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CORONAVIRUS THROUGH EL MUNDO AND LA VANGUARDIA'S HEADLINES

El coronavirus a través de los titulares de El Mundo y La Vanguardia

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Abstract

The coronavirus has become a pandemic that has condemned more than 3.000 million people to confinement in the world. In Spain, the virus affects more than 200.000 persons and has caused the death of more than 22.000. The purpose of this investigation is to reflect the role of newspapers during the first month's news coverage of Covid-19 in our country. For this reason, we have carried out an analysis of the elements of first reading, such as headlines and other elements that make up the titling groups, published in *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*, the two digital newspapers that have the largest number of readers. Starting from the hypothesis that the information related to the new virus is not very informative and somewhat sensational, we have used the case study as a research method to analyze a total of 2.513 headlines published between February 24 and March 24. Despite the fact that most of the headlines are informative, there is a writing style focused on the spread of the virus, deaths and the negative repercussions it is having in areas as far removed from health as economic, cultural and sports. So both newspapers focus on sensational aspects instead of trying to explain what is happening to citizens and explain the complexity of the phenomenon.

Keywords: Digital media, headlines, news, coronavirus, pandemic, health, Covid-19

Resumen

El coronavirus se ha convertido en una pandemia que ha condenado al confinamiento a 3.000 millones de ciudadanos de todo el mundo. En España, el virus afecta a más de 200.000 personas y ha provocado la muerte de casi 23.000, es por ello, que la presente investigación tiene por objeto realizar una reflexión sobre el papel de la prensa escrita durante la cobertura informativa del primer mes del Covid-19 en nuestro país. Para llevarla a cabo hemos realizado un análisis de los elementos de primera lectura, como son titulares y otros elementos que conforman el grupo de titulación, publicados en *El*

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Mundo y La Vanguardia, los dos diarios digitales con un mayor número de lectores. Partiendo de la hipótesis de que las informaciones relativas al nuevo virus son poco divulgativas y un tanto sensacionalistas, hemos recurrido al estudio de caso como método de investigación para analizar un total de 2.513 titulares publicados entre el 24 de febrero y el 24 de marzo. Pese a que en su mayoría son de índole informativo, se aprecia un estilo de redacción centrado en la expansión del virus, los fallecimientos y las repercusiones negativas que está teniendo en ámbitos tan alejados de la salud como son el económico, el cultural y el deportivo, por lo que hemos comprobado que los titulares de ambos diarios se centran en aspectos sensacionalistas en vez de intentar explicar a los ciudadanos lo que está sucediendo y promover un conocimiento que dé cuenta de la complejidad del fenómeno.

Palabras claves: Prensa digital, titulares, noticias, coronavirus, pandemia, salud, Covid-19

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1. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus or Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new virus detected in humans in late December 2019. The first cases occurred in China, specifically in the city of Wuhan, and although at first it was thought that the focus was in a seafood and fish market in that town, research carried out by the Chinese Academy of Science has ruled it out and continue to shuffle the idea that the virus mutated in an animal before passing to humans.

So far, seven viruses of the coronavirus family are known, including SARS-CoV-2, which have jumped from animals to humans and have been responsible for "the most destructive disease outbreaks in history, such as the influenza pandemics of 1918, 1957, 1968, and the SARS², MERS ³and Ebola outbreaks" (Navas, 2020).

Coronaviruses are so named because of the spike proteins that protrude from their surface, and it is these spikes that attach themselves to the cell to enter it. Once inside, it uses the cell's machinery like a factory to make copies of itself and its genetic material. The crucial feature of Covid-19 is that it can lodge in both the upper respiratory tract, spreading by coughing, and the lower respiratory tract, causing disease in the lungs.

The new pandemic, as defined by the World Health Organization, spreads mainly from person to person, mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected

² Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

³ Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

person coughs or sneezes. These droplets with the virus can be deposited on different surfaces and objects, where it is able to survive for up to 36 hours, making it potentially infectious if anyone who has come into contact with it touches their mouth, nose and eyes.

According to the Ministry of Health (MSCBS, 2020), the permanence of SARS-CoV-2 is feasible on copper, cardboard, stainless steel and plastic surfaces for 4, 24, 48 and 72 hours, respectively, when kept at 23°C and 40% relative humidity. This allows it to be transmitted very easily. To all this, in addition, we must add the fact that an infected person, and potentially transmitter, may not have symptoms for fifteen days. Also, once the disease is over, during the excretion phase of the virus, which lasts an average of 20 days, patients are still able to spread it.

With a case fatality rate of 3.7% (WHO, 2020), the coronavirus has spread rapidly across the globe, so that five months after its emergence, the new virus has already affected more than three million people, of whom more than 170,000 have died.

Among the main measures to prevent the spread of the virus are proper hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based disinfectant, covering the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing with a tissue or with the inside of the elbow, as well as avoiding direct contact with other people, which means keeping at least one meter away from them.

According to the Ministry of Health, human coronaviruses "are efficiently inactivated in the presence of 95% ethanol or sodium hypochlorite at concentrations of 0.1%" (MSCBS, 2020:4), making hygiene an essential element in the fight against the disease. However, this measure alone has proved inefficient, which has led the World Health Organization to declare an international health emergency in ⁴order to increase coordination between global health networks and standardize prevention, treatment, quarantine and awareness programs.

With a "very high" risk of expansion, governments have had to take drastic measures to contain its spread and many countries have opted to close borders and confine their citizens to their homes, which is generating serious economic and social repercussions.

In Spain, and based on Article 116 of the Constitution, the Government decreed a State of Alarm on 14 March, in order to guarantee the protection of citizens' health, contain the disease and reinforce the public health system. For a period of 15 days, the population was ordered to remain in their homes, being able to move around, on an individual basis, to carry out essential activities, such as buying food or medicines, attending health centres or financial institutions, returning to their usual residence, assisting vulnerable people and travelling to the workplace.

⁴ To declare an international emergency, WHO requires **three criteria**: that it is an extraordinary event, that it constitutes a risk of rapid spread to other countries, and that it requires a coordinated international response.

The new situation has meant that large companies have responded quickly to the crisis by extending work from home, so that teleworking, which according to data from the INE (2019) in our country only reached 7% of the employed (1.4 million people), now reaches "65% of the 19.7 million employed who have continued working after the decree of the state of alarm" (Peña, 2020). This is possible thanks to the fact that Spain is the third country in Europe in fibre connections, accounting for 65% of fixed broadband connections, and 4G mobile networks offer coverage to 99% of the population (Lafraya, 2020).

After the initial fortnight planned by the Government, the Congress of Deputies gave its endorsement to extend the situation until April 12 and the conditions of isolation were tightened, opting to paralyze all economic activity, except those activities defined as essential, in order to further limit social contact, mobility and decongest the Intensive Care Units of health centers.

After two new extensions, less restrictive, and with an expected end date of 9 May, the Spanish Government has announced that the "de-escalation" will begin timidly from 27 April, when children under 14 will be allowed to leave the house, although the outings "will be limited and subject to conditions to limit contagion" (Cué, 2020).

1.1. Press headlines to get to know the current news

The coronavirus has transcended the field of health and is affecting our daily life in all its orders, which is why this study aims to analyze the headlines about this pandemic published in *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*.

The choice of headlines as the object of analysis for this research responds to the need to explore the journalistic discourse of this health crisis through a complex text. The headline, as the first layer of the news, becomes its most "synthetic representative, at the same time as it singles it out and assumes it, separating it from the rest of the contents of the newspaper" (Ruiz Acosta, 1992:82). These "autonomous texts" (Zorrilla Barroso, 1996) have the mission of attracting the readers' attention so that they read the informative texts that follow, and even, so that they pay for subscription services, a business model focused on the payment of quality contents.

The headlines are configured as the part of the news with the greatest impact on the audience, "mainly due to the tendency of a significant part of the readers to pay attention only to the headline of an information" (López and Túniz, 1995). In fact, according to the *Digital News Report* study (Amoedo, 2019), Internet users only read the headlines of the news of the media, which allows them to know the current news of the moment in a superficial way.

In Spain, according to the *White Paper on Information* (AMI, 2017), 49.3% of print readers only read headlines and consume certain news of interest. In the digital sphere, this percentage reaches 57.1%, and 63.7% for those who access information through social networks.

In the current cultural model, the consumption of information through *smartphones* has become the first choice of reading, in fact, according to a study published by the Association for Media Research (AIMC, 2019), 68.4% of Spanish Internet users use a mobile phone to read the newspaper, compared to those who use a laptop (51.6%). This change in habits has meant that the written media "have been forced to adapt the consumption of their news products to the new technological devices and new channels of access and distribution of information" (Benaissa, 2019).

The acceleration of the pace of news production and the reduction of reading time on electronic devices has meant that headlines have become the main way of finding out about current news and, proof of this, is that since 2000 "all the major Spanish newspapers with digital editions have introduced free headline services via e-mail" (Pou, 2000).

The work of titling is one of the levels of *gatekeeping*, or the process of reconstruction that each newspaper makes of reality, and is the result of a procedure of inclusions and exclusions, "capable of defining by itself the ideological tendency of a media outlet" (Oliva, 2011).

Given that the basic and main function of the headline is to show or announce the essence of the news item, it is of special interest to reflect on the informative quality of the headline applied to the information published in digital newspapers about the coronavirus and to check whether, as Fontcuberta states, "the aim of the headline in journalistic news is to announce, attract and synthesise" (1996:117), three qualities that manage to make this element the informative reference of everything that happens in the world.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

The aim of this research is to know the informative treatment that *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* are giving to the coronavirus. To do so, we are going to analyse the headlines of the news that both newspapers have published about this pandemic in order to, through different variables and categories, find out whether the press plays an informative, preventive and/or awareness-raising role.

As a secondary objective, we set ourselves the study of the rest of the elements that make up the title group and other elements of first reading, such as images, videos or maps, in order to carry out a complex reflection on the role of the press during the coverage of the first month of Covid-19 in Spain, and, in this way, to be able to determine whether there has been an alarmist and sensationalist treatment in such information.

In the research design, we started from the following hypotheses:

H1. The media do not do a great job of prevention and/or awareness-raising.

H2. The information related to the coronavirus is full of sensationalism and is not very informative, as should be expected.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objective set, we have resorted to the case study as a method of social research because of its great relevance for the development of human and social sciences, as it involves a process of inquiry, characterized by the systematic and in-depth examination of particular cases (Barrio et al., 2010).

The most characteristic feature of this method is the intensive and in-depth study of a case/s, understood as a "system bounded" by the limits set by the object of study, but framed in the global context where it occurs, which would allow, according to Thomas (2011), to test procedures, identify problems and select variables and measurement instruments relevant to the study.

In order to obtain a structured accumulation of data that facilitates the extraction of inferences of interest for the objectives of this research, we have completed our study with a quantitative approach, opting for a mixed methodological perspective, which allows us to use statistics and the measurement of certain phenomena, characteristic of the quantitative, with the in-depth exploration of the problems examined and the extraction and understanding of the meanings linked to them, characteristic of the qualitative.

To carry out this research we have conducted a study of the headlines published by *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* in its digital edition. The choice responds to the fact that both are the most consulted newspapers in Spain through the Internet and social networks according to comScore (PRnoticias, 2019), which shows that 21.4 million users accessed the website of the Godó Group through their mobile devices in December 2019, 300,000 more users than the readers who chose *elmundo.es*, which is in second position.

The study period covers from 24 February, the day on which the media recorded the first possible positive report of coronavirus in Spain⁵, until 24 March 2020, so that the data obtained were topical and to assess the impact it has generated in its context, since it is a sufficient period to develop a proper longitudinal study.

In total, we have analysed 2,513 licensees, which have been categorised by means of a file containing the following parameters:

1. Identification of the number of daily news published.
2. Location. Cover or inside pages, as well as the section in which it is located.
3. Length. Headlines in one, two, three, four or five columns.

⁵ Date on which the virus jumped to the peninsula, detecting the first cases in the Community of Madrid, Catalonia and Valencia. The first patient registered in Spain was a German tourist who had to be hospitalized in La Gomera on January 31.

4. Presence of headings and headbands
5. Presence of photographs, videos, maps or infographics.
6. Identification of the source of the news (firm, newsroom, agency, special envoy or correspondent).
7. Classification of the licensees on the basis of the three major typologies identified by Núñez Ladeveze (1991:221):
 - Informative. Identifies a unit of action in space-time.
 - Appellative. It uses language to draw attention to a fact that is not reported because its knowledge is presumed.
 - Expressive. It does not provide information about the facts, but states the subject of the information without allowing the news to be identified.

To this triple classification we add two more, the opinative headlines and the quotation headlines.

- Opinative. They provide an evaluative interpretation of what has been said, so that it is a headline closer to opinion than to information, as it provides added value (Mediavilla, 2010).
 - Quotation. Those who "select a sentence from the discourse as a representation of the meaning of the speech act" (Zorrilla, 2002:145).
8. Identification of the type of informative discourse. To do so, we will check the frequency with which headlines are of the enunciative type and, therefore, respond to the Subject + Verb + Predicate scheme, or have a noun phrase structure, which is formed by a nucleus that may be accompanied by a determiner or an adjacent.
 9. Identification of the most commonly used verb tenses and whether they are used in active or passive voice.
 10. Following the methodology presented by Costa-Sánchez (2011), we will outline the presence of words likely to generate alarm in the population, such as: epidemic, pandemic, alert, emergency, alarm, quarantine, worst (bad/serious), crisis/chaos, panic (fear/fear), confinement/isolation, threat, contagion/infection, risk/danger, dead, apocalyptic.
 11. Topic addressed. For this purpose we have proposed the following categories:
 - Contagions, evolution and stories of those infected.
 - Deaths.
 - Medical discharges.
 - Vaccines, treatments and scientific advances.
 - Status of the situation.
 - Messages of tranquility.
 - Official communications (Government and Autonomous Communities).
 - Containment, quarantine and preventive measures.
 - Alarm Status.
 - Explanation of how the virus works.
 - Border closures.
 - Economic, social/cultural, sporting and employment consequences.
 - Interviews.

- Maps.
- Others.

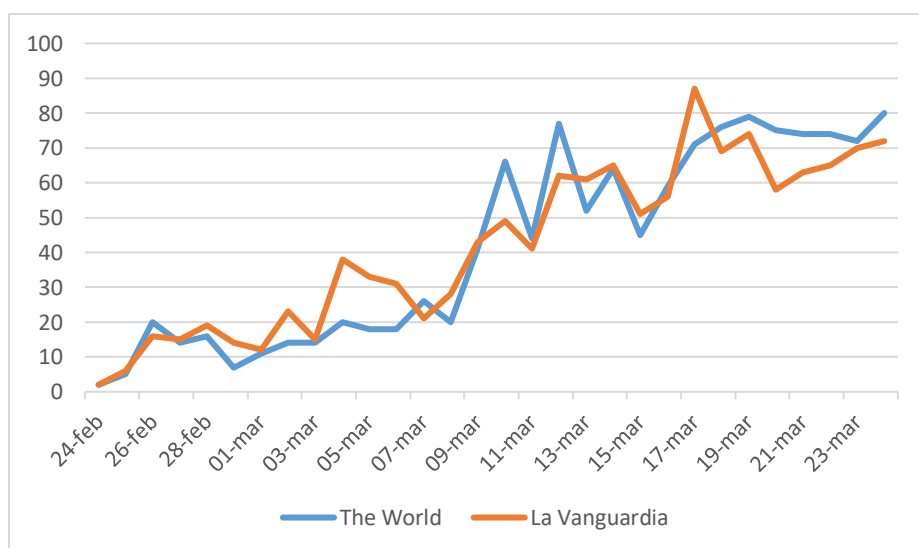
12. Identification of the news values that predominate in health headlines based on the proposal of Díaz Rojo (2009), based on the theory of Galtung and Ruge (1965) and later studies; and which are adapted to the new media context of Web 2.0: continuity, curiosity, celebrity, deviance, personal drama, entertainment, social impact, magnitude, elite nations, negativity, novelty, power, polemic, positivity, geographical or cultural proximity, relevance, surprise, utility and educational value.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout this study, we have analysed a total of 2,513 headlines, of which 1,254 were published in *El Mundo* and 1,259 in *La Vanguardia*.

The number of daily news items has been growing proportionally to the dimensions of this pandemic. If during the first two days, both newspapers only published 15 headlines, this number increased eight times during the first fortnight of March. In fact, on March 12th, the day the Government announced that the State of Alarm would be declared, both newspapers published 129 headlines (64 and 65, respectively).

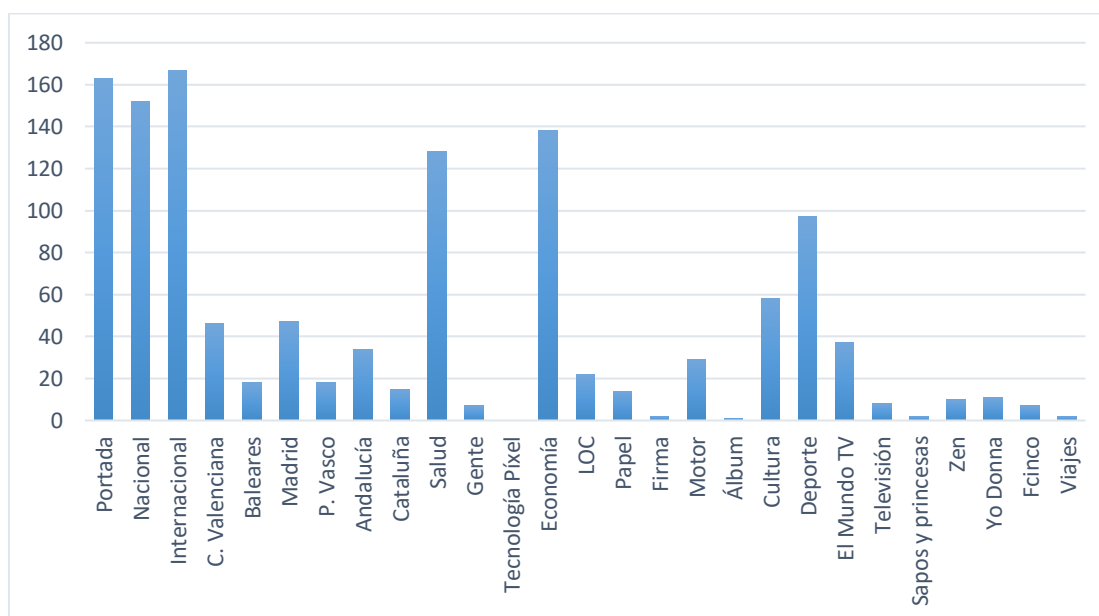
The increase in contagions, deaths and a confinement that affects all areas of our lives has meant that between 15 and 24 March half of the headlines of this study have been published, as can be seen in the following graph.



Graph 1. News published by *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* (24/02 to 24/03)
Source: own elaboration

4.1. Location of the licensees by sections

73% of the headlines analysed in *El Mundo* were in the International (14%), Front Page (13%), National (12%), Economy (11%) and Health (10%) sections. This gives us an idea of the global reach that the coronavirus has in all areas of our lives and of the importance of the topic, which comes to cover all the information on the front page and the news in sections such as International or Economy, before the Health section (See Graph 2).



Graph 2. News published by section in *El Mundo*

Source: own elaboration

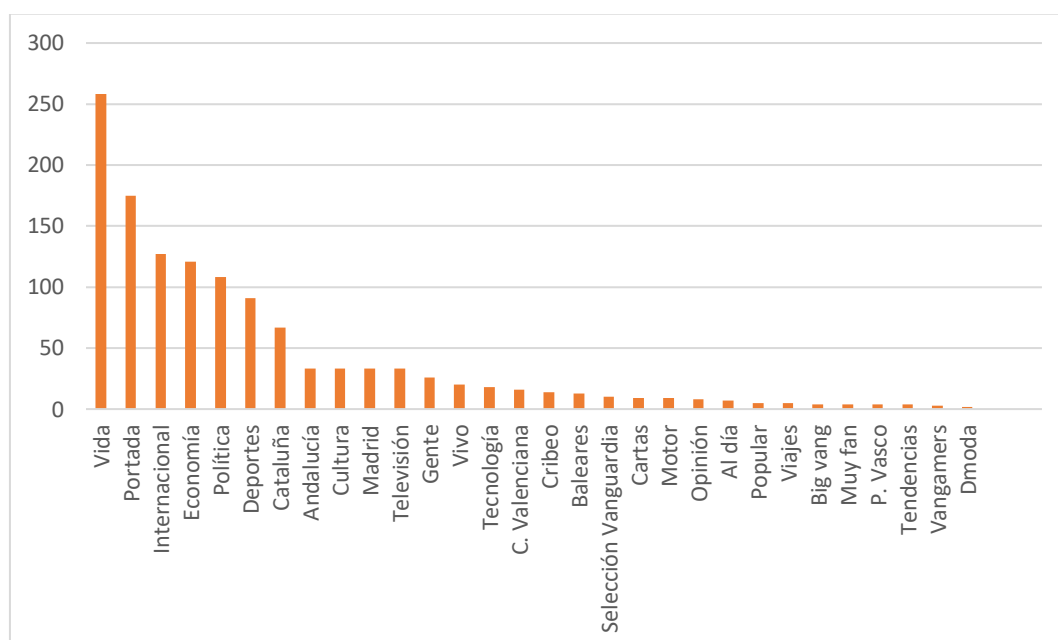
A similar phenomenon is observed in *La Vanguardia*, where 63% of the analyzed headlines are located in the same 5 sections: Life (20%), Front Page (14%) International (10%), Economy (10%) and Politics (9%) (See Graph 3). However, the newspaper of the Godó Group gives priority to the Life section, which includes news about Science and Health, and which responds to the newspaper's interest in this area. *La Vanguardia* was the first newspaper to insert "four monographic pages dedicated to the dissemination of science and medicine" (Alonso-González, 2018:57) and which were the precursors of the various Science, Medicine and Health supplements that have survived to the present day.

Another aspect to be pointed out is the weight of sports news. Eight percent of the news in *El Mundo* and 7% of the news published by *La Vanguardia* fall into this section which, although thematically it is very far from the subject of our study, has been seriously damaged by the virus, which has led to the suspension of all sporting disciplines, ETEs in football squads and even the cancellation of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, a circumstance that had only occurred four times before and due to the

Coronavirus through El Mundo and La Vanguardia's headlines

historical conjuncture of World War I and II (Berlin 1916, Tokyo/Helsinki 1940 and London 1944).

Local information also has a specific weight within the set of headlines analysed in both newspapers, in fact, *El Mundo* has published 178, which means 14% of its news, and *La Vanguardia* 166, 13%. Curiously, these news are limited in both newspapers to the Autonomous Communities of Andalusia, Madrid, Catalonia, Basque Country and Valencia. The news related to other regions are very scarce and are included in the National and Politics sections, respectively.



Graph 3. News published by sections in *La Vanguardia*
Source: own elaboration

In all, the 1,254 headlines analysed in *El Mundo* were published in 26 different sections, and the 1,259 in *La Vanguardia* in 30, some as varied as Technology, Travel and People, which is a clear reflection of how the coronavirus affects all aspects of our lives, from the way we relate to others, to new ways of working or entertainment.

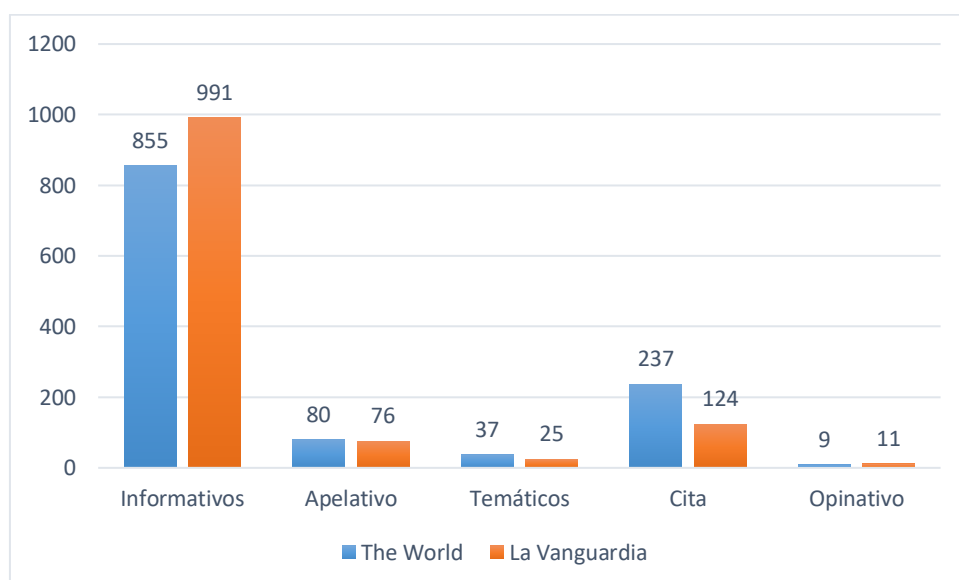
4.2. Typology and size of the licensees

74% of the headlines appearing in *El Mundo* are of medium impact (3 columns), followed by those of high impact (4 and 5 columns) in 14% of the cases, while those of low impact (1 and 2 columns) accounted for 12%. In the case of *La Vanguardia*, high impact headlines predominate (76%), followed by medium impact headlines (16%) and low impact headlines (8%).

By typology, 75% of the headlines are informative, while the remaining 25% are distributed among thematic, appellative, opinative and quote headlines. By newspapers,

Coronavirus through El Mundo and La Vanguardia's headlines

informative headlines are more abundant in *La Vanguardia*, up to a total of 991, while those of quotation are more abundant in *El Mundo* (237), as can be seen in graph 4.



Graph 4. *Typology of the licensees*

Source: *own elaboration*

Although the presence of informative headlines is the majority, a style of writing focused on the spread of the virus and its consequences can be appreciated, moving away, therefore, from the informative to focus on the coronavirus as the protagonist of all areas through a style of writing that verges on the sensationalist.

This same idea is reinforced after the study of the size of the headlines, since both newspapers try to attract the reader's attention with eye-catching headlines, presenting the most relevant facts of the day at a glance, which gives us an idea of the informative importance of the coronavirus for both media (Armentia and Caminos, 1998:199), and at the same time, it shows the overinformation about this issue that we are having.

Regarding the syntactic structure, most of the headlines follow the formula of Subject + Verb + Complement. This logical structure is used 74% of the time by *El Mundo* and 80% by *La Vanguardia*, the rest, as can be seen in graph 5, either start the headline with a participle because there is no subject (11% and 7%, respectively), or the subject is implicit and does not contribute anything (15% and 13%).

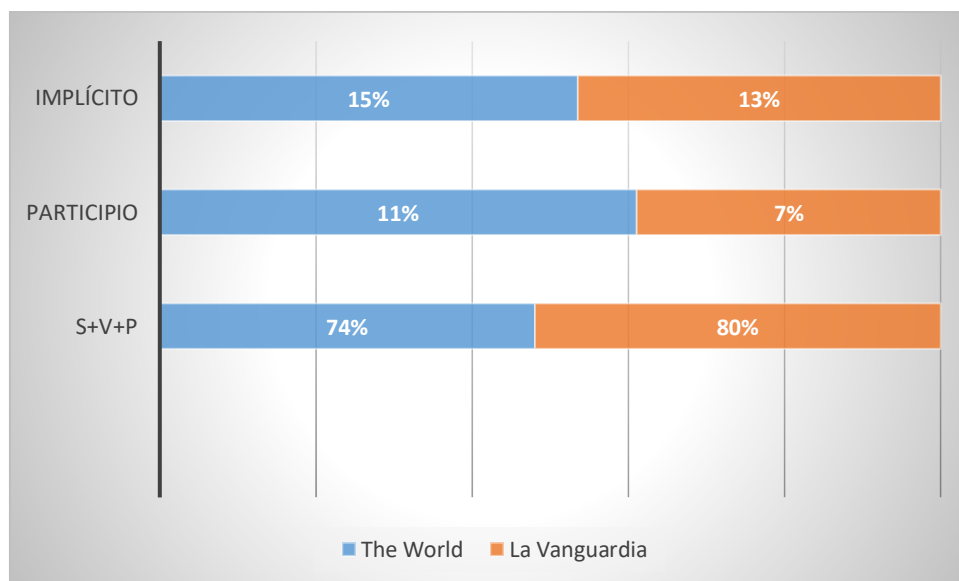


Figure 5. *Syntactic structure of the headlines*

Source: *own elaboration*

Although most of the news items are written in the past tense because they refer to events already concluded, 85% of the verb tenses used by both newspapers are in the present indicative tense, which is multifunctional, since it presents both past and future events as current, and at the same time it is shorter when dealing with a headline. To a lesser extent, the infinitive is used (*El Mundo* 7% and *La Vanguardia* 6%), whose use is mainly limited to opinion headlines.

Other verb tenses used residually are the past (3% and 2%, respectively) and the future (5% and 7%), which are mainly used in the headlines of quotations and to announce certain events that are almost certain to occur. The use of the conditional, which could convey imprecision, and verb constructions in the negative have not been detected.

Regarding the voice, all the headlines of both newspapers are in active voice, complying with the basic rule of journalistic writing of not using the passive voice in the headline.

From the grammatical analysis, it is possible to affirm that the frames adopted are very similar in both newspapers and offer an interpretative context in which the coronavirus is presented as an agent subject and not as a patient of other economic, political and social agents, in such a way that both *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* elaborate their discourse around the coronavirus crisis and the consequences it is generating.

4.3. Characteristics of the qualification group

Both newspapers make a correct use of the hierarchy of contents to guide the user and, for this purpose, they group the elements belonging to the same informative unit in order to facilitate a double speed reading, that is to say, a first quick reading of headlines, headlines and headings, and a more relaxed and in-depth reading of the news.

This new trend in Spanish journalism has been led by *El Mundo*, pioneer in giving a new direction to journalistic design, giving great importance to the headline group and the presence of large photographs in order to speed up the reading of the text.

80% of the headlines of *El Mundo* include a headline and 14% a preheadline. In the case of *La Vanguardia*, the preheadline appears in 9.4% of the occasions and the headline in 77.2% of the headlines.

Regarding the authorship of the texts and their professional link with the media in which they are published, 79% of the news items in *El Mundo* are signed, 68% of them by a professional and 11% by special envoys or correspondents. The rest is divided between 9% of news coming from agencies, 10% of texts written by the editorial staff and 2% without signature.

As in *El Mundo*, only 2% of the news published by *La Vanguardia* lacks a byline. However, 61% of the news items belong to the staff, 9% of which correspond to special envoys and correspondents. Likewise, 15% of the information is signed by an agency and 22% by the editorial staff.

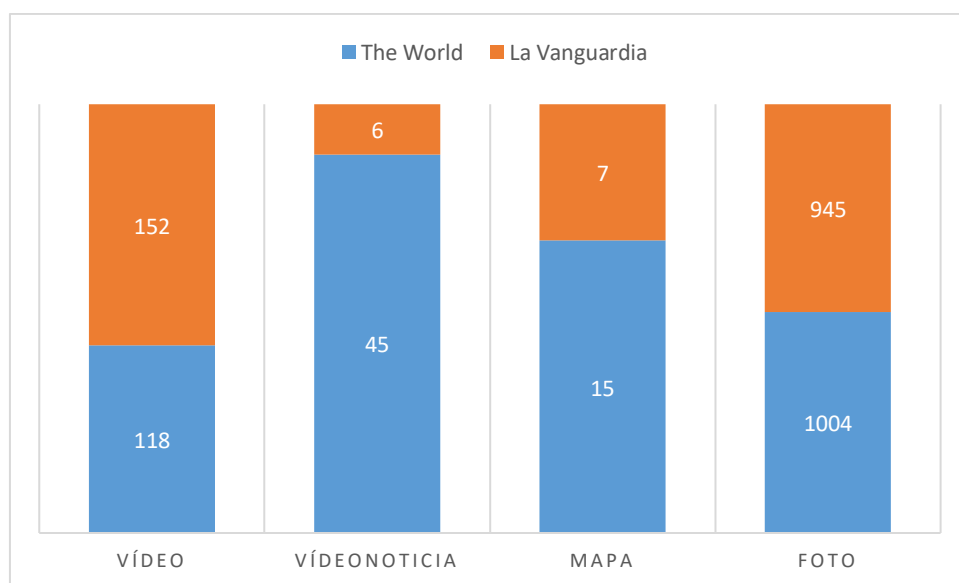
The professional affiliation of the journalist who signs the news item is directly related to the greater or lesser originality of the topic covered. Thus, while there is a thematic homogeneity in 90% of the news items coming from agencies and editorial offices, those signed by in-house journalists, special envoys and correspondents present a high degree of originality, which grants informative exclusivity to the medium that publishes it.

In this sense, *El Mundo's* news are more complete and complex than those published by *La Vanguardia*, which relies more on information from press agencies and official communications.

In the post-modern era, the visual persuades the reader as much or more than a good suggestive headline (Imbert, 1999), so that the "photographic aspects, as well as graphics and infographics (given the primacy of the visual over the textual)" increase "the degree of understanding of the news for readers" Fernández-Gil (2010:138).

In this sense, the iconic elements that accompany the headlines of our study, as we can see in Graphic 6, are more numerous and varied in *El Mundo*, which makes use of the multimedia possibilities of Web 3.0 to include video news and interactive maps that enrich the journalistic texts and also serve as a Visual Impact Centre of the information.

While *El Mundo* illustrates 94% of its news about the coronavirus, *La Vanguardia* does it in 87.3%. Similarly, 90% of the images analysed in both newspapers have a high impact, as they appear in three or four columns, however, *El Mundo* goes further and, at least in 20% of the occasions, offers image galleries, which allows the media to interact virtually with other people about the same news.



Graph 6. Iconic elements accompanying news items

Source: own elaboration

Regarding the presence of "alarm-words", as Costa-Sánchez (2011:38) calls them, it is worth mentioning that they appear in 25.4% of the headlines of *El Mundo* and in 30.3% of those of *La Vanguardia*, being more abundant in the front page news, which indicates that there is an intention to seek a greater impact on the readers' sensitivity.

In *El Mundo*, the five most used words (in 69.3% of the occasions) were "dead", "contagion", "confinement", "alarm" and "quarantine", appearing in 18.1% of the headlines. On the opposite side we find "apocalyptic", "alert" and "threat", which appear in only 5 headlines.

"Confinement", "dead", "contagion", "quarantine" and "crisis" are the most used alarm-words in *La Vanguardia*, in fact, they represent 73.5% of the total and appear in 22.7% of the headlines analysed. On the contrary, "epidemic", "fear" and "emergency" are the words that appear less frequently, only in 1.4% of the headlines.

Regarding the headbands, throughout our analysis we had detected a total of 1,009 in *El Mundo*, of which only 47.5% refer to the virus. Of these, 56% are the word "coronavirus" and 22% "Covid-19". To a lesser extent the word "crisis" (8%), "pandemic" (4%), and in 3% of the cases "alarm" and "epidemic".

In *La Vanguardia*, out of a total of 972 headbands, 82.6% refer to the virus. The most abundant word is "coronavirus" (30%), followed by "emergency" (22%) and "Covid-19" (18%). To a lesser extent, "crisis" is used (11%) and in 4% of the occasions the words "pandemic", "alarm" and "epidemic" are used indistinctly, although they share certain common features such as the loss or threat to life.

In view of the figures provided, we can see that both the headlines and the headbands of *El Mundo* are more informative than those used by *La Vanguardia*, which is more alarmist by recurrently using the combination "health emergency", "coronavirus crisis" or "health crisis".

Regarding the headlines, 70% of the 187 headlines analysed in *El Mundo* and 75% of the 119 in *La Vanguardia* contribute to spectacularize the information by incorporating terms considered to generate concern in the population, such is the case of 'crisis' and 'alarm', which appear in more than half of the headlines analysed.

4.4. Subject matter of the headlines

In relation to the subject matter, headlines referring to the level of contagion, its evolution and the number of deaths as a result of the coronavirus represent 25.5% of the total in *El Mundo*. They are followed, in order of frequency, by those related to confinement and quarantine (16.6%), economic consequences (13%) and social and cultural repercussions (8%). Messages of reassurance (0.1%) and medical discharges and improvements (1%) are, on the contrary, the least used topics by this newspaper.

A similar line is found among the headlines of *La Vanguardia*. Contagions and deaths represent 28.3% of the headlines, followed by those referring to confinement (17.4%), economic consequences (10.5%) and social and cultural repercussions (8%). These five topics occupy 64.2% of the headlines analysed. At the opposite end of the scale, we again find messages of reassurance, interviews and medical discharges and improvements (0.4%, 0.5% and 0.9%, respectively).

If we relate the size of the headlines with the subject matter, we find that the headlines with the highest visual impact and which are the main ones on the front page and section covers of *El Mundo* are those highlighting the number of infected people and the deaths caused by the coronavirus (40.5%), mainly in Spain and Italy. They are followed by those highlighting the negative consequences of the coronavirus on the economy (16%) and those related to prevention measures and containment (8.6%).

In contrast, those dedicated to explaining the mechanism of how the virus works (1.8%), medical discharges (1.8%) or those that convey messages of reassurance to the population (0.6%) are in the minority among those with the greatest visual and general impact.

In the case of *La Vanguardia*, front page headlines dealing with contagion and deaths in Spain account for 41.1%. They are followed by those related to confinement and quarantine (13.7%), economic consequences (7.4%) and official communications (7.4%). On the other hand, headlines devoted to explaining the mechanism of the virus, medical discharges and messages of reassurance to the population only represent 3.4% of the total.

4.5. News values

News values are the factors or properties that make an event newsworthy, that is, the criteria used by the media to select newsworthy events and to present the news in a journalistic way (Díaz Rojo, 2009). In this sense, it is interesting to note that both *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* coincide fully in the values used and in the tone: negativity and polemic.

Personal drama, social impact, defeatism and controversy are the predominant values in 69.2% of the headlines. There are numerous stories of infected people and relatives of the deceased narrated in first person, like the one of the actor of Gomorrah, "locked up with the corpse of his sister who died of coronavirus" (*El Mundo*, 12/03); news about deaths, lack of material... "Italy. Locales cerrados, tanatorios desbordados, funerales prohibidos" (*El Mundo*, 12/04); and other polemics like the manifest discrepancies between Government and opposition or the mockery of the Catalan independentistas for the deaths in Madrid: "El polémico tuit de Ponsatí sobre la crisis del coronavirus madrileña. From Madrid to heaven" (*La Vanguardia*, 15/03).

Pessimism is also present in the news that talk about the consequences that the coronavirus has caused in all aspects of our lives: economic, sports, labour, social and cultural (23%). "The coronavirus leads airlines to one of the worst crises since 9/11" (*El Mundo*, 07/03), "The April Fair also succumbs to the coronavirus: it is suspended and could be held in September" (*El Mundo*, 15/03).

Similarly, the negativity is felt in headlines that speak of the qualitative and quantitative magnitude of the virus, present all over the planet: "El coronavirus deja ya mil muertos. Chronology of a curve that does not flatten out" (*La Vanguardia*, 20/03), and that has put power and elite nations in check (10%): "Trump has in the coronavirus crisis his biggest obstacle to re-election" (*La Vanguardia*, 15/03).

As it is an unknown virus, for which there is still no treatment, hopelessness pervades even the news that report new facts that occur for the first time, such as the confinement and border closures between countries: "The Government prepares the confinement of Spaniards in their homes except to go to work and emergencies" (*El Mundo*, 14/03); "The confinement feeds the picaresque" (*La Vanguardia* 19/03).

Even the news related to actors, musicians or celebrities from different disciplines usually mention infections or deaths caused by the coronavirus (1.6%): "Tom Hanks improves from the coronavirus, although "he is not very well", says his sister" (*El Mundo*,

19/03), "Lucía Bosé, mother of Miguel Bosé, dies from the coronavirus" (*La Vanguardia*, 23/03).

On the other hand, the headlines that allude to positivity, educational values and usefulness do not reach 6% of the total. In fact, the news with positive statements represent 5.4% of the total, and are those related to medical discharges, advances in the achievement of a vaccine, the work done by the Army, or the speed with which the field hospital was set up in Madrid: "Vacuna del coronavirus: carrera de EEUU, china y Europa para frenar el virus... y la patente" (*La Vanguardia*, 18/03); "Madrid monta en tiempo récord el hospital más grande del mundo para el coronavirus, sólo superado por China" (*El Mundo*, 23/03).

Curious or novel aspects only appear in 1.7% of the headlines, and always as a determining factor in arousing interest: "The fauna recolonises the city in the face of the confinement caused by the coronavirus" (*La Vanguardia*, 24/03) or "Quarantine cleans the canals of Venice" (*El Mundo*, 18/03).

There are also few headlines that point to entertainment (1.8%): "A complete guide to series on all platforms to cope with confinement" (*La Vanguardia*, 15/03); to relevance, that is, to the way in which the pandemic directly and immediately affects the lives of readers: "The coronavirus imposes telework on tens of thousands of workers in 24 hours: Banks, operators, construction companies, SMEs..." (*El Mundo*, 11/03), or which, in an informative tone, provide scientific knowledge about how the virus works (1.9%): "Differences between the coronavirus and the common flu: symptoms, transmission, lethality..." (*El Mundo*, 11/03). (*El Mundo*, 11/03), or which, in an informative tone, provide scientific knowledge about how the virus works (1.9%): "Diferencias entre coronavirus y gripe común: síntomas, transmisión, letalidad..." (*El Mundo*, 24/03). (*El Mundo*, 24/03).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the headlines indicates that we are subjected to a great deal of over-information about the coronavirus, but rather than being constructive and helping the reader to understand the complex picture we are facing, it causes confusion and alarm.

The use of unsettling words such as "crisis" or "emergency" predict an uncertain future in which it will be difficult not to become infected and that the situation is disastrous to say the least. The negative wording used in the headlines contributes to this, more focused on contagions, deaths and disastrous repercussions in areas as far removed from health as the economic, cultural and sporting spheres.

The headlines help to structure the readers' interpretation of the full text of the article, and if the information provided by the headlines is taken exclusively as a reference of current affairs, we will be before an alarmist and sensationalist reconstruction of the

same, as the headlines with the greatest visual impact and those that occupy the front pages are far from transmitting messages of calm, especially in *La Vanguardia*.

The news value of the headlines analysed is more than justified, however, the vocation of public service is replaced by an interest in reaching the largest number of readers using fear and insecurity as a decoy and, in this sense, bad news is in the majority, so that the media prefer to highlight the failures of health and medical research.

The predominant value in the titling bodies is polemic, a newsworthiness criterion present in the number of contagions and deaths, in the absence of basic preventive material and in the lack of political unanimity to carry out joint measures.

Although, to a lesser extent, it barely reaches 11% of the total, hope and good news also have a place in the headlines, especially those that relate the solidarity of the people, the donations of companies, the excessive efforts made by the health community and the magnificent work done by the Army and the State Security forces.

Although the present study confirms the starting hypotheses and the objectives set out in our research, we are obliged to take into account some potential limitations of the study when interpreting the results. First, although the analysis of headlines provides important data, we must bear in mind that, as Bleich et al. (2015) state: "although headlines help to structure readers' interpretation of the full text of the article, they do not determine it".

Likewise, it would be interesting to carry out a subsequent study to see if the results obtained are maintained over time or, once the peak of contagions and deaths has passed and the confinement has de-escalated, if the media opt to move away from sensationalism and advocate a more reassuring and informative message, as well as an educational one.

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