# The salience of inequality in Spanish cybermedia in a pandemic year

## La relevancia de la desigualdad en los cibermedios españoles en un año de pandemia

*A relevância da desigualdade nos ciberméios espanhóis em um ano de pandemia*

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**ABSTRACT** | The increase in inequality resulting from economic policies adopted to mitigate the 2008 financial crisis has been a frequent issue on the global media's agenda. Thus, when in March 2020 the world was paralyzed by the coronavirus pandemic, many voices spoke out calling for more supportive policies to curb the widening gaps in society. The aim of this study is to explain the salience given by the Spanish media to the relationship established between inequality and the coronavirus within the current hybrid media system, in which topics can be approached from the perspective of new actors, in new media spaces and, therefore, from new logics of journalistic production. To this end, we analyzed the journalistic stories published by six Spanish cybermedia during the first year of the pandemic. It has thus been possible to evaluate the evolution of the issue's salience in the media agendas, as well as the weight of ideological bias in its journalistic reporting. The results show that, after an initial boom, the subject's relevance declined over time, although inequality continued to be present in journalistic products. In addition, the media's ideology has an impact on the issue's coverage and the use of new opportunities in the digital context.

**KEYWORDS**: relevance; inequality; cybermedia; content analysis; Spain.

**RESUMEN|** *El aumento de la desigualdad derivada de las políticas económicas desarrolladas para combatir la crisis financiera de 2008 ha sido un tema recurrente en la agenda mediática mundial. Por lo tanto, cuando en marzo de 2020 el mundo se paralizó debido a la pandemia por el coronavirus, muchas voces se alzaron reclamando políticas más solidarias que frenasen el aumento de las brechas presentes en la sociedad. El objetivo de este estudio es explicar la relevancia otorgada por los medios españoles a la relación que se establece entre desigualdad y el coronavirus, dentro del actual sistema híbrido de medios, en el que los temas pueden desarrollarse desde la perspectiva de nuevos actores, en nuevos espacios mediáticos y, por ende, desde nuevas lógicas de producción periodística. Para ello, se analizan los relatos periodísticos publicados por seis cibermedios españoles a lo largo del primer año de la pandemia. Así, se ha podido medir la evolución de la relevancia del tema en las agendas mediáticas ay el peso del condicionante ideológico en su desarrollo. Los resultados muestran cómo, tras un primer momento de apogeo del tema, su relevancia decrece con el paso del tiempo, aunque la desigualdad seguirá presente en los productos periodísticos. Asimismo, se constata cómo la ideología del medio influencia en la cobertura que se hace del tema y el aprovechamiento de las nuevas oportunidades del entorno digital.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *relevancia; desigualdad; cibermedios; análisis de contenido; España.*

**RESUMO|** O aumento da desigualdade resultante das políticas econômicas adotadas para mitigar a crise financeira de 2008 tem sido um tema frequente na agenda da mídia mundial. Assim, quando, em março de 2020, o mundo foi paralisado pela pandemia do coronavírus, muitas vozes se levantaram pedindo mais políticas de apoio para diminuir as lacunas cada vez maiores na sociedade. O objetivo deste estudo é explicar a importância dada pela mídia espanhola à relação estabelecida entre a desigualdade e o coronavírus, dentro do atual sistema híbrido de mídia, no qual tópicos podem ser abordados a partir da perspectiva de novos atores, em novos espaços e, portanto, a partir de novas lógicas de produção jornalística. Para este fim, foram analisadas as matérias jornalísticas publicadas por seis cibermeios espanhós durante o primeiro ano da pandemia. Desta forma, foi possível avaliar a evolução da importância do tema nas agendas da mídia e o peso do preconceito ideológico no seu desenvolvimento. Os resultados mostram como, após um boom inicial do tema, sua importância diminuiu ao longo do tempo, embora a desigualdade continue presente nos produtos jornalísticos. Além disso, a ideologia da mídia tem um impacto sobre a cobertura do tema e o aproveitamento de novas oportunidades no ambiente digital.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**: relevância; desigualdade; cibermeios; análise de conteúdo; Espanha.

## INTRODUCTION

Journalism is in crisis and has been so since the irruption of the World Wide Web (Díaz-Noci, 2021). In the midst of the Internet Galaxy (Castells, 2001), our way of communicating has changed drastically. We relate to others in a different way and access information through new devices and platforms (Newman et al., 2021). Thus, in a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), journalistic work mutates, necessarily changing. The current ecosystem is characterized by an increase in initiatives, models, channels, formats, narratives, and contributions from active audiences, among others (López-García et al., 2019) and, especially, by an increase in its complexity. The media landscape is developing in a context in which the number of media has grown exponentially and audiences are highly fragmented, with almost infinite options for news consumption (Meikle & Eden, 2011; Boczkowski & Anderson, 2017).

The consolidation of the digital society and, therefore, of this hybrid media system, is an indisputable reality. This is shown by the Reuters Institute's 2021 *Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2021). During that year, smartphones are the preferred medium for Spaniards to access news; in fact, they are twice as popular as computers, which, in turn, confirms the continued decline of the print press (Newman et al., 2021). As for the report *Sociedad Digital en España 2020-2021* (Digital Society in Spain 2020-2021) (Fundación Telefónica, 2021), it points out that our country is a leader in fiber and will reach 100% coverage by the end of 2025. Similarly, the percentage of citizens who use the Internet several times a day was 81% in 2020, and the percentage of the population that surfs the Internet at least five days a week reached 83.1% (Fundación Telefónica, 2021).

These data are confirmed by the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) prepared annually by the European Commission. The document indicates that Spain is one of the countries that has experienced the most significant progress in the last five years in this area, now ranking 11th in the European Union. In addition, in the latest report, it improves its score in four of the five major indicators: connectivity, digital skills, Internet use, integration of digital technology, and digital public services (Comisión Europea, 2021). Although the decline of traditional media has occurred progressively (Martínez-Costa et al., 2019), it has been in 2021 when consumption has made the definitive turnaround. As shown by data from the second 2021 wave of the *Estudio General de Medios* (General Media Study) (https:// reporting.aimc.es/index.html), the media with the highest penetration in Spain is, for the first time in history, the Internet, with 84% compared to 82.8% for television, which had historically been in the lead.

Considering the above, it is important to qualify several aspects that determine and explain the hybrid media ecosystem from Chadwick's perspective (2013). It is estimated that the first change linked to this scenario was the emergence of a large number of actors capable of generating information beyond the legacy media. In this regard, the inclusion of new actors does not remain only in the sphere of the so-called citizen journalism, understood as an amateur modality of the profession (Suárez-Villegas, 2017), but encompasses NGOs, academics, political parties or activists, among others. Consequently, sources are empowered (Díaz-Noci, 2021), who no longer need journalists in the same way.

This change is directly related to the system's second transformation: the emergence of new spaces for publication and media consumption: these are, due to their predominant role, the social networks. In addition, there are various digital platforms, such as blogs or forums. All of them are what Cabrera Menéndez and colleagues (2019) define as new media. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that in today's media ecology, legacy media coexist with new media; indeed, one of the keys to Chadwick's (2013) reasoning is that it is not a dichotomous system (one thing or the other), but is based on the coexistence of the various actors, which delves into the complexity of the reality in which we live. Thus, we mutate from more or less stable structures to fluid and flexible ones (Deuze, 2021), replacing the so-called liquid society (Serrano-Tellería, 2017, 2019, 2021) by a gaseous one (Scolari, 2020, 2021).

The last major change concerns journalistic routines (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), understood as defined by Lecaros and Greene as "habitual, current, and tailored procedures that are accepted as appropriate professional practices" (2012, p. 54). Such routines were profoundly modified with the incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs), new actors, and new spaces. The way of working has changed beyond the use of different technologies or the constant need for immediacy (Salaverría, 2005; Masip, 2005; Díaz-Noci, 2013, 2019; Calvo-Rubio et al., 2018). The logic of trending, clickbait as a strategy, or the economy of attention in a system of surveillance capitalism, among others, is imposed (Pérez-Arozamena & Odriozola-Chéné, 2020; Bazaco et al., 2019; Zuboff, 2020). Thus, Martínez-Costa and colleagues (2019) point out that we are facing the third generation of cyber-journalism, as yet unnamed, surpassed by the web and mobile. An incipient journalism, marked by the progressive irruption of artificial intelligence (AI) and the role of active audiences in the digital public sphere (Masip et al., 2019), so that the new ways of working and newsmaking are yet to be defined. However, and without diminishing from the above, a recent Chilean research points to the reinforcement of classic routines, such as the editor's relevance (Greene et al., 2022).

On the other hand, we have recently experienced the biggest crisis of the 21st century in the wake of COVID-19. On March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic, life changed. From that moment on, population confinements were taking place all over the world, in addition to the one in Wuhan and different areas of China (EFE, 2020). Thus, with most of the population in their homes, the consequences came quickly (Tragacete, 2020); for example, much of the world's economic activity was paralyzed and educational centers were closed (Preguntas y respuestas…, 2020). During that time, different social actors exposed how, in this extreme situation, inequality among citizens increased and, consequently, the media began to discuss this problem (Diez-Roux, 2020). The media interest in the crisis caused, in turn, that quickly the journalistic coverage of the pandemic itself became the research problem to be studied (Costa-Sánchez & López-García, 2020; Lázaro-Rodríguez & Herrera-Viedma, 2020; Moreno et al., 2020; Túñez-López et al., 2020).

Thus, inequality becomes one of the main topics on the political and media agenda, one of the most worrying issues in the public sphere (Song et al., 2019). A clear example is found in the 2030 Agenda of the Government of Spain, where "reducing inequality within and between countries" is presented as the tenth of the Sustainable Development Goals (https://www.mdsocialesa2030.gob.es/agenda2030/index.htm). Thus, the Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Gobierno de España, 2021) outlines one of the main action lines: the fight against inequality, linked not only to the tenth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations, but also to others such as the first: end poverty in all its forms, worldwide. At this point, it recalls that we understand inequality as the disparity that makes some people have access to certain standards of living and others do not (Ray, 1998); i.e., variations in living standards across a population (McKay, 2002).

However, the prominence of this concept has not been continuous or homogeneous in a traditional way in the media. Regarding its discontinuous presence, it is important to point out that issues have a life cycle. It is not usual for a specific topic to receive attention for a long period (Downs, 1972). In the case of inequality, the 2008 economic crisis led to an increase in research focused on this topic (Odriozola-Chéné et al., 2020).

Two fundamental works highlight economic inequality as a pivotal element from which public debate is articulated: *The Spirit Level* by Kate Pickett and Richard G. Wilkinson (2009), in which the authors demonstrate that more egalitarian societies are happier, and *Le Capital au XXIe siècle*, by Thomas Piketty (2013), with his controversial proposal for an annual global wealth tax to alleviate the

devastating effects of differences in income and wealth among citizens. Likewise, others such as *The Price of Inequality* (Stiglitz, 2012) or Milanović's *The Haves and the Have-Nots* (2010) and *Global Inequality* (2016) stand out. The prominence of inequality translated into journalistic treatment, due to its link with social protests around the world: Arab Spring (2010-2012), 15-M (2011), Occupy Wall Street (2012), or the Yellow Vests movement (2018) in France. Thus, a second wave of interest in this regard has occurred around the coronavirus and its consequences, since in situations of alarm citizens demand a large volume of information (Seeger et al., 2003; Pieri, 2018: Masip et al., 2020; Casero-Ripollés, 2021). At this point, it is necessary to consider the capacity of the media to contribute to the visibility of social problems/causes (Strodthoff et al., 1985), since they are the intermediaries between States and citizens in democratic systems (Habermas, 2006). Considering the above, it is important to note that the frame of interest changes with each editorial line (Miller & Reichart, 2001), since not all media stimulate information opportunities, political interest, and knowledge in the same way (Casero-Ripollés, 2021).

## OBJECTIVES

All of the above explains the need to seek an answer on the media coverage given by the Spanish cybermedia to this issue. This work pursues a clear goal: to describe the relevance given by the Spanish cybermedia to the relationship established between inequality and the pandemic within the current hybrid media system.

It should be noted at this point that the way in which relevance will be understood in this research is from Dearing and Rogers' perspective (1996). The authors define this system as a unidimensional concept, constructed from the dimension of the number of news items published.

To meet this objective, we conducted a one-year longitudinal content analysis (March 2020-February 2021) of six Spanish digital newspapers. These are both legacy media and native, since the idea of media coexistence in the postmodern hybrid ecosystem prevails. In addition, we consider that research on digital culture benefits from longitudinal analysis (Döveling et al., 2018). Thus, we selected publications that relate the two key concepts: economic inequality and coronavirus. Thus, we inquire whether, as Guardino (2019) argues, the media have not lost their ability to produce and circulate messages that can politically shape nurtured groups of public opinion during major debates.

The following research questions arise from the objective:

*Q1.* What is the coverage, in terms of relevance, that the Spanish cybermedia give to the issue of economic inequality linked to the pandemic derived from the coronavirus? I.e., regarding attention cycles (Downs, 1972), when are more journalistic stories dealing with the subject published?

*Q2.* Regarding the hybrid ecosystem, who signs these pieces mostly: agencies, journalists, collaborators…? In which sections are they published, what genre predominates in them?

*Q3.* Finally, following Miller and Reichart (2001), the question arises: does the relevance given to the subject matter vary according to the editorial criteria of each cybermedia? And is the treatment also conditioned by the framework?

## METHODOLOGY

This research conducts a quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) to measure the relevance of inequality in the agenda of the Spanish cybermedia and the news coverage given to this issue in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

The study, of a longitudinal nature, covers from March 2020, when the WHO declares the coronavirus crisis as a global pandemic (Pérez & García-Real, 2020) and governments, including that of Spain, begin to establish measures that lead to the paralysis of economic activity (Ortiz de Zárate, 2020), until February 28, 2021. A descriptive analysis is thus approached, which, through the systematic examination of communication symbols and the analysis of relationships, allows to describe the communication and make possible inferences about its meaning (Riffe et al., 2019).

The media chosen for the analysis are: *abc.es, elconfidencial.com, eldiario.es, elmundo.es, elpais.com, and lavanguardia.com,* which, in the months prior to the start of the analysis period, were among the ten most visited by unique users according to ComScore (El ranking de audiencias…, 2019).

| Cybermedia | Ideology | Ownership |
|---|---|---|
| ABC.ES | Conservative | Grupo Vocento |
| ELCONFIDENCIAL.COM | Liberal | Titania Compañía Editorial S. L |
| ELDIARIO.ES | Social-democratic | Diario de Prensa Digital S. L. |
| ELMUNDO.ES | Liberal | Unidad Editorial (belonging to RCS Media Group) |
| ELPAIS.COM | Social-democratic | PRISA |
| LAVANGUARDIA.COM | Liberal | Grupo Godó |

**Table 1. Cybermedia and ideology**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Likewise, their choice is based on the presence of diverse ideological lines that include social democratic, liberal, and conservative profiles in the Spanish context.

The analysis units are all those news pieces published in the six selected cybermedia between March 1, 2020 and February 28, 2021 in which the concepts of inequality and coronavirus are linked (N=2,727). Thus, we work with the entire population to study media relevance, understood, from a unidimensional perspective, as the number of news items published (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). For the configuration of the population, we performed an advanced Google search based on the terms inequality and coronavirus. Subsequently, the coders manually checked whether the coincidence of these terms was coincidental or causal, eliminating those publications in which the relationship between the two was not direct.

Afterwards, we worked with a stratified probability sample (n=958) according to the weight of each media outlet in the population as a whole, deepening the analysis of media coverage according to the following variables: media's ideology (conservative, liberal, social-democratic), publication date°, authorship (unsigned, agencies, generic signature, own journalists or collaborators), the mention of the term inequality in those texts signed by journalists, the media space where the story is located (traditional sections, blogs, supplements/specials, special pages, products from other collaborating groups or products from other publications of the media group), the text's journalistic function (informative, interpretative, or argumentative), the presence of the concept inequality in the headline and the presence of the concept coronavirus or COVID-19 in the headline.
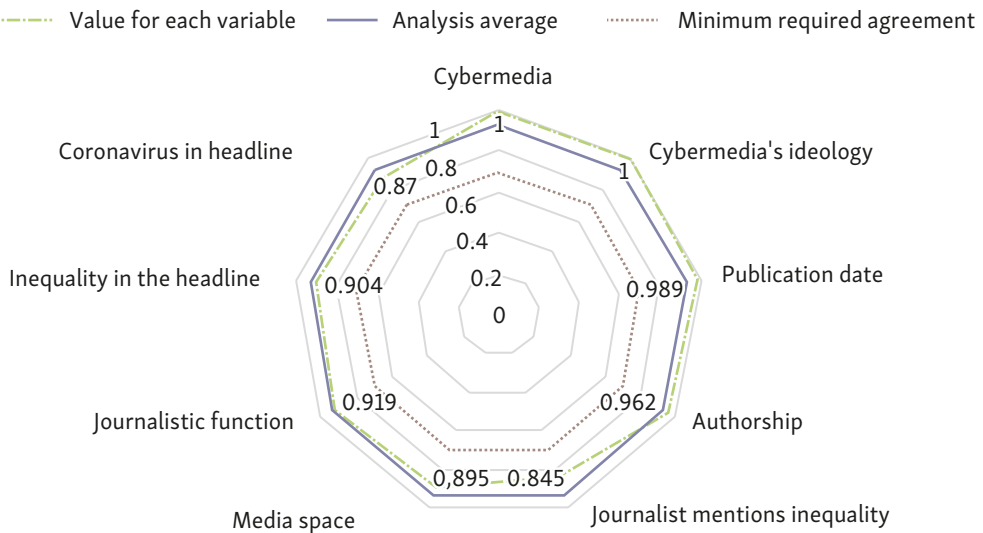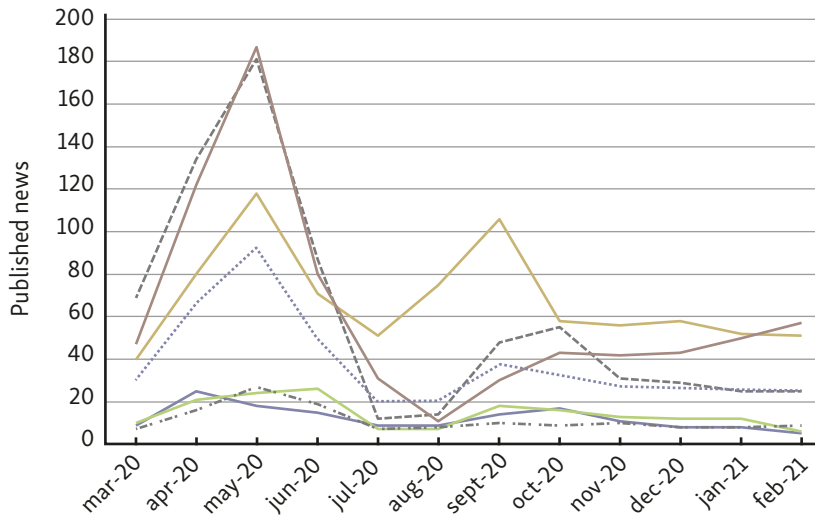
**Figure 1. Inter-coder agreement**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

To measure inter-coder agreement, we used the Krippendorff Alpha index, applicable in coding processes conducted by two or more observers, and in variables with different number of categories, considering agreement by chance, and with different measurement scales (Krippendorff, 2004). In this way, in all variables the levels of agreement between coders are maintained at values above 0.85, thus guaranteeing the reliability of the analysis.

## RESULTS

### Inequality relevance and treatment

First, the process of analysis focuses on relevance. At this point, we should remember that the first research question refers to its study, namely, what is the coverage, in terms of relevance, that the Spanish cybermedia give to the issue of economic inequality linked to the pandemic derived from the coronavirus? Following Downs (1972), we study when more is published on the subject. The relevance when talking about inequality and its link to the coronavirus varies throughout the period March 2020 - February 2021 and, in turn, varies in each of the analyzed media. However, at a general level, it can be seen that the topic grew until it reached its maximum relevance in May 2020 (N=555) in mostly all the media. From that moment on, during the summer period, there was a decrease in the importance given by the media ($M_{jul-ago20}$=120.5), until a new upturn, not as important as that of May, between September and October of the same year ($M_{sep-oct-20}$=212). From then on, the media reduced their interest again, maintaining a similar level of attention throughout the last months until February 2021 ($M_{nov20-feb21}$=157.3).

| | mar-20 | apr-20 | may-20 | jun-20 | jul-20 | aug-20 | sept-20 | oct-20 | nov-20 | dec-20 | jan-21 | feb-21 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abc.es | 9 | 25 | 18 | 15 | 9 | 9 | 14 | 17 | 11 | 8 | 8 | 5 |
| elconfidencial.com | 10 | 21 | 24 | 26 | 7 | 7 | 18 | 16 | 13 | 12 | 12 | 6 |
| eldiario.es | 69 | 134 | 181 | 87 | 12 | 14 | 48 | 55 | 31 | 29 | 25 | 25 |
| elpais.com | 40 | 80 | 118 | 71 | 51 | 75 | 106 | 58 | 56 | 58 | 52 | 51 |
| elmundo.es | 7 | 16 | 27 | 19 | 7 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 9 |
| lavanguardia.com | 47 | 122 | 187 | 80 | 31 | 11 | 30 | 43 | 42 | 43 | 50 | 57 |
| MEDIA | 30.3 | 66.3 | 92.5 | 49.7 | 19.5 | 20.7 | 37.7 | 33.0 | 27.2 | 26.3 | 25.8 | 25.5 |

**Figure 2. Treatment of inequality in the cybermedia: March 2020-February 2021**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

When the cybermedia address the relationship between inequality and coronavirus, they do so from different approaches and perspectives. Thus, according to the main theme of the stories analyzed, social issues, related to education, health, or social mobility, are the most common (37.1%). Other commonly related topics are politics (21.6%), the economy (17.8%), and labor issues (15.7%).

Although these data refer to journalistic products in which inequality and coronavirus are linked, it should be noted that inequality is explicitly mentioned in the headline elements in only 11.8% of the cases, while coronavirus (or COVID-19) is mentioned in 42.5% of the products analyzed.

From here, it is possible to outline a response on the informative treatment from the logic of the hybrid media ecosystem. To this end, we will answer the questions posed in the second research question: who signs these pieces mostly? Agencies, journalists, collaborators...? In which sections are they published, and which genre predominates in them?
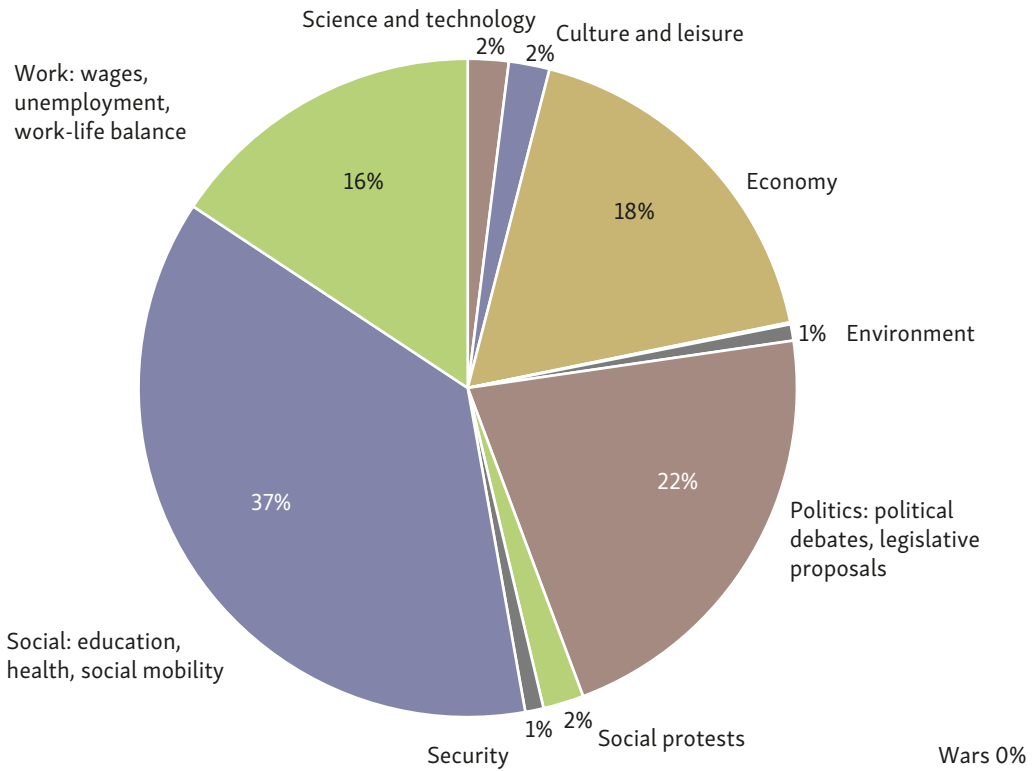
**Figure 3. Main topic of the journalistic stories**

*Source: Own elaboration.*
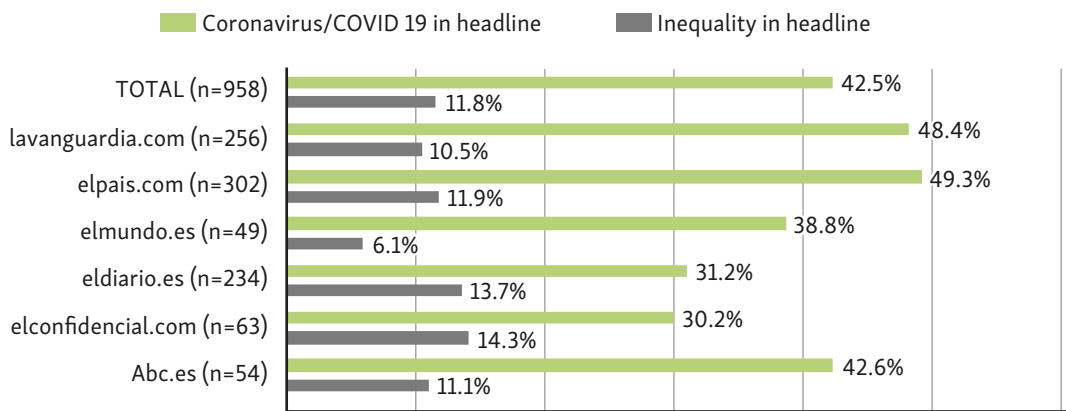
**Figure 4. Presence of the terms inequality and coronavirus/COVID-19 in headlines**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

As for the origin of the journalistic products presented in the different cybermedia analyzed, the use of information from agencies is generalized (26% average in the total number of cybermedia), with *eldiario.es* (28.2%) and, mostly, *lavanguardia.com* (64.1%) standing out.
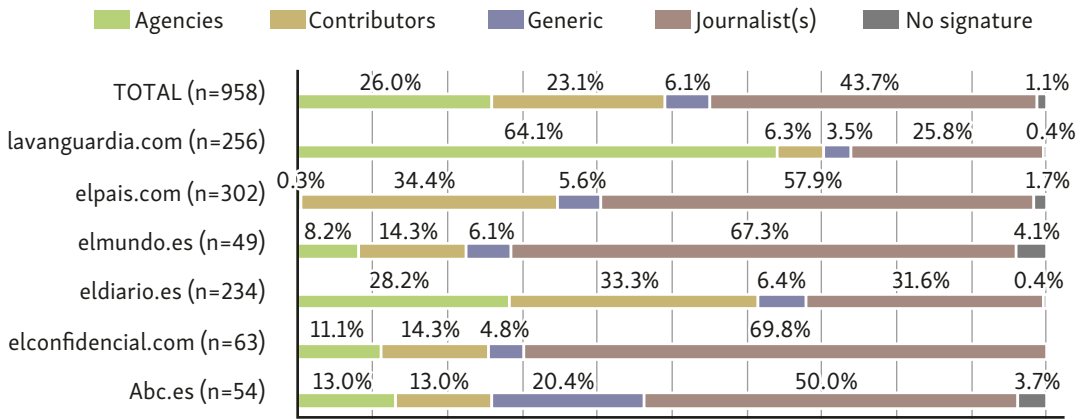
**Figure 5. Authorship of journalistic products**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

The weight of agency information is lower than that generated by the media's own journalists (43.7%), and slightly higher than that produced by non-journalist collaborators (23.1%). In the case of the use of exclusive products from journalists, *abc.es* (50%), *elconfidencial.com* (69.8%), *elpais.com* (57.9%), and *elmundo.es* (67.3%) show higher values than the average. In the case of stories developed by other media's external collaborators, *eldiario.es* (33.3%) and *elpais.com* (34.4%) stand out.

These journalistic products are mostly found in the general and traditional sections of the media (77.3%), with *abc.es* (92.6%), *elmundo.es* (85.7%), and *lavanguardia.com* (95.3%) standing out.

Two other areas in which inequality is present are supplements or special sections (12.2%), and blogs (6.7%). Thus, in *elpais.com* it is common for the topic to be in supplements or special sections (30.1%), and in the cases of *elconfidencial. com* and *eldiario.es*, to blogs (12.7% and 17.5%, respectively).

Finally, the use of news stories from other collaborating media or from other publications of the media group itself is much lower (0.9% and 2.8%). In the case of products from other collaborating media, *eldiario.es* stands out (3.4%), and in the case of products from other publications of the media group itself, *elpais.com* (7.6%).
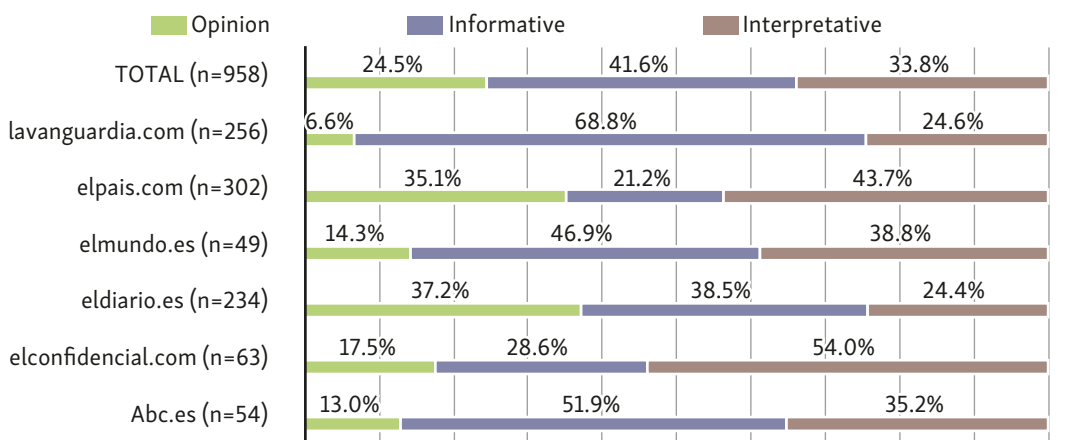
In terms of the journalistic function of each of the products, informative products dominate (41.6%) compared to opinion (24.5%) or interpretative products (33.8%).

It can be seen that informative texts dominate in *abc.es* (51.9%), *elmundo.es* (46.9%), and *lavanguardia.com* (68.8%); argumentative texts (editorials, columns, opinion columns...) increase their presence in *eldiario.es* (37.2%) and *elpais.com* (35.1%), and interpretative articles (reports, chronicles, interviews...) in *abc.es* (35.2%), *elconfidencial.com* (54%), *elmundo.es* (38.8%), and *elpais.com* (43.7%).

Blogs    Products of the media group's publications    Products from other media partners    General sections    Supplement /specials

TOTAL (n=958)    6.7% 2.8% 0.9%    77.3%    12.2%

lavanguardia.com (n=256)    0.8%    95.3%    3.9%

elpais.com (n=302)    4.6% 7.6% 0.3%    57.3%    30.1%

elmundo.es (n=49)    2.0%    85.7%    12.2%

eldiario.es (n=234)    17.5%    3.4%    79.1%

elconfidencial.com (n=63)    12.7% 1.6%    74.6%    11.1%

Abc.es (n=54)    1.9%    92.6%    5.6%
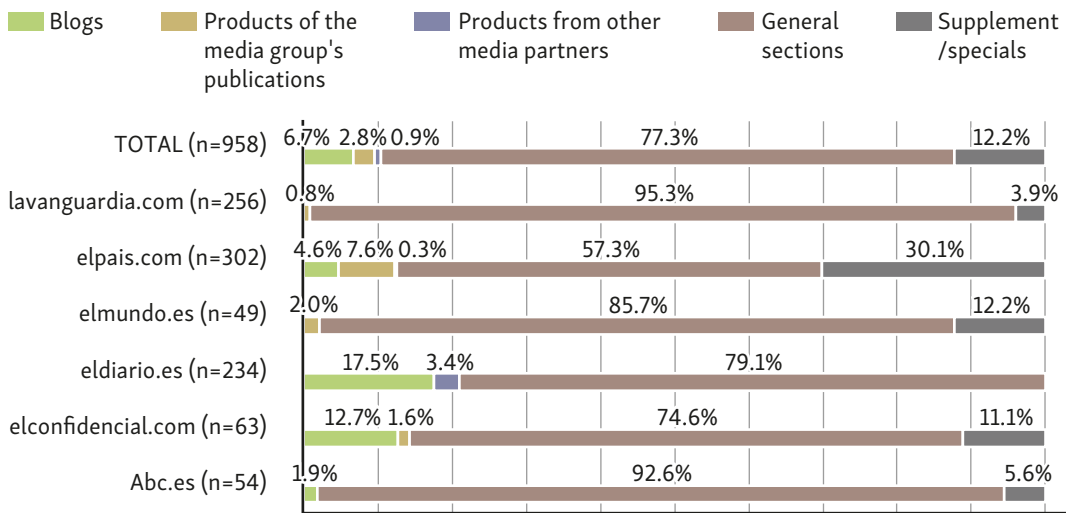
**Figure 6. Sections in which journalistic products are published**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Opinion    Informative    Interpretative

TOTAL (n=958)    24.5%    41.6%    33.8%

lavanguardia.com (n=256)    6.6%    68.8%    24.6%

elpais.com (n=302)    35.1%    21.2%    43.7%

elmundo.es (n=49)    14.3%    46.9%    38.8%

eldiario.es (n=234)    37.2%    38.5%    24.4%

elconfidencial.com (n=63)    17.5%    28.6%    54.0%

Abc.es (n=54)    13.0%    51.9%    35.2%

**Figure 7. Journalistic function of journalistic products**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Finally, beyond the distribution of frequencies in terms of authorship, section, and journalistic function that dominates in each of the products analyzed, it was found that these issues are related. Thus, the section influences the development of the journalistic function ($p<0.01$); i.e., the media that use a greater variety of media spaces will also present a greater variety of texts in terms of their journalistic function. Likewise, the authorship of the text influences the journalistic function ($p<0.01$), and it can be observed that opinion texts will be preferably signed by collaborators, informative texts will come from information agencies, or will be signed by journalists from the media itself, and interpretative or mixed texts will be mostly the product of journalists from the media.

**Influence of the editorial line on the development of journalistic products**

This section attempts to answer research question 3, based on the research of Miller and Reichart (2001): does the relevance given to the topic varies according to the editorial criteria of each cybermedia? The general overview shown so far indicates how the relevance and treatment of inequality in each of the analyzed media varies greatly; thus, the relevance of the topic is much higher in three cybermedia during the period analyzed: *elpais.com*, 29.9% (n=816 news items), la *vanguardia.es*, 27.2% (n=743 news items), and *eldiario.es*, 26% (n=710 news items), two of them of social-democratic ideology (*elpais.com* and *eldiario.es*) and the other, liberal (*lavanguardia.es*). At the other extreme are the other three, which respond to a conservative ideology (*abc.es*, 5.4% (n=148 news) or liberal (*elconfidencial.com*, 6.3% (n=172 news) and *elmundo.es*, 5.1% (n=138 news).

Similarly, coverage of inequality varies according to the editorial line of the media analyzed (table 1). The conservative media of the sample (*abc.es*) focuses on the informative genre based on studies conducted by third parties, as we can see in the selected news item : "Warning that the crisis will affect women more" (EFE, May 12, 2020), when the Central Sindical Independiente y de Funcionarios (CSIF) (union trade) demanded specific measures from the government. Being an important issue, the coverage was superficial, limiting itself to reproduce the union's discourse in a news item elaborated by EFE agency. On the contrary, the most progressive media in the sample –the social-democrats *elpais.com* and *eldiario.es*– have opinion stories by other actors, as we can see in the opinion piece in the Economy section of elpais.com, "New inequalities after the pandemic" (Missé, 14 January 2021), signed by Andreu Missé, director of the magazine *Alternativas Económicas* or in "Crisis, poverty and inequality: the avoidable story" (Prats, 25 January 2021), opinion article, signed by the head of inequality of Oxfam Intermón, within the blog section of *eldiario.es*. Finally, in the case of those of liberal ideology, they take an aseptic and objective approach to the issue. In the case of the newspaper of the Godó group, they limit themselves to reproducing the statements of the New York mayor from a news item by EFE (Redacción, April 24, 2020), the same line followed by *elconfidencial.com*, reflecting the results obtained by an independent investigation by the University of Oxford (Sánchez, May 11, 2020). In the case of *elmundo.es*, they use a news item that is closer to an advertorial, which explains the work done by the La Caixa Foundation to alleviate the effects of the crisis among the most vulnerable, but without going into the matter in depth, with a generic byline (El Mundo, September 11, 2020).

**Image 1. Examples of headlines that address inequality (March 2020-February 2021)**

*Source: Own elaboration based on news extracted from elmundo.es, lavanguardia.com, elconfidencial. com, elpais.com, eldiario.es and abc.es.*

On the other hand, the different relevance given to inequality by the newspapers makes it necessary to ask to what extent it is related to their own ideology. Although this influence is not transferred to the evolution and relevance of the topic throughout the quarters of analysis ($p>0.05$), this influence is observed in other variables of the analysis.

First, despite the fact that ideology does not influence a higher occurrence of the concept in the headline ($p>0.05$), it does influence the frequency of mention of the concept by the journalists ($p=0.01$), being more common for the concept to be mentioned by the journalist in the social-democratic media than in the liberal/conservative media.

Another aspect that conditions ideology is the signature ($p<0.01$), in such a way that the social-democratic media are more likely to use their own collaborators and journalists, the liberal media to use information from agencies, and the conservative media to use their own journalists.
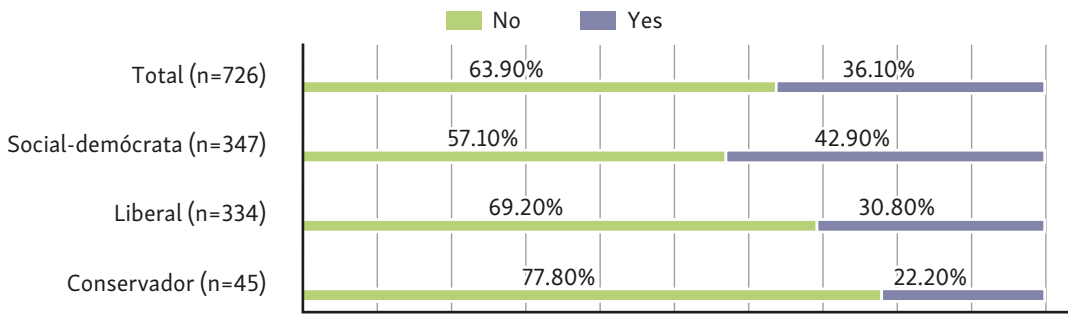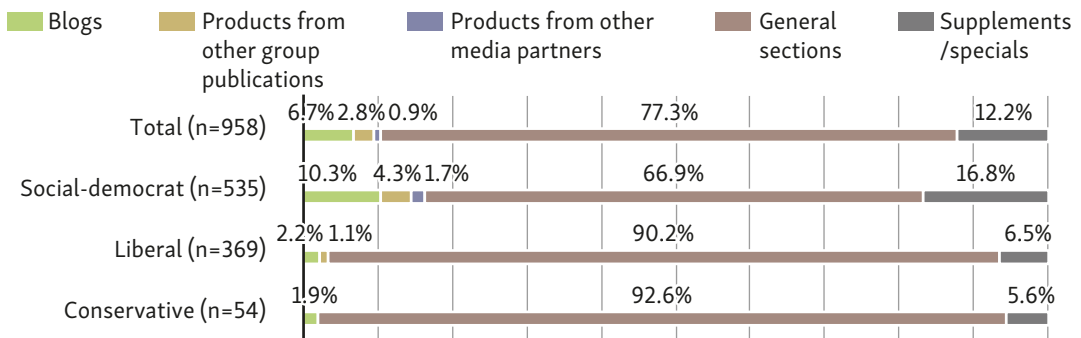
**Figure 8. Mention of inequality by the journalist according to media ideology**

*Source: Own elaboration.*
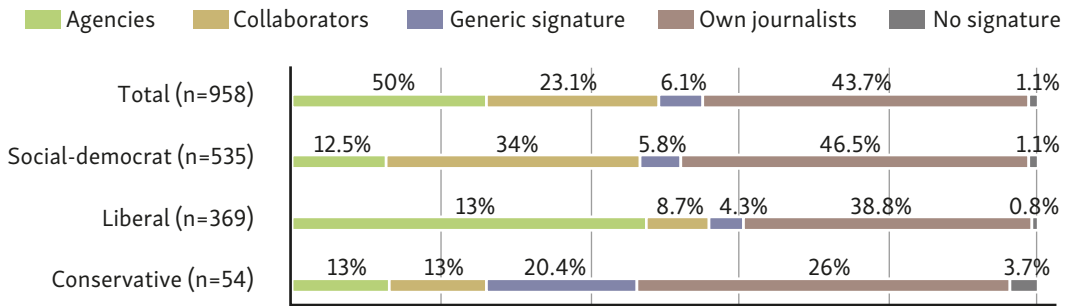
**Figure 9. Authorship of journalistic texts according to the media's ideology**
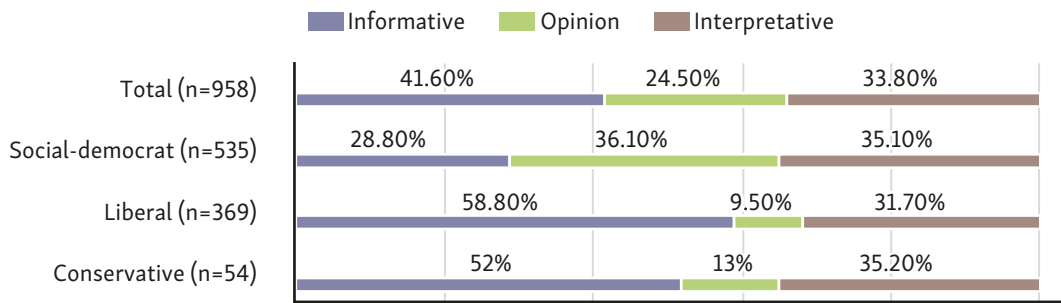
*Source: Own elaboration.*

**Figure 10. Spaces in which journalistic texts are published
according to the media's ideology**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Likewise, ideology causes a different positioning of journalistic products in the sections of each media (*p*<0.01); in the social-democrats is more common for the topic to be out of the traditional sections and to be developed in special supplements, blogs, and even products of other collaborating media or those belonging to the cybermedia group itself, as opposed to the preferential treatment in traditional sections in the liberal and conservative media.

**Figure 11. Function of journalistic texts according to the media's ideology**

*Source: Own elaboration..*

The predominant journalistic function of the products analyzed is also conditioned ($p<0.01$); conservative and liberal media privilege informative products, while social-democrats generate, to a greater extent, opinion products. The development of interpretative products is similar in all media.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis results coincide with the cycle of attention to issues in the media proposed by Downs (1978). The coverage given by the cybermedia analyzed to inequality in its relation to the pandemic over the course of a year shows how, after an initial phase of alarming discovery of the increase in inequality due to the crisis derived from the pandemic, the media decrease their attention and relevance; i.e., there is a gradual decrease in the intensity of public attention to the problem. This does not imply, however, the disappearance of the health catastrophe unleashed in March 2020, a problem that is still on the media agenda one year later. Likewise, it should be considered that this relevance, measured by the presence of the concept in journalistic stories, does not imply that inequality is the central axis of the products, as indicated by its scarce presence in the headline elements of most of the texts analyzed.

In this treatment of inequality, the development of each media is heterogeneous, not only according to the relevance given, but also to other important aspects, such as the products' authorship, the sections in which they appear, or the journalistic function or functions that condition the story's development. When addressing these issues, the relationship between these aspects should be considered, since the authorship of the product and the section in which it is published condition the product's journalistic function. On the one hand, the greater the diversity of media spaces, the greater the diversity of journalistic functions in the media products as a whole; on the other hand, the use of specific authors (journalists, agencies, or collaborators) will condition the prevalence of one or another journalistic function.

It should be noted that this diversity or heterogeneity in the coverage given to inequality in the cybermedia analyzed can be explained in some issues according to the media's ideology.

Thus, although the relevance given over the months cannot be linked to the media's ideology –understanding this relevance from a unidimensional perspective, i.e., the number of news items published (Dearing & Rogers, 1996)–, other aspects, such as authorship, function, or publication space, do relate to ideology, facilitating a more open and heterogeneous coverage of the issue that incorporates new frames and actors and develops in new media spaces, in the search for greater visibility (Strodthoff et al., 1985)

Thus, in the social-democratic media, the topic is developed more in non-traditional sections, avoiding the exclusive informative format and giving, on the one hand, importance to the deepening of the problem through interpretative texts signed by their own journalists and, on the other, allocating space in texts of an opinionated nature with the perspective of collaborators from outside the media.

For all these reasons, the progressive ideology media become the spearhead of the social problem linked to inequality and its importance in the context of the pandemic, going beyond the specific media attention (Downs, 1978) and allowing a maturation of inequality as a social problem developed from specific frames (Strodthoff et al., 1985). These newspapers, consistent with their ideological line, are configured in specific media, where social actors linked to the problem find it easier to transfer their discourses (Strodthoff et al., 1985), a fact enhanced by the emergence of new media spaces within the cybermedia, which allow these social actors to improve their persuasive effects (Petrova, 2008) through the construction of their own messages.

Thus, the content analysis has made it possible to measure the relevance given to inequality and the coverage developed according to the media's ideology. However, the descriptive scope of the research does not allow empirically deepening in the specific reasons that motivate the development of journalistic production processes and the organization of the different contents related to this issue. The use of qualitative techniques, such as in-depth interviews or direct observation through ethnographic procedures, would make it possible to fill these explanatory gaps in order to make further progress in the study of the media's role in addressing inequality and that of the new hybrid media system and its new media actors.

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