presence of this figure allows the audience to become aware of some of the decisions taken regarding certain contents. This can contribute to improving the Corporation’s credibility and prestige.

Fourthly, the reports handled do not state that the ombudsman has acted *ex officio* in relation to the *Clan* channel,<sup>7</sup> but rather that his or her actions derived from the parents’ complaints. During the period analysed, the main activity has been to respond to complaints and suggestions from children’s parents.

In short, the social function carried out by the ombudsman can be extracted analysing these reports, along with the risks children are exposed to. The parents pass on the complaints and suggestions to the office about the aspects that may be potentially harmful to the children. At home, it is also the parents or adults who are responsible for establishing criteria and/or filters for responsible media consumption. It would be necessary to know, therefore, the level of media literacy that they have in order to assess their function. As pointed out by Torrecillas-Lacabe (2012: 140) “the lack of protection of children at home in front of the television begins with the lack of adequate media literacy for parents (...)”. Hence, parents’ media literacy considerably determines the media education that children receive and their attitude towards the media as consumers of the future.

The current information society, which is multi-screen and hyper-connected, poses great and new challenges for the television system, making the contexts of use multiply, diversify and renew (PÉREZ-TORNERO 2008). In this new environment, media literacy processes take on greater relevance in order to awaken a critical spirit in citizens so that they demand sustainable communication based on the veracity of the messages and the rigour of information (DEL MORAL & VILLALUSTRE 2013). The generations of children, digital natives, will be prosumers who will participate, more than any other previous generation, in the media in an active and continuous way in a highly mediatized environment, hence the need to train them minimally. Establishing responsible consumer habits is a task that lies with various agents of formal and informal education; however, it was observed that, from the ombudsman’s office, no *ex officio* actions were carried out that contributed to this end.

In the second part of the research, currently underway, it will be possible to observe whether the concerns, complaints and suggestions of the parents have been altered or, on the contrary, are similar to those expressed during the years analysed. This will allow us to establish comparative and evolutionary analyses of the ombudsman’s actions in response to the parents’ complaints.

In future research, it will be necessary to determine whether the child and adolescent population is able to assess the

violation of their rights or not, as well as to adopt a critical stance on television content, as was confirmed in the study by Espinosa, Ochaíta and Gutiérrez (2014) in a sample of Spanish adolescents (12-18 years old).

## Notes

1. The papers by Fernández-Martínez and López-de-Ayala (2011) or Ruiz-San-Román and Salguero-Montero (2008) on compliance with the code are noteworthy.
2. Another extremely interesting paper is that of Paz-Rebollo and Martínez-Valero (2014) on the formation of the first child and youth audience for television in Spain covering the decade 1958-68.
3. A previous precedent was the establishment of the figure of the Radio Listener's Ombudsman in RNE (1986).
4. It should be mentioned that at present the public television services of Extremadura, Catalonia and Andalusia have the figure of the Media Ombudsman.
5. The age rating is as follows: content for children, content not recommended for children under 7, content not recommended for children under 13 and content not recommended for children under 18.
6. In this regard, it is worth noting Ortiz-Sobrino, Fuente-Cobo and Martínez-Otero's paper (2015) on indicating content on the main Spanish television channels.
7. The ombudsman has acted ex officio as a result of content issued in TVE-1 considered unsuitable for children.

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