

# **Inequality and coronavirus: informative coverage in six Spanish online legacy media (March-May)**

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## **1. Introduction**

December 2019, a new no identified virus put in quarantine 44 people in the Chinese city of Wuhan (Agencies, 2020). Quickly, this event turned up first in the confinement of Wuhan and then in several areas of the country (Efe, 2020). However, this medical step did not avoid the propagation of the disease and some countries all over the world found out citizens who presented the symptoms of this virus. On 11th of March, WHO declared the world pandemic (Pérez & García-Real, 2020). The following days different states took a decision: the lockdown of their population. In Spain, the government announced the Alarm State two days later and its citizens went to home confinement (Remacha Rejón & Riveiro, 2020).

In this way, due to the lack of awareness about the virus and resources to combat it, with most of the population in their homes, the consequences arrived rapidly (Tragacete, 2020). For instance: economic activity was cancelled and educational centres were closed (*Cinco Días*, 2020). Different social actors exposed inequality among citizens and the media began to discuss the increase of this problem due to the health crisis (Díez-Roux, 2020).

For this reason, this research looks for an answer about the Spanish media coverage in this subject. In other words, about inequality and lack of opportunities (education, health or research, for instance) in this pandemic scenario.

## **2. State of the art**

Inequality is understood like disparity which causes some people to have access to certain living standards and others not (Ray, 1998, p. 170). In media, the salience of this concept has not been continued or homogeneous in a traditional way. Continued because its presence has ups and downs in the media agenda. On the other hand, it is neither homogeneous due to its presence changes in media analyzed in the same historic moments.

Concerning the discontinued presence in media, it is important to stand out that themes have a life cycle. It is not usual that a specific topic has the attention for a long period (Downs, 1972, pp. 39-40). In the case of inequality, the economic crisis of 2008 supposed an increase in research focused on this issue (Milanovic, 2006, 2012; Piketty, 2013; Stiglitz, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, 2015). So,

the salience was translated to the treatment in the media, because of its link to social protests around the globe: Occupy Wall Street (2012) Arab Spring (2010-2012); 15-M in Spain (2011), or Yellow Vests movement (2018).

Furthermore, coverage of inequality has not been homogeneous, like it has been said before. This topic is in a maturation process (Strodthoff, Hawkins y Schoenfeld, 1985). The process takes a different speed in each media of the ecosystem. Also, the heterogeneous in the treatment binds together with the interests of the journalistic corporations. In this way, the frame changes with every single editorial line (Miller & Reichart, 2001) and the persuasive efforts of the social actors (Petrova, 2008).

Therefore, the research question which aims this paper breaks down in two parts:

RQ1 Which is the salience that Spanish media gives to coverage of inequality linking the effects of the pandemic?

RQ1.1. How important is the ideology of the media in the salience awarded?

RQ1.2. Which differences are there in the treatment of this topic in the Spanish media?

### **3. Methods**

The approach of this investigation is quantitative. With a content analysis that allows analyzing manifest content and latent one. This last could not be measured in a straight way, but it might be represented with one or more indicators (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 23).

The analysis focuses on six Spanish online legacy media: abc.es; elconfidencial.com; eldiario.es; elmundo.es; elpais.com and lavanguardia.com. These are usually in the list of the 10 most popular because of its unique monthly users (*Dircomfidencial*, 2019) and have different ideologies, which goes from social democrats to conservative or liberals.

The period of analysis focuses on March, April and May of 2020. The analysis units are all the publications which speak about inequality and coronavirus (N=1135). In this way, to measure the mediatic salience, it worked with the whole population. In this point, it should be noted that the relevance is understood like the number of the published news (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). After that, regarding the weight of each newspaper in the whole population, it chose a stratified probabilistic sample (n=288). Thus, it became an in-depth analysis of the salience according to the ideology of the media, the authorship of the information, the sections that appear in the news and the function (informative, opinion, or mixed) that is prevalent in the text.

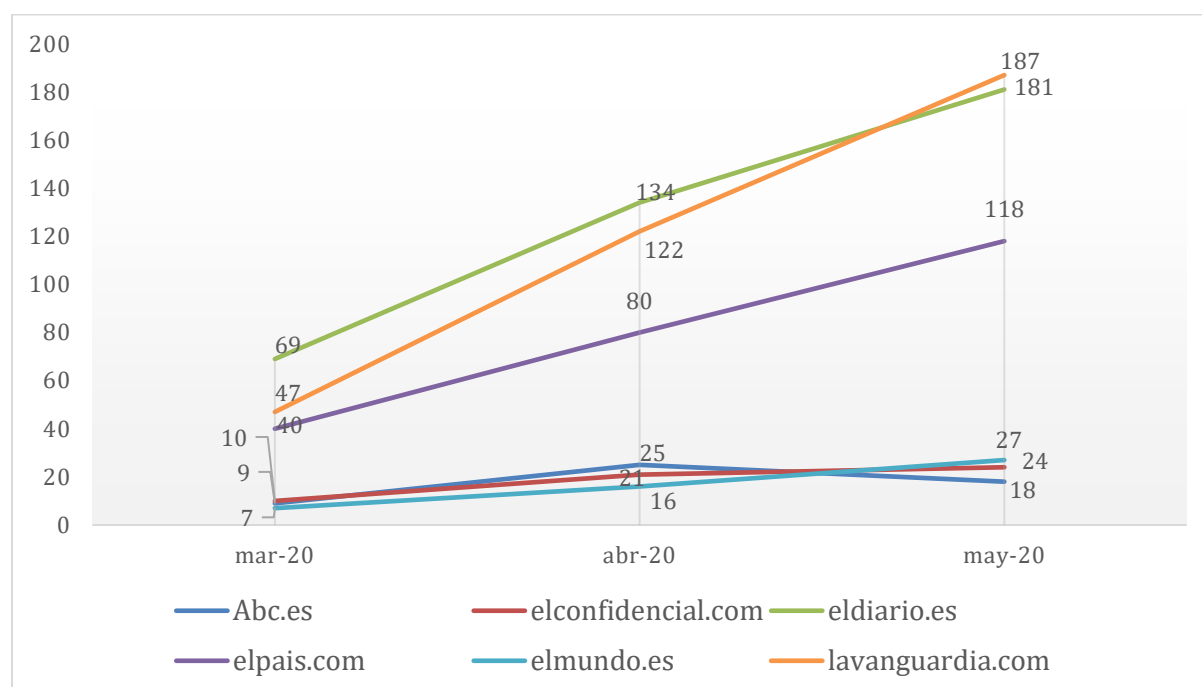
## 4. Results

The salience given by the six media analyzed about inequality and its correlation with the pandemic effects is very variable. However, over the months it seems that the trend grows.

The figure number one shows this inclination. On the one hand, there are eldiario.es, elpais.com and lavanguardia.com that stand out in the coverage. On the other hand, it found abc.es, elconfidencial.com and elmundo.es.

It should be noted that the three media where the coverage is higher two of them (eldiario.es and elpais.com) have a social democrat ideology, however, lavanguardia.com has a liberal one.

Figure 1. Publications in the established period by media



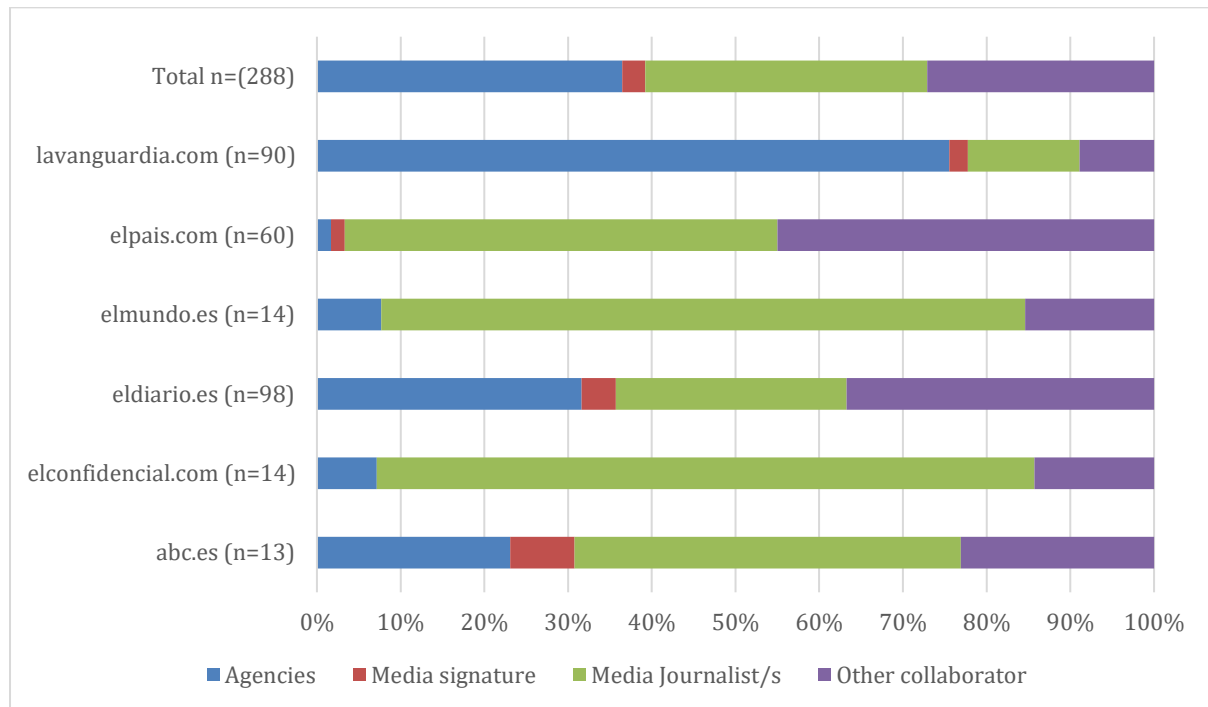
Source: own elaboration

Regarding the origin of the news shown in the different online media analyzed, it should be pointed out that information from news agencies is widespread, standing out eldiario.es, 33.7%; and especially, lavanguardia.com, 74.4%

The impact of this information from news agencies is more salient than the product of journalists and collaborators from these newspapers.

In this case, among the media which produce their contents, stand out elconfidencial.com, 92.9 %; elmundo.es, 92.3 % y elpais.com, 96.7 %.

Figure 2. Authorship by media

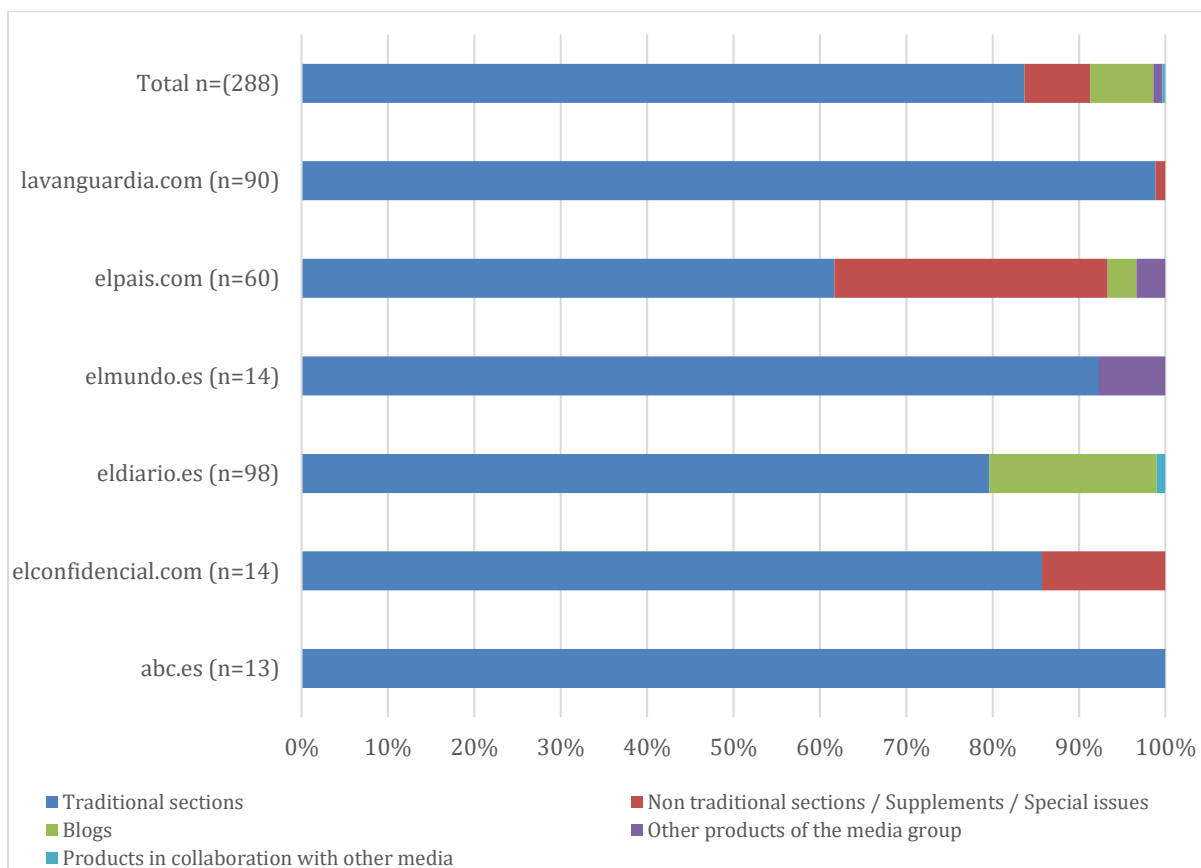


Source: own elaboration

When it comes to cover these news, general and traditional sections of media are the most commonplace for publishing, 83.7%, highlighting in this field: abc.es, 100 %; elmundo.es, 92.3 % y lavanguardia.com, 98.9 %.

By contrast on elpais.com it is also common to publish this information on nontraditional sections, supplements or special issues 31.7% and in the case of eldiario.es it is displayed on blogs, 19.4%

Figure 3. Sections of the publications by media

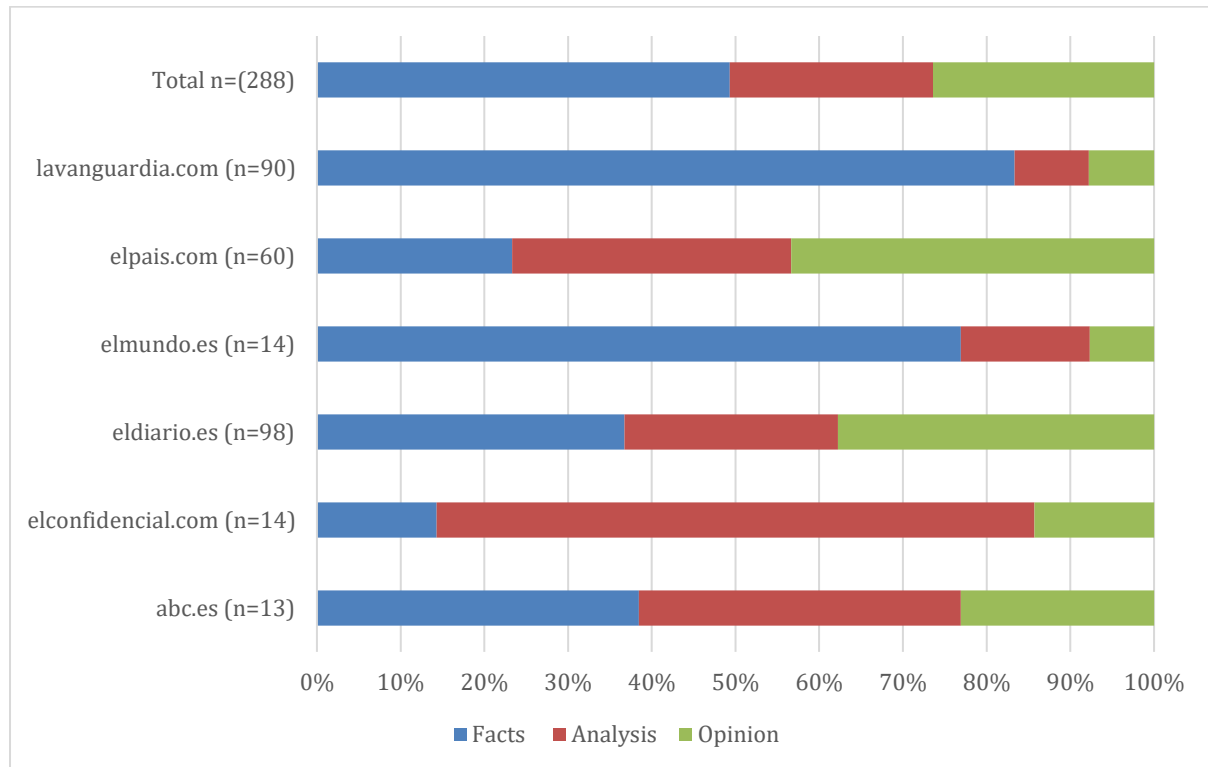


Source: own elaboration

Finally, regarding the nature of the news, there is a predominance of informative news, 49.3% in contrast with opinion articles, 26.4 % or analytical articles 24.3 %.

When observing the type of news in these six online media corporations, information news prevails in elmundo.es, 76.9%; and lavanguardia.com.83.3 %; Opinionated articles increase the frequency in eldiario.es, 37.8 % and elpais.com, 43.3 %; and combined/interpretative articles in abc.es, has 38.5 %; and 71.4% elconfidencial.com, respectively.

Figure 4. Genres of the publications by media



Source: own elaboration

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the results obtained after the analysis of the first term, we can conclude that the salience of the inequality and its connection with the effect of the pandemic is uneven in the six selected online legacy media. Nevertheless, the coverage carried out for all of them showed an upward trend.

On the other hand, when linking this question with the ideology of each newspaper, it is observed that the two media with a social-democratic position, elpais.com and eldiario.es, stand out considerably over the rest of them. Also, lavanguardia.com (liberal values) which in May has been the main generator of news focused on this topic has emerged in this subject.

However, this fact contrasts markedly if we include the category of authorship. We can observe in the case of Godó's group newspaper, most of the publications come from agencies. On the other hand, in the case of online media with an editorial line close to social democracy, the profusion of their own pieces is greater; as well as the disparity of sections where they are published and the journalistic genre used

In this way, to answer the research questions, it could be affirmed that the coverage in the six media analyzed is very unlike. It observed a link between salience and ideology. Besides, the effort to cover the issue with its own resources

is greater, its ability to position itself in the agenda of the media from different spaces and formats increases.

Finally, about the limitations of this research results we have to say this investigation belongs to a bigger one. This one deepens on the time perspective because it will be a longitudinal investigation of a year. In addition, it will be intensified in other areas like frames, social actors who became sources, original ways to get information and the journalistic quality, of course, avoiding infotainment.

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