Impact and treatment of Banksy's art actions in the Spanish press

Impacto y tratamiento de las acciones artísticas de Banksy en la prensa española

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ABSTRACT
Introduction: This paper analyzes the impact of the contents about Banksy in the four main Spanish newspapers. The aim is to detect the treatment that the press makes about this figure and determine if these newspapers publish content in the same proportion, which is the main theme, what are the graphic resources they use, if there are evaluative connotations, etc. **Methodology:** Some of the hypotheses suggest that Banksy manages to put the media focus on the cause that his actions vindicate and that the more conservative newspapers are more critical and limit the space dedicated to him. All

the publications that contain the word Banksy have been analyzed with a sheet elaborated ad hoc for this study. A total of 2248 items have been recorded, out of 221 pieces analyzed. **Results:** The *ABC* newspaper is where the negative evaluative connotations emerges to a greater extent, but also the one that offers the most space to Banksy or his work, followed by *El País*. The case claimed by Banksy is barely covered by all the newspapers, being null in the case of *El Mundo*. **Conclusions:** It is verified that a conservative newspaper such as *ABC* does not necessarily limit its space to this type of content. In general, the figure of Banksy and his actions, highly adjectives in all the newspapers, take center stage against the cause that he vindicates. The iconic nature of the Banksy concept, used often by newspapers as a brand, can be confirmed.

Keywords: Urban art; Social art; Media; Banksy; Graffiti; Stencil; Press.

RESUMEN
Introducción: Se analiza el impacto de los contenidos publicados sobre Banksy en los principales diarios generalistas. Se trata de detectar el tratamiento que hace la prensa española sobre esta figura. Determinar si se publica contenido en la misma proporción, cuál es la temática principal o si existen connotaciones evaluativas. **Metodología:** Algunas hipótesis apuntan a que Banksy consigue poner el foco mediático en las causas sociales que reivindica y que los medios más conservadores le dedican un espacio más limitado y crítico. Se analizan las publicaciones que contienen la palabra Banksy durante un periodo de repercusión, mediante una ficha elaborada ad hoc para este estudio. Se registran un total de 2248 items, de 221 piezas analizadas. **Resultados:** El diario *ABC* es donde en mayor proporción aflora el carácter evaluativo negativo, pero también el que más espacio le dedica Banksy o a su obra, seguido de *El País*. La causa reivindicada por Banksy es escasamente tratada por todos los diarios, siendo nula en el caso de *El Mundo*. **Conclusiones:** Se constata que un diario conservador como *ABC* no necesariamente limita su espacio a este tipo de contenidos a priori vinculados a reivindicaciones sociales. Sin embargo, el debate sobre el valor de su obra y la propia figura de Banksy, altamente adjetivada en general, cobran protagonismo frente a las causas sociales que reivindica. Se constata el carácter icónico de Banksy, incluso como concepto, que es empleado por los diarios como una marca, hasta en los contenidos que no se refieren directamente a él.

Palabras clave: Arte urbano; Arte social; Medios de comunicación; Banksy; Grafiti; *Stencil*; Prensa.

1. Introduction

In the early 2000s, street artist Banksy began spreading his artwork on the streets of London. Over a period that extends until 2010 (Boero, 2018), the enigmatic artist from Bristol built his worldwide fame as a representative of counterculture (Sauda *et al*., 2021) through his constant interventions of urban art with political and social claims, practiced illegally on the streets of various cities around the world. His actions, particularly the one that took place at Sotheby's auction house, where a shredder destroyed the famous Girl with a Balloon immediately after being auctioned, have sparked an interesting debate about the value of art. Furthermore, speculations and theories about Banksy's identity add anticipation to his interventions. "The committed subject bases their actions on the embrace of an ethical morality, a desire that guides their work towards various causes, depending on different foundations" (Tortosa-Ibáñez, 2019, p. 18).

Banksy has been described in various ways by the media (artist, author, graffiti artist, anti-system, creator, provocateur, legend...) and has been the subject of news, reports, and editorials. His actions could be framed as a commitment to a cause, whether ideological, political, or cultural. It is worth highlighting the role that the media plays in the development of the urban art phenomenon and its

assimilation by society. These artistic expressions with a social complaint aspect capture the attention of the media in the early stages due to their provocative nature and novelty as a form of protest. According to Abarca-Sanchís, Banksy is a good example of an artist who uses the media to amplify the reach of his work, "whose meteoric career has been deliberately fueled by skillfully provoked media appearances. This attention has allowed him to transition from a subcultural star to a star of mainstream culture" (Abarca, 2010, p. 3). One of the main objectives of these types of expressions is to bring to light and highlight the small details that may not be perceptible to some people, but are to the artist who focuses on them (Tortosa-Ibáñez, 2019).

In this sense, Banksy's presence is not uncommon in the content published by the media. He often makes headlines due to the intrigue surrounding his identity, with the latest theory linking him to the music band Massive Attack. In fact, this article focuses on the media coverage that has been established around Banksy.

2. Art as a social and media speaker

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, emerging hip hop culture, along with graffiti, evolved into the mural format, giving rise to the first street art that soon spread worldwide and, in the 1990s, became a well-known urban practice in Europe (Moriente, 2015). There are countless definitions of what urban art or street art is, also known as post-graffiti (Borhes, 2018). According to Emilio Fernández, it refers to "different manifestations of independent art that are created in the public space, sometimes illegally but also sometimes with permission, and whose result are surprising, ephemeral, and understandable works, sometimes purely aesthetic and sometimes with a strong social message" (2018, p. 18).

In fact, street or urban art "is a visual and popular artistic expression that aims to make visible, position, and invite reflection on a political or social issue, which in turn becomes a subversive invitation through playfulness and irony in the public space" (Arce, 2020, p.43). It establishes a link between art and politics that highlights "the relationships established between artistic creation and the social phenomena that determine its production and reception, and its potential to promote critical awareness among the population" (Pérez-Rubio, 2013, p. 197). This type of art has become a distinct discipline during modernity (Alonso-Martínez *et al*., 2018). According to these authors, unlike the knowledge of Art History required to appreciate some of the works exhibited in conventional cultural circuits, these artistic expressions are understandable by everyone as they do not require any specific training to be valued, and they have conquered public space in a context marked by various social movements advocating for feminist, ethnic or sexual minority rights, environmental causes, among others. Thus, urban art has become a popular means of expression and political activism.

> During two consecutive decades - the '70s and '80s - and until it gained strength in the mid-'90s with the term *street art* or urban art, this artistic and communicative expression developed, evolved, and matured into a tool that played with identity and public spaces, positioning itself as the most influential popular artistic technique through which social protest, the visibility of communal, local, or national issues, and even the staunchest opposition to anti-capitalist movements took on democratic tones by giving "voice" to women and men who could now express their disagreements, dissents, and political positions in a creative, influential, and subversive manner, with an enviable amplification thanks to the use of public space as a means of communication. (Arce, 2020, p. 44).

The social and political transformations experienced in the second half of the 20th century favored the conversion of artistic creation into a tool for political action aimed at drawing attention to existing inequalities. These artistic expressions have political content "because they imply a disagreement, a

confrontation with the partitions of sensible reality. The great power of subversion that these aesthetic experiences possess in general is their ability to expand the subjects, objects, and spaces suitable for debate, creating new scenarios for politics" (Pérez-Rubio, 2013, p. 196).

Authors like Ballaz-Bogunyá define this set of postmodern activism strategies that arise from the artistic sphere and have a component of political denunciation as 'artivism' (Ballaz-Bogunyá, 2009, p. 139), an acronym formed by the two terms. Artivism, according to Aladro-Vico *et al.* (2018), emerged in the 21st century and is the heir of urban art and graffiti art from the 20th century. In the words of these authors, "it is a new language that emerges from the overflow of academic and museistic artistic creation, towards social spaces and places. Artivism, the hybridization of art and activism, has a semantic mechanism in which art is used as a means to communicate energy towards change and transformation" (Aladro-Vico *et al.*, 2018, p. 9).

Artivism also arises in a context of institutional and political crisis characterized by a growing distrust towards traditional political processes. This is the case of 'artivists' like the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei who, through his work, has been able to "mobilize society for change and generate political events" (Méndez, 2022, p. 37). Another prototype of a protest artist is Banksy, whose secret identity "functions in urban mystique in the manner of comic book superheroes" (Ballaz-Bogunyá, 2009, p. 140), which is essential for their protection. According to Delgado, the denouncing works of these artists are agitators, but their objective is the transformation of reality.

> Artivists share the vehemence and intentionality of the old agitation and propaganda art, but they do not content themselves, like *agitprop*, with being mere transmitters of party slogans or instruments at the service of popular pedagogy for revolutionary projects. Instead, they combine a novel artistic language with a transformative political proposal for reality. (Delgado, 2013, p. 69).

In this sense, urban art would not only be an artistic movement, but also a social one, whose essence is the interrelation that is generated with people and the environment, aiming to communicate with the message's recipient in order to change attitudes. Graffiti and street art have evolved from being a local phenomenon to a larger entity (Ross *et al.*, 2020). It is a way to express protest, opinion, and awareness about social issues. The hottest social conflicts of each moment become protagonists, causing the themes addressed by urban artists to be ever-changing (Fernández, 2018). This is precisely what distinguishes urban art from graffiti, which emerges from the exaltation of the self (López, 1994, p. 180). Its subversive content is what characterizes urban art, which takes as reference "the reality of the world, reflecting the prevailing social tension of a moment or a socio-political context, recalling a historical event, or denouncing a situation" (Allende, 2017, p.10).

Today, the Internet has become an important tool for these artists to showcase their work outside of traditional cultural networks. According to Alonso *et al.*, on the Internet, the perception of invading public space disappears and it becomes a showcase "where ideas and demands can be expressed equally, but without the antisocial component attributed to urban art" (Alonso-Martínez *et al.*, 2018, p. 54). In this line, some research highlights the role of the Internet compared to traditional media, concluding that "urban art is a topic that is rarely addressed by the media, and social networks are the most accessible and effective way to disseminate this type of creations" (Gándara and Marfil-Carmona, 2016, p. 387). In the words of Abarca-Sanchís, the Internet has been "the terrain where Banksy's proposals (...) have nourished the roots of their social acceptance" (Abarca-Sanchís, 2010, p. 3). For this author, the emergence of the Internet will facilitate the expansion of urban art and will become the "other wall" or the "new subway" where creations can be depicted and shared with the world. Social media has also contributed exponentially, with Instagram being a way to launch or market the brand of a street artist (MacDowall, 2019; Foushéec, 2019; Shannon, 2019; Gotta, 2020; Kang *et al.*,

2019; Bernárdez-Rodal *et al.*, 2019). "Banksy's escalation in mainstream media (...) was preceded and provoked by the popularization on the internet of a series of actions by the artist designed to be disseminated in the form of videos on *YouTube*" (Abarca-Sanchís, 2010, p. 4).

3.   The "Banksy effect"

While Frank Shepard Fairey is considered one of the proponents of urban art, Banksy is undoubtedly one of the best paradigmatic examples of this movement. He has been the driving force behind the "democratization" of *street art* and has changed the way it is perceived (Fernández, 2018). The "Banksy effect" is a term coined to describe the growing interest in street art that has emerged as a result of Banksy's popularity, as he has become a cultural phenomenon, using his particular style as a vehicle for political and social protest. However, not everyone applauds the fame of this Bristol-based artist, and some wonder if Banksy has sold out and moved away from his roots as a street artist (DeTurk, 2015).

Banksy's work is characterized by the aesthetic of *stencils* loaded with a strong, ironic, and acidic social message (Zárate, 2019). His works offer sharp social criticism and political commentary (Goldstein, 2020), addressing the ills affecting the globalized world (Brassett, 2009); criticizing consumerism, global warming, war, and sarcastically mocking the lifestyle of modern societies (Jones, 2014). Banksy's motivations show that he is a true activist hero fighting for those who have no voice (Dahlquist, 2019). In fact, "one of the reasons for the admiration that figures like Banksy evoke is their ability to express a critical attitude towards political, social, or cultural situations that are exposed in public spaces" (Marcos-Alba and Juan-Gutiérrez, 2022, p. 234). His work "generates visceral responses of shock, humor, and surprise" (Khan, 2010, p. 177).

Banksy's work seems to challenge the rules of conventional art. "The anonymity of the author, and the always transgressive nature of his pieces which appear on surfaces and spaces of all kinds around the world, disrupts the convention of art in museums and places of worship" (Aladro-Vico *et al.*, 2018, p.15). His art, protected by his anonymity, is offered to any passerby, stimulating their senses and provoking their thoughts (Diógenes, 2011). In 2010, he was listed as one of the most influential people by *Time* magazine, alongside Barack Obama, Steve Jobs, and Lady Gaga. His works, spread across almost the entire world, have brought him fame not only in the world of street art but also in the media, which have speculated about his name and age. There have been even conjectures about his place of birth from him, although most studies about the artist suggest that he was possibly born in Bristol, England, as his beginnings from him started in this city in the early 1990s. Banksy joined the urban art movement influenced by the work of Blek Le Rat, filling the walls of Bristol with rats, although there is no documentation of these early works in the city. Later on, it is believed that he moved to London and from there began to travel to other cities around the world (Berlin, Tokyo, Barcelona, Los Angeles, among many others), leaving his mark on them.

Banksy gained worldwide recognition in the early 21st century when he depicted some of his most significant and renowned works on the walls of the West Bank, denouncing the Israeli government for the construction in the occupied territories of Palestine. Banksy elevated street art to the status of artistic production (Marcos-Alba & Juan-Gutiérrez, 2022). Prior to this, he held his first exhibition in the United States, attended by the general public as well as media and notable figures from the art and culture world. This led to works by prominent *street art* entering auction houses, making Banksy the most prominent and valued creator. However, this also brought him criticism from those who believed he was straying from his principles as an artist who criticized social injustices through his works and entering the art market (Valesi, 2014).

In between, Banksy clandestinely exhibited works in various museums around the world, generating widespread media attention. He was labeled as a "guerrilla fighter" or even an "art terrorist" (Valesi, 2014), gaining even more notoriety than before. With these actions, Banksy sought to mock the art market, criticizing it and arguing that only a small group can participate in buying, selling, promoting, exhibiting, and deciding on the success of art (Banksy, 2006).

The Walled Off Hotel, an artistic installation, museum, and gallery opened by Banksy in 2017 in Bethlehem, Palestine, in collaboration with a local Palestinian graffiti artist and entrepreneur, is another of the artist's interventions with significant impact. This controversial project (Khader, 2020) was known as the "hotel with the worst view in the world" (Graham-Harrison, 2017), as all its rooms have views of the separation and annexation wall built by Israel. The artist's goal in this project was to promote dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Despite receiving support from the Palestinian public in general, Banksy's action generated ambivalence (Milani, 2022), as he was accused of gentrification (Nassar, 2017) and of commodifying and normalizing the occupation (Muslemani, 2017).

All these actions, along with those that would come later, increasingly daring, surprising, and controversial, affected the positioning of Banksy's work, name, and image, leading to the creation of a striking brand (Warren *et al*., 2019; Vince, 2019; Cunha *et al*., 2021) and being present in the media agenda by publishing all of Banksy's actions, the media has contributed to generating anticipation about the artist's anonymity and his work. Each action, such as his intervention *Love is in the Bin* in September 2018 at Sotheby's auction house (London) just after his artwork was sold for over a million dollars, shaking the debate on the value of art (Hutter, 2021; Branczik, 2020 ; Byrd, 2021; Gonçalves and Milani, 2022), and the role of the media is essential in enhancing this impact and public image and reputation (García-Marín, 2020).

4.   Objectives, Hypothesis and Methodology

The first objective of this study is to analyze and compare the coverage of Banksy by the Spanish press. In order to do so, it aims to determine if the main newspapers studied publish content about this figure in the same proportion, in which section they have a greater presence, what is the predominant journalistic genre, and whether the content is accompanied by visual resources or not. The second objective is to measure the impact of Banksy in the press by quantifying the presence of this figure in headlines and analyzing the evaluative character of the published content.

Our hypothesis is that more conservative media dedicate less space to this icon of street art, as Banksy often exposes social grievances associated with left-wing ideology. Furthermore, they tend to portray Banksy in a negative connotation when depicting his figure (h1). Other assumptions are that Banksy manages to draw the media's attention to social injustices (h2), that news related to Banksy is primarily interpretive in nature (h3), and that the press, in general, portrays him as an influential icon (h4).

In terms of sample and units of study, we have chosen to analyze the four most popular digital newspapers during a specific period that spans from 2016 to January 2019, which includes two milestones in Banksy's career: the year 2016, when the debate about Banksy's identity resurfaced, and January 2019, three months after one of Banksy's most significant actions in terms of media coverage, which involved the "self-shredding" of the artwork *Girl with Balloon at Sotheby's*. The relevance of this period can be considered high for the analyzed object of study, as the word "Banksy" was the most searched term on Google[1] during the second week of October 2018. Considering the selection of this time frame, we have chosen the four most popular digital newspapers according to Comscore as of February 2019, which are *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, and *ABC*.

Initially, the *MyNews* platform was used for an initial contact and pre-analysis, which is crucial in content analysis to establish realistic categorization parameters (Bardin and Suárez, 1986). Subsequently, a keyword search (Banksy) was conducted in each of the digital newspapers in the sample during the analysis period, which covers the years 2016 (full), 2017 (full), 2018 (full), and the first week of January 2019 A total of 221 units of analysis were registered and analyzed, corresponding to all[2] the contents published in the press containing the word "Banksy" during the analyzed period in the four selected newspapers. The most commonly used registration units in content analysis were taken into account, and additional items were added to the coding, including presence or absence of the word "Banksy" in the headline of each piece, photographic or audiovisual elements in each unit, journalistic genre, section in which it is published, thematic focus, and evaluative character of the central theme of the news (positive, negative, neutral). To ensure coding reliability (intercoder reliability), a double coding of a subsample (n: 110, 50%) was calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient (K), resulting in 106 and 107 matches, yielding an agreement coefficient of 0.936 (equal to or greater than 80). This is a valid percentage (Landis and Koch, 1977; Igartua, 2006), ensuring reliability. A total of 2248 items were recorded, from which the necessary results were extracted to draw conclusions.

5. Results

During the analyzed period, 2,248 items have been registered, corresponding to 221 pieces published in the four media that contain the word Banksy. The newspaper that collects the most pieces is *ABC* (36.65%), followed by *El Mundo* (24.88%), *La Vanguardia* (22.62%) and *El País* (15.83%).

Figure 1. *Number of articles published in each newspaper.*
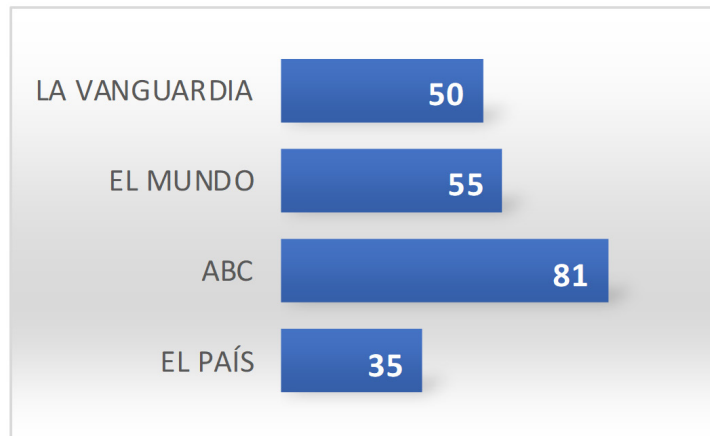
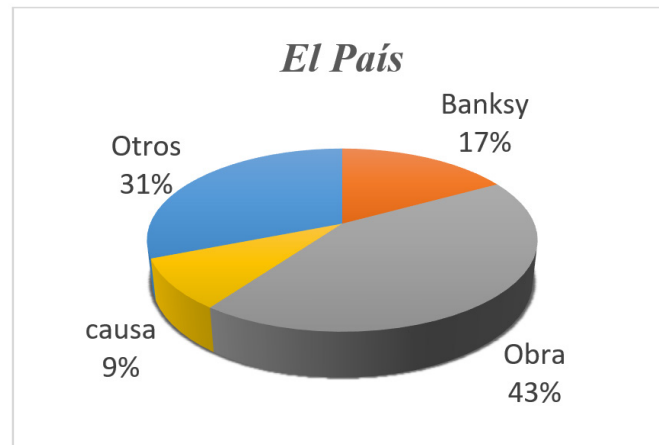**Source:** Author's own work.

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[1] according to Google Trends.

[2] The sample fulfils the criterion of absolute representativeness, since the units of analysis are all the published contents limited to a specific historical moment (Krippendorf, 1990).

[3] According to Bardín and Suárez (1986), the most commonly used units of registration in content analysis are: the word, the theme, the object or referent, the character, the event, and the document.

[4] The thematic focus is classified into four dimensions: on his artistic work linked to the debate on the value of the art market, on social and political causes and demands, on Banksy's character and his identity, and others not directly related to Banksy or his actions as protagonists.

Regarding the placement of the pieces in the sections of the newspaper, the majority are framed in the culture section (73%), followed, with a significant difference, by the sections of Style/Trends/ Living (5%), International (4%), Opinion (4%), regional editions (3%), economy (2%), and travel (1%). 8% of the registered pieces are located in other diverse spaces such as Social Media, Technology, Cinema, Music, photo galleries, or gastronomy. Among the 221 analyzed pieces, 24 correspond to opinion articles and 3 correspond to photo galleries. The rest are informative pieces, classified as 2 chronicles, 2 reports, 4 interviews, and 183 news articles. Therefore, 82% of the content about Banksy registered in this study corresponds to regular news articles that are published based on current events. This analysis also reveals a similar trend in the four newspapers in terms of the quantity of pieces published with Banksy as the protagonist. The newspapers register between 8% and 17% of content related to the artist himself, which in most cases is related to information about his identity and the mystery surrounding it. In this sense, headlines like "The latest theory about Banksy: it's Robert del Naja from Massive Attack" (*El País*, 09/06/2016), "Is this man Banksy? A video recorded in Australia raises doubts" (*El Mundo*, 10/06/2016), "A mathematical study says Banksy is Robin Gunnigham" (*La Vanguardia*, 03/05/2016), or "A university study insists that Banksy is a forty-year-old named Robert Gunningham" (*ABC*, 03/04/2016), in which it is stated that "unraveling his identity has become a national pastime, giving a few minutes of glory to whoever comes up with the latest theory." *ABC* and *El País* are the newspapers that dedicate the most news articles to the actions, works, and exhibitions of the urban artist (Figure 2 to 5).

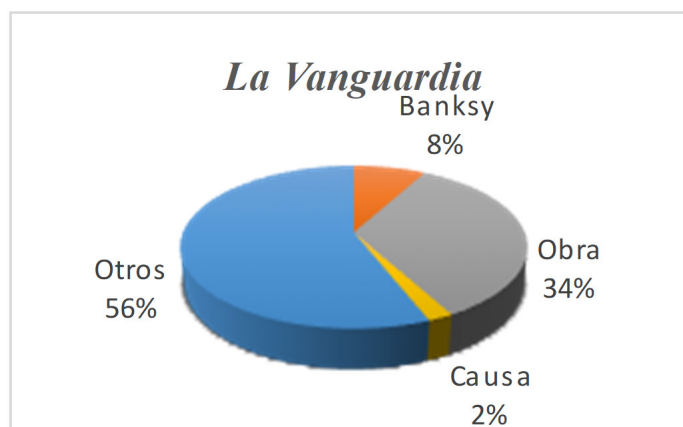**Figure 2.** *Space for each thematic approach in El Pais.*

Source: Author's own work.

Figure 3. *Space for each thematic approach in El Mundo.*
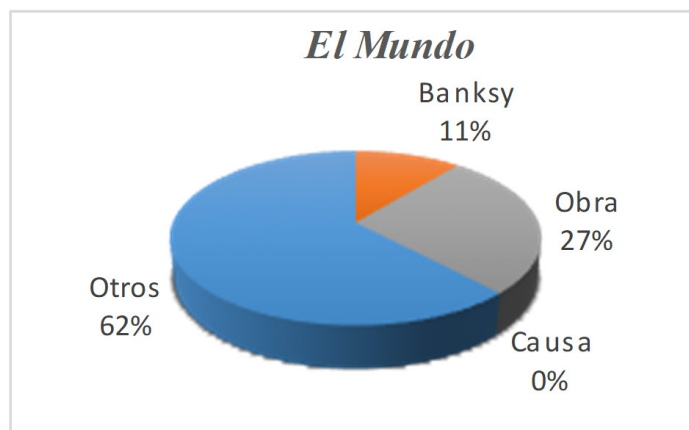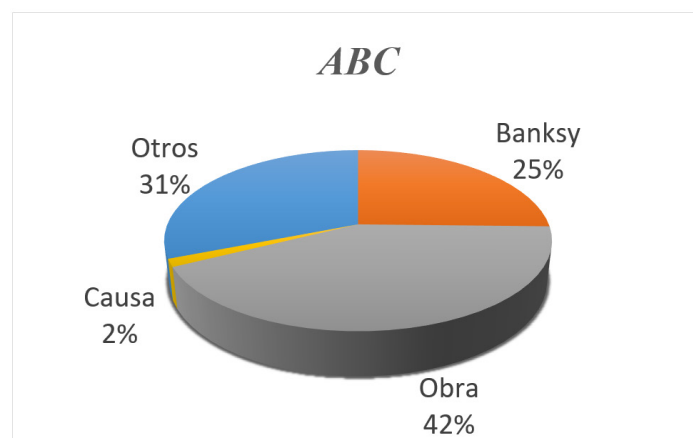

Source: Author's own work.

Figure 4. *Space for each thematic approach in La Vanguardia.*

Source: Author's own work.

Figure 5. *Space for each thematic approach in ABC.*

Source: Author's own work.

Only *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, and *ABC* mention Banksy in pieces where the cause advocated by the street artist takes the spotlight in the published content, with *El País* taking the lead. Examples of this are "Banksy reinforces his fight for refugees" (*El País*, 01/25/2016), where the graffiti he painted in front of the French embassy in London to denounce a violent police raid in the Calais Jungle was published, or "Banksy apologizes to the Palestinian people on the centenary of the Balfour Declaration" (*ABC*, 11/3/2017), where the motive for the action was the centenary of the text by former British Chancellor Arthur Balfour that led to the creation of the State of Israel. His work appeared on one of the walls of the Walled Off Hotel he built in the occupied West Bank. However, *La Vanguardia* and *El Mundo* dedicates a higher percentage to other types of content that are not centered around Banksy's figure, his work, or his cause. In this group, referred to as "others," pieces have been registered where Banksy's figure or work appears secondary or elusive, as well as those that use his name as a brand or a kind of descriptive noun. This is the case with headlines and phrases such as "the Portuguese Banksy" (*ABC*, 10/28/2017), "the Afghan Banksy" (*El Mundo*, 09/29/2016), "the Roman Banksy" (*ABC*, 19 /10/2016), "the Honduran Banksy" (*El Mundo*, 12/12/2016), "Banksy from Rome" (*ABC*, 08/05/2018), or "the Polish Banksy" (*El Mundo*, 04/10 /2017).

Regarding the relevance and weight of the character in headlines, 60% of the pieces include the word Banksy in the headline. However, it turns out that 10% of these pieces do not actually have Banksy as the protagonist (neither him, nor his work). In these cases, the word Banksy is used in the headline as a simile or as a descriptive noun to refer to a brand or an artistic action of similar nature to his. On the other hand, 86% of the publications include at least one photo, which in most cases depicts one of Banksy's artworks or his actions as a graffiti artist from Bristol.

Regarding the evaluative nature of Banksy's character and actions in each piece, the majority show a neutral stance, although strongly adjective-laden[5]. The newspaper El País has registered a higher positive trend than the others (*El País* 33%, *El Mundo* 28%, *ABC* 22%, *La Vanguardia* 17%) with expressions or paraphrases such as "Banksy is a star in street art, a true legend of popular culture of which little is known beyond his work" (01/25/2016), "it's fantastic" (06/8/2016). With slightly

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[5] It is commonplace in all newspapers to refer to Banksy with adjectival expressions such as "celebrated artist", "street artist", "celebrated graffiti artist", "enigmatic artist", "elusive artist", "mysterious creator", etc.

lower frequency, evaluative expressions that clearly refer to the character in a positive light have been registered in the rest of the media, such as "the relevance of the artist is undeniable" (*El Mundo* 6/10/2018) or "Banksy has changed the history of art, and it's important that his work endures and can be seen in a museum" (*El Mundo* 05/25/2016), "a highly interesting artist", "the world's most famous street artist of the 21st century " (*ABC*, 11/10/2018) or "the most celebrated street artist on the planet, with legions of admirers" (*La Vanguardia* 03/8/2017).

Figure 6. *Descriptive nature of the content.*
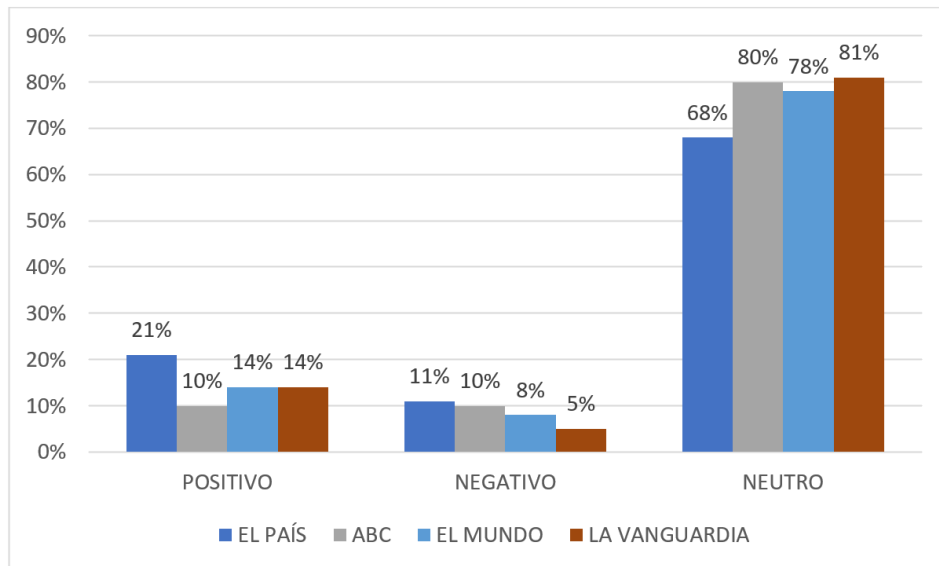
Source: Author's own work.

The predominant tone of criticism has been negative, particularly in *ABC* (*ABC* 37%; *El País* 27%; *El Mundo* 27%; *La Vanguardia* 9%), which has featured a higher volume of pieces with derogatory undertones: "Banksy is not a painter, but rather a masterful advertiser, making him the biggest speculative hoax of the century. Behind the name Banksy, there is nothing." (10/8/2018), and labeling him as a "clown", "gunman", and "thief" (12/7/2018). Furthermore, *ABC* openly categorizes Banksy in the left-wing ideological line, stating: "He possesses a powerful political and poetic voice, spiced with humorous depth charges. But the leftist perspective of the graffiti artist has become just another gimmick for the most exclusive capitalist art circles that want to appear modern." (*ABC*, 03/04/2016). Criticism of Banksy's political stance also emerges from other ideological perspectives, as highlighted by *El País*: "One may question whether his politically correct protest-epitomized by the trendy imagery on t-shirts-increasingly masks economic calculations and even a certain reactionary undertone." (*El País*, 10/04/2019).

Other negative expressions recorded in the rest of the media include: "Like any football virtuoso, Banksy will retire one day, victim of a badly timed kick (...) becoming just another ego to add to the long list of celebrities who squeeze every last gram out of the same old shit." (*El País*, 09/19/2017); "His work is devoid of any interest and is basically bad, for example. Because that's not discussed in the media that glorifies his figure: the absolute lack of interest in his work." (*El Mundo*, 10/14/2018); "These 'montages', without identifying the buyer, only serve to obscure the value of art." (*La Vanguardia*, 10/27/2018).

While it is true that the *ABC* newspaper has the highest percentage of negative evaluative content in relation to the total sample, it is also true that it has dedicated the most space to Banksy. In this regard, it is worth noting that if we analyze the percentage values for each media independently, *ABC* would not be in the lead, as it registers a lower percentage of negative content compared to *El País* (*El País* 11%, *ABC* 10%, *El Mundo* 8%, *La Vanguardia* 5%) in relation to the total publications of each media outlet.

6.   Conclusions

The role of the media in the development of the phenomenon of street art and its dissemination in society is crucial, which is why it has been studied from various perspectives. Banksy is an example of how socially conscious artistic expressions capture the attention of the media, which can serve as a megaphone. This study focuses on the coverage and treatment given by the Spanish press, specifically the four most widely read newspapers during the chosen analysis period, on the phenomenon of Banksy. It is noteworthy that the newspaper *ABC* publishes a significant amount of information compared to the other newspapers, which shows that a conservative newspaper does not necessarily limit its coverage to socially-relevant content. (h1). In fact, although this newspaper has registered the highest percentage of negative evaluative content overall (37%), it does not show a significant difference compared to the other newspapers, especially when considering the proportion of individual publications of each media outlet. It is *El País* that leads to this result. Another initial idea was that Banksy manages to focus the press on social injustices (h2). The truth is that very few pieces actually develop the cause advocated by the street artist (*El País* 9%; *ABC* 2%, *La Vanguardia* 2% and none in *El Mundo*). It can be observed that the focus is on reflection around the art market and Banksy's person. In fact, all the information related to Banksy, whether in the opinion section or as regular news (83%), contains interpretative elements (h3). Even the news with more neutral evaluative content, i.e., those that presumably neither praise nor belittle his actions or the nature of the phenomenon, contain a journalistic style loaded with descriptive adjectives. It seems that there is a need to decipher and describe what Banksy's figure and the surrounding phenomenon represent.

If Banksy's objective is to act as a messenger by portraying social injustices in his works, it seems that the news remains more focused on the messenger himself, who becomes a protagonist to the point of seeing his image reflected in the press as a popular icon (h4). This conclusion is clear, as Banksy's figure is often used beyond the news that arises from his works, interventions, or controversies. In fact, 10% of the pieces that mention Banksy in the headline do not have the artist or his work as the protagonist of the content. He is often mentioned as an effective resource, either as a simile or as a descriptive noun ("the Roman Banksy" *ABC*, 10/19/2016; "the Honduran Banksy," *El Mundo*, 12/12/2016) to refer to a controversial artistic action or something similar to his style. Therefore, the word Banksy is used as a brand image or a hook, either because it's related to urban art or because his name de él is often used as a descriptive adjective to reflect an intention. His statements have been used as famous quotes or as a voice to complete news coverage (as in the case of reactions to the La Rambla attack in Barcelona in 2017, *La Vanguardia* 08/26/2017), which further demonstrates the influence and social relevance Banksy holds in the press.

7.   References

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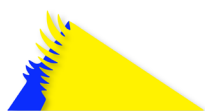
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