

# Fake news during the COVID-19 State of Alarm. Analysis from the political point of view in the Spanish press.

Las fake news durante el Estado de Alarma por COVID-19.  
Análisis desde el punto de vista político en la prensa española.

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Since December 2019, when talk began in Spain about the coronavirus that was affecting China, rumors and vague news populated the world. When the disease reached Europe, the proliferation of information multiplied. Since the State of Alert was decreed, hoaxes and fake news have been a constant, which has been reflected in media reports. **Methodology:** This paper analyses the information published in the Spanish press about fake news related to politics, the controversial declarations of the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard, and social networks; to know the volume of news and the treatment that the media has given to them. A mixed, qualitative/quantitative methodology has been used with the support of the MAXQDA 2020 tool. **Results:** After the analysis of 229 texts, it can be stated that the topic of which most information has been published about politics (48.47%), followed by social networks (28.8%) and the controversial statements of the Chief of Staff of the Guardia Civil (22.7%); although at all times the political debate has been present in the information. **Discussion:** This work opens a line of investigation on whether the spread of harmful information can be limited in a pandemic or whether freedom of expression is above it. **Conclusions:** The media on the ideological right have published more information with greater political content (73.87%), compared to the left-wing media with only 26.13%.

**KEYWORDS:** Buló; COVID-19; mass media; *fake news*; social media; politics; credibility.

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## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Desde que en diciembre de 2019 se empezara a hablar en España sobre el coronavirus que estaba afectando a China, los rumores y las noticias imprecisas poblaron el mundo. Cuando la enfermedad llegó a Europa, la proliferación de información se multiplicó. Desde que se decretara el Estado de Alarma, los bulos y las *fake news* han sido una constante, que se ha reflejado en las informaciones de los medios de comunicación. **Metodología:** En este trabajo se analizan las informaciones publicadas en la prensa española sobre *fake news* relacionadas con la política, las polémicas declaraciones del jefe del Estado Mayor de la Guardia Civil y las redes sociales; para conocer el volumen de noticias y el tratamiento que los medios han hecho de ellas. Se ha usado una metodología mixta, cualitativa/cuantitativa con el apoyo de la herramienta MAXQDA 2020. **Resultados:** Tras el análisis de 229 textos se puede afirmar que el tema del que se han publicado más informaciones relacionadas con *fake news* es política (48,47%), seguido de las redes sociales (28,8%) y las polémicas declaraciones del jefe del Estado Mayor de la Guardia Civil (22,7%); aunque en todo momento el debate político ha estado presente en las informaciones. **Discusión:** Este trabajo abre una línea de investigación sobre si se puede limitar la propagación de informaciones perjudiciales en una pandemia o si está por encima la libertad de expresión. **Conclusiones:** Los medios que se sitúan en la derecha ideológica, han publicado más informaciones con mayor contenido político (73,87%), frente a los medios de izquierda con solo un 26,13%.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Bulo; COVID-19; medios de comunicación; noticias falsas; redes sociales; política; credibilidad.

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Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

### 1. Introduction

The term *fake news* has become ubiquitous quite quickly. However, nowadays, there are still media that spread more fake news -relatively dark- compared to the behavior of the media considered solvent and traditional. (Nelson and Taneja, 2018). Moreover, although *fake news* is, certainly, not a new phenomenon (Parra and Oliveira, 2018, Blanco-Herrero and Arcila-Calderón, 2019), in certain media its publication has been accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic that is taking place in the world.

The term 'information', starting from the journalistic concept, has to contain the truth in itself, without the need for further adjectives (Brajnovic, 1979). But nowadays the information does not come only from the traditional media, which is what is regulated in Spain by the Constitutional Court, as a fundamental right that it is, but it can come from anywhere and filter into the collective knowledge as truth, without being it (Campos, 2008).

The lack of truth, or veracity as some prefer to refer to it, is shielded by freedom of expression (Tandoc et al., 2018), and when you try to end this distortion of reality, you can fall into censorship. As Azurmendi states (2005:40) "information is not exclusive" to the journalistic sector "nor journalism is the only information with social dissemination."

It is complex to combine the right to information, with the right to inform and have freedom of expression in all the media through which information can reach the public. Various works from jurisprudence deal with this area (Piñas, Villacrés, and Patricio, 2019 and Escandón, 2019). Some studies analyze how fundamental rights can be protected in social networks, for example, the right to rectification in the Spanish and Latin American sphere (Ortega-Ruiz and Forero, 2018). This work will not enter into legal terms, but it is aware that the object of study can act in this context.

The impact of *fake news* about the coronavirus has been of such importance that the platform *Salud sin Bulos*, created by the Association of Health Researchers in Spain (AIES), has implemented a tab on its website to address deception about the coronavirus. But, beyond certain platforms that try to deny fake news, these have now become so important that the Government has taken measures to stop them. Thus, in an alleged lapse, the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard, José Manuel Santiago, in one of the numerous appearances of charges by the State security forces, came to affirm that the Civil Guard was working “to minimize criticism of the government's management” in the context of the fight against *fake news* “susceptible to generating social stress and disaffection of government institutions” (Cadena SER, 2020). These words, spoken on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020, were interpreted as interference by the security forces in freedom of expression. The next day, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard tint his words: “When I speak of hoaxes and misinformation, I mean that the Civil Guard tries to analyze activities of uncertain origin”; to which he added that all the activities of the Civil Guard are carried out “respecting the principle of freedom of expression” (El Mundo, 2020). All these statements were broadcast live by the main television networks in Spain and they were echoed by all the media, radio, digital, and printed in the country; without distinction of ideologies.

In this context, it is of special interest to analyze the information about fake news that has appeared in the traditional written media, whether in print or digital; Since, at this time, the proliferation of information on the phenomenon of *fake news* has been made manifest in the media. And it is that this term has entered, fully, to form part of the media agenda. Not because too much fake news is appearing in the media -which would be an attempt against the principle of veracity that must be present in journalistic practice- but because, at a time when citizens and social agents of all kinds can disseminate information freely through social networks, the falsification of reality is occurring at very high levels (Silverio, 2018 and Shu *et al.*, 2017).

### 1.1. *Maldita.es* vs. *Newtral*

The journalist Ana Pastor, the image of the television network *La Sexta*, founded in 2018 *Newtral*, a visual content company that, among other business areas, is oriented to the verification of news and innovation in journalism through *fact-checking*. It was not the first time that she was dedicated to this function, because since 2013, in her show ‘El Objetivo’ of the same station, she carried out this verification function, first with ‘Maldita Hemeroteca’, through *Maldita.es*. She would later create *Newtral*, which was the first Spanish media outlet to join the *International Fact-Checking Network*, an international body of independent verifiers. And it is that, “after 5 years verifying information, *Newtral* has joined the *Facebook* external data verification program in March 2019” (Alonso, 2019, p. 46).

*La Sexta*, alongside *Antena 3*, form the second-largest communication group in Spain, Atresmedia, only behind Mediaset. Likewise, *La Sexta* was born in 2006 when the Government of Rodríguez Zapatero granted a DTT license to a group formed, among others, by *Televisa*, *Globomedia* (Emilio

Aragón), and *Imagina Media*, with *Roures (Mediapro)* as the most visible figure. *Imagina* has small participation in Atresmedia and shows such as "El Intermedio", "El Objetivo de Ana Pastor", "La Sexta Noticias", or "Al Rojo Vivo" depend on it. It is worth remembering the words of José Manuel Lara Bosch (son of the founder of Planeta and president from 2003 to 2015): "with La Sexta I want to make a center-left television" (Reig y Labio, 2017, p.126).

On the other hand, there is the *Maldita.es* platform, which defines itself on its website as a non-profit medium whose purpose is to provide citizens with "tools so that they do not pass you", focused on controlling misinformation and public discourse through fact-checking techniques (*Maldita.es*, 2020).

Since June 2018, *Maldita.es* has also been part of the *Fact-Checking Network* and, according to their website, they are the only Spanish medium that was part of the High-Level Group on *fake news* and disinformation appointed by the European Commission in 2018. But it should not be forgotten that *Maldita.es* and *Maldito Bulo* come from *Maldita Hemeroteca*, which is a project created by two journalists, Clara Jiménez Cruz and Julio Montes, and that both have worked in *La Sexta*; even more, *Maldito Bulo* had a section on "El Objetivo" of *La Sexta* and collaborated with other shows on the network ("Al Rojo Vivo", "Más Vale Tarde", "La Sexta Noche"). Now they no longer have that relationship, but they collaborate with 'Julia en la Onda' of *Onda Cero*. Likewise, they have sometimes worked with *eldiario.es* (Magallón-Rosa, 2018).

As you can see, the struggle between *Maldita.es* and *Newtral* is clear, both claim to be the first to be part of the same international verification body, for example, but this tension between platforms is only due to the position in the market since both *Newtral's* ideological line as well as *Maldita.es's* is of left. The struggle of both platforms is not the object of this work, but the reluctance or the support of the different media to them depending on their ideological position have been reflected in this work.

## 2. Bibliographic Review

Parra and Oliveira (2018) conducted a review of the existing literature regarding *fake news*, placing their emergence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A time when newspapers began to proliferate due to the advancement of new technologies. Thus, if the trains and the steamship were the means of transport that led to the first fake news in history in 1835, published by *The Sun* (Salas, 2019); In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Internet is posited as the most agile and fastest means of transport, as well as a propagator of information. Until now, within the Internet, social networks have been the most active propagators of so-called *fake news*, considering the media as the bearers of the truth, beyond hoaxes (Tandoc *et al.*, 2018). In this way, Blanco-Herrero and Arcila-Calderón argue that online communication and, specifically, social networks, are the culprits of the appearance of fake news (Blanco-Herrero and Arcila-Calderón, 2019).

Since 2018, there have been several studies that test the concern of Spanish Internet users about fake news, such as the one carried out by Digital News Report, which figures this concern in 69% of Internet users (Vara, 2018). In the 2019 edition, this report measures the population's unease about this type of news and says that "the majority of Spanish Internet users (68%) are concerned about discerning what is true or false on the Internet, although this anxiety affects especially those over 45 years of age (70%), compared to those under 25 years of age (57%)" (Vara, 2019: par. 7). Therefore, it seems clear that Spanish people are interested in knowing whether the information they receive, through social networks, but also from the media, is true or false. In fact, there is a degree of

mistrust in what the media publishes. Thus, those who "choose digital media are much more distrustful (only 39% trusts them) than those who prefer traditional media such as TV (51%) and radio (47%)" (Vara, 2019: par. 4). Although television and radio are also already on the Internet, with the same or similar programming to that broadcast through conventional media (Vara, 2019). In this sense, information professionals have a great responsibility to put an end to public mistrust in the face of false information (Román-San-Miguel, 2019, López-Borrull, Vives-Gràcia and Badell, 2018).

The population, while increasingly concerned about taking care of their physical and mental health (Bakir and McStay, 2018), must also take care of their informative health; as Amorós assures that "reading and believing *fake news* burdens our informative health" (2018, p. 14). Fake news becomes so important in the health of the population that the World Health Organization (WHO) had to state a warning in February 2020 of a new disease that it calls 'informademic' or 'infodemic'. In this report, the WHO warned that:

The 2019-nCoV outbreak and its response are accompanied by a huge 'informademic', an overabundance of information that is sometimes accurate and sometimes not that makes it difficult for people to find reliable and secure sources when they need them (...) The Organization is working 24 hours a day to identify the most widespread rumors that may harm the health of the population, such as false prevention measures or cures. These myths are then refuted with proven information (*Europa Press*, 2020).

This statement was echoed by all the media and news agencies in Spain.

The population consumes false news as true too often (McGonagle, 2017), since it receives the information that comes to it through social networks just like that found in traditional media. This is what concludes a study carried out by researchers from different Italian universities. In this work, five social networks and the information they give about COVID-19 are analyzed, specifically evaluating the commitment and interest of users about COVID-19 and the evolution of the discourse of both truthful and questionable information. In this sense, said work concludes that there are no significant differences in their diffusion patterns between the information marked as reliable and the questionable one (Cinelli et al., 2020). This means that truthful information and that which is not is disseminated through social networks with the same fluidity and following the same patterns, so that it is difficult to separate true information from *fake news* (Flintham et al., 2018). Fake news also takes advantage of the innovative products of "technological giants such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter", which are the platforms on which most of the false information is disseminated, generating a flow of information almost impossible to control (Richter, 2018). Besides, they become highly relevant due to the great diffusion provided by digital media and, as noted, by social networks (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Blanco-Herrero and Arcila-Calderón, 2019).

In general, citizens seek information and exhaustively monitor it when crises occur and, consequently, the consumption of information increases exponentially. Even in a media context where news consumption has increased dramatically from time to time and mediated by social media platforms (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018), people with higher availability will likely continue to be exposed to news from a greater variety of sources, while people with less availability will probably continue to consume news from the most popular sources (Nelson and Taneja, 2018). In fact, in the



United States, in the case of Covid-19, “92% of adults (...) frequently accessed the news about the pandemic, registering an increase of 34% over the period before the health emergency” (Casero-Ripollés 2020). In the Spanish case, we already have some data; Thus, since the decree of the State of Alarm of March 14<sup>th</sup> and until April 10<sup>th</sup>, 184,057 news about 2019-nCoV and COVID-19 were published, which represents 63.74% of the total that were 288,781 news recovered with the help from the *My news* database. In this sense, in a month since the State of Alarm decree, almost twice as many news were published than in the two months before said decree (Lázaro and Herrera, 2020).

Moreover, after analyzing the statements made by the government of Spain through *Twitter* during the state of alarm, it can be concluded that among the most successful publications we find a tweet with purely advertising content, published on March 15<sup>th</sup>, in which the poster of the campaign “We stop this virus together” appears, but most importantly with a call not to share *fake news* (Castillo-Esparcia, Fernández-Souto, and Puentes-Rivera, 2020).

Citizens cannot reach the absolute truth, beyond verifying some facts, just as they cannot create big lies, because, among other things, they cannot disseminate (Rapp and Salovich, 2018). Only large, structured, and organized pressure groups can create big lies that spread as truth. Likewise, if these organized groups create a reality, which may be uncertain, the population will accept it as real. The ability of anyone to create *fake news* or a hoax is very limited, and only those who have power can expand it and even implant it as truth. For this reason, Carrera (2018) argues that the lie cannot be refuted with facts, but that it is necessary to support and provide arguments and documents, and that when they try to convince us that we live in the era of post-truth, for not having the ability to control the falsehoods that are spread at high speed through social networks, is a fallacy since this capacity has never existed.

However, today citizens are no longer satisfied with what they hear and read but are critical of the information they receive. According to a study carried out by *Digilab* researchers (Masip et al., 2020: 3), in Spain, “the coronavirus crisis has caused 78% of citizens to get information more than before the pandemic, and 52% do so three or more times a day when before the crisis only 28% did it”. It is striking that, according to this study, 77.4% of those surveyed thinks that “the media are conditioned or highly conditioned by their editorial line in the information treatment of the pandemic”; furthermore, “44.6% indicate that the media are treating this information sensationally and generating unnecessary social alarm”

In the same way, it is important to note that, according to the *Digilab* study, during the pandemic, “although 80.3% say they have received fake news or news of doubtful veracity, these mostly come from social networks and instant messaging applications (64,3%). And *WhatsApp* is the main gateway for fake news. And what is more novel is that “73.5% of the people surveyed say they check the fake news, even if it is only the news that interests them.” This already indicates a change in attitude in the population, who does not believe everything they consume, but rather try to contrast the information; and this contrast of information is done, firstly, through the *Google* search engine and, secondly, through the media. Contrary to what one might think, with platforms such as *Maldita.es* or *Newtral*, among many others (Vázquez-Herrero, Vizoso, and López-García, 2019), which have become so fashionable in recent years, only 10% of respondents verify information through the use of *fact-checkers*. Besides, rectification usually arrives late, when the information has already been disseminated and the image of the person affected has been damaged (Kim, Moravec and Dennis, 2017).

Therefore, if citizens use traditional media to contrast falsehoods and, as Carrera (2018) states, these are within the circle of post-truth; Where does the truth dwell? Once again, people go to other places to find out, beyond the media: reports, research papers, books, etc. (Corner, 2017). In short, science continues to be the necessary method in democracy (Del-Fresno-García, 2019). An argument that is also present in other research works (Andreu-Sánchez and Martín-Pascual, 2020, and The Lancet, 2020). Of course, all mediated under the Internet umbrella, controlled by a handful of multinationals, mostly five: *Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Facebook, and Google* (Zuazo, 2018).

### 3. Objectives and Methodology

This research work is based on three hypotheses:

1. Different social actors have used social networks to spread hoaxes for and against the government's management of the crisis, and these have reached the media.
2. Political parties have accused each other of spreading hoaxes and false news during the State of Alarm, and false information has crept onto the agendas of traditional media.
3. The Government, in its communication strategy, has wanted to put an end to the hoaxes, but this decision has turned against it when it was learned that the Civil Guard cybercrime unit was working against this false information since the media has ideologically used this supposed State censorship. Likewise, it must be borne in mind that the option that is being presented for citizens against these hoaxes is to access various platforms that work to combat them, such as *Maldita.es* or *Newtral*, but these have a specific ideological line that can question their function. (Bernal-Triviño and Clares-Gavilán, 2019).

From these hypotheses a series of questions arise that are identified with the objectives of this work:

- O1. Find out what has been the volume and the treatment that the media has done on *fake news* during the pandemic, concerning political issues, social networks, and on the statements of the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard.
- O2. Know if the media have echoed different hoaxes or false news that have circulated on the networks during the pandemic and if they have done so with an ideological bias.

To respond to the proposed objectives, two media of left or center-left ideology have been selected: *El País* and *El Periódico*; and two others of right-wing or center-right ideology: *El Mundo* and *ABC*. This distinction is collected from the search engine *prensadigital.com* which was the first search engine for newspapers in Spain. Besides the contributions of authors such as Cachán (1995), Gómez (2010), Reig (2011), or Nogales and Mancinas (2014). The information on *fake news* and hoaxes that appeared in digital editions (although those that were under subscription were consulted on paper) of these media during the State of Alarm decreed by the Government have been analyzed. The period studied runs from March 16<sup>th</sup> to May 9<sup>th</sup>, when the third extension of the State of Alarm in Spain ends.

Written media have been selected because they are the media that, according to the EGM of April 2020, have increased their audience. A study that also ensures that "the media continue to be valued positively by more than 90% of those surveyed, although a certain saturation of information on the health crisis is beginning to be perceived" (EGM, 2020, par. 1). The selection of media has been made taking as a reference the EGM I Ola of 2020 and attending to media that are general and national, where *El País* appears in the first place, followed by *El Mundo*, *ABC*, and *El Periódico*.

In this work a mixed methodology is used, mixing the qualitative and quantitative approach (Johnson *et al.*, 2007), with the help of the analysis tool MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 (Release 20.0.8). On

the one hand, and through quantitative methodology, this work makes a recount of the information that appears related to the object of study, as well as the space dedicated to them; on the other hand, and for the qualitative analysis, to identify the objectivity/subjectivity of the information, the different terms used in the information are addressed and how they are related to each other, identification in which MAXQDA2020 will help. This program allows you to export clouds and word combinations in .jpg, as well as data in Excel format. In this work, both formats are combined. The mixed research method enriches the sample, it is given greater reliability with the use of the appropriate tool, in this case, a computer program, integrity is added to the treatment of the sample, and the meanings are optimized giving greater perspective to the data (Collins *et al.*, 2006)

To select the information, some items have been established which are those that have determined whether the content in question is added (or not) due to its direct relationship with the topic addressed. These items are the most repeated terms regarding *fake news* or falsified information. Thus, the words chosen to do the document screening are: *fake news*; false data, news, or information; hoax; disinformation; lie; rumors; reliable news or information; veracity; truth. The terms resulting from these roots have also been included. With this, the singular and plural, the verbs, adjectives, and names of the same root, as well as the contents considered synonymous.

### 3.1. Design of the research

Once the different selected newspapers have been emptied, a classification by subject has been established. Although the central theme is false information and COVID-19, within this false information related to the controversy created by the statements of the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard, General José Manuel Santiago, in which he cited as a line of work on hoaxes "minimize this climate contrary to crisis management by the Government" (Ortega, 2020 tweets 3 and 4) has been analyzed in depth. These would form a plot of the study. The statements of the different high commands of the State Security Forces and Bodies during the first weeks of the State of Alarm have been part of the Government's communicative discourse (López-García, 2020).

The next section of the classification includes news whose topic is related to hoaxes in politics. This term refers to news items that refer to a politician or party or institution with involvement in false information, what they have said, or what they are accused of having said about false information or the spread of a hoax.

In any case, and without ceasing to condemn the dissemination of this news from the morals and ethics of citizens, we will still have to wait to see the development of this situation, because, although the government itself has claimed to be working on it, the dissemination of fake news or hoaxes is not considered a crime in the Penal Code of our country (Espinosa, 2020, p.57).

The third rung of the classification is made up of news about initiatives to prevent the spread of *fake news* through mobile applications or social networks. Social networks have become the biggest broadcasters of hoaxes.



The new information technologies have favored informative democratization, however, this two-way communicative process by which citizens can become the origin of the news is exempt from truthfulness controls, so informative rigor and data verification disappear, intrinsic qualities of Journalism (Alonso, 2019, p. 32).

At this point is the news related to the surveillance of social networks for the dissemination of hoaxes and in turn the controversy over the link of this control with the freedom of expression contained in the Spanish Constitution.

The media, within its social function of denying false information, by publishing it, maybe contributing precisely the opposite. Polage (2012) ensures that our mind ends up assuming as true the information that we do not remember exactly but vaguely. “And it is not even useful to unmask the fake new, because by denying it we inevitably repeat it, and that facilitates its storage in the brain” (Amorós, 2018, p. 100). Therefore, if this social function of the media is not used, the motivation would become of another nature. For example, the fact that falsified news is more attractive and are shared more can translate into economic benefits for the media, telling or denying them, and therefore these hoaxes are sneaked into the media agenda. As collected by the ethics and journalism network of the New Ibero-American Journalism Foundation, “viralization strategies such as *click-baiting* are common practices in many media, which do not correspond to the vision of journalism as a public and social service” (Loterio-Echeverri, Romero-Rodríguez, and Pérez-Rodríguez, 2018, p. 298). Besides, according to the Constitution, the journalist has the obligation to issue truthful information, so if they report a fact, knowing that it is false, they are not complying with that legal imperative. However, this neglect of functions is not always denounced before the courts, but “the only punishment is that the viewer stops believing in a certain media or professional, an important penalty in a world directed by audiences and *followers*” (Sánchez-Gey, 2019, p. 170).

Once the information classification was carried out, 229 documents published during the 55 days that make up the selected sample were analyzed.

## 4. Results

After the analysis of the 229 texts that make up the corpus of analysis of this research work, in general, it can be affirmed that the topic that has raised the most information related to hoaxes or falsified information has been related to the content of a political nature. Of the total of the texts analyzed, 111 are on this matter, which represents 48.47% of the total. Regarding social networks, 66 documents have been found that represent 28.8% of the total analysis and on the controversial statements of the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard, a total of 52 pieces of information (22.7%) have been collected.

The graphics and images of word clouds and word combinations have been selected so that they are as relevant as possible for the research. For this reason, sometimes one or the other has been used and the frequency of appearance of words has varied. The results are presented in descending order in the number of information.

### 4.1. Controversial Statements by the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard

#### 4.1.1. ABC newspaper

If the data from the analysis graphs are broken down by media regarding the statements of General José Manuel Santiago (which we find on pages 10, 11, 12, and 13 of this article) it can be observed that in the newspaper *ABC* the term that appears the most, with a frequency of appearance of 137 times and found in 85.84% of the documents, is the word “Government”, but the second (98 times and a frequency of 72.73%) is “hoax”. In this way, the term hoax, which is the one that the Government prefers to use over other synonyms, has been widely included in the daily agenda of this media. The synonym “fake” appears 9 times in 15.15% of the texts. “State” appears after the word hoax, which in this context can be considered synonymous with ‘Government’ that tops the ranking. In this case, it appears 78 times, and in 75.76% of the analyzed information. Significant are the following two words, “freedom” and “expression”, the first with a 66 frequency and a 48.48% appearance in the documents, while the second follows very closely, appearing 57 times in 45.45% of the documents.

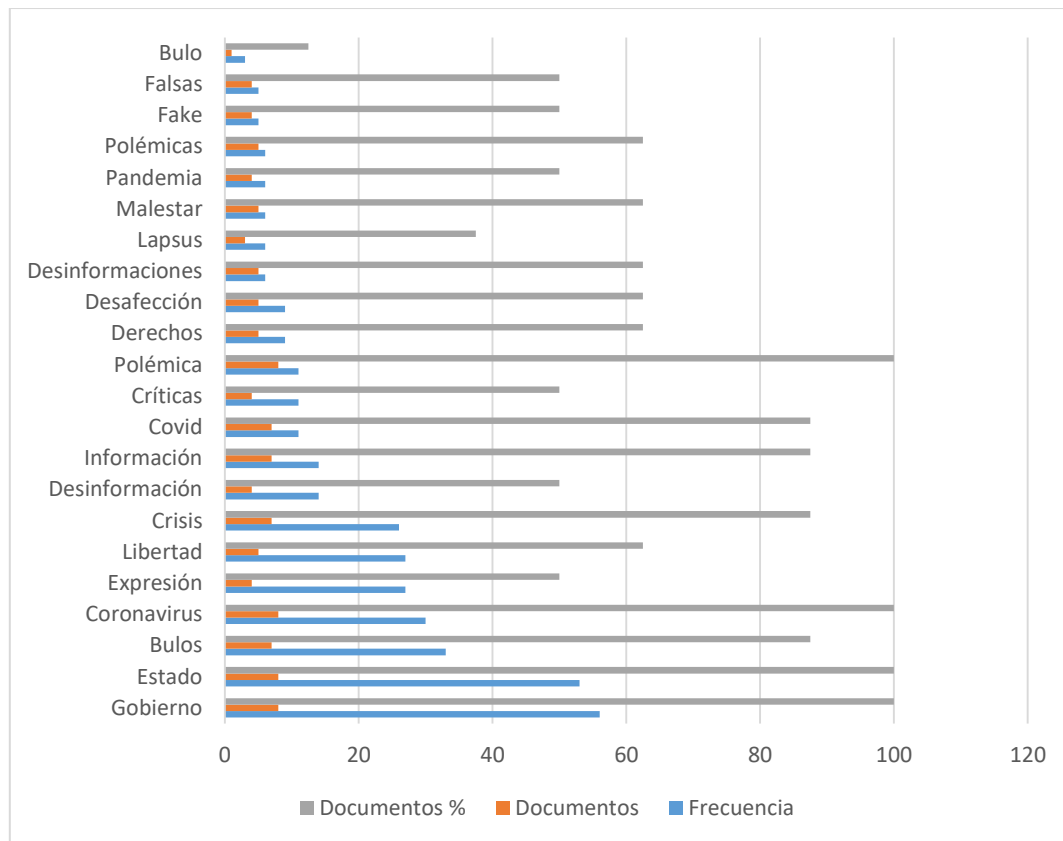
These numbers would serve to confirm the relationship that the newspaper *ABC* establishes between the general's statements, the hoaxes, and the defense of freedom of expression. This correlation would be similar to that seen in the statements of the Popular Party, Ciudadanos, or Vox regarding the relationship between what the general said and freedom of expression. The position of the three opposition groups in this regard is clear in the information from *Europa Press*: "PP, Vox, and Cs criticize the CIS question on media control for trying to "put a muzzle" on freedom of expression" (*Europa Press*, 2020) A fact in which the political leaders delved days later: "Casado accuses the Government of "persecuting freedom of expression and prohibiting criticism": "We are not going to allow it " (*Europa Press*, 2020).

Of course, the word coronavirus also appears to a large extent: 46 times in 48.48% of the selected texts.

Taking into account that the motive given by the Minister of Interior Affairs, Fernando Grande Marlasca, from the first moment of the crisis, was a slip: "If these are the expressions he has uttered, it must have been a slip of the general when answering" ( Couple, 2020); This word only appears 21 times and in 36.36% the documents about what happened. Something similar occurs with the word 'failure' (7 times in 21.21% of texts), which was the term used as an explanation by the director of the Center for Emergency Coordination of the Ministry of Health, Fernando Simón, “use failures in the speeches that we can have, phrases that people who are already at the limit of our resistance say, to attack us as a team, is not something decent” (García, 2020). The words 'error' or 'misunderstanding' do not appear and 'censorship' and 'attack' only appear 4 times in 0.09% of documents and twice in 3.03% of texts, respectively.

The extracted data indicates that the day that more information is published about what happened in the newspaper *ABC* is April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the day that the General of the Civil Guard makes the statements, with seven news about what happened and later on April 21<sup>st</sup>, when 6 news were published, corresponding to the day after the general returned to the press conference. The topic is followed, although with less intensity on the 20<sup>th</sup> with three news, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> with one, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, and 29<sup>th</sup> with another each day respectively. Therefore, the crisis of the general's declaration lasts for ten days in this newspaper.



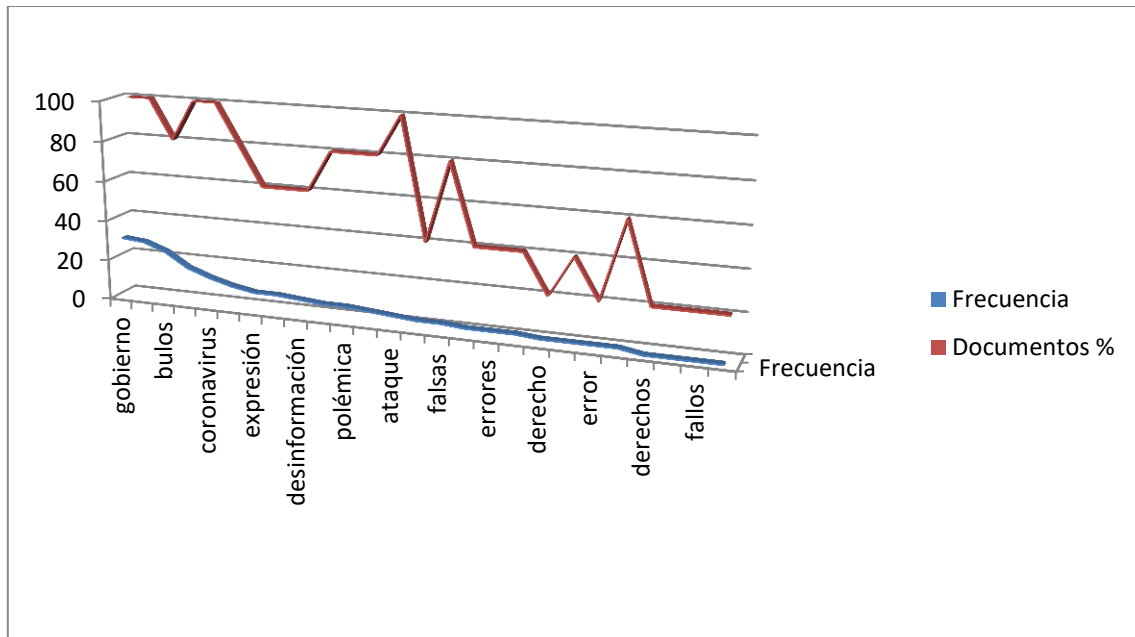


**Graph 1:** Most relevant words repeated in *El Mundo*.  
**Source:** Self-made with MAXQDA2020.

#### 4.1.3. El País

The observation of the tables extracted from the study of the newspaper *El País* shows that the most used terms are recurrent. Among them ‘Government’ and ‘State’ with a frequency of 31 and 30 respectively; both words appearing in 100% of the texts. "Hoaxes" is repeated with a frequency of 26 and in 80% of the texts, while the word "fake" is only 3 times in 60% of the information studied. However, the word 'disinformation' appears 9 times in 60% of the texts and 'disinformations' once. ‘Coronavirus’ has a frequency of 15, appearing in all the information. Curiously, the term “slip” is encountered 9 times, 'errors' 4, 'failures' 1.

The words ‘freedom’ and ‘expression’ have a frequency of 10 and appear in 60% of the items. This indicates that the statements made by political parties that related the general's statements with freedom of expression in this media have had less echo than the two previously analyzed. It is also striking that the word ‘censorship’ decreases in appearance to 2 times and 40% of appearance and the word ‘attack’ appears in 100% of the texts, although only 6 times.

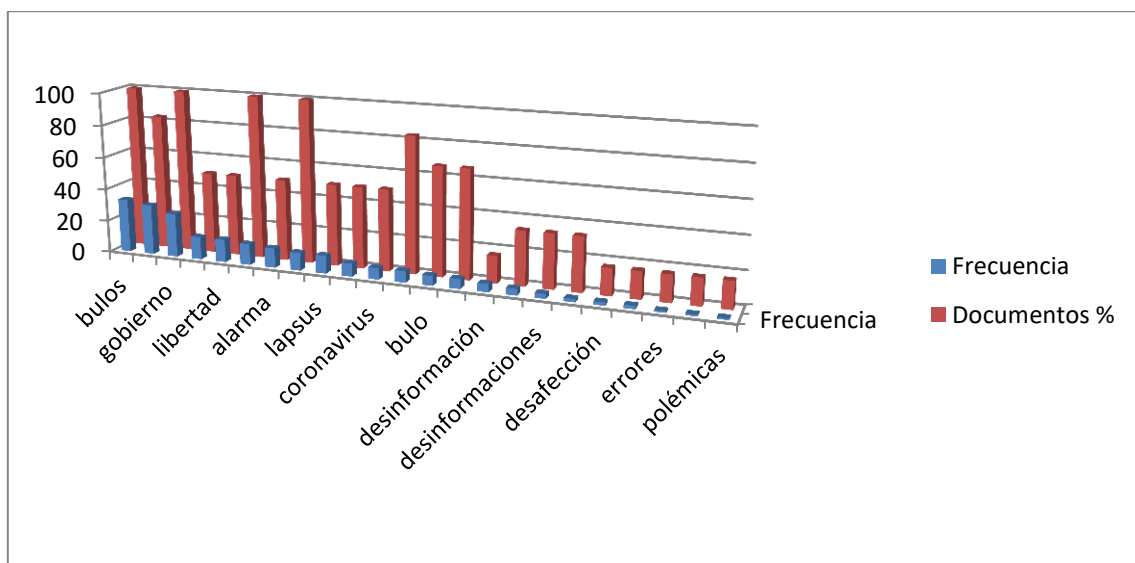


**Graph 2:** Most relevant words repeated in *El País*.

**Source:** Self-made with MAXQDA2020.

#### 4.1.4. El Periódico

In *El Periódico* the main words are repeated in the top positions and this order: ‘Government’ and ‘State’, with 31 and 30 frequency and appearing in 100% of the texts. The word ‘hoaxes’ appears with a 26 frequency and an 80% appearance. ‘Coronavirus’ lowers the frequency of appearance, only 7 times. The term ‘censorship’ does not appear and ‘attack’ is only mentioned once. The terms ‘expression’ and ‘freedom’ appear with a frequency of ten and are shown in 60% of the texts analyzed, also decreasing their importance like *El País*, compared to *ABC* and *El Mundo*. Here it can be concluded that the media with a tendency to the left have established less relationship between the incident of the general and the supposed loss of freedom of expression argued by the *Partido Popular* and *Vox*.





**Graph 3:** *Most relevant words repeated in El Periódico.*

**Source:** Self-made with MAXQDA2020.

From the data obtained, it can be deduced that all the analyzed media have published official interventions accompanied by official statements, photographs, and even videos. Regarding the volume, the *ABC* newspaper is the one that has included the most information on the subject analyzed, followed by *El Mundo*, then *El Periódico*, and finally *El País*. Numerically, the right-wing ideological media have published more information on this matter and have followed up for a longer number of days.

## 4.2. Social networks in the information about COVID-19

The fourth parameter is composed of news related to social networks and falsified information, highlighting as "novel" the control initiatives to prevent the spread of hoaxes. They have already been used around the last electoral campaigns "*WhatsApp* wants to fight against hoaxes: it will let you search on Google the images you receive to verify their veracity" (Ansorena, 2020), "This is how social networks will try to stop 'fake news' in the elections of 28-A" (ABC, 2019) and now with the COVID-19 crisis, this idea has been returned to "*WhatsApp* will only allow forwarding messages to one conversation to combat hoaxes" (Martínez, 2019). The fact is that this measure, together with the fact that the climate was already rarefied due to the general's controversy regarding the monitoring of information and whether this involves censorship or if it affects freedom of expression, led to new falsified information about the initiative, its objectives, and who would be the appropriate body to say if something is a hoax or not. Something that has caused not only an increase in the news on this topic but this growth has not been exempt from ideological bias. Something evident in the frequency and percentage of the appearance of certain words, as has been proven in this study.

### 4.2.1. ABC

The most relevant words that are derived from the *ABC* analysis are: 'messages', '*Facebook*', 'networks', '*WhatsApp*', 'accounts', 'profiles', and 'users', terms directly related to social networks, applications, and technology. Along with these specific words, there are others directly related to the first: 'information', 'hoaxes', with a 71% and 68% frequency respectively and appearing in 65.71% of the information both. Along with 'hoaxes', with very similar data are located: 'false' and "fake", with a frequency of 50 and 49 and a percentage of 60% and 37.14%. 'Disinformation' is found in 40% of the texts.

Other words to highlight are "*checker*", "*checking*" or "*check*" related to those companies that are dedicated to confirming whether the information is true or false and that have been questioned because it has been disseminated that they would be the ones who would control the messages according to government guidelines. "The company dismisses as 'false rumors' the hoax that tries to make people believe that *WhatsApp*, the independent content verification media, and the Government are 'united' to 'censor' messages" (*El Mundo*, 2020). The hoax expanded so much that it was advised to download another mobile application similar to *WhatsApp* that is the most used, in this case, *Telegram*, to avoid this control. All this despite the company's denial explains the change in this way: "once a message has been shared five times, it will only be possible to forward that message to other chats one by one" (*Del Castillo*, 2020). What is certain is that *Facebook*, the owner of *WhatsApp*, pays *Maldita.es* and *Newtral* to verify content, whose role is to contrast the fake news -something that is not new- about the pandemic and that data is published on their pages, but there is no correlation with *WhatsApp* nor can you filter the messages that have been reported. *WhatsApp*

assured that it is not true that it leaks information and that it is not technically possible either (ABC, 2020). The controversy arises from the fact that the ideological tendency of *Maldita.es* and *Newtral* is obviously known and the information about this controversy is used with a clear ideological bias.

In the combined words, the terms related to the controversy described are repeated: 'social networks' with a frequency of 43 and appearing in 60% of the information; 'Social network' with frequency 31 and 40%; 'Forwarded messages' with a 17 frequency and 22.86%; 'Viral messages', although with a 6 frequency and appears in 5.71% of the texts.

Also in the main position, the terms related to falsified information: 'fake accounts,' with a frequency of 28 and appearing in 28.57% of the texts; 'Fake profiles' also 28 in frequency and 22.86% appearance; 'Fake news' with a frequency of 16 and 25.71%; 'False news' with a frequency of 14 and 28.57%.

With regularity also appear: 'Pablo Iglesias', 'political parties', and 'Pedro Sánchez'; besides other terms such as: 'checking network', 'uncover hoaxes', 'fact-checking', and 'fact cheking'.



**Image 2:** Combination of words about Social Networks. From frequency 6.  
**Source:** Self-made with MAXQDA2020.

#### 4.2.2. El Mundo

In the newspaper *El Mundo* there are words very similar to those of *ABC* as the most mentioned. 'WhatsApp' tops the list with a 39 frequency and appearing in 62.50% of the information. 'Government' is the next word with a 29 frequency and 75% appearance. "Fake" is located with a 25 frequency and 87.50%. It is noteworthy that in this medium are the words related to *fact check* and specifically with companies related to *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* and protagonists of the controversy: '*Maldita*' with a frequency of 23 and appearing in 37.50% of the texts; '*Newtral*' with 13 frequency and also 37.50%; and, specifically, the term 'verifiers' in 37.50% of the documents.

The term 'hoax' is located with a frequency of 22 and appears in 87.50% of the items. The use of the word 'bot' is noteworthy. *Bot* is a robot apherisis that refers to a computer program that performs tasks autonomously and repetitively over the Internet. This term becomes relevant because other important information related to social networks, falsified information, and the Coronavirus is the appearance of hundreds of fake profiles that affected the page of the Ministry of Health. Later it was discovered that they were fraudulent: "Facebook attributes the fake accounts that interacted with the page of the Ministry of Health by giving 'Like' to their messages to a global spam network (unsolicited messages sent in bulk for commercial or advertising purposes)" (Vega, 2020). This is information with ideological bias, although it has not been possible to verify whether it benefited one ideological trend or another.

In the combined words, one of the most frequent terms is 'fake accounts' (15) in 25% of the texts. This is followed by 'social networks' with a frequency of 9 in 62.50% of the items. Verification companies with the most representative names at the social level also appear. Thus, 'Ana Pastor' founder of *Newtral* appears with a frequency of 6 in 12.50% of the information analyzed, and 'Clara Jiménez' co-founder of *Maldita.es*. Likewise, the pairs 'fake accounts' and 'fake information' and 'fake profiles' are also representative.



**Image 3:** Combination of words about Social Networks. From frequency 4.  
**Source:** Self-made with MAXQDA2020.

### 4.2.3. El País

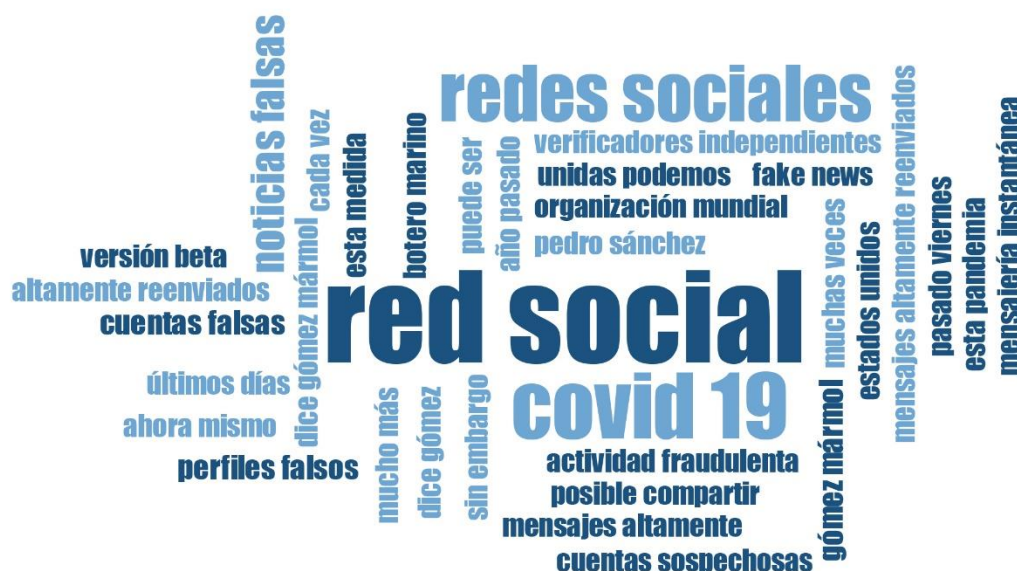
When analyzing the frequency of words in El País, an important difference is appreciated. Thus, although the most repeated words are 'WhatsApp' and 'Facebook', with a 54 and 53 frequency, and appearing in 52.94% and 64.71% of the texts, respectively, the terms related to the verification of information such as *Maldita.es*, *Newtral* appear to a lesser extent (4 and 1 respectively). Verifiers and their derivatives do appear a total of 21 times. Thus, El País reports on the controversy but does

not mention the verification agencies so much. 'Bot' is also found with a frequency of 25 and in 23.53% of the texts. "Hoax" goes up to a frequency of 31 and is found in 64.71% of documents.

In the combined words, the change in frequency is also noteworthy, the names related to the verification companies do not appear, only the term 'independent verifiers', with this qualifier that determines it, with a frequency of 4 and appearing in 11.76% of the analysis samples.

There are also terms related to the subject of false accounts following the Ministry of Health. For example, 'fake news,' "fake profiles", 'high accounts', and 'suspicious accounts', with 13, 8, 7, and 4 frequencies and the first three appear in 17.65% of the texts and the last one in 23.54%.

Related to the response to this controversy that it was a fraudulent activity related to an automatic labor bot, the following terms appear: 'fraudulent activity' and 'highly forwarded' with a frequency of 4 and appearing in 17.65% and 23.53% of the texts, respectively.



**Image 4:** Combination of words about Social Networks. From frequency 4.

**Source:** Self-made with MAXQDA2020.

#### 4.2.4. El Periódico

In *El Periódico* there is a frequency of words very similar to that of *El País*. Among the first are 'messages' and 'networks' with a frequency of 13 and 11 and appearing in 33.33% and 66.67% of the texts. The word 'hoax' appears with a frequency of 10 but in 100% of the news. The term 'disinformation' appears 5 times and in 33.33% of the information analyzed. The most significant social networks: 'Facebook', 'Twitter', 'WhatsApp', are present in 50% of the documents, in 33.33% and 83.33% respectively.

Regarding the verification companies, *Maldita.es* does not appear, while *Newtral* does so 7 times in 33.33% of the documents, and the word 'Pastor', the last name of the founder of *Maldita*, is 5 times in 33.33% of the texts.







coronavirus generated great controversy. A fact that is directly connected with the control of fake news by the public powers and, therefore, with the controversial statements of the general and social networks, analyzed previously. Specifically, the CIS's question was: "Question 6. Do you think that at this time the dissemination of hoaxes and misleading and poorly founded information should be prohibited by social networks and social media, sending all information on the pandemic to official sources, or do you think it is necessary to maintain total freedom for the dissemination of news and information?" (CIS, April 2020, p. 8).

#### 4.3.1. ABC

Among the words with the most presence according to their frequency and percentage of appearance on ABC is 'Government' (204 times in 77.55% of the texts). Underneath in reiteration appears the last name 'Sánchez' with a clear relationship to the Government since it is pointing to the president. The next word is 'hoax' with a frequency of 63 and appearing within 53.6% of the selected information. Very close is the concept 'State' and then the protagonist of one of the biggest political controversies, except for the case of the general already exposed, which is the CIS's survey, with a frequency of 56 and appearing in 28.57% of the information. Related to this controversy is the word 'barometer' with a frequency of 13 and a 14.29% appearance in the content, and also the last name 'Tezanos' with a frequency of 40 and a percentage of appearance of 26.53%.

Indicating the references to political parties, the first to be mentioned is 'PP' (51) in the 34.69% of the texts; the next is 'VOX' with a frequency of 42 and a 26.5%; the third 'Podemos' (41 of frequency and 32.65% of the texts); then 'PSOE' with a 34 frequency and a 30.61%; and finally 'Ciudadanos' with a 20 frequency in a 26.53% of items. However, besides these direct relationships, there are also terms such as 'Iglesias' that has a direct relation with 'Podemos', 'opposition', 'executive', 'congress', 'minister', 'Moncloa', 'commission', 'left', 'politics', 'president' etc.

The word 'freedom' also appears well placed in the table with a frequency of 41 and a percentage of appearance of 28.57%.

Within the combined words, those formed by the name and surname of different political protagonists stand out. Among these, there is 'Pedro Sánchez' with a frequency of 29 and found in 36.73% of the texts; in fourth place 'Díaz Ayuso', reference to the president of the Community of Madrid, of the Partido Popular; 'Grande Marlaska', surnames of the Minister of Interior Affairs of the Socialist Party, are located with a frequency of 8 and a 12.24%; 'Pablo Iglesias', name and first surname of the Minister of Social Rights, from Podemos, with a frequency of 7 and a 10.20% appearance and 'Félix Tezanos', president of the CIS, with a frequency of 6 and 12.24%.

Besides these names in the combined, the frequency and percentage of appearance of the union of words such as 'social networks' is noteworthy, following "Pedro Sánchez" at the top, with a 21 frequency and seeing it in 24.49% of the texts; "Unidas Podemos" with 17 frequency and 22.45%. It is followed by 'Central Government', 'Civil Guard', and 'Health crisis'. Remarkable is the union of 'fake news' with 9 frequency and 12.24% appearance in the selected documents. 'Hoaxes' and 'hoaxes and information' are less frequent, as are 'official sources'.





**Image 8:** Combination of words about politics. From frequency 4.  
**Source:** Self-made with MAXQDA2020.

### 4.3.3. El País

On the contrary, in *El País*, certain combined words either do not exist or are very scarce, but others also stand out concerning the topics championed by each ideology in this crisis. Thus, 'Unidas Podemos' with a 28 frequency and appearing in 42.11% of the news, followed by 'social networks' with a 21 frequency and 47.37%, 'DÍaz Ayuso', then, 'healthcare material' and 'Pedro Sánchez'. Faced with this information claim, in this medium, there are other assessable word combinations such as 'criminal organization', with a frequency of 10 and 21.05%, and 'extreme right' with a frequency of 7 and 21.5%.

Regarding fake information, there are also very frequent combined terms that indicate the Government's position and the reflection that this medium makes of it. Thus in the headline after 'Unidas Podemos', we find 'social networks' with a frequency of 21 and appearing in 47.37% of the information, "false news", 'official sources', 'misleading information', 'insults and slander', and 'fake news'. These words support the most important issues of this pandemic on false information, the defense on the accusation of obscurantism, the hoaxes through social networks against the Government, the controversy over the statements of the general and the monitoring of information, criticism regarding the intentional search for support through the CIS's survey to gain power over information control, among others. All of these issues are noted at the top of the table.

In the frequency of simple words, we also find clear results 'hoaxes' with 49 frequency and 73.68% of appearance and followed by 'VOX' with 47 frequency and the same percentage. 'Government' follows at the beginning of the table in the third position with a frequency of 86 and appearing in 100% of the texts. Other political parties appear less frequently as 'PP' with 24 mentions, 'PSOE' with

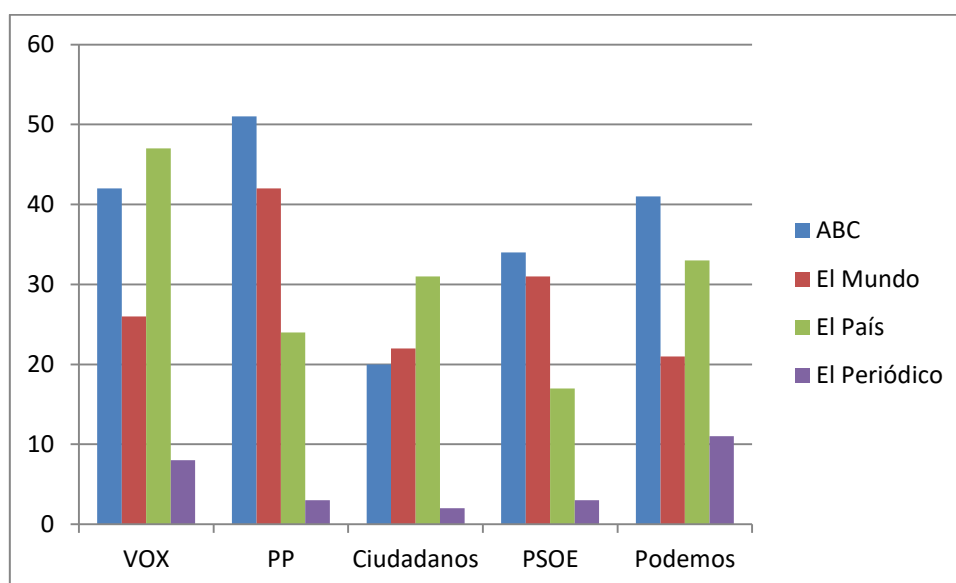






**Image 10:** *Combination of words about politics. From frequency 4.*  
**Source:** Self-made with MAXQDA2020.

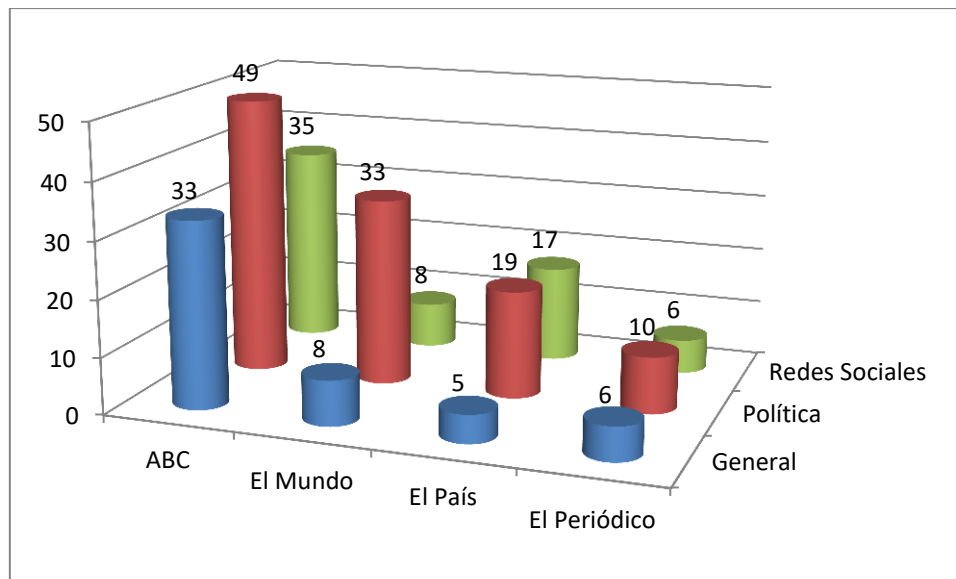
Establishing a comparison of the appearance of the different political parties in the information on hoaxes and *fake news*, we observe that, in general, *ABC* is the medium that mentions the political parties the most and *El Periódico* the least. *ABC* and *El Mundo* are the media that most mention ‘PP’ while, curiously, the media that most mentions VOX is *El País*. It is also noteworthy that *El Periódico* is the medium that most mentions VOX and Podemos, and that these political parties are also the most mentioned by *El País*. In fact, the latter mentions PSOE the least and mentions Ciudadanos more than the PP. This fact can have several readings, on the one hand, that *El País* does not want the name of the PSOE to be related to a large extent with the crisis of the pandemic and, on the other, that it focuses more on highlighting the role of VOX and Podemos in it.



**Graph 4:** *Mentions of political parties by the media.*  
**Source:** self-made



After the analysis of the newspapers under study (*ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País*, and *El Periódico*), it is verified that the information in which hoaxes or falsified information appear concerning political information is the most quantitatively numerous. Furthermore, it is in the analysis of politics and *fake news* where the greatest difference in the number of texts is found. In the *ABC* newspaper, 49 news items are quantified where political content is the highest priority, in *El Mundo*, 33; in *El País*, 19, and *El Periódico*, 10. It is noteworthy that 73.87% of the information with the greatest political content has been published in the media with ideological tendencies to the right, compared to the left-wing media with only 26.13%.



**Graph 5:** Number of information by topic in the media.  
**Source:** self-made

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

These data reflect the trends of some media and others, while the media with an ideology closer to the Government try not to delve into the information that, due to content, can politically affect the party in power, the media located in the opposite ideology enter more in the political debate of the pandemic.

In the qualitative sphere, the differences in this item are also marked. If the words that have the highest frequency and percentage in the *ABC* newspaper are analyzed, those related to the controversial question of the CIS about the control of hoaxes take the spot. It is an issue that harms the parties in the Government and benefits those who are not. It is not a position observed exclusively in the newspaper *ABC*. In *El Mundo*, also right-winged, the most repeated words have been linked to the fraudulent mask crisis. A content that also tends to negatively affect the parties in power and help to strengthen the political opposition. Both issues have been prolonged both in the number of information and also in the number of days in which content about them has been published in the ideologically right-wing media.

If the most frequent and higher-percentage words are taken into account, in *El País* it is detected that they do not coincide with the previous ones and when they have dealt with the topics CIS and masks, it has been briefly, publishing fewer texts about them than the other newspapers analyzed. Also, the

chosen words demonstrate a very different approach. Among the most frequent ‘slander’, ‘insults’, ‘misleading information’, ‘official sources’, which present a defense position to the State in the face of the two controversies raised. Moreover, the use of the term 'hoax' appears used together with 'Vox', not regarding the Government, something that does not happen in the two aforementioned media.

Finally, including the variant of *El Periódico*, it is limited to the coverage of the two issues featured in the newspapers *ABC* and *El Mundo*, but concisely. Point out that among the most repeated words there are two not included in any of the previous media; ‘Stop confinement’ and ‘extreme right’. In the use of these terms, the ideological bias of the medium in question is also perceived.

With these data, it can be concluded that, depending on the ideology of the medium in question, the information is told differently -choosing some terms or others- and more or fewer texts and space are devoted to the subject, benefiting parties with an ideological tendency and hurting those who do not think alike.

These differences between media are also perceived in another of the topics studied. In the controversy over the statements made by the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard, General José Manuel Santiago, it is noteworthy that all the media used provided information on what the general said and the subsequent reactions. However, the follow-up and approach were very different.

While at first everyone exposed what happened, because the controversy generated was clearly newsworthy, *ABC* and *El Mundo* included information about what happened for more days. Among this news, it can be seen how the day after the controversial statements, *ABC* titled "La Moncloa studies that police and Army officials do not participate in press conferences" (SE, 2020) and also publishes the news "The Government disavows to the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard without the opposition believing its version" (Muñoz, 2020).

Moreover, six days later, *ABC* also pointed out the change in the format of the Government's press conferences: “Police and Civil Guard assume that the Government will withdraw them from the La Moncloa press conferences” (Morcillo, 2020). With this headline, the controversy is fueled when inside the text it is indicated that it was something already known: “government sources have already been considering for at least two weeks to change that format so that only the spokesmen for Health and Transport would give explanations, but the controversy aroused by the words of General José Manuel Santiago, delayed the decision.

They did not want to link this controversy about minimizing criticism of the Government with the change of model” (Morcillo, 2020).

The newspaper *El Mundo* maintains a similar line, continues to cover everything related to the controversy and, for example, in the case of the change in press conferences, the headline is the following: “Moncloa puts an end to the daily appearances of uniformed men that reported on the management of Covid-19”. And it subtitles “The press conferences of the technical team, the first victims of the Interior order on the monitoring of information against the Government” (Lázaro, 2020).

On the contrary, *El Periódico* includes in its pages the change of model, but does not include it in the headline, does not initially relate the event to what happened with the general, and when at the end of

the text it mentions it, it highlights in bold that the reform “was expected before this week due to the gradual loss of octane rating of the appearance ”(Fernández, 2020).

In the case of *El País*, which is the one that contains less news about the controversy, it does not publish the information as independent news.

If the news broadcasted by the ideological right-wing media about the altercation is added compared to those with a left-wing trend, it is observed that the former gave 78.9% of the information while the latter only published the 21.2% of the total.

Give more or less coverage to an issue, in this case, is directly related to the ideology of the media and the political consequences of the issue. However, including and prioritizing a piece of information in a headline that is denied within the text is deontologically criticizable and is also a reflection of the current struggle for *likes* or *clickbait* in journalism over the veracity of the information. *Clickbait* headlines create a so-called “curiosity gap,” which increases the likelihood that the reader will click on the target link to satisfy their curiosity. The motivation for the *clickbait* is usually the click-through rate and the resulting ad revenue. Even though not all fake news may include *clickbait* headlines, specific *clickbait* headlines could serve as an important indicator and can be used to help detect fake news (Shu et al., 2017).

Despite all this, after analyzing the texts, it can be seen that the Government, in its communication strategy, has wanted to put an end to these hoaxes, since it has never denied the general's statement. Not even the protagonist retracted. Faced with the controversy, Santiago's response was "we pursue hoaxes, not political criticism" and assured that they work with "scrupulous respect for freedom of expression." However, others have pointed to this measure as alleged censorship by the Government and, therefore, as an attack on freedom of expression. In this sense, a fight to "protect" citizens from lies became a supposed attack on a fundamental right contained in the Spanish Constitution.

This variable is also related to another included that has been analyzed in the hoax parameter with political involvement. This is the case of the question posed by the Sociological Research Center (CIS): “Do you think that at this time it should be prohibited the dissemination of hoaxes and misleading and poorly founded information on the networks and social media, referring all the information on the pandemic to official sources, or do you think that we must maintain total freedom for the dissemination of news and information?” (CIS, April 2020, p.8). In the same way, information on this aspect has been used ideologically to support or negatively criticize the government's position.

Likewise, concerning the parameter of information on social networks as disseminators of hoaxes about the coronavirus, it is also demonstrated that there is political bias. With the data extracted, it is clear that the political parties have accused each other of spreading hoaxes and fake news during the State of Alarm and fake information has crept into the agendas of the traditional media.

On social networks, the most numerous reports have been those related to the news that *WhatsApp* was going to control messages to combat hoaxes. Once again there is an ideological bias. For example, the information from *ABC*: "Fear of censorship due to *WhatsApp's* decision to limit forwarded messages" (Sánchez, 2020), includes two words 'fear' and 'censorship', which have nothing to do with the official version of the application. This medium, in the body of the news, indicates *Newtral* and *Maldita.es* among the companies that will verify the data and decide if it is a hoax. With this, they generate a feeling of doubt in the verification, since, although both define

themselves as 'independent bodies', they have a specific ideological line that could distort the concept of verification. This fact is also evident in the words used and their frequency in each newspaper.

Perhaps the editorial line of *ABC* has been the one that has been most faithfully reflected in the information about COVID-19. It has been the medium that has devoted the most time and space to issues that could harm the parties in power. It is a crisis that the government, of left-wing ideology, has to resolve, therefore, giving more space to an issue that may harm the ruling party, in contrast, benefits the opposition parties.

These conclusions coincide with the data extracted from *El Mundo*. Therefore, numerically, the right-wing ideological media have published more information about hoaxes related to politics, the controversial statements of the General, and about the dissemination through social networks and have followed up a greater number of days. More extension in time also means that readers keep this supposedly negative data on the Government in mind for longer. On the contrary, the fact that a medium stops publishing information can soften opinions that are contrary to government management.

Therefore, the traditional media have echoed different hoaxes or fake news that have circulated through the networks during the pandemic and have done so with an ideological bias. Not only in their approach and treatment but also including ideological content from social networks such as *Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook*.

All this means that the starting hypotheses have been clearly demonstrated and exceeded, as different social actors have used social networks to spread hoaxes in favor and against the government's management of the crisis, and these have reached the media. Political parties have accused each other of spreading hoaxes and fake news during the State of Alarm and fake information has crept into the agendas of traditional media. Besides, the Government's decision to end the hoaxes was a problem due to the unfortunate words of the Chief of Staff of the Civil Guard, whether it was a slip or not, the media has ideologically used this supposed 'censorship' or attack on the 'freedom of expression' by the state.

This work opens a line of future research on whether the spread of information that may be considered harmful in a pandemic can be limited or if the right to freedom of expression is more important. On the other hand, it is necessary to address the doubts that the dissemination of many of the false information does not have legal consequences. However, after this pandemic, there is a before and after about the conception of what it means to transmit *fake news*, not only for communication scholars but for society in general, for political parties, and the Government, for the dimension they have given it by including them within the communicative priorities of this health crisis.

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