Venezuela, in the international press: a biased coverage

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Abstract

Introduction. Coverage of Venezuela was examined in 28 major newspapers in Latin America, Europe and the U.S. over a period of one year. The objective was to determine whether there was a systematic bias. **Methodology**. Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was combined. Several categories were condensed into two variables –trend and impact– with a simple measurement scale attached. **Results**. A systematic negative bias in the coverage of Venezuela in the major newspapers was shown: 82% of the articles published had a negative impact. At the same time, 95% of the topics were associated with the Venezuelan government. **Discussion and conclusions**. A systematic negative bias means that the right to information of the citizens-readers is not being fulfilled.

Keywords

Venezuela; Chavez; hegemonic press; non-hegemonic press; content analysis; bias.

Contents

1. Introduction [1]

A study by Latinobarómetro (2011: 8) points out that the Venezuelan "people perceive the actions of the Hugo Chávez government as positive, while the world classifies them as negative". One explanation for the difference between the perceptions of the Venezuelans and the rest of the world, is that this is the result of the stereotypes and purported 'common sense' created partly by the hegemonic press.

This article is aimed at analysing this phenomenon and clarifying if the information process surrounding Venezuela (that emerges from the universe of selected Western hegemonic newspapers) is marked by a systematic negative bias.

We define hegemonic newspapers as those with a significant capacity for influencing public opinion, which pursue the creation of a 'hegemonic common sense'. The hegemonic press makes use of partial representations (which favour or prejudice particular interests), that are portrayed as objective, neutral or impartial (Ducrot, 2004). To achieve their objectives, the hegemonic newspapers are organised as big companies or conglomerates, which in turn are supported by other large companies that finance them through advertising.

As far as the media coverage of Venezuela is concerned, many analysts have written about the importance of bias (e.g. Kronenberg, 2009). Most of these studies focus on the coup d'état in 2002 and the active role the mass media played in it (Britto, 2006; Bartley and Ó Briain, 2003; Lupien, 2013; Hellinger, 2005: 17). They also analyse how the coup was covered internationally (Mateos, 2002). According to Pascual Serrano, the Venezuelan case "is certainly the one that has accumulated most elements of informational partiality in the media" (2009: 19).

In the present study, we have aimed to verify these assertions by means of a systematic, rigorous and longitudinal measurement, using a very large sample (more than 15 thousand articles from 23 hegemonic newspapers based in Latin America, Europe and the United States). We combined quantitative and qualitative content analysis and also monitored the coverage of Venezuela in five non-hegemonic newspapers for comparative purposes.

The choice of content analysis is coherent with Van Dijk´s analysis of this method that argues that it tries to "highlight abuse of power, domination and inequality" (2007: 352). At the same time, we follow the methodological investigation of hegemonic press bias by José Manuel de Pablos (2008: 151) who argues "that it should be possible to distil [this bias] in a patent and demonstrable way". Following this line of research, we present a simple and replicable bias analysis model.

2. Methodology

We chose content analysis as a working methodology and "research technique destined to formulate –from certain data– replicable and valid inferences that can be applied to their context" (Krippendorff, 1990: 28).

For this purpose we apply a systematic and objective assessment to measure the variables: impact and trend –both explained below– in relation to information published about Venezuela by the international press. The results will infer a number of validated conclusions.

The mass media type chosen for the investigation was the press. The reasons for this decision include the observations of Lochard and Boyer (2004: 85) on the "determinant [place] of the press in the media system" which implies that the major newspapers highly influence the agenda of other news media (Couso, 2012).

We chose the digital versions of the newspapers to conduct the research as several polls show that people prefer online newspapers to find out about international issues, more than the television or radio (Sahagún, 2010: 46). At the same time, the availability of the digital version of a newspaper is not limited to the geographical location in which the paper is distributed, but exceeds all boundaries and can be accessed in real time anywhere in the world.

The unit of analysis for the universe of the included newspapers was to find all the articles containing the word [Venezuela] or the word [Chávez].

The sample includes publications that appeared over a period of one year, specifically between the dates of July 1, 2009 and June 30, 2010. That is, a total of 365 days, an extensive period of time within which we aspired to achieve certain representation in terms of the dynamics of the newspapers.

The following 23 newspapers constitute the universe from which the sample was taken: *El Espectador* (Colombia), *El Tiempo* (Colombia), *El Comercio* (Ecuador), *La Razón* (Bolivia), *Abc Color* (Paraguay), *La Nación* (Argentina), *Clarín* (Argentina), *El Mercurio* (Chile), *El Universal* (Mexico), *O Globo* (Brasil), *O Estado* (Brasil), *A Folha* (Brasil), *The Wall Street Journal* (U.S.), *The New York Times* (U.S.), *The Washington Post* (U.S.)*, ABC* (Spain)*, El Mundo* (Spain)*, El País* (Spain), *The Guardian* (UK), *Financial Times* (UK), *The Times* (UK), *Le Monde* (France) y *Le Figaro* (France).

In terms of the quantitative aspects that were taken into account, the total sample came to 15,841 articles that were published by the group of 23 selected hegemonic newspapers. The sample was divided according to the macro genre of opinion (columns, commentaries and editorials) and macro genre of information (news, reportages and interviews).

The selection of qualitative categories for the content analysis took the following aspects into consideration:

1. The topics chosen: We took into account here Serrano's thesis (2008) called "Silence/ First Page", according to which the media usually do not talk about the policies of those governments which have a 'docile' policy towards the dominant power. And, on the other hand, the media constantly keep in their news agenda the policies of 'rebellious' governments, in the latter case with a critical slant (2008: 81-84). Serrano gives as an example of the "First Page Governments" (with a constant presence in the media) the case of Venezuela and its government´s policies.

2. Balance and relevance of sources used in the article: We also took into account the so-called "specialists" and "analysts" quoted by the journalist in the piece and if the sources used are direct or indirect (especially in the case of publications belonging to the macro genre of information). Moreover, when sources were anonymous or unidentified sources we studied whether the unnamed sources were used to support a determined line of argumentation and of what type that was. Stuart Hall (1978) provides us with the foundations for the study of news sources in the context of power relations that we applied here.

3. The adjectives used by the author: They enable us to examine the implied values and the existence of possible bias. For that reason we pay close attention to the use of terms involving assessments and judgments.

4. Misrepresentations: In some occasions false data is used and reference is even made to events that never occurred.

5. Silence: It is very important to highlight the news events of public interest that are not covered by the media. This paper examines their omission of important data while selecting topics. This void analysis is central to a number of scholars including Althusser, 1970 (what is excluded is just as important as what is included in the problematic) and Foucault, 1970 (the discourse always operates through exclusion) as well as Zizek, 2005 (who conceives of what is not shown as part of ideology he critiques). As Durandin, the misinformation is achieved by any of these stratagems: either, "highlighting certain negative elements" using exaggeration or exposure, "or by reducing elements" which could range from omission to minimisation (1995: 122-123).

6. Double standards; we observed where similar news realities were treated in different ways.

The evaluation of these different categories included in the study has led us to establish, on the one hand, manifest variables which are physically present in the messages and that can be counted and quantified easily and, on the other hand, latent variables, which are the non-directly observable aspects that are inferred from the manifest indicators, as is the case of news blackout (Igartua, 2006: 185).

2.1. The Variable 'Tendency'

The key variables chosen for the content analysis were: tendency and impact. These condense categories mentioned above.

The variable 'tendency' takes into account, as a reference, the favourable or unfavourable inclination (or lack of inclination) expressed by the journalist in his or her article.

Faced with certain objective facts (that can be verified and confirmed) newspapers often behave partially, taking a normative position on them. This study assesses whether such a tendency exists and if so, if it is for or against the events in Venezuela and the policies of its government.

As part of our study, we assess the degree of informational balance in the analysed publications. To do this we consider the sources used in each piece, adapting the instrument used by the Media Observatory of Venezuela. The categories were established in the following way:

"Direct source: explicit identification of the source providing the information. Indirect source: unidentified source". This category indicates whether the sources used were mentioned or remained anonymous. Klibis Marin, who conducted a review of this methodology, defined the evaluation based on this category as a "fundamental value of a news" (2008: 91).

"Contrast of News Sources: use of sources that are the object or the subject of the news to verify and/or contrast the information".

"Contrast of Media Sources: use of two or more sources on the same event presented by the media".

"Balance of Sources: Selection and distribution of the sources based on their provenance: government, opposition, etc."

The variable tendency is related to discourse analysis and to the terms used to describe a certain reality through journalistic publications. We aim to clarify whether there is a clear position for or against Venezuela and its government.

Tendency also has to do with lexicological bias of the publications. To determine if this kind of bias exists we considered the following items:

1. The title is a fundamental part of any press article, attracting the attention of the readers who often decide on its basis if to continue reading. In this sense, it is considered essential to analyse the structure of the title and all its words that could reveal bias.

2. Terms which identify intentionality. For the purposes of our study and the identification of bias, the analysis of terms marked by intentionality has been fundamental. The encoder and the analyst of the journalistic pieces identified such terms to decide if the bias was favourable or unfavourable to the image of the Venezuelan government.

By way of example, we present below an indicative list of verbs that was used by the encoders in their work:

Even though in many cases the verbs used by the press are merely descriptive and used simply to name a speech act, sometimes the verbs are selected for "positions implicitly favouring the statements advocated by their author" (Sánchez García, 2010: 110). This is true for a great number of verbs such as: to "say", "assure", "commit oneself", "guarantee", "promise", "challenge", "defend", "insist", "hold", "offer", "propose", "claim", "advise", "recommend", "approach", "analyse", "believe", "doubt", "study", "object", "prefer", "see" and "regret". At other times, Sánchez García claims, the verb is used not only to enhance the image of the subject of the publication, "but also to indirectly criticize the author of the statements" the subject is positioned against. This is the case of expressions as: "question", "accuse", "blame", "denounce" and "make somebody responsible" (*Ib*.). There are also verbs used to criticize the author of the statements explicitly: "warn", "threaten", "predict", "foretell", "attack", "disqualify", "reject", "order", "move away", "look for" and "pretend" (*Ib*.).

2.2. The Variable 'Impact'

The second variable taken into consideration has been called impact. The impact is related to the topic selection by the mass media, an aspect that leads us to question the motivations and the decision-making processes in the media regarding the choice of "newsworthy" events.

Teun van Dijk has described this decision-making processes in the following way:

 "The editor in chief, along with all the other editors, cooperate in the daily decisions on the general content policy of their paper. Theoretically, the journalists depend on these decisions and choose and elaborate their articles guided by them, at times even following very precise guidelines they receive. Their professional socialisation and a complex process of informal communication provide them with a knowledge on what kinds of articles are likely to be accepted, as well as what schemes, styles and contents are coherent with the editorial line. [...] The journalists know what news, events, topics and angles and what style fit inside the

limitations of the editorial frame. They also know the norms and values inherent to the news making, and possess an integrated system of criteria which defines the "interest value" and the "newsworthiness" of the events and their textual reconstructions in their articles" (1997: 50-71).

When we refer to impact we are taking into consideration the topic selected by the newspaper to be turned into news, as well as the assessment that is proposed to the average reader who is not inclined either favourably nor unfavourably towards Venezuela. The evaluation of this variable moves the focus from the ambit of content analysis (that is applied here too, in that we measure the impact in a systematic quantitative manner) to other qualitative methods such as discourse and semiotic analysis, where the importance lies not only in what is said but also in how it is said.

Regarding the content analysis, this method is applied from the linguistic angle and as Igartua says "the goal of the analysis is to discover the meaning of the language and its implicit ideological assumptions in the manifest language" (2006: 190). Both in the tendency analysis (the micro aspects of the language like the choice of words and expressions) as well as in the impact analysis (the macro aspects of the language, such as the topic choice) we are interested in examining how linguistic constructions are established to influence readers´ conclusions about a certain reality.

We use qualitative techniques developed by semiotic analysis where "the analysis focus is in the profound or latent meaning of the message and not in its manifest qualities" (*Ib.*: 192). In this sense, in addition to the study of linguistic constructions, we also take into account statistical data on the image of Venezuela and its government in other countries.

The impact variable is intimately related to the mechanisms of newsworthiness. Therefore 'impact' is deeply affected by the choice of main topics according to which information is organised, which affects the reader in a more or less predictable way. It is important to stress that impact is also linked to the previously described 'tendency' variable. That is, in the cases where bias was found, whether favourable or not, the impact goes in the same direction. As a matter of fact, the variable 'impact' was included during the design of the methodological tool when we detected cases of publications that didn´t have a clear tendency (as they had source balance and no bias), but even so they tended to adopt a negative perspective or focus. It is in these cases, where the variable impact gains importance, as an additional variable to tendency.

When it comes to evaluation of the impact of an article, we take into consideration framing theory and the way main focus points are established by the mass media on certain issues, the case study being Venezuela and it´s government.

For the content analysis in relation to this variable, we will follow a model inspired by the writings of María del Mar Blanco Leal who, in her book *Models of analysis for a critical study of the press*, asks the following questions: "How does every newspaper approach the information? What do they pay most attention to? Is the publication trying to inform or to convince? What ideological, political, economic and social flow could we insert it in? (2008: 140).

To elucidate the positive or negative way in which the focus of a particular journalistic item is performed, we will have to make use of a number of guiding categories [2]:

Title	One examines how the title is written, what position is adopted by the journalist and if it is possible to perceive a preconceived attitude
Topic justification	One may ask whether the event that forms the basis of the news is really relevant, if it has the necessary qualities to be turned into news. Otherwise, one is facing the intention of merely filling a page, with a too sensationalist or unprofessional attitude
Position taken by the newspaper	A set of parameters is established to help determine what position the newspaper is adopting towards the Venezuelan government: Agrees totally / Agrees / Somewhat disagrees / Disagrees totally
Who prepares the information	It needs to be determined whether sources are internal or external, if those interviewed or quoted are experts on the topic, if they participate in party politics, if it is usual that they write for the paper; and other elements relevant to shed light on the authors' attitude towards the Venezuelan government
Approach of the newspaper and of the journalist	This category is complementary to the previous ones and we arrive at it mainly through in-depth interviews on the perception of Chávez and his government

Since the present study questions the myth of objectivity and the existence of journalistic neutrality, as a person preparing a journalistic publication always introduces a certain subjectivity in her/his writing, the variable impact will be catalogued either as negative or positive in relation to the image of the Venezuelan government.

2.3. Scale

The scale to measure quantitatively the content analysis is based on a relatively simple system where both variables (tendency and impact) are assigned numeric values that range from -1 to +1.

Both variables always take into consideration the construction of the image of the Venezuelan government. As far as the tendency is concerned, it may be unfavourable (-1), favourable (+1) or no tendency (0), the latter being used for cases where we have identified no bias according to the categories used in the study.

Regarding impact, publications considered negative for the image of the Venezuelan government receive value -1, while the positive ones get +1. We do not assign value 0 as far as impact is considered, as we do not believe in the existence of neutrality. Nevertheless, given that for some cases the line between what we consider as positive and negative can be very diffuse, there is the possibility (when encoders prefer not to venture into making a decision they are not sure of) to assign the rating "undefined", which is marked with the value (0). This qualification can be considered an acceptable error for the research, since it occurred for less than 10% of the publications.

To achieve a systematic, objective, replicable and valid analysis, we used an empirical inter-subjective research methodology. It takes as its starting point the general 'common sense' in order to escape the categories and assessments based on mere subjective perception of the authors and overcome the reductionist subjectivism in general. The purpose was to approach the research object in the most pertinent way and come to conclusions that are as close as possible to what could be called the 'common sense' criteria. We wanted to draw on the inter-subjective reality –something

several individuals agree on as far as a particular object is concerned (Berganza *et al*., 2005: 212-217).

The task of encoding of information, that is, the assignment of each unit of analysis within a given category –an essential part of our study– was carried out by a number of persons who were encoders. Given the large volume of newspapers chosen for the research, the total number of encoders involved in different stages of the study reached seven. These encoders, previously trained, were responsible for evaluating of thousands of journalistic pieces collected over one year, according to categories described above to determine the tendency (favourable, unfavourable or no tendency) and the impact (positive, negative or not defined).

As José Javier Sánchez Aranda stresses on the subject of various studies that work with content analysis, the ideal is that various researchers arrive at the same results (*Ib.*, 2005: 213).

To ensure inter-subjectivity of our content analysis and the reliability and validity of its results, each item of the sample was analysed independently by two different encoders, and the results were later reviewed by the project coordinator, who is the first author this publication.

2.4. Reliability

There are different coefficients used to assess the encoding reliability, a process performed once you have encoded all the sample material and introduced it to the IT system. Its aim is to check whether the inter-subjectivity is really at work and measure the degree of agreement among the encoders in their evaluation of categories. As it is an exact agreement, we use a nominal level of measurement in our study. Once the encoders are trained, the reliability of the results obtained from their analysis is calculated through the procedure for nominal scale data proposed by Holsti, whose reliability formula is one of the most commonly used (Wimmer y Dominick, 1996: 184-188; Igartua, 2006: 216-225).

The formula used was: Reliability = 2M ÷ (N1+N2), where M is the number of encoding decisions both encoders agreed on, while the sum N1 + N2 is the total of the encoding decisions taken by both encoders. An agreement regarding all the decisions would give the result 1.

Usually only between 10% and 25% of the sample is analysed by two encoders and the reliability check is only applied to this subsample (Igartua, 2006: 214). However in the present investigation all the items were analysed by two encoders, which increases the reliability of the encoding process considerably. Additionally, between 15% and 20% of the sample was later reviewed by the project coordinator. This decision added a correction filter for possible methodological errors.

Out of 15,841 articles published by the 23 hegemonic newspapers, the first and the second encoder agreed in the case of 14,520 evaluations, which gives a result of 0.916, that is 91.6% reliability, according to Holsti formula.

As the minimum level of agreement is 0.80 (80%) for the data to be reliable (Igartua, 2006: 221), we might consider our study highly reliable with its result 0.91.

2.5. Non-hegemonic press

Six months into the investigation, we decided to include five more newspapers to the universe in order to contrast the discourse of the hegemonic press. The group of papers we called "non-hegemonic" included the following:

La Jornada (Mexico), *Página 12* (Argentina), *Morning Star* (UK), *Il Manifesto* (Italy) and *L´Humanité* (France).

We started to analyse them daily from January 1, 2010.

This group of newspapers possesses a number of features that distinguish it from the hegemonic press group:

1. These newspapers are not owned by big conglomerates, as is the case of hegemonic press

2. Their publicity income is very low, as big publicity companies do not normally invest in them.

3. These non-hegemonic papers honestly admit their partiality and their commitment to certain ideals. That is, they do not try to disguise their orientation and bias under the myth of objectivity.

The group of 5 non-hegemonic newspapers published a total of 583 articles on Venezuela and its government in the studied period. Regarding reliability, the agreement between the encoders who analysed these items was reached in 532 cases, which gives us 0.917 (that is 91,7%), according to Holsti formula.

3. Results

3. Results in hegemonic press

Among the quantitative data regarding the hegemonic press, we analyse here first the number of articles published by each paper:

Chart 1: Number of articles published by each newspaper

Source: Elaborated by the authors
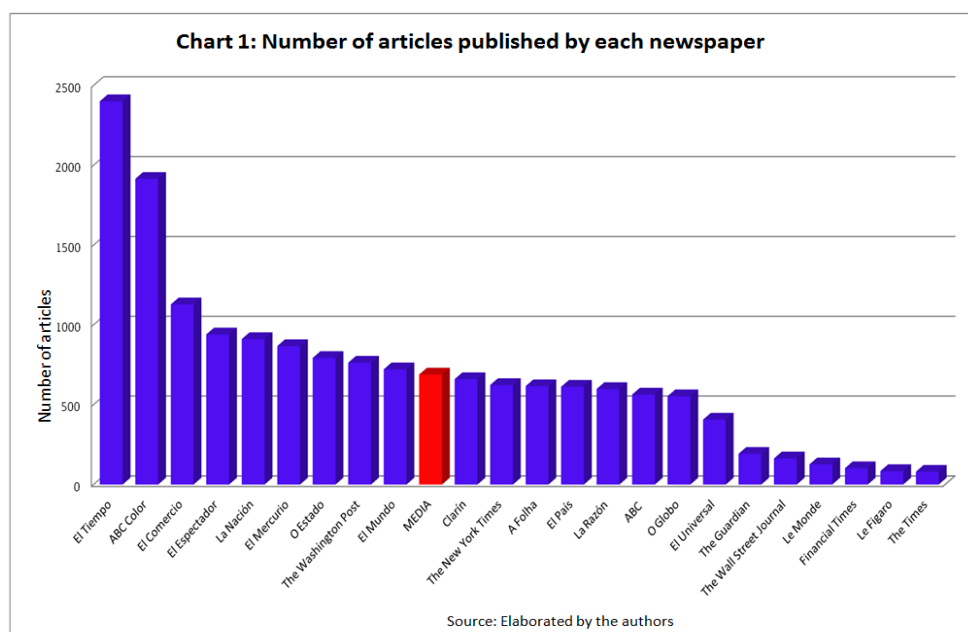
We have calculated an average of 43 daily publications and an average of 689 articles published by each newspaper during the year in question, with gives a frequency of 1.9 articles per newspaper daily.

We registered great differences between the numbers of articles published by the different newspapers. *El Tiempo* from Colombia had the highest number with 2,401 publications, while *The Times* from United Kingdom published only 80 articles. That is why, while *El Tiempo* published an average of 6.6 articles per day, *The Times* published one article every forth or fifth day.

Chart 2 is highly explanatory when it comes to the percentage of publications of each newspaper in the total of the sample. While the first five newspapers with most publications occupy 46% of the total, six papers with least publications have only 6% all together. The remaining 12 papers have an average of 4.3% each, as their percentages vary between 3% and 5% per paper.


Chart 2: Percentage of publications of each newspaper in relation to the total
Source: Elaborated by the authors
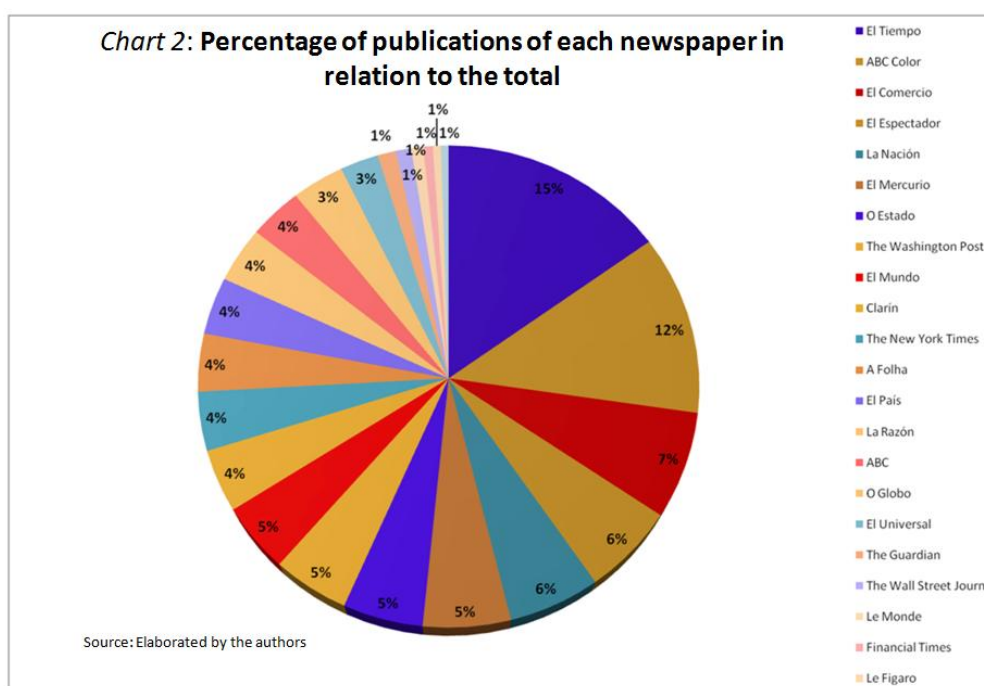
Another criteria taken into account was the number of articles per journalistic genre:

Type of the article	Num. of published articles
News	9.304
Reportages	3.378
Columns and commentaries	1.862
Editorials	446
Interviews	442

We conclude that the information genre clearly dominates over the opinion genre. It is important to stress that out of 12,682 reportages and news items published by the hegemonic press, 57% were signed by press agencies, as chart 3 shows. It is also important to note that in the total of the items coming from the agencies, we have not included those signed by a newspaper but which have contents from a news agency cable with some subjective assessments added to mark the editorial line of the newspaper. That is why the impact of news agencies is even bigger than what is presented here.

Chart 3: **Division of sources: agencies and Newspapers**

Source: Elaborated by the authors
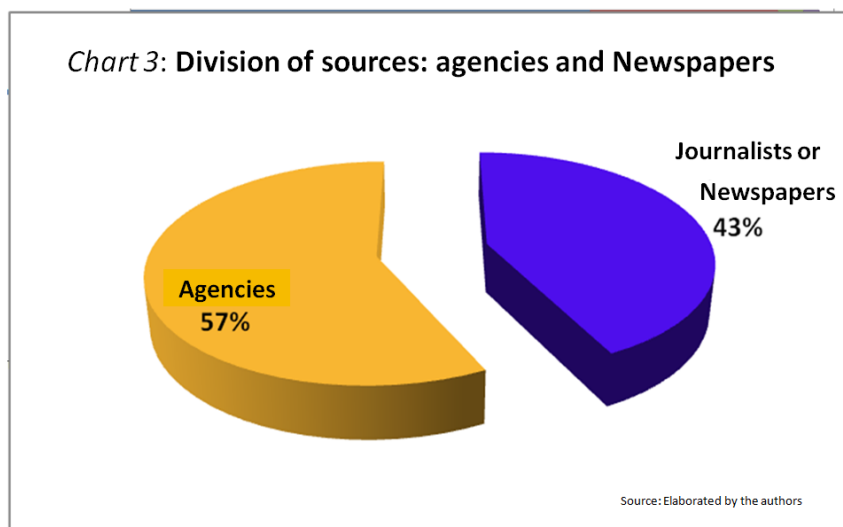
As far as the topics of the publications are concerned, the overwhelming majority are related to the Venezuelan government and its activity, as chart 4 shows. This indicates that the hegemonic press has focused on the construction of the image of the government and, more specifically, the image of the president Hugo Chávez. In the qualitative analysis we will describe how they were presented. News about sports, tourism and culture were either very scare or intimately connected to the Venezuelan government.

Chart 4: **Major topics of the articles**

Source: Elaborated by the authors
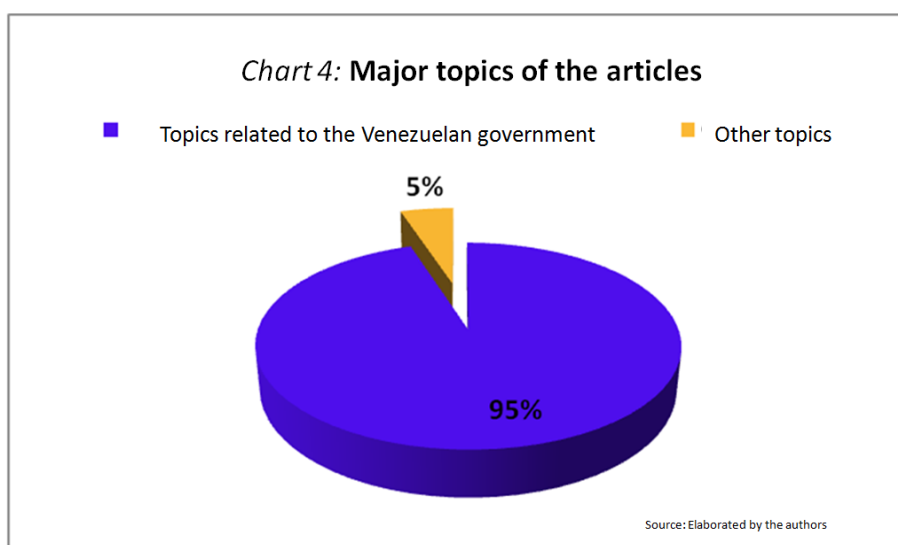
Analysing the tendency of all the articles published by the hegemonic press, (including all the journalistic genres taken into consideration in the study) chart 5 shows that, even though the majority

of the articles don't have a tendency (8,798 out of 15,826), there is a high number of publications with a unfavourable bias towards the Venezuelan government (6,876) and a marginal number of articles with a favourable bias (117).
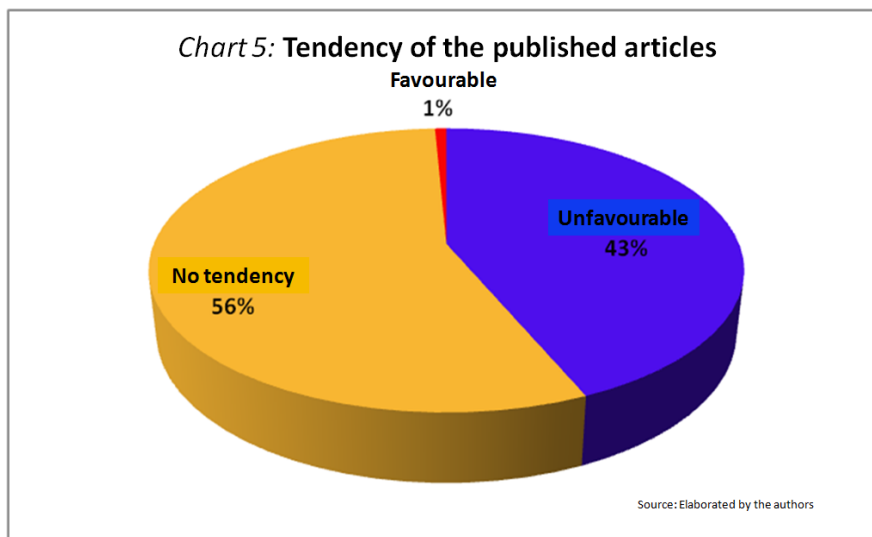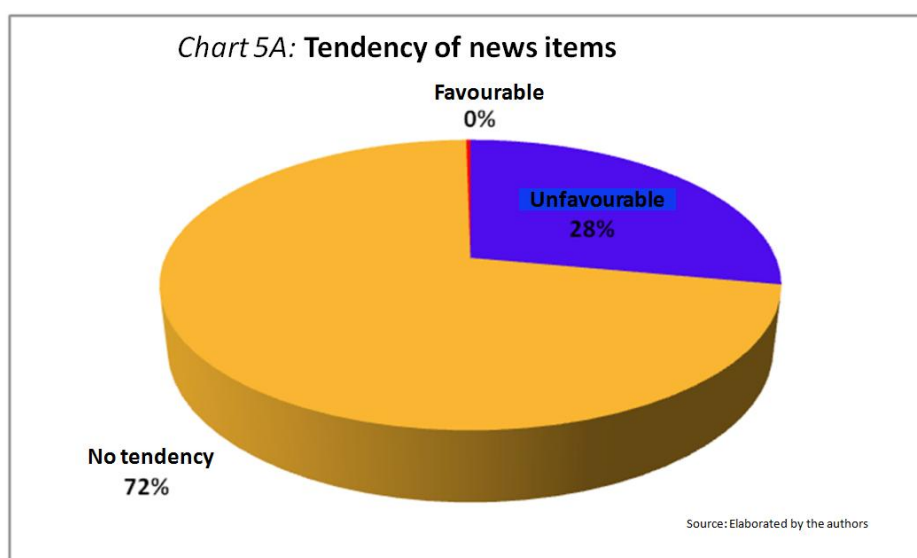

Chart 5: **Tendency of the published articles**

Favourable 1%

Unfavourable 43%

No tendency 56%

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Chart 5A illustrates that most news items from the hegemonic press didn't express any tendency. However, the absolute data gives us a significant figure: out of 9,301 news items identified, 2,595 expressed an unfavourable tendency. That is, one out of four news items was adverse. At the same time, we can see that the number of news with a favourable tendency is marginal, only 24, which is less than 1%. We have proven that a high number of news items have a bias against the Venezuelan government in spite of belonging to information genre which does not allow for the subjective interpretation of the author.

Chart 5A: **Tendency of news items**

Favourable 0%

Unfavourable 28%

No tendency 72%

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Chart 5B: Tendency of the articles published by each newspaper
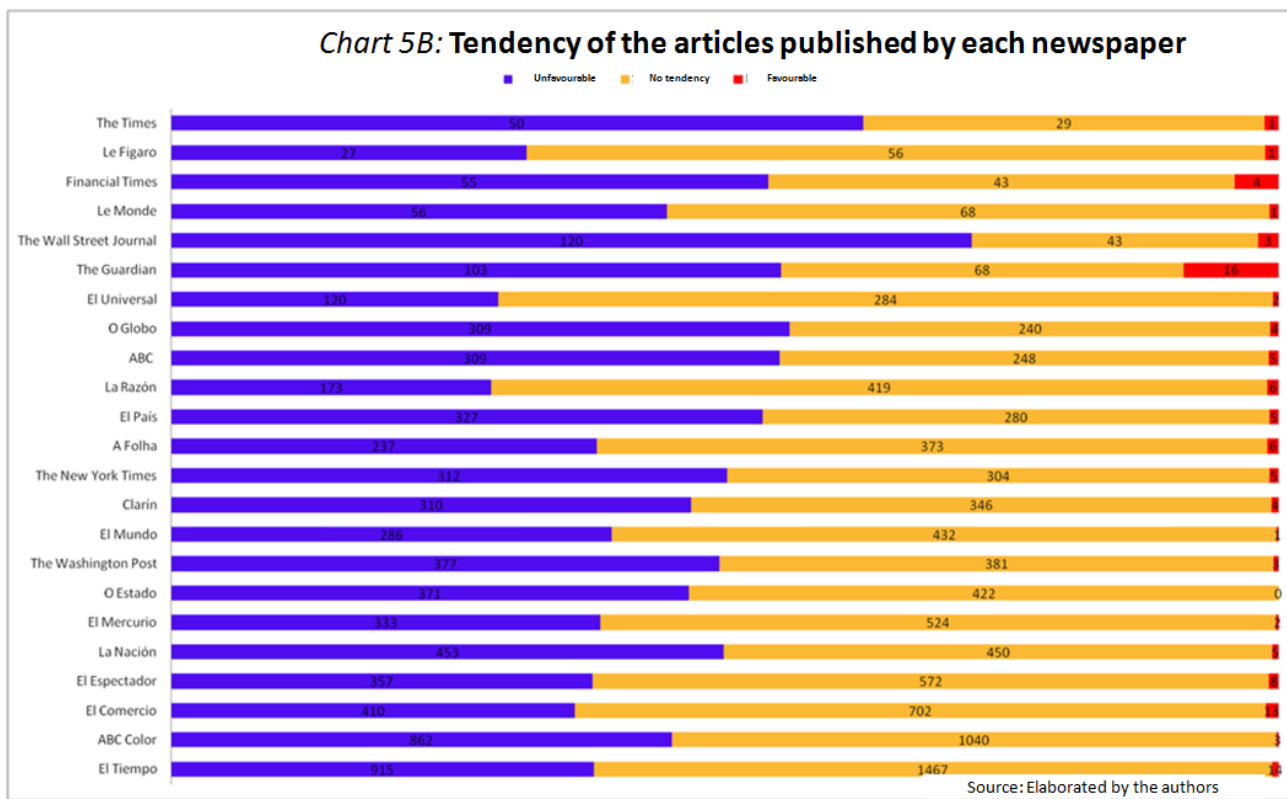
Source: Elaborated by the authors

Chart 5B shows the percentages of the articles about Venezuela with a negative tendency, without tendency and with a positive tendency, in each of the newspapers. The numbers indicate the quantity of articles of each tendency in each paper. As we can see, the percentage of articles representing the negative tendency is quite high. The newspapers where the negative tendency towards Venezuela is most evident are the English-language conservative papers, *The Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, with the latter having the highest percentage of items with negative bias. Both papers belong to the *News Corporation* that is owned by Rupert Murdoch.

Chart 5C: Tendency of the publications from news agencies

Favourable 0%

Unfavourable 28%

No tendency 72%
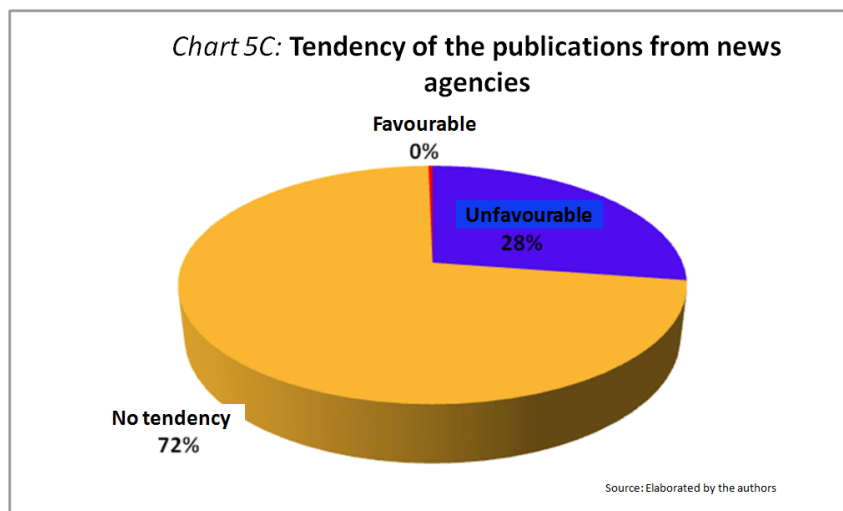
Source: Elaborated by the authors

Chart 5C shows that the tendency of articles coming from press agencies corresponds to the previously analysed percentages of tendencies expressed by the news items. As we said before, the major part of reports that appear in the newspapers with the highest frequency of articles, come from the cables of the news agencies they contract.

As far as the impact of the articles is concerned, chart 6 shows that 82% of the publications of all journalistic genres included in the study had a negative impact (*i.e.* 12,964 articles out of the total of 15,886), while those with positive impact only add up to 12% (1,951 publications).

Compared with the variable 'tendency', we observe a dramatic increase in negative publications. On the other hand, the publications considered positive also increase their presence (although they continue to be in a minority). The publications whose impact was impossible to define were 936 in total.

Chart 6: **Impact of the published articles**
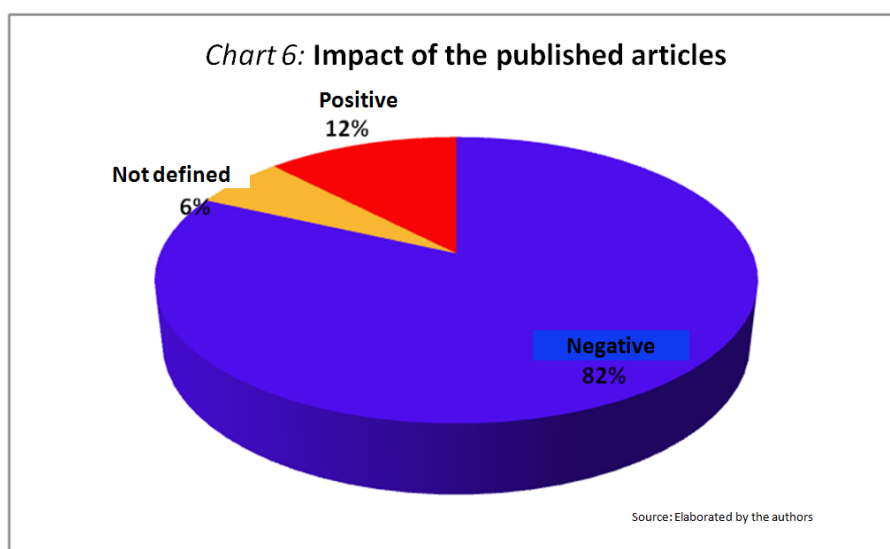
The following chart 6A presents the results of the hegemonic press analysis in terms of impact. The first aspect that stands out is that in all the studied newspapers the proportion of negative impact publications is remarkably high. The newspapers with the highest number of negative publications are, once again (as in the case of the variable 'tendency') *The Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, two titles of historic reputation owned by Rupert Murdoch´s conglomerate. The newspapers that generated least negative impact are: *La Razón* (Bolivia) (again just as in the case of the variable 'tendency') followed by the French papers *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro.*

Chart 6A: Impact of the articles published by each newspaper
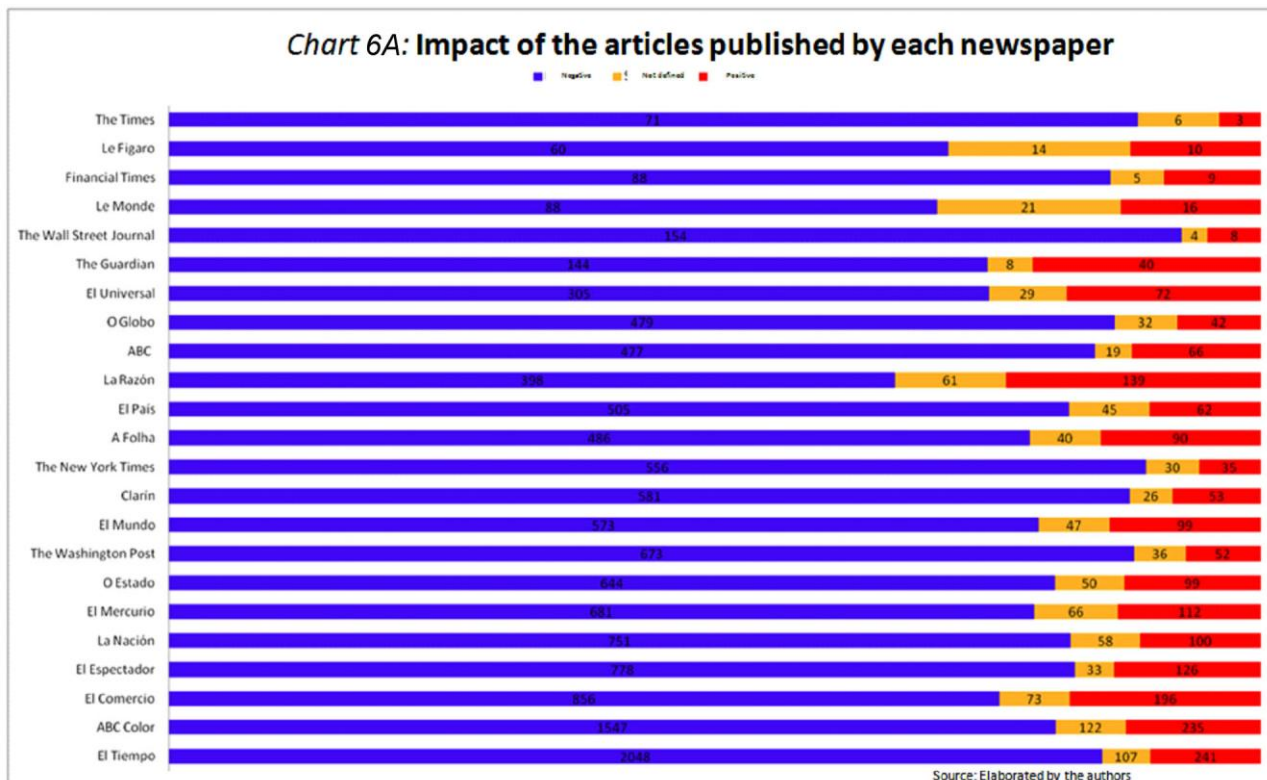
3.2. Results in non-hegemonic press

During the six months of daily analysis of Venezuela´s coverage by the group of five non-hegemonic online newspapers, we have found a total of 583 articles. That gives us an average of 3.2 articles per day or 0.64 per paper per day. Comparing both groups of newspapers, these initial numbers already point to a great difference in terms of frequency and quantity of news as the hegemonic papers had an average of 1.9 articles per paper per day, that is, approximately 3 times higher than the non-hegemonic ones.

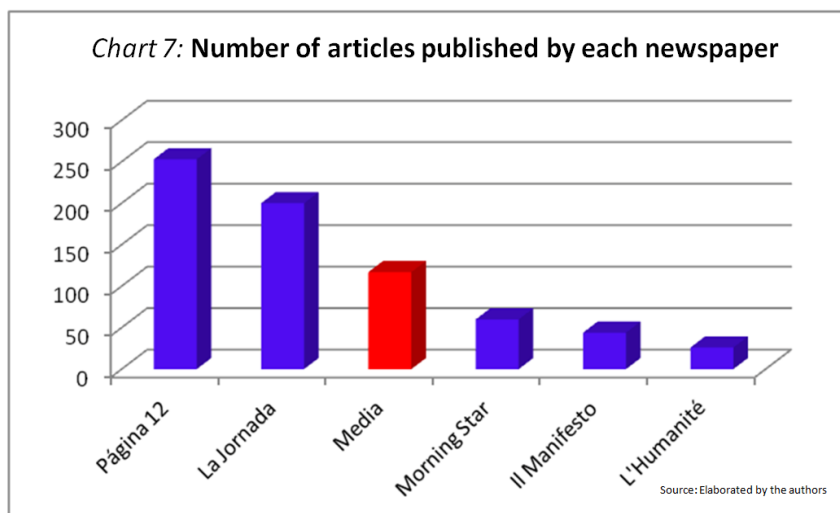Chart 7: Number of articles published by each newspaper

Chart 8 shows the percentage breakdown of the articles published by the different non-hegemonic newspapers. As we can see, a great majority of the publications appeared in *Página 12* and *La Jornada*. These two papers have the best technological platforms, biggest budget and least economic problems. As a consequence, they update their online news continually in a similar way as the hegemonic press does.
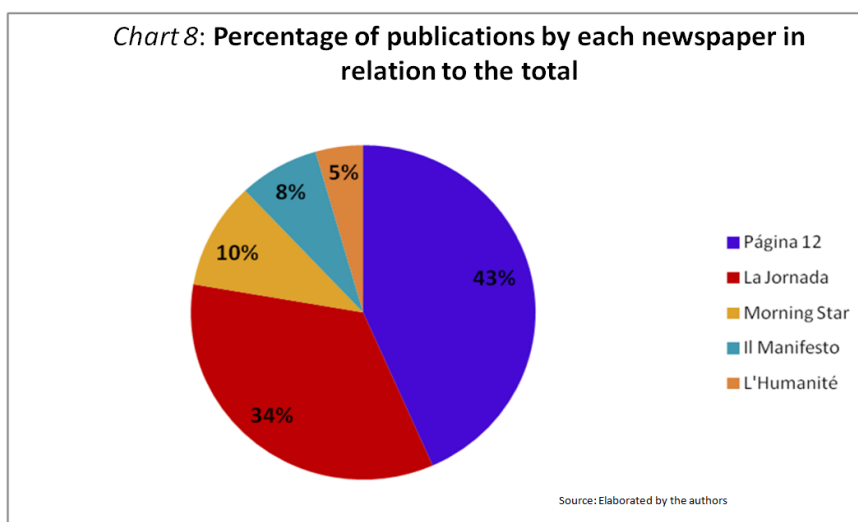

Chart 8: **Percentage of publications by each newspaper in relation to the total**

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Chart 9 shows the 'tendency' of articles published by the non-hegemonic papers: the publications without tendency largely dominate (472 out of the total of 583). Meanwhile, items with an unfavourable and favourable tendency represent small and similar quantities: 43 and 65, respectively, the difference between them being only 3%.

Chart 9: **Tendency of the published articles**

Source: Elaborated by the authors
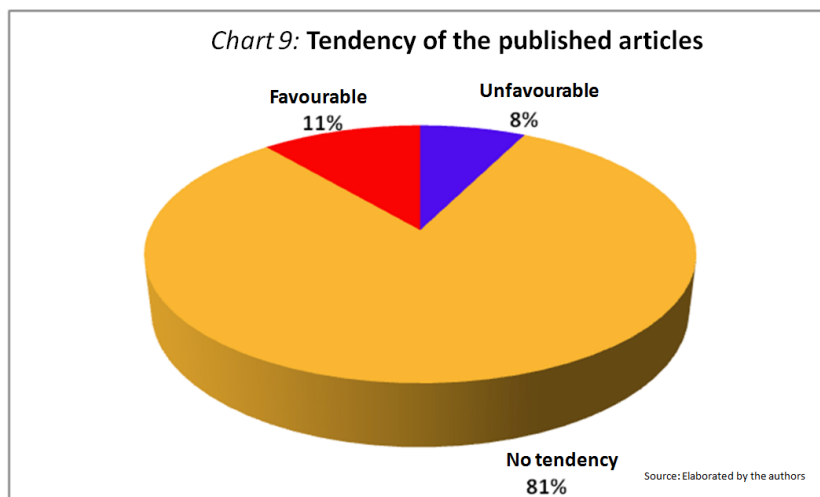
If we compare these results with those from the hegemonic press analysis, we can establish that there is less bias and more plurality in the non-hegemonic group. We come to this conclusion having verified that there are less articles with negative bias towards the Venezuelan government and also because there is more balance between the number of favourable and unfavourable publications.

Chart 9A shows in detail how the articles published by the non-hegemonic press do not have a pronounced unfavourable tendency found in the hegemonic press.

Chart 9A: Tendency of the articles published by each newspaper
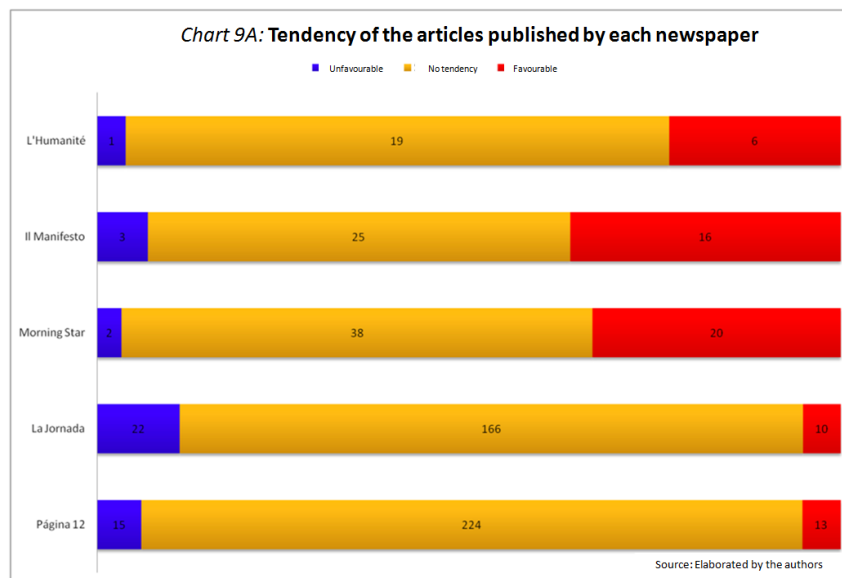
On the basis of the data shown in chart 9A we can divide the non-hegemonic press into two subgroups. The first subgroup that has published most articles consists of *Página 12* and *La Jornada*. We observe equilibrium between the numbers of articles with favourable and unfavourable tendency (the latter are slightly dominant). In the second subgroup of newspapers (*The Morning Star*, *Il Manifesto* and *L'Humanité*), even though it has a lower number of publications on Venezuela, the articles favourable towards the government correspond to a higher percentage than the unfavourable ones. In both groups the great majority of articles have no defined tendency.

Looking at the impact of all the publications from the non-hegemonic press, the results are of great interest (see chart 10). In the fist place, the publications with negative impact dominate (49%: 281 out of 513). This result proves that negative stories are most newsworthy. Moreover, it falsifies the hypothesis that these newspapers have a political affiliation with the Venezuelan government. Nevertheless, once again we can conclude that the diversity is much bigger than in the case of hegemonic press, as there are also many publications with positive impact (221 in total). Another detail, maybe less interesting and more controversial, is that the encoders could not define if an article had positive or negative impact in 78 cases from the non-hegemonic press.
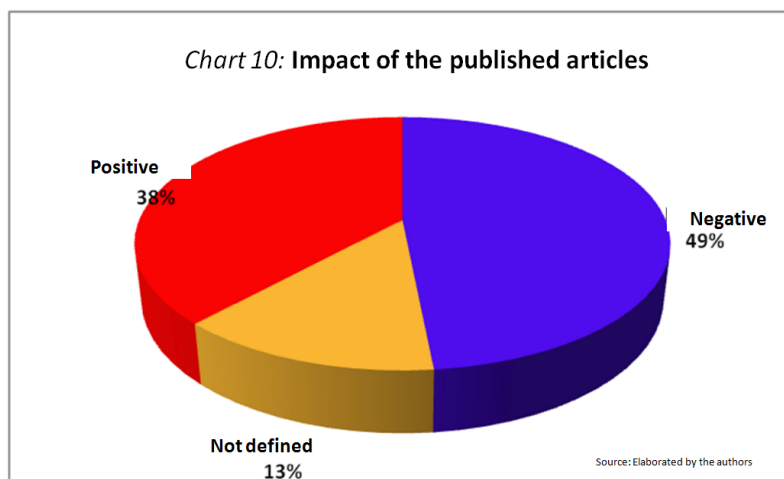

Chart 10: Impact of the published articles

Chart 10A, the last one we present in this section, illustrates the variable 'impact' for all of the publications in each one of the newspapers. The two papers which published most items (*Página 12* and *La Jornada*) are the only ones where most articles have negative impact. But because of this, the majority of items published by the non-hegemonic press group have negative impact.

This negative impact is due to the huge amount of items coming from news agencies. These appear in the 'latest news' section of these two online newspapers and are published without any adaptation to the editorial line. Consequently, these publications correspond to the orientation of the hegemonic press, the biggest client of news agencies.

The positive impact items dominate in the other three newspapers from the non-hegemonic group. This is especially pronounced in the case of *Morning Star* where there is little space for those with negative impact. This echoes the situation with the hegemonic press group in that it is its exact opposite. In the papers *Il Manifesto* and *L'Humanité* negative articles are frequently published despite positive ones being in the majority.

Chart 10A: Impact of the articles published by each newspaper
Source: Elaborated by the authors
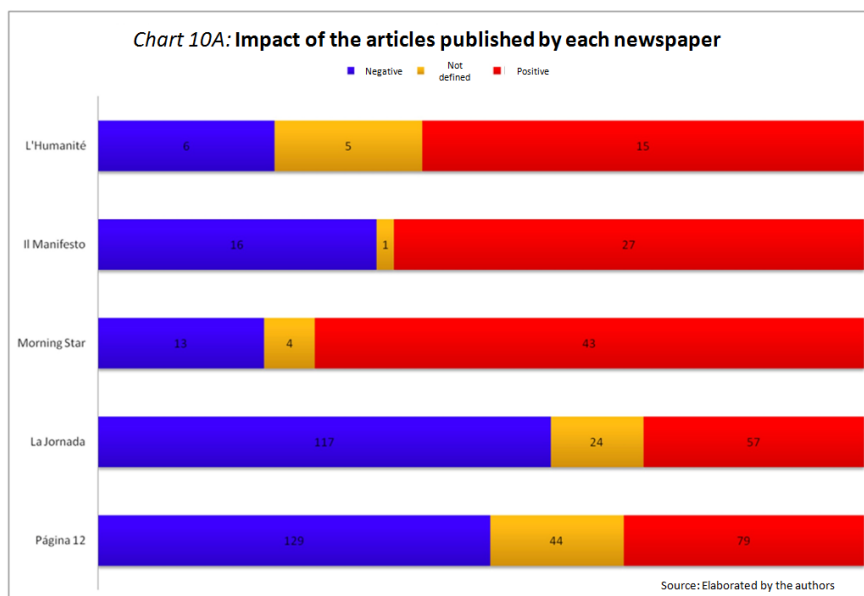
4. Discussion and conclusions

On the methodological level, we have presented an analytical model that is both simple and replicable. It condenses various qualitative categories into two basic variables: 'tendency' and 'impact', with a corresponding scale permitting a quantitative result and "a patent and demonstrable distillation" of bias (de Pablos, 2008: 151).

We have confirmed the existence of a systematic negative bias towards Venezuela in the hegemonic press, as 82% of all the articles published by it during one year have negative impact. At the same time, 95% of topics are related to the Venezuelan government, especially to the figure of Hugo Chávez, president in the period under analysis. This confirms Serrano´s thesis "Silence/ First Page".

This result would explain, in part, the conclusion of public opinion studies like Latinobarómetro which find huge disparities between how the politics of the Venezuelan government are assessed inside and outside the country, with foreign public opinion being much more negative. Our study

suggests this is because the hegemonic media are practically the only intermediary of the Venezuelan reality for those outside of the country.

As a result, the systematic negative bias in Venezuela´s coverage by the hegemonic media has democratic consequences. It also means that the citizens´ right to information is not being fulfilled.

Looking for the reasons for this systematic bias in the hegemonic press coverage of Venezuela, we argue that the editorial line of these papers is adverse towards the country because of:

i. Ideological motives: the hegemonic press interprets the reality through the liberal ideology that clashes with the vision of the Venezuelan political process inspired by socialism.

ii. Economic motives: the interests of the principal companies who own and finance hegemonic newspapers conflict with the actions of the Venezuelan government.

iii. Ideological-economic motives: the hegemonic papers are big companies guided by capitalist free market rules and the discourse of the Venezuelan government is critical towards the social consequences of these capitalist rules.

Furthermore, this study has shown that the news agencies contribute to the consolidation of 'common sense' created by the hegemonic press as the majority of news comes from them and not from a specific paper. At the same time, the major clients of news agencies are the hegemonic newspapers. Hence, there is a correspondence between their editorial lines. As the news items from the agencies are published by lots of media, they contribute to the homogenisation of this hegemonic common sense. Moreover, none of the major news agencies operating in Latin America belongs to the region. They are companies from Western developed countries (i.e. the metropolis) where information (about the periphery) is generated.

In the non-hegemonic paper group, the impact of 49% of the publications was negative even though there was also a significant number of articles with positive impact (38%). Most articles had no tendency and among those that did, both favourable and unfavourable variables were represented. Analysing these results, we would argue that the editorial line of the non-hegemonic press is more favourable towards the Venezuelan government because of:

i. Ideological motives: the non-hegemonic newspaper group does not share the liberal ideology and that is why it is closer to the Venezuelan orientation in its editorial approach.

ii. Economic motives: the companies financing the hegemonic press have no economic ownership or control of the non-hegemonic press. Thus both the resources from these companies and the dependency on them are much smaller.

iii. Ideological-economic motives: the non-hegemonic press is not structured on the lines of the typical capitalist company. They are not owned by large conglomerates with wide-ranging investments and economic interests and, in many cases, the journalists own the paper (*La Jornada*, *Il Manifesto*). As a result, there is greater scope for the independence of journalists and capacity for dissent from the hegemonic capitalist discourse.

The news agencies are sometimes used by the non-hegemonic newspapers and, as a result, their publications get contaminated by the stereotypes of the hegemonic press. That is why some of the non-hegemonic newspapers either do not use the services of news agencies or discard the ones

considered to be most adverse to the paper´s editorial line. Online versions and the aspiration to update the web page continually are the major explanations for why they take lots of contents from news agencies. The result of the use of news agencies by the non-hegemonic press is the introduction of information divergent from its own editorial line that ends up blurred. The most obvious example of this process is *La Jornada* from Mexico.

Our study shows that the non-hegemonic press escapes form the stereotypical reductionism regarding Venezuelan reality through:

i. More open agendas and more variety of topics: The non-hegemonic press publishes information that is excluded by the hegemonic one.

ii. Greater plurality of voices: In the non-hegemonic press we find voices both in favour and against the government. Meanwhile, it is extremely difficult to find voices favourable towards the government in the hegemonic press.

iii. More thorough use of sources and information checking: partly due to their awareness of the existence of stereotypes and their desire to avoid being accused of propagating them, both the balance between the sources and the rigorous use information is greater than in the hegemonic press.

5. Notes

1. Fernando Casado would like to thank MinCI of Venezuela. Ewa Sapiezynska is grateful for the support from MECESUP Programme at Universidad de Chile.

2. Part of the categories used to design the variable were taken from Blanco Leal (2008: 141 and following pages) and later adapted to the requirements and form of our study.

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