

# **TELEVISION, BRANDS, AND THE PANDEMIC: How Spanish TV Channels Treated the Brands Most Valued for Their CSR during the COVID-19 Lockdown**

Sanjuán Pérez, Antonio; Videla Rodríguez, José Juan; Nozal Cantarero, Teresa and Martínez Costa, Sandra<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Sociology and Audio-visual Communication, University of A Corunha, A Corunha, Spain.

[s.martinez@udc.es](mailto:s.martinez@udc.es)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020, the Spanish Government announced a total lockdown of the population and the interruption of all nonessential economic activity. From this point, televisions adapted their programming schedules by reducing their usual informative content, such as sport or economic segments. In this context, it would be reasonable to assume that the overall television coverage devoted to the main Spanish brands would decrease, but what about those considered to be most active in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR)? In this work, we analyze the presence of the Spanish brands that are most valued for their CSR on the four main television channels with the highest audience over the two months of total lockdown, and also in the online press. The study confirms that the television coverage of these brands was not only reduced but was also mostly positive during the pandemic, so it reveals the CSR importance in crisis periods.

Keywords: content analysis, COVID-19, agenda setting, brands, CSR.

## **1. Introduction**

The health crisis caused by COVID-19 prompted the Spanish Government to declare a state of alarm on 14 March 2020, establishing total lockdown at home for all citizens,

except those working in services deemed essential to the community. Beyond the obvious economic consequences of the pandemic, patterns of social activity were also altered.

This situation meant that all kinds of industrial and service activities came to an almost complete halt. Its immediate consequences can be described as the second great crack in globalization, after the depression of 2008–2013 (Fernández, 2020).

Large corporations were affected not only economically, like all other companies, but also in terms of their social visibility. The corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies of a company, as well as their internal activities, are usually a constant source of news. However, amid the state of alarm, the situation became exceptional, but previous to this, there had always been a risk that companies would adopt decisions contrary to their recognized principles and values (Fontrodona and Muller, 2020).

The financial and economic crisis that began in 2008 motivated corporations to develop specific campaigns demonstrating their solidarity and actions against the situation. Many companies emitted different communications that directly or indirectly alluded to the crisis and the ways of confronting it, appealing to positive values that promoted unity and joint effort. At the same time, most of the IBEX-35-listed companies increased their social commitment during the crisis, regardless of the evolution of their profitability (Miras et al., 2015). These same IBEX-35 companies collaborated with the Spanish Government in 2020 during the coronavirus crisis, contributing in some cases up to 25 million euros (Expansión, 2020). Many others reoriented their activity towards the development of products or the implementation of services to help combat the immediate effects of the pandemic (Tomba et al., 2020). With an agenda predominantly based on the pandemic, these actions allowed corporations to transcend the media, giving them public projection.

## ***1.1. Theoretical Framework***

As detailed below, this study takes into account the theoretical field of CSR, the theories of framing and agenda-setting, and the most recent publications related to social communication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **1.1.1. CSR during COVID-19 crisis**

When defining CSR, Kim and Austin (2020) indicate the lack of consensus across disciplines, but they conceive that CSR includes any actions that go beyond a company's obligations and that are aimed at the social good. This includes employees, communities, the environment, and society as a whole. For this reason, CSR practices have an impact on a company's reputation among customers, suppliers, investors, and employees (Santos et al., 2020), provided that the communication strategy has been effective and has met the expectations of each of these groups (Villagra et al., 2015). In the specific case of consumers, CSR enhances their image of the company (Simon, 1995; Berens et al., 2005), the quality of its products (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Brown, 1998), and its organization (Handelman & Arnold, 1999).

In times of crisis, CSR aims to minimize any negative effects of the activity of a company while maximize its positive effects benefitting society (Balaguer and Nae, 2013). Although CSR does not determine the profitability of a company, it does help to increase it, as proven by the tendency to earn more with greater investment in this field (Gil, 2016).

Business behaviors during the pandemic were aligned with the Xifra CSR Effective Management Principles (2020). These include being proactive towards the immediate needs of society, directing messages towards solving problems, and knowing how to communicate these to the community to have a positive effect on consumer perception and brand reputation. Xifra also understands that the framework in which companies act in a crisis depends on the framing given to that situation.

Along the same lines, Sirera (2020) studies brand reputation management in the COVID-19 health crisis scenario; Banerjee and Balaganapathy (2020) investigate, using content analysis method, how Indian brands' marketing strategies engage consumers in the battle against the pandemic; Santos et al. (2020) analyze the effects of various companies' socially responsible actions during pandemic, and they conclude that CSR actions produce a significant improvement in the image of the company and its reputation, loyalty, as well as in satisfaction of workers and consumers; Fontrodona and Muller (2020) deal with how CSR offers criteria for action in this crisis situation and concludes that socially responsible companies must strive to remain whole in a context such as that of Covid-19; and also Rosenthal (2020) reflects on the way in which solidarity during the pandemic influences the social valuation of brands. Igartua et al. (2020) focus on the behavior of communication users around the world in the weeks after the declaration of the pandemic and show that the behavior of the audience when looking for information is unequal; and He and Harris (2020) study how the COVID-19 pandemic influences corporate social responsibility and marketing, and concludes that for consumers, ethical dimension of their decisions has become salient during the pandemic, which is also likely to shift them towards more responsible and prosocial consumption.

Sanjuán et al. (2020) address televised information on the pandemic in Spain broadcasting before the lockdown and they conclude that the media did not foresee the repercussions that the pandemic would bring, despite the slight increase in related information before confinement; Villena and Caballero (2020) address public Spanish television coverage of the COVID-19 crisis and uses content analysis to conclude that there was not enough information about the health crisis.

Also, they focus on agenda-setting and framing theories to highlight the importance of news coverage in the media; while Túñez, et al. (2020) also focus on public television,

investigating how European public broadcasters responded to the pandemic in terms of organization and television production.

Casero (2020) analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on the media system and concludes that citizens consider the search for information and the following of news as key activities in critical situations; Lázaro and Herrera focus on the digital media's treatment of news of the pandemic and analyze the volume growth of news indexed in *My news* database; and Radu (2020) addresses the fight against misinformation surrounding COVID-19 and concludes that the time to set rules and establish good practices should be ahead, rather than during the crises.

López et al. (2020) consider the audience as an object of communicative investigation during COVID-19, identifying audience profiles to discover the perceived level of public trust in different media outlets. In the USA, Jurkowitz and Mitchell (2020) investigate how citizens perceive the pandemic according to their sources of information, and detected that many people was misleading or confusing about the COVID-19 news.

Social networks in relation to the pandemic are the target of several investigations from different prisms. Thelwall and Thelwall (2020) analyze more than three million English tweets to find out what information was being disseminated about COVID-19; Pérez et al. (2020) also focus on Twitter to detect the presence of fake news and its influence on user reaction. González and Iriarte (2020) adopt Instagram to verify what Spanish pharmaceutical influencers did in the first months of the pandemic. Papa and Manou (2020) focus on Facebook to determine the main COVID-19 narratives present on social media through user reactions. More generally, Hao et al. (2020) analyze the many transformations in the way in which citizen used social networks during the pandemic.

### 1.1.2. Framing theories

This article addresses the theory of framing, one of the most important tools in the study of public opinion, as highlighted by different methodological investigations including the classic work by Bryant and Miron (2004). Their study reveals that, among the 1,806 articles on content analysis published between 1956 and 2000 in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Communication*, and *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronics Media*, the most widely used theoretical tool was the theory of framing, followed by agenda-setting (Piñeiro, 2020).

Before delving into this research, we must differentiate between the frame, established by Gregory Bateson (1972) as the context or framework of interpretation that makes people attend to and/or reject certain aspects of reality, and the theory of framing. Framing theory and the frame both guide the focus of research in different ways since those who study the frame present it as a static entity with its own characteristics, while those who analyze framing, as in our case, investigate the transmission of information between the media and its audience through the news (Amadeo, 2002).

Focusing more specifically on its application to media activity, the theory of framing highlights that the totality of media broadcasting “frames” reality and configures it, constructing the viewer’s opinion of a fact or event (Scheufele, 1999) by focusing on particular aspects of the environment while leaving others aside (Goffman, 2006).

As Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) indicate, framing analyzes the way in which the media presents topics of public interest and, subsequently, their interpretation. Therefore, that builds the representation the consumer has of a certain brand. Navarro and Olmo (2018) state that the public visibility of a topic is insufficient to provide this value alone but is nevertheless essential since any information that does not appear in the media does not exist in the audience’s imagination.

### 1.1.3. The agenda-setting theories

This research is also framed in the context of the agenda-setting theories of McCombs and Shaw (1972). They argue that the issues known and debated by the public are not only disseminated by the media but also constructed by it as well.

Agenda-setting studies differentiate three types of agenda: media, public, and political. These encompass different parts of the communication process, such as the influence of the news media agenda on the public agenda, the need for guidance and other contingent conditions to enhance or restrict the media's influence, the influence of external agendas on each news media outlet, and the consequences of all this activity on attitudes, opinions, and behaviors (McCombs, 2006).

The fundamental hypothesis is that there is a transfer of relevance from the media agenda to the public agenda, and that this is what explains the effects of the media on individuals and communities (Ardèvol et al., 2020). Therefore, in this research, it is relevant to know how the public agenda affects brands when carrying out their CSR policies, and also if their actions during COVID-19 pandemic were relevant. In this process, the personal and group media dynamics influencing the configuration of the media agenda must be considered: the journalist's own psychology, journalistic routines, organizational guidelines, external sources (including other media), and the prevailing social ideology (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

Agenda-setting and framing have generated significant scientific debate regarding their relationship. There are researchers who conceive agenda-setting as a phase of framing, while others consider them to be independent theories. Such discussion has focused on determining the integral morphology of the process to place an object at the center of attention; therefore, the relevance of agenda-setting and the importance of the attributes of the corresponding object, i.e., frame setting, have been differentiated (Aruguete, 2017).

Finally, this work uses content analysis, defined as “a research technique designed to formulate, based on certain data, reproducible and valid inferences that can be applied to its context” (Krippendorff, 1990, 24). Bardin (1996, 29) defines it as the “set of communication analysis techniques aimed at obtaining indicators (quantitative or not) by a systematic and objective description of the content of the messages, allowing the inference of knowledge related to the conditions of production/reception (social context) of these messages”.

Therefore, analysis of the messages about the brands will help to identify the topics related to them and transmitted by the media during COVID-19.

## **2. Materials and Method**

The object of study of this investigation is the television and press coverage of the most important Spanish brands, along with the treatment of the five brands that are most valued according to their CSR on TV channels, during the COVID-19 crisis. The objective is to determine whether the coverage of these brands in the press and on TV increased or decreased during the health crisis, as well as to identify and categorize their treatment as positive, negative, or neutral.

To define the most important Spanish brands, data from the 2019 “best companies” ranking published by *Interbrand* (2020) and *Brandirectory's* (2020) “most valuable” companies were compared. Both listings share 26 Spanish brands in total: Amadeus, Banco Santander, Bankia, Bankinter, BBVA, Bershka, CaixaBank, Cepsa, Cruzcampo, El Corte Inglés, Endesa, Iberdrola, Iberia, Inditex, Loewe, Mahou, Mapfre, Massimo Dutti, Mercadona, Movistar, Naturgy, Prosegur, Repsol, Sabadell, Seat, and Zara. Massimo Dutti was not mentioned on television during the analyzed period, so the total number of brands considered herein is reduced to 25.



The five brands most valued according to their CSR were extracted from the special report of MERCO (*Monitor Empresarial de Reputación Corporativa*, Business Monitor of Corporate Reputation) published on 20 May 2020 on the firms with “greater commitment/social responsibility during the pandemic. The results are based on a consultation of 2,017 citizens and a panel of 257 experts, including 42 business-area professors, 32 members of consumer organizations, 49 economic information journalists, 33 NGO representatives, 51 financial analysts, 40 union members, and 28 social media managers (MERCOS, 2020).

As seen, the five most valued brands are also included in the *Interbrand* and *Brandirectory* lists. Furthermore, all five were mentioned on television during the analyzed period. They are Banco Santander, Iberdrola, Inditex, Mercadona, and Seat.

Once the sample of companies had been selected, their names were sought in the content broadcast 24 hours a day by the four leading Spanish television channels (Barlovento, 2020): La1, Tele 5, Antena 3, and La Sexta, during the pre-lockdown (60 days from 13 January 2020 to 12 March 2020, both inclusive) and lockdown periods (60 days from 13 March to 11 May, the date on which most of Spain passed to phase 1 of progressive opening up). In total, the complete programming schedule of the four channels was reviewed for 120 days, representing a total of 2,880 hours of content, measuring the presence, frequency, and type of treatment of the brands. Advertising segments and sponsorship content were excluded so as not to distort the data with paid presence. For this work, we developed an experimental analysis technique for which we have the subtitles of a total of 24 hours of the four channels that are the object of study. These subtitles are intended to integrate the population with hearing difficulties and are generated in an automated way in some channels and semi-automated in others (speech to text detection plus human review). With the help of the nVivo software, we searched

the broadcast content for the brand's name to determine the frequency of mentions, and where and how they were produced.

This means that, for this study, we observed both non-fictional and fictional contents, which is interesting to know about a complete framework for those brands in television. However, this will be a limitation for the study, as will be explained later.

The process was repeated using the *ProQuest Global Newsstream* press database, selecting the most read Spanish newspapers as sources (*El País* and *El Mundo*), plus the economic newspaper *Cinco Días*. In this way, any increase or decrease in TV coverage can be compared with that of the general popular Spanish newspapers (Statista, 2020).

Next, content analysis was carried out on the brand treatment in the analyzed TV coverage, specifically the treatment of the five brands identified by *MERCO* as those with "greater commitment/social responsibility during the pandemic." To do this, the researchers simultaneously reviewed the 24-hour coverage by the four national television channels during the 60 days of lockdown and carried out inductive coding of the content to identify the relevant themes or dimensions.

During this review process, duplication of mentions within each analysis unit were refined. So, if a brand was mentioned multiple times, for example, in the same news segment or comments, the repetitions were eliminated when referring to a single context unit. However, if the same unit of analysis referred to two different context units, or issues related to the same company, they were accounted for separately.

A total of 552 mentions were coded and initially classified into 20 different thematic fields: selfless collaboration, stoppage of activity, furloughing [*expediente de regulación temporal de empleo (ERTE)*], incentives for employees, increase in employment, shareholders' meetings, Iberdrola League, poor service, maintenance of employment, maintenance of service, security measures, positive general mention, negative general

mention, neutral general mention, promotional, resumption of activity with problems, resumption of activity without problems, profit warnings, respirators, and stock rises.

Each of the 20 fields was grouped into 11 subcategories classified into three main categories: “prosocial/CSR activity”, “internal activity” and “others” (Table 1). Note that, although advertising and paid content segments were eliminated, Liga Iberdrola brand coverage was taken into account. Despite being derived from sponsorship, its coverage is not considered to be paid as it corresponds to current affairs, being a CSR activity to promote the visibility of women’s football. It should also be noted that, within the category “prosocial/CSR activity” “respirator manufacturing” was added as a subcategory due to the high frequency of its specific mentions.

Prosocial/CSR activity	Donation and manufacturing Setting an example Respirator manufacturing Iberdrola League
Internal activity	Personnel policies Safety measures Stoppages of activity Reopening Economic Services
Others	Others

Table 1: Categories and subcategories used to classify brand mentions. Compiled by authors.

In the category "others" we include mentions that did not fit in either the CSR/Prosocial or Internal Activity categories, such as jokes, song letters ("I hit myself with a Seat Panda", i. e.) or dialogues ("I bought bread at Mercadona"). Each of that mentions was analyzed by four coders and categorized as positive, negative, or neutral/indefinite in terms of brand reputation, always with the unanimous agreement of the research group. Any context unit that did not achieve group consensus was considered neutral/indefinite.

### ***2.1. Research Questions and Hypotheses***

This research is based on a series of questions, many of them derived from the characteristics of the situation experienced. The foreseeable decrease in the presence of brands in all television content and the press is worth mentioning, due to the halt in economic activity throughout the health crisis. It would seem logical to expect that COVID-19 would become a priority in news agendas, overshadowing economic and business content. Thus, the first research question is presented as follows:

*RQ1: Is there a reduction in the presence of brands on television and in the press during the lockdown?*

Following the agenda-setting theory, it is worth asking whether the presence of brands on both media platforms exhibits a similar evolution. Therefore, the following research question arises:

*RQ2: Is the presence of brands equally reduced on both media platforms during lockdown?*

On the other hand, following the theory of framing in the context of the pandemic and the health and economic crisis in which Spain has found itself, the following question arises about the presence of brands:

*RQ3: What did TV coverage focus on during the lockdown regarding brands?*

This brings us to the question of whether TV coverage will emphasize brands' CSR actions, in theory in a positive light, or whether they will prioritize health-related content or the internal activity or economic/labor-related problems of the brands. Thus, the following research question is specified:

*RQ4: Have broadcasters taken a mostly positive, negative, or neutral approach to brand-related issues?*

Finally, it is worth asking whether public or private ownership of a TV channel has any effect on the channel's focus, considering the nature of their income or the social function assumed for the public broadcaster. In this context, the following research questions arise:

*RQ5: Have private television channels (advertising segments excluded) devoted more coverage to brands than public channels?*

And also:

*RQ6: Have private TV channels given brands a more positive treatment than public channels?*

### **3. Results**

To facilitate the analysis of the results and follow the order of the research questions, the discussion below is divided into two subsections. The first is dedicated to the frequency of mentions of the 25 selected brands on television and in the press. The second focuses on the coverage of the five brands considered to have the greatest social responsibility during the pandemic, an assessment of their mentions on television, and a comparison between private versus public television channels.

### 3.1. Overall Frequency of Brand Mentions in the Press and on Television

The results of this study indicate that the frequency of brand coverage differed between the press and on television, during both periods. On television, the total coverage of the 25 brands was higher during the lockdown than in the previous period. Prior to the establishment of the state of alarm, between January 13 and March 12, the 25 selected brands were mentioned 1,310 times. During the period of lockdown between March 13 and May 11, they were mentioned 1,673 times, representing an increase of 27.7%. On the contrary, in the analyzed press, brand mentions went from 3,382 to 2,955, corresponding to a reduction of 12.6%.

However, the total sum of mentions from both platforms reduced by 64, thus confirming that during the lockdown, the 25 brands analyzed received less press and television coverage than in the previous period. However, the difference (0.6%) was not very significant.

As shown in Table 2, looking at each brand individually, only 6 saw a decrease in their television coverage, while 16 experienced an increase, and 3 saw no change. In the press, 14 brands saw their mentions decrease, 9 experienced an increase, and 2 showed no change. Note that print media generally reduced their volume of information and publication size during lockdown. These data means that brand coverage is more reduced in the press than on television.

		TELEVISION			PRESS		
		13/01/2020– 12/03/2020	13/03/2020– 11/05/2020	Difference	13/01/2020– 12/03/2020	13/03/2020– 11/05/2020	Difference
1	Seat	66	298	232	84	109	25
2	Iberia	199	205	6	181	165	-16
3	Sabadell	60	196	136	259	221	-38

4	<b>Inditex</b>	21	173	152	143	183	40
5	<b>Iberdrola</b>	18	116	98	204	177	-27
6	El Corte Inglés	135	112	-23	112	116	4
7	Bankia	41	88	47	181	220	39
8	<b>Mercadona</b>	94	87	-7	67	81	14
9	Naturgy	1	65	64	110	117	7
10	Zara	109	57	-52	23	39	16
11	BBVA	320	48	-272	448	310	-138
12	<b>Santander</b>	21	47	26	326	239	-87
13	Movistar	29	39	10	213	110	-103
14	Repsol	51	38	-13	175	158	-17
15	Endesa	104	19	-85	13	15	2
16	Loewe	16	19	3	138	122	-16
17	CaixaBank	4	18	14	248	216	-32
18	Mapfre	10	15	5	116	105	-11
19	Bankinter	4	10	6	180	132	-48
20	Bershka	2	10	8	6	6	0
21	Cepsa	0	6	6	20	15	-5
22	Amadeus	2	2	0	7	13	6
23	Mahou	2	2	0	100	76	-24
24	Prosegur	0	2	2	28	10	-18
25	Cruzcampo	1	1	0	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	1.310	1.673	363	3.382	2.955	-427

Table 2: Brand presence on television and in the press, before and during lockdown, ordered by mentions on television during lockdown. The brands from the *MERCO* report are shown in bold. Compiled by the authors.

Table 2 reveals several noteworthy points. Firstly, note the significant increase in certain brands' presence on television: Seat multiplies its presence by 4.52, Sabadell by 3.27, Inditex by 8.24, and Iberdrola by 6.44. As for Naturgy, which multiplies its presence by 65, we identified a paid campaign, therefore the data are not considered to be significant. It is true, however, that the variations in the press are much less significant. None of the brands managed to double their number of mentions, although we should highlight the increases seen by Seat, Inditex, and Mercadona, potentially indicating the greater stability of the press' news agenda compared with that of television. This comparison also reveals some striking contrasts: Sabadell showed one of the highest increases in television mentions, while in the press it lost 15%. Coverage of Banco Santander was multiplied by 2.24 on television but reduced by 73% in the press. The evolution of BBVA, one of the brands whose presence was apparently most affected by the pandemic, is also striking: on television it reduced to just 15% of its previous presence, and in the press to 74.1%.

Among the five brands considered by *MERCO* to have the highest CSR, Seat and Inditex are the most favored quantitatively by the new media situation. The coverage of these two brands grew both in the press and on television. Iberdrola also saw an increase in its presence on television but a reduction in the press, albeit to a much lesser extent. Mercadona experienced a small reduction on television (0.7%), but its newspaper coverage increased by 21%. Finally, Banco Santander remained very stable in terms of its general ranking as the second most mentioned brand in the press before the state of alarm and the first after, while on television it maintained its position throughout both periods, in this case as the twelfth most mentioned brand. Meanwhile, in the ranking of the five companies with the best reputation, it becomes the fifth most mentioned, surpassed by Inditex, with which it was previously equal on television, and Iberdrola.



Finally, it is interesting to point out two more aspects. The first is that the brands with the best social reputation, as defined in the *MERCO* report, were not the most mentioned in global terms, i.e., in the ranking of 25 brands selected for this study. Secondly, the press agenda seems more stable than that of television. In the press, 17 brands maintain their position or only vary by one point, while in television, only 7 maintain their position. In the press, 8 brands vary by two or more positions, compared with 18 variations in television.

### ***3.2. Television Treatment of the Brands with Greater Corporate Responsibility***

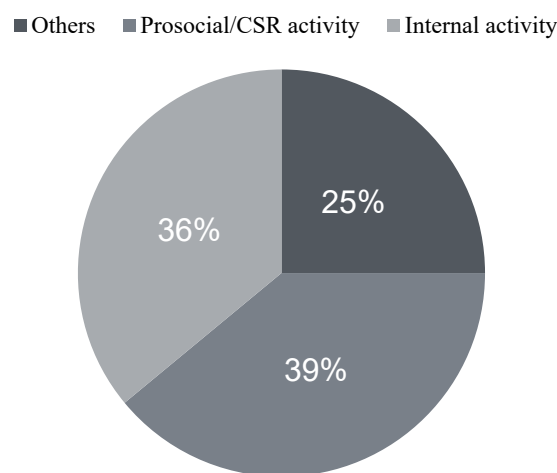
Having reviewed the data on the overall frequency of the 25 brands in the press and on television, the five brands valued according to the *MERCO* report were selected. A total of 552 units of analysis were registered and classified into the three categories and 11 subcategories presented in Table 1. Unanimity, or the consistency or reliability of the classification system, reached 98.55%, with only eight discrepancies.

Brand treatment was also categorized, assessing it to be positive, negative, or neutral/indefinite. Unanimity on the 552 positive or negative mentions reached 67.2%. It should be noted that the remaining 32.8% include both discrepancies in the valuation (27) as well as unanimous agreement on the lack of definition or neutrality of the mention (144). This corresponds to a reliability of 93.3%.

### ***3.3. Brand Mentions by Category***

Having eliminated duplicates, the brand with the highest number of mentions in total was Seat (201), then Inditex (150), followed by Iberdrola (85), Mercadona (76), and finally Banco Santander (40).

The television categories referring to the five brands were divided into three large blocks (Figure 1). On the one hand, brands' prosocial actions and corporate social responsibility received 214 mentions (38.76%). Coverage dedicated to internal activities encompassed 198 mentions (35.87%), and finally, a third block was dedicated to other mentions, with 25.36%. These results therefore means that television coverage classed as "prosocial actions" is more numerous than "internal activity" or "others."



Graph 1: Total mentions by category. Compiled by authors.

As mentioned above, equipment manufacture and donations (112 times) were distinguished from the manufacture of respirators by Seat within the CSR category since it attracted a large number of mentions (80).

The category of "setting an example" when fighting the COVID crisis, e.g., reducing the salaries of senior executives, attracted few mentions within CSR (19). Finally, the Iberdrola League was mentioned on 12 occasions, which although it represents a small total number, is significant given that sporting activity was stopped in Spain during this period.

In the category dedicated to the “internal activity” of companies, the highest number of mentions referred to personnel policies (63), which includes furloughing. This was followed by references to the stoppage of company activities (39) and, with the same number of mentions, their subsequent reactivation. The brand’s own services (26) were discussed more times than specific COVID-19 security measures (22), although the difference is small. In last place we find economic news related to the brands, such as stock market variations and similar issues (9).

Brand mentions are placed in the “Other” category when they are not associated with any specific activity. This occurs with Mercadona, whose brand name is used to speak of a supermarket in general, or with Seat, which is referred to in the lyrics of a song.

### 3.4. Brand Valuation

Television coverage of these brands was mostly positive. This was always the case when referencing a brand’s CSR. The mentions related to internal activity, including furloughing, also had a mostly positive or indefinite focus. On rare occasions, a brand’s internal activities were presented in negative terms, for example, when a brand reopened their sites without adequately complying with security measures (6) or offered poor services (4). This was also seen in the “Other” category, where the indefinite categorization of brand treatment (105) prevailed over the positive (32) and negative (3).

BRAND		ANTENA 3		LA 1		LA SEXTA		TELE5			
		Mentions	%	Mentions	%	Mentions	%	Mentions	%	N Total	%
Seat	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>100</b>
	Positive	36	69.23	31	46.00	17	53.13	33	67.35	117	58.20
	Neutral/Indef.	16	30.77	35	51.00	15	46.87	16	32.65	82	40.80

	Negative	0	0	2	3.00	0	0	0	0	2	1.00
<b>Inditex</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>
	Positive	25	83.33	33	80.49	19	52.78	39	90.70	116	77.33
	Neutral/Indef.	5	16.67	8	19.51	13	36.11	4	9.30	30	20.00
	Negative	0	0	0	0	4	11.11	0	0	4	2.67
<b>Iberdrola</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>
	Positive	16	88.89	15	25.0	16	80.00	27	87.10	74	87.06
	Neutral/Indef.	2	11.11	1	75.0	4	20.00	3	9.68	10	11.76
	Negative	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3.22	1	1.18
<b>Mercadona</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>
	Positive	6	50.00	9	39.13	7	19.44	0	0	22	28.95
	Neutral/Indef.	6	50.00	13	56.52	26	72.22	5	100	50	65.79
	Negative	0	0	1	4.35	3	8.33	0	0	4	5.26
<b>Santander</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>
	Positive	8	80.00	5	50.0	6	60.00	9	90.00	28	70.00
	Neutral/Indef.	1	10.00	5	50.0	4	40.00	0	0.0	10	25.00
	Negative	1	10.00	0	0	0	0	1	10.00	2	5.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		122		158		134		138		552	

Table 3. Categorization of brand treatment. Compiled by the authors.

In comparison, it should be noted that Seat (117) and Inditex (116) have the highest number of positive mentions in absolute terms on all the television channels, mainly being related to their CSR activities, e.g., the manufacture of respirators, the manufacture of gowns and masks, and the offer to transport personal protective equipment (PPE) to health workers. Selfless collaborations and donations by other brands received much less coverage. For example, any mentions of Mercadona's donations or Banco Santander's

economic donations are much less frequent compared with Seat's manufacture of respirators.

In the case of Mercadona, neutral content predominated (Table 3). As mentioned above, this is due to the use of the brand name when referring to the generic term "supermarket" (more significantly in La Sexta). It should be noted that, overall, Inditex has almost four times more positive than neutral mentions.

In total, Iberdrola obtained the most positive evaluation (87.06%), closely followed by Inditex (77.33%) and Banco Santander (70%). Although Seat was the most mentioned brand, only 58.21% of these evaluations were positive (Table 3). Finally, Mercadona received most negative mentions (5.26%), although neutral valuations predominated due to the metonymic use of its name (65.79%).

### ***3.5. Frequency and Categorization of the Treatment of Brands on Public and Private Television***

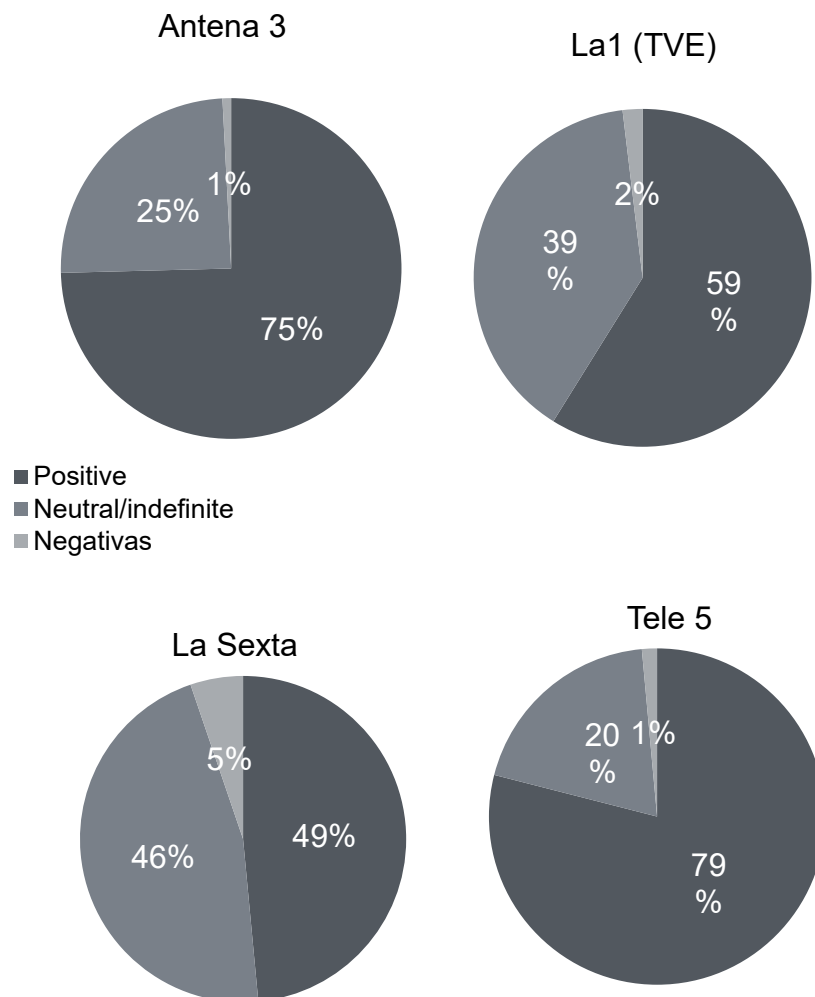
In terms of references by TV channel, La1 mentioned the five analyzed brands the most (158), followed by La Sexta (134), Tele 5 (138), and Antena 3 (122) (Graph 2). Therefore, during lockdown, in private television channels brands were mentioned more than in public channels do.

If we analyze the categorization of brand treatment by channel, we find that Antena 3 (74.59%) and Tele 5 (78.99%) presented brands in a more positive light. La1 maintained a positive focus in 58.86% of its coverage, and La Sexta in 48.51% (Graph 2). These data means that there are more positive mentions of brands on private than public television channels since La Sexta, a private one, broadcast less positive coverage than La1 (TVE).

Combining the results between channels and brands, Seat was the most mentioned on La1 (68) and Antena 3 (52). While the latter channel presented a mostly positive assessment

of the brand, La1 showed a neutral coverage, mentioning the stoppage of the company's activities, a subject that other channels paid little attention to. Meanwhile, the proportion of positive versus neutral coverage of Inditex was similar on both television channels.

Mercadona received only five mentions on Tele 5, all with a neutral rating. Its presence on La Sexta, with 36 references, 26 of them neutral, was mainly due to the aforementioned use of its name as a generic supermarket. It is also the only brand that did not have mostly positive coverage.



Graph 2: Distribution of mentions by categorization on televisions. Compiled by the authors.

La Sexta, with seven references, had the most negative coverage of the brands. It mentioned Inditex negatively four times for its resumption of activity, and Mercadona three times, twice for poor service. La1 made three negative references, two to Seat and one to Mercadona. On Tele 5, the negative coverage focused on Iberdrola and Banco Santander, which also received the only negative mention from Antena 3 (Table 3).

#### **4. Conclusions**

This study analyzes the presence and treatment on television during the COVID-19 pandemic of the Spanish brands considered to have the greatest social responsibility. The health crisis and subsequent declaration of a state of alarm suggested that television channels would alter the production of their content, paying much less attention to the large commercial firms that are usually present under normal conditions. However, based on this study, it is possible that Spanish brands with a better reputation, and that quickly adopted CSR measures, managed to increase their presence on the main television channels (except Mercadona) and receive mostly positive coverage, not only in news programs but also in all segments analyzed. However, several authors (Hallin, 1986; Robinson, 2001; Schudson, 2003) have suggested that the media tend to make their content more positive in situations of generalized crisis (terrorism, catastrophes, wars, or pandemics), abandoning criticism and even professional objectivity for the sake of supposedly shared values. This research reinforces this idea; in crisis situations, the media also treat big brands positively as another element of the social order. According to the valuations of the brands on television, we can note a lack of coverage focusing on economic consequences, infections in the workplace, closures, and layoffs. Efforts instead were focused on reporting donations of supplies, gown manufacturing, and respirators, thereby reinforcing the positive aspects of “pitching in” during a crisis

situation. All this coverage occurs without any significant differences between publicly owned media, with budgets that are not so dependent on advertising revenue, and private media with much more obvious commercial interests.

The few variations in the focus of the press on brands compared with television can also be interpreted as a symptom of informational consistency. Even after reducing their volume of content and coverage, the press remained more faithful to news reporting than television, at least as far as this investigation is concerned. This may be due to an increased rigidity in their routines, to the extent that the three brands that were mentioned most often were the same before and throughout the first state of alarm. However, we must consider that the press publishes essentially informative content, while televisions broadcast much more entertainment and infotainment throughout their 24-hour programming.

#### 4.1. Future lines of work

As an extension of this research, it would be pertinent to check which elements had the most impact on brand valuation: visibility understood as the number of mentions, or their positive or negative treatment.

Similarly, this work disregarded any content that could be identified as paid, for example, interviews that generated repeated mentions in subsequent informative content. A comparison between this direct branding strategy with indirect CSR would open another possible line of work in relation to brand equity.

Another aspect to consider is that this research focused on the text and context of the coverage, without taking into account the audiovisual aspect. In this sense, apart from the prolific field of television discourse analysis, this study could be expanded by examining the production format, as proposed by Feng (2016), and distinguishing between colloquial and read mentions, spoken on set or on location, or resorting to the inter semiotic



relationships between spoken language, sound, and image used in multimodal discourse analysis (MDA).

#### 4.2. Research limitations

This study suffers from some limitations. The first one is the choice of the media for the quantitative analysis (television and press) since there is not a balanced amount of information between them. The second limitation is in the use of the *ProQuest Global Newsstream* database since it no longer allowed access to a limited number of editions of the newspapers studied.

Although this fact was not relevant, since local and regional television stations were not analyzed either, that is, national broadcast media were compared, the amount of data in the analysis can be extended to a more complete research.

Another potential limitation of this study is the diffuse border between paid advertising and other ad formats. For example, for this research, we did not take into account ad breaks and pauses indicated just as sponsorships, but we analyzed the messages related to Iberdrola women's league. This fact was relevant for us because it continued to appear in the news, despite the break from sports activities. So we consider that for further research, each advertising modality must be analyzed case by case to determine which actions are merely advertising and which ones are CSR actions.

#### References

- Amadeo, B. (2002). La teoría del Framing. Los medios de comunicación y la transmisión de significados. *Revista de Comunicación*. Vol. 1, 6-30.
- Ardèvol Abreu, A.; Gil de Zúñiga, H.; McCombs & M. E. (2020). Orígenes y desarrollo de la teoría de la agenda setting en Comunicación. *Tendencias en España (2014-*

2019). *Profesional de la información*, v. 29, n. 4, e290414.  
<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.jul.14>

Aruguete, N. (2017). Agenda Setting y Framing: un debate inconcluso. *Más Poder Local*. n. 30. 36-42.

Balaguer Franch, M. R. & Nae, I. C. (2013). La crisis financiera y la responsabilidad social corporativa en las entidades financieras españolas, en La Gran Recesión y sus salidas. Proceedings of I Congreso de Economía y Libertad. Ávila.

Banerjee, S. I & Balaganapathy, S. (2020). Covid as a Marketing Tool for Advertisements. *Communication Today*. April-September 2020, 24, 108-115.

Bardin, L. (1996) (2ª ed) *Análisis de contenido*. Akal.

Barlovento (2020) Barlovento audience results. <https://barloventocomunicacion.es>

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology*. Ballantine Books.

Berens, G., Van Riel, C. B. M. & Van Bruggen, G. H. (2005). Corporate Associations and Consumer Product Responses: The Moderating Role of Corporate Brand Dominance. *Journal of Marketing*, 69, 35-48.  
<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.69.3.35.66357>

Brandirectory (2020) España 100. 2019 ranking. <https://brandirectory.com/rankings/spain/2019/table>

Brown, T. (1998). Corporate Associations in Marketing: Antecedents and Consequences. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 1(3), 215-233.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540045>

Brown, T. J. & Dacin, P.A. (1997). The company and the product: Corporate Associations and Consumer Product Responses. *Journal of Marketing*, 61(1), 68-84.

- Bryant, J. & Miron, D. (2004). Theory and research in mass communication. *Journal of Communication*, 54(4), 662-704. <https://www.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02650.x>
- Casero Ripoll s, A. (2020). Impact of Covid-19 on the media system. Communicative and democratic consequences of news consumption during the outbreak. *El profesional de la informaci n*, v. 29, n. 2, e290223. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.mar.23>
- Expansión (2020) Donaciones solidarias: las empresas del Ibex se unen para aportar ayudas frente al coronavirus. <https://www.expansion.com/empresas/2020/03/24/5e7a2e5fe5fdea9f648b4640.html>
- Feng, D. (2016) Doing “Authentic” News: Voices, Forms, and Strategies in Presenting-Television News. *International Journal of Communication* 10:4239-4257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481319890387>
- Fernández Riquelme, S. (2020). Primera historia de la crisis del coronavirus en España. *La Razón Histórica, Revista hispanoamericana de Historia de las Ideas*, n. 46, 12-22.
- Fontrodona, J. & Muller, P. (2020). Reforzar la integridad empresarial ante la crisis del Covid-19 (Strengthening Business Integrity in the Face of the COVID-19 Crisis) (April 8, 2020). *IESE Business School Working Paper* No. OP-333.
- Gil Salmerón, A. M. (2016). The relationship of CSR and the business profit: can the most responsible companies be more profitable? *Journal FIR, FAEDPYME International Review*, Vol. 5 n° 8, january- june 2016, 60-71.
- Goffman, E. (2006). *Frame Analysis. Los marcos de la experiencia* (1° ed.). Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), Siglo XXI Editores.

- González Romoa, Z. & Iriarte Aguirrea, S. (2020). Analysis of the communication management of Spanish pharmaceutical influencers on Instagram during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Revista Española de Comunicación en Salud*. Suplemento 1, S9-S30. <https://doi.org/10.20318/recs.2020.5402>
- Hallin, D. C. (1986). *The uncensored war: The media and Vietnam*. University of California Press.
- Handelman, J. M. & Arnold, S. J. (1999). The role of marketing actions with a social dimension: appeals to the institutional environment. *Journal of Marketing*, 63, 33-48.
- Hao Nguyen, M., Gruber, J., Fuchs, J., Marler, W., Hunsaker, A. & Hargittai, E. (2020). Changes in Digital Communication During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for Digital Inequality and Future Research. *Social Media + Society* July-September 2020: 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120948255>
- He, H. & Harris, L. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy. *Journal of Business Research*, v. 116, 176-182. [10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.030](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.030)
- Igartua, J. J., Ortega Mohedano, F. & Arcila Calder n, C. (2020). Communication use in the times of the coronavirus. A cross-cultural study. *El profesional de la información*, v. 29, n. 3, e290318. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.18>
- Interbrand (2020). Best Spanish brands. <https://interbrand.com/newsroom/zara-movistar-santander-lead-interbrands-best-spanish-brands-2019/>
- Jurkowitz, M. & Mitchell, A. (2020). Cable TV and COVID-19: How Americans perceive the outbreak and view media coverage differ by main news source. PewResearch Center, Journalism Media. <https://www.journalism.org/2020/04/01/cable->

tv-and-covid-19-how-americans-perceive-the-outbreak-and-view-media-coverage-differ-by-main-news-source/

Kim, S. & Austin, L. (2020) Effects of CSR initiatives on company perceptions among Millennial and Gen Z consumers. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 25, 2, 299-317(19). <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-07-2018-0077>

Krippendorff, K. (1990). *Metodología de análisis de contenido. Teoría y Práctica*. Paidós Comunicación.

Lázaro Rodríguez, P. & Herrera Viedma, E. (2020). Noticias sobre Covid-19 y 2019-nCoV en medios de comunicación de España: el papel de los medios digitales en tiempos de confinamiento. *El profesional de la información*, v. 29, n. 3, e290302. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.02>

López Rico, C., González Esteban, J.L. & Hernández Martínez, A. (2020). Polarization and trust in Spanish media during the COVID-19. Identification of audience profiles. *Revista Española de Comunicación en Salud*. Suplemento 1, S77-S89.

McCombs, M. E. & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda setting function of the media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. XXXVI, 176-187.

McCombs, M. E (2006). *Estableciendo la agenda. El impacto de los medios en la opinión pública y en el conocimiento*. Paidós.

Merco (2020) Merco presenta el ranking Empresas con mayor compromiso / responsabilidad social durante la pandemia. <https://www.merco.info/es/actualidad/ranking-merco-empresas-con-mayor-compromiso-responsabilidad-social-pandemia-covid19>

- Miras, M.; Escobar-Pérez, E. & Galán, J. L. (2015) Efecto de la crisis sobre el compromiso social de las empresas españolas cotizadas. *Universia Business Review*, n. 48, 18-51.
- Navarro, J. A. & Olmo, A. (2018). Presencia política en Televisión Española en los últimos procesos electorales. *Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico*, 24 (2), 1473-1488.
- Papa, V. & Manou, T. (2020). Recurrent Narratives Around the COVID-19 Crisis in Social Networks: A Case Study Analysis on Facebook. *Tripodos*, n. 47, v. 2.
- Perez Dasilva, J. A.; Meso Ayerdi, K. & Mendiguren Galdos, T. (2020). Fake news y coronavirus: detección de los principales actores y tendencias a través del análisis de las conversaciones en Twitter. *El profesional de la información*, v. 29, n. 3, e290308. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.08>
- Piñeiro Naval, V. (2020). La metodología de análisis de contenido. Usos y aplicaciones en la investigación comunicativa del ámbito hispánico. *Communication & Society*, 33(3), 1-16. 10.15581/003.33.3.1-16
- Radu, R. (2020). Fighting the ‘Infodemic’: Legal Responses to COVID-19 Disinformation. *Social Media + Society*. July-September 2020. 10.1177/2056305120948190
- Robinson, P. (2001). Theorizing the influence of media on world politics: Models of media influence on foreign policy. *European Journal of Communication*, 16(4), 523–544. 10.1177/0267323101016004005
- Rosenthal, B. (2020). A ascensao das marcas solidárias. *GV-executivo*, vol. 19, n. 3, 42-45. <https://doi.org/10.12660/gvexec.v19n3.2020.81732>

- Sanjuán Pérez, A.; Martínez Costa, S; Videla Rodríguez, J. J & Nozal Cantarero, T (2020). Información sobre coronavirus y Covid-19 en las principales cadenas de TV españolas en el periodo previo al confinamiento. *Profesional de la Información*, v. 29, n. 6, e290611. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.nov.11>
- Santos Jaén, J. M; Tornel Marín, M. T. & Gracia Ortiz, M. D. (2020). Repercusiones sobre las empresas de sus actuaciones socialmente responsables ante la pandemia generada por el COVID-19. *La Razón Histórica. Revista hispanoamericana de Historia de las Ideas*. n. 46, 1-11.
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49 (1), 103-122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x>
- Scheufele, D. A & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, Agenda Setting and Priming: the evolution of Three Media Effects Models. *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 57, 9-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00326.x>
- Schudson, M. (2003). What's unusual about covering politics as usual. In B. Zelizer & S. Allan (Eds.), *Journalism after September 11* (70–80). Routledge.
- Shoemaker, P. & Reese, S. (1996). *Mediating the Message. Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*. Longman.
- Simon, F. L. (1995). Global corporative philanthropy: a strategic framework. *International marketing review*, 12 (4), 20-38.
- Sirera, S. (2020). Marcas en cuarentena. *Revista de los Estudios de Ciencias de la Información y la Comunicación*, ISSN-e 2014-2226, N°. 97
- Statista (2020) Número de lectores diarios de los principales periódicos españoles en 2021(en miles de lectores) <https://es.statista.com/statistics/476795/newspapers-daily-daily-mas-leidos-en-espana/>

- Thelwall, M. & Thelwall, S. (2020). Covid-19 tweeting in English: Gender differences. *El profesional de la información*, v. 29, n. 3, e290301. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.01>
- Tomba, C.; Allisiardi, A.; Muñoz, C.; Cortellezzi, P.; Lira, V. A. (2020). *La responsabilidad de la Comunicación de Bien Público en tiempos de pandemia. Análisis comparativo entre Argentina y España. Informe realizado en el marco del COVID-19*. Observatorio de Medios. Universidad Juan Agustín Maza.
- Tez Lopez, M., Vaz Alvarez, M. & Fieiras Ceide, C. (2020). Covid-19 and public service media: Impact of the pandemic on public television in Europe. *Profesional de la información*, v. 29, n. 5, e290518. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.sep.18>
- Villagra, N., Cárdbaba, M. A. M. & Ruiz San Román, J. A. (2016). Comunicación de RSC: una revisión de las tesis clásicas sobre la coherencia entre la acción de RSC y la actividad organizacional. *Communication & Society* 29(2), 133-149.
- Villena Alarcón, E. & Caballero Galeote, L. (2020). COVID-19 Media Coverage on Spanish Public TV. *Trípodos*, n. 47, v. 2. <https://doi.org/10.51698/tripodos.2020.47p103-126>
- Xifra, Jordi (2020). Comunicación corporativa, relaciones públicas y gestión del riesgo reputacional en tiempos del Covid-19. *El profesional de la información*, v. 29, n. 2, e290220 <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.mar.20>