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## Journalism or greenwashing? Sponsors of COP25 Chile-Madrid in the Spanish press

### *¿Periodismo o greenwashing? Patrocinadores de la COP25 Chile-Madrid en la prensa española*

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#### **Abstract**

On 2 December 2019, the 25th United Nations Climate Change Conference, chaired by Chile, began in Madrid. Among the main sponsors of this summit were companies from different sectors such as banking, insurance and energy. This research analyses the media coverage received by two of the main sponsors of COP25, the energy companies Endesa and Iberdrola, before, during and after the summit. The methodology, based on content analysis and framing, sought to search references to these two companies in six Spanish newspapers between November 2019 and January 2020. The results of this research show that the Spanish press did not critically examine the activity of these two energy companies, an approach that is only predominant in one of the six newspapers analysed. In addition, the presence of greenwashing elements in texts on COP25, where these companies appear, is noteworthy. This work offers an invitation to reflect on journalistic business models; the relationship between advertising, interest groups and freedom of information and the responsibility of the media in the context of the current climate emergency.

#### **Keywords**

Journalism; greenwashing; advertisement; COP25; climate change

#### **Resumen**

El 2 de diciembre de 2019 comenzó la 25ª Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático presidida por Chile en Madrid. Entre los principales patrocinadores de esta cumbre figuraban empresas de distintos sectores como la banca, los seguros y la energía. Esta investigación analiza el tratamiento periodístico que recibieron dos de las principales empresas patrocinadoras de la COP25, las energéticas Endesa e Iberdrola, antes, durante y después de la cumbre. La metodología utilizada se basa en el análisis del contenido y el framing, para buscar en seis periódicos españoles referencias a estas dos empresas entre noviembre de 2019 y enero de 2020. Los resultados de este trabajo indican que la prensa española no abordó de forma crítica la actividad de estas dos energéticas, un enfoque que solo predomina en uno de los seis diarios analizados. Además, destaca la presencia de encuadres de greenwashing en textos sobre la COP25 donde aparecen estas compañías. Este trabajo invita a la reflexión sobre los modelos de negocio periodístico; la relación entre publicidad, grupos de interés y libertad informativa, y la responsabilidad de los medios de comunicación en el contexto de la emergencia climática.

#### **Palabras Clave**

Journalism; greenwashing; advertisement; COP25; climate change

## 1. Introduction

Global warming is worsening every year, temperatures have risen by 1.1°C since the pre-industrial era and science has set the 1.5°C limit as the barrier beyond which biogeophysical imbalances would produce severe alterations and damage to ecosystems and the life of the beings that inhabit the Earth (IPCC, 2018). To contain this rise in temperatures, emissions would have to be reduced by 45% compared to 2010 and reach zero emissions by 2050 (IPCC, 2018). However, the human response is slow and does not match the climate crisis situation. Communication is a key element to understand the complexity of why humanity fails to act in the face of a predicted climate crisis. The media are responsible for fostering awareness in the public opinion, but they have limited themselves to keeping the issue alive without giving it the relevance that science demands (Boykoff, 2011). In the study of this media dysfunction, it is interesting to focus on interest groups, those institutions, organisations, or social actors that seek to influence society and politics, among other ways, through the media.

The 25th United Nations Climate Change Conference 2019, chaired by Chile and held in Madrid, ended without a real commitment to reduce emissions by the participating nations. The conference was shrouded in controversy, such as the Chilean authorities continuing to organise the conference in Madrid despite the social crisis in Chile, and the failure of the Madrid City Council to properly manage the waste from the dismantling of the macro-event, which was not separated for recycling. One of the most striking controversies was the sponsorship of the summit, led by energy companies such as Endesa and Iberdrola, which are among those that emit the most greenhouse gases (GHG) into the atmosphere in Spain (Observatorio de la Sostenibilidad, 2019).

The companies that sponsored the summit also sponsored a multitude of media outlets (Serrano, 2019). During the days of the summit, in addition to the usual advertising inserts, it was common to see sections, bulletins, special coverage and texts in the Spanish press sponsored by the companies that also sponsored COP25. The most striking example of this practice is Endesa's sponsorship of the front pages of the main Spanish newspapers on 2 December 2019, the day the conference began. The content of this front page was an advertorial on renewable energy and the future of the company. An analysis by the communication and climate change observatory ReCambia (2019) of the University of Seville counted 34 print media whose front pages were sponsored. Of these, 12 newspapers published the advertorials without stating that these were advertised, contradicting the General Advertising Law, according to the observatory; seven newspapers did indicate that they were advertisements, but in almost imperceptible small letters; five did so in small letters, and only one newspaper, *La Vanguardia*, indicated that the front page was an advertisement in a larger notice. The observatory concludes that these media that have tried to hide the advertising nature of the front page with typographic resources have incurred in "a media practice that discredits the journalistic profession by trying to confuse the public by disguising as news what is purely the self-interested content of a company. And not just any company, but the most polluting company in Spain".

Events such as the COPs are an interesting object of study from a communication perspective, as they are forums where climate policies are to be agreed upon on an international scale. The Spanish media tend to show conformity in their coverage of COPs, i.e., they do not confront the problem, they do not assimilate the urgency (Arcila Calderón et al., 2015). However, there are few studies on the subject from a political economy of communication perspective. The study of COP25 provides an opportunity to understand how interest groups such as energy companies carry out public relations and communication actions to introduce their discourse into the media and political agenda. The purpose of this research is to analyse how the Spanish press advertising strategy of COP25 sponsors Endesa and Iberdrola may have influenced the media coverage of these companies.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Climate change and communication

The media are key mediators between science, citizens, and politics (Boykoff, 2011). Climate change is an issue that does not receive the attention and rigour in the media that the urgency of action to mitigate it requires (Fernández-Reyes & Mancinas-Chávez, 2013). The self-interested dissemination of denialist approaches and the bias of certain deontological standards of journalism (such as the claim of neutrality and information balance) have contributed to creating a confused climate of opinion on global warming (ibid. 2013). Moreover, the media discourse on climate change is marked by infocination and it is dominated by perspectives more closely linked to mere adaptation to the consequences to come than to the mitigation of GHG emissions (Fernández-Reyes, 2014).

Although a vision aligned with the climate consensus prevails in the Spanish press, there is a certain denialist redoubt, especially in some digital publications (León and Codina, 2016) and opinion pieces (Martín-Sosa, 2021). In terms of thematic aspects, there is a notable absence of solutions when discussing temperature, natural catastrophes, or migrations; an emphasis on technological solutions and a focus

on renewable energies, ignoring other possible areas of climate action; and a lack of questioning of the overexploitation of natural resources (Fernández-Reyes *et al.*, 2013). These media dysfunctions in the thematisation of global warming also lead to the under-representation of important sources of GHG emissions such as animal exploitation (Moreno & Almiron, 2021).

The media has a great responsibility, as it can either be a catalyst for climate action, or the opposite. In this sense, it would be desirable for journalism to adopt a public service role in the face of the climate crisis. To do so, it would have to report on global warming from a perspective of systemic change: at this point of environmental degradation, a holistic socio-cultural change focused on sustainability is needed, a transition that journalism should promote (Fernández-Reyes & Águila-Coglan, 2017). To this should be added the urgent reflection on those ideological aspects that constitute a barrier to climate action and that emerge from anthropocentric and patriarchal worldviews (Almiron & Tafalla, 2019; Herrero, 2013; Hultman & Pulé, 2018).

There is no one right way to communicate climate change. The most effective recipe is a mix of creativity and strategy that connects with different audiences in different contexts (Boykoff, 2019). When communicating climate change, it is essential to consider human emotions. Using loss frames evokes fear in the audience (Nabi *et al.* 2018), although it can awaken sacrificial attitudes through negative emotions (Bilandzic *et al.* 2017). Texts focused on actions to combat climate change reduce fear and anger (Feldman and Hart, 2018), although these emotions precisely promote a news story to be shared more on social media (Segado-Boj *et al.* 2020). Emotional messages must be designed with caution, especially when talking about the risks of climate change, which must be communicated rigorously but without falling into excesses that arouse reactions of denial and anxiety (Mah *et al.* 2020).

Media coverage of climate change is shaped by issues that go beyond the mere setting of a thematic agenda, as they are influenced by journalistic routines, the ideology of the practitioner and the editorial line of the media outlet, as well as the culture in which they are embedded and the political economy of the media company (Saunders *et al.*, 2018). It is therefore more appropriate to use a structural approach to make sense of media coverage on global warming.

## **2.2. Communication, power, and interest groups**

In order to understand the functioning of communicative practices, it is necessary to extend the margins of analysis to their context, as proposed by the discipline of the Political Economy of Communication and Culture (PECC). The PECC, and currents within this discipline such as the Structure of Information, are nourished by the analysis of history and the study of economic and power relations, adopting a structuralist approach to events, and adding an ethical component to achieve a multidisciplinary and complex perspective of reality (Almiron Roig, 2009; Mancinas-Chávez, 2016).

When placing the media in the current economic context, it is noticeable that communication groups are financialised and communication is a commodity at the mercy of the influences and interests of the global market (Almiron, 2010; Reig & Labio, 2017). In Spain, the mainstream press has followed neoliberal and mercantilist globalisation dynamics that result in multiple political-economic connections that endanger their independence (Nogales Bocio & Mancinas-Chávez, 2014). This dynamic of connections also appears on the internet, especially in groups which are currently considered protagonists of the digital sphere such as Google, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft, which share shareholders and investment funds in their shareholding structure (Mancinas-Chávez *et al.*, 2019b). Furthermore, when analysing the shareholder composition of a large media group, such as the PRISA Group, from the perspective of global warming, the main shareholders have economic interests in sectors with significant GHG emissions, such as fossil fuels (Moreno-Cabezudo, 2018).

Media companies are immersed in an ecosystem of pressures that derive from their economic context, conditioning factors on the journalistic profession summarised by Reig (2015): media ownership, in the form of owners who set the guidelines for content; advertising, a form of exercising power on the part of advertising companies; political interference; news production and its routines, which are increasingly accelerated in the digital context; audiences, who generally opt for uncritical content; and journalists who are closer to companies and lobbies than to the rigorous nature of the profession. Of these pressures, this paper focuses on two of them: the advertising and the actions performed by interest groups.

On the one hand, advertising, in the past, represented the economic independence of the press from the political powers. However, nowadays "dependence on advertising leads to the emergence of hierarchical pressures on journalists from within the media" (Odríozola-Chéné *et al.*, 2019, p. 126). From an economic point of view, advertising is a key element in the study of the media, since their public service ideal is conditioned by profitability and, this, by the interest of advertisers (Labio Bernal, 2001). In recent times, a hybridisation of journalistic and advertising formats has been taking place, causing journalistic genres to cross the line into advertising, leaving aside the public service that should

characterise the profession. Advertisers have begun to borrow the formats and styles of journalism to insert their message into the discursive continuity of the newspaper, causing confusion among the audience, which assimilates business messages as informative and not advertising (Labio, 2006).

On the other hand, interest groups, made up of employers, large corporations, think tanks and other actors, engage in lobbying, an activity that consists of exerting influence on public policy-making processes through communication strategies and/or public relations tactics (Scott, 2018). In the field of global warming, there are discursive coalitions, known as the 'denial machine' (Piltz, 2008), led by conservative think tanks and corporations that seek to promote climate denialism and inaction in order to protect their economic interests and place them on the political and media agenda (Almiron & Xifra, 2020). Fossil fuel and electricity companies have played an important role in this network promoting denialist discourses (Brulle, 2019).

Companies develop public relations strategies to promote their interests. To the extent that they are affected by the socio-political environment, they develop strategies to gain influence in the public sphere and political power through lobbying (Lerbinger, 2005). Among the various tactics they can undertake are media relations. One form of media relations is the purchase of advertising space, whereby the company seeks not only to offer products and services, but also to improve its public image and try to draw attention to issues of interest to it (ibid. 2005). In fact, the fossil fuel lobby's investment in advertising campaigns increases in periods when there is more media attention on global warming or political events on the subject (Brulle *et al.*, 2020). In this area, one of the most studied cases is that of ExxonMobil, an oil company that has worked to promote climate change denialism, among other ways, by sponsoring pressure groups and think tanks that disseminate climate change denialist ideas (Oreskes & Conway, 2018; Piltz, 2008). An illustrative example of ExxonMobil's public relations campaign is the analysis of Supran and Oreskes (2017), who found how the company paid for advertorials in The New York Times with anthropogenic climate change denialist content to spread public confusion. Supran and Oreskes (2021) have concluded that the company's communication on climate change is dominated by frames of uncertainty that downplay the seriousness of the climate crisis, and by frames of consumer blame that make the company's own responsibility invisible. The authors note that 'propaganda tactics of the fossil fuel industry such as these have received less scrutiny than those of their tobacco counterparts' (Supran & Oreskes, 2021, p. 18). The ExxonMobil case in the United States has received some academic attention, nevertheless, in Spain there is a lack of knowledge about the lobbying activities of energy and fossil fuel companies in relation to climate change.

Global warming is a controversial issue because it compromises our economic system, the notion of progress and our way of life (Herrero, 2011). Hence, the media discourse on climate change is subject to numerous interferences by the established powers (Mancinas-Chávez, 2013). Being confronted with the climate emergency, it is urgent to identify those processes that hinder climate action. In this case, by focusing on the media representation of companies that emit high amounts of greenhouse gases and how it can be conditioned by the influence of these same organisations.

### 2.3. Greenwashing

To contextualise business communication actions within the power structure in which communication is situated, it is useful to turn to the theory of legitimacy. According to Mark Suchman (1995, p. 574), "legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions." In today's society, marked by the climate crisis, actions that aim to contribute to its mitigation are considered desirable. Hence, polluting companies have embarked on the development of green image campaigns or campaigns that seek to align their identity with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), regardless of their actual commitment to them (Backer, 2019). Such strategy is known as greenwashing.

According to the systematic review carried out by Sebastião Vieira de Freitas *et al.* (2020), there is no general and unanimous definition of greenwashing. However, among the different interpretations of greenwashing that they propose, the aspect of greenwashing as an act of selective dissemination is of interest for its communicative study. In other words, greenwashing is understood as the dissemination of positive information about the environmental aspects of a company, while negative information is not disseminated or is not disseminated at the same level (ibid. 2020). To expand on the concept of greenwashing, it is useful to refer to the work of Peter Seele and Lucia Gatti (2017), who propose a typology based on the legitimisation effects of these messages:

- False greenwashing. Occurs when a company is accused of greenwashing even though its messages are consistent with its corporate social responsibility actions. Although the accusation is not based on solid data, the delegitimising effect for the company happens in the same way as in true greenwashing.

- Greenwashing. Is the process that takes place when a company promotes campaigns that are not consistent with its environmental actions. Greenwashing only exists if the company is accused of it by the media, NGOs or other actors.
- Potential greenwashing. Occurs when a company communicates apparently green actions that are inconsistent with its actual actions but receives no criticism. If there is no accusation of greenwashing, the company benefits from the positive effects on its legitimacy, despite the inconsistency of its actions.
- No greenwashing. If the company communicates corporate social responsibility actions that are consistent with reality, and receives no criticism, there is no greenwashing.

In short, what Seele and Gatti (2017) propose is a definition of greenwashing that takes into account public scrutiny. If there is no accusation, there is no greenwashing, it goes unnoticed. Hence, the work of the media and NGOs is crucial in exposing cases of greenwashing to the public. In academia, Seele and Gatti (2017) propose extending research on greenwashing beyond misleading communication by companies. Instead, they propose to focus on accusation to better understand how the scrutiny of actors such as the media or NGOs can alter the perception of messages about corporate social responsibility in the environmental field.

To sum up, advertising has always been an object of study of interest to the political economy of communication, since it involves a power relationship between the advertiser and the media company. Nowadays, marked by the climate crisis, the study of advertising takes on new aspects by applying concepts such as legitimisation and greenwashing. Not only can a company offer a green image to the world that legitimises it through its advertisements, but it also influences the media in which it places its advertising so that these messages have an influence on the news media. Green advertising from companies such as Endesa has a calming effect on the audience's consciousness (Carrasco Gras, 2015). However, there is a lack of knowledge about the influence that advertising relationships have on the critical content of information, specifically on climate change. This research seeks to provide empirical evidence to fill this gap in the academic literature.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Object of study and research questions

The object of study of this research is the representation in the Spanish press of the energy companies Endesa and Iberdrola (sponsors of the COP25 Madrid-Chile, held between 2 and 15 December 2019) before, during and after the world climate summit. To this end, the following research questions have been set:

P1: How did the Spanish press represent these companies before, during and after COP25? Was there greenwashing in the media coverage?

P2: What are the differences in the coverage of the different newspapers selected?

P3: Is it possible to relate the advertising investment made by these companies to the type of media coverage they received before, during and after COP25?

#### 3.2. Selected newspapers and justification

The newspapers chosen for this research were *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, *Eldiario.es*, *Okdiario* and *La Marea*. They were chosen on the basis of the criteria of largest audience, diversity of editorial line, variety of business model and diversity of formats. On the one hand, *El País*, *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* have been analysed in their paper editions. They have been chosen for their influence and for being the three most widely read newspapers unrelated to sports in Spain according to the General Media Study of the Association for Media Research (AIMC) (2020). On the other hand, *Eldiario.es*, *Okdiario* and *La Marea* have been studied for being digital newspapers, with the intention of adding diversity in a scenario in which media pluralism is threatened by financialisation. *Eldiario.es* has been selected because of evidence that the digital native press can stand out from traditional media in terms of investigative journalism (Mancinas-Chávez *et al.*, 2019a). In addition, *Eldiario.es* is of special interest for this study on advertising influence in journalism because it has an editorial line that is critical of power and based on engagement with its audience (Escolar, 2020), but the proportion of revenue from subscriptions does not reach that of other media considered alternative (Canela, 2019). Although *Okdiario* stands out for its yellow journalism and has been ranked as the least credible media for those who read it (GIPEyOP & Mediaflows, 2017), it has been chosen to add a liberal-conservative editorial line in the digital sphere. Finally, *La Marea* was selected for its subscription-based business model, its code of ethics for advertisers and the creation of a thematic section on climate change called *Climática*. The time period chosen for the study of these newspapers runs from 1 November to 31 January, covering the month before the summit to the month after it.

Of all the companies sponsoring COP25, Endesa and Iberdrola have been selected for being among the diamond sponsors and for being ranked first and eighth, respectively, among the companies with the highest greenhouse gas emissions in Spain in 2018 (Observatorio de la Sostenibilidad, 2019). Applying Seele and Gatti's (2017) classification, the communication of these companies in relation to their corporate social responsibility would be classified as greenwashing. Their attempts to portray a green image are a stark contrast with reality, as these companies are among the largest GHG emitters in Spain.

### 3.3. Methodological tools and criteria

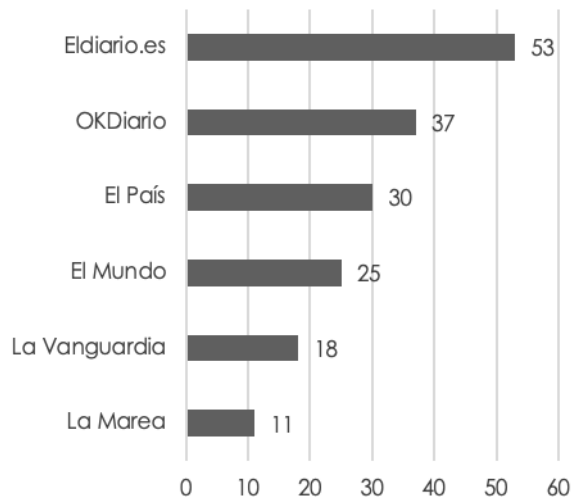
In order to answer the research questions, we have chosen to use content analysis in conjunction with framing theory. Content analysis is a quantitative method that consists of defining categories that emanate from the theoretical framework of a research and that will be searched in the media content to infer meanings or characteristics of these (Neuendorf, 2017). Framing theory, on the other hand, states that framing a fact consists of selecting certain parts of a perceived reality to provide a particular view of a problem (Entman, 1993). Reality is then perceived around conceptual frames that offer interpretations of a fact (ibid. 1993). Content analysis is a popular method in communication studies (Neuendorf, 2017) and used quite frequently in different studies on press coverage of an event (e.g., Mancinas-Chávez *et al.*, 2019a). For its part, framing as a theory applied to the study of communication content also has a certain amount of experience, and has applications in the study of journalistic messages on issues such as climate change (e.g., Moreno & Almiron, 2021).

The texts that make up the sample analysed were extracted from the selected media through the Factiva and MyNews digital newspaper libraries and the Google Advanced Search search engine, by entering the keywords "Endesa" or "Iberdrola" for the period between 1 November 2019 and 31 January 2020. From among the search results, we selected as units of analysis those texts that:

- Included direct mentions of the companies analysed in the headline.
- Addressed sustainability or energy thematically, with relevant mentions of the companies concerned.
- Were about the company, even if it was not mentioned in the headline.
- Had relevant mentions (news about sports, stock exchange results or power line incidents have been excluded).

After applying these criteria, a sample of 174 texts was obtained, of which 30 were collected from *El País*; 18 from *La Vanguardia*; 25 from *El Mundo*; 53 from *Eldiario.es*; 37 from *Okdiario* and 11 from *La Marea*.

**Figure 1: Number of texts per newspaper**



Source: Own elaboration.

The analytical categories have been established on the basis of the theoretical framework, are aimed at answering the research questions and have been tested with a small number of texts until they were accurately adjusted. They are the following: month (November, December or January); authorship (agency, journalist or newsroom); genre (news, report, analysis, opinion, other); subject matter (economy, environment, corruption, other); type of mention (favourable, neutral or unfavourable); existence of

greenwashing (yes or no); company mentioned (Endesa, Iberdrola or both), and examples, to gather illustrative cases to support the subsequent commentary.

For the detection of greenwashing elements in the texts, the concepts of greenwashing provided by de Freitas *et al.* (2020) and Seele & Gatti (2017), together with the framing theory, have been used. From de Freitas *et al.* (2020) the conception that greenwashing is basically the selection of certain positive aspects of a company's ecological impact, while hiding negative facts, has been taken. According to Seele & Gatti (2017), for greenwashing to occur, the polluting practices of the company must go unnoticed, and the greenwashing message must prevail. Table 1 shows the criteria used to differentiate a text that has a greenwashing frame from one that has not. The coding of texts with greenwashing frames has been checked twice by both authors of this paper to ensure the reliability of the coding (Neuendorf, 2017).

**Table 1: Types of framing with and without greenwashing analysed**

Framing with greenwashing	Framing without greenwashing
Information on company commitments and announcements on climate change, especially in the future, which are not qualified by data on pollution from these companies.	Information on the company's climate change commitments and announcements, qualified by the company's current pollution data or some criticism of the difficulty in achieving these objectives.
Information on non-journalistic events such as greenwashing advertising campaigns of companies.	Critical information on corporate greenwashing advertising campaigns.
Coverage of companies' cultural, artistic or event sponsorship activities of all kinds in order to revitalise their image.	Critical coverage of companies' cultural, artistic or event sponsorship activities of all kinds in order to revitalise their image.
Content offered by the media that is inserted directly from company press releases, or opinion pieces by company executives.	Journalistic critique and contrast of the information provided by the company itself.

Source: Own elaboration.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Press coverage on Endesa and Iberdrola

This section details general aspects of the coverage of Endesa and Iberdrola in the six media analysed, such as the month in which the information was published, authorship, subject matter, journalistic genre and the type of mention made (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: General features of the news coverage analysed (n=174)**

Month	Texts	Proportion	Authorship	Texts	Proportion
December	70	40,23%	Newsroom	79	45,40%
November	69	39,66%	Journalist	71	40,80%
January	35	20,11%	Agency	22	12,64%
	174	100%	Columnist	2	1,15%
Topic	Texts	Proportion	Genre	Texts	Proportion
Environment	66	37,93%	News	152	87,36%
Economy	47	27,01%	Others	8	4,60%
Corruption	46	26,44%	Opinion	6	3,45%
Others	15	8,62%	Report	6	3,45%

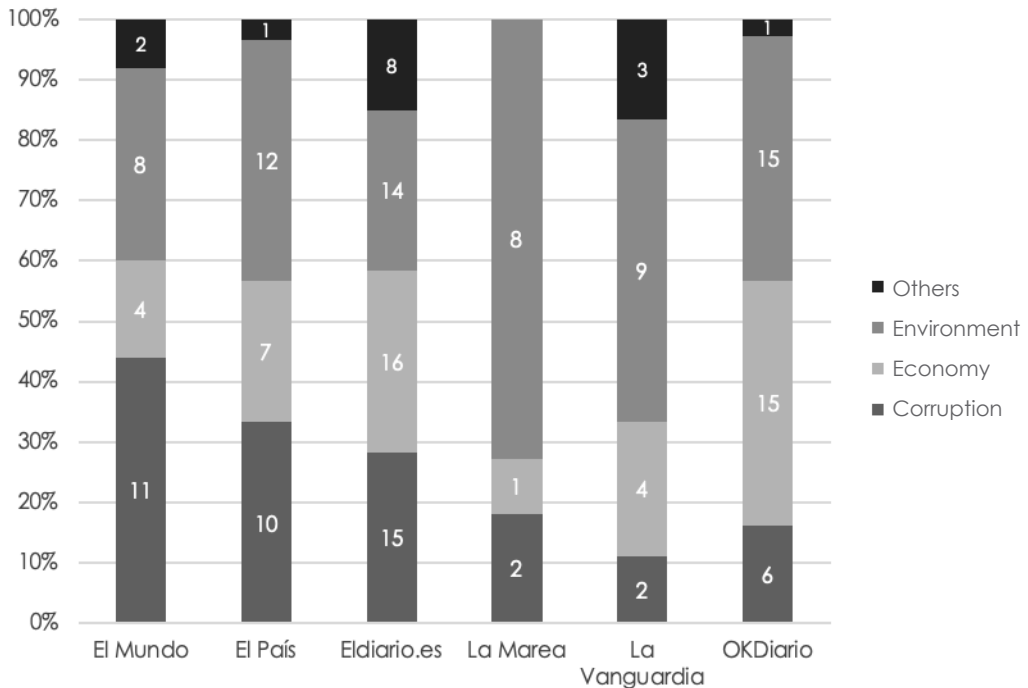
Source: Own elaboration.

In Figure 2 we can see that December, the month in which COP25 was held, was the month in which most pieces were published, 70, with mentions of Endesa and Iberdrola, followed by November, with 69, while only 35 were published in January. As for the authorship of the texts, almost half, 45.40%, are signed by the newsroom, a sum close to the number of pieces signed by a journalist, 40.80%. Only two texts have been signed by an article writer, both published in *El País* and signed by Ignacio S. Galán, chairman of Iberdrola. *El Mundo* does not sign any piece as an agency; *El País* only does so in 3.3% of the cases, and *La Vanguardia* in 33.3% of the texts analysed. In the case of the digital newspapers, text signatures vary significantly from one text to another. The case of *La Marea* is striking, with 81.9% of the texts signed by journalists and only 18.2% by editorial staff, and that of *Okdiario*, where 89% of the texts are signed as newsroom. *Eldiario.es* presents similar results to the traditional press.

In terms of journalistic genres, news is by far the most used in the six newspapers analysed. In the traditional press, in *El Mundo* 96% of the texts are news, compared to 4% of analysis. Meanwhile, 86.7% of the texts in *El País* are news, followed by opinion, with 6.7%, making it the newspaper with the highest number of opinion texts among the traditional press analysed. *La Vanguardia* stands out for being the traditional newspaper with the most reports, 5.6% of the total, compared to 88.9% of news and 5.6% of "Other genres". Of all the newspapers analysed, *La Marea* is the newspaper with the most reports, with 18.2%. This genre appears in 2.7% of *Okdiario*'s texts and in 1.9% of *Eldiario.es*'s texts. The rest of *La Marea*'s information corresponds to news in 45.5% of published pieces, and the category "Other genres" occupies 18.2%. In this last category, most of the texts have been chronicles of the COP25 conference. In *Okdiario*, news accounts for 97.3% of the texts analysed. On the other hand, *Eldiario.es* presents 84.9% of news and is the digital media with more opinion, 7.5% of the total number of texts.

Looking at the subject matter (Figure 3), the majority is dedicated to "Environment", with a total of 66 texts (37.93% of the sample). This is followed by "Economy", with 47 pieces and 27.01% of the texts analysed; "Corruption", with 46 publications and 26.44% and, finally, the "Others" category with just 15 pieces, representing 8.62%.

Figure 3: Distribution of topics in each newspaper



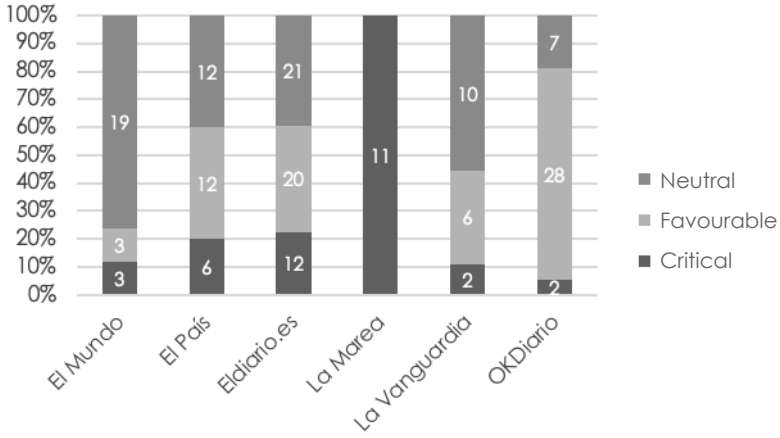
Source: Own elaboration.

With regard to the type of mention (Figure 4), 39.66% of the texts were favourable to Endesa and Iberdrola during the three months analysed, the same percentage as the number of neutral pieces. On the other hand, 20.69% of the news items were critical. By media, *La Marea* was the most critical, with all its news items mentioned in this way, compared to *Okdiario*, the least critical of the six, with only



5.41% of critical pieces and 75.68% favourable. Of the three traditional newspapers, *El País* has had more favourable mentions (40%) than *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*, but it has also been the paper with the most critical texts (20%). *El País* had a neutral approach in 40% of the information, compared to *El Mundo*, with 76%, and *La Vanguardia*, with 56% of neutral texts.

**Figure 4: Distribution of the type of mention in each newspaper**

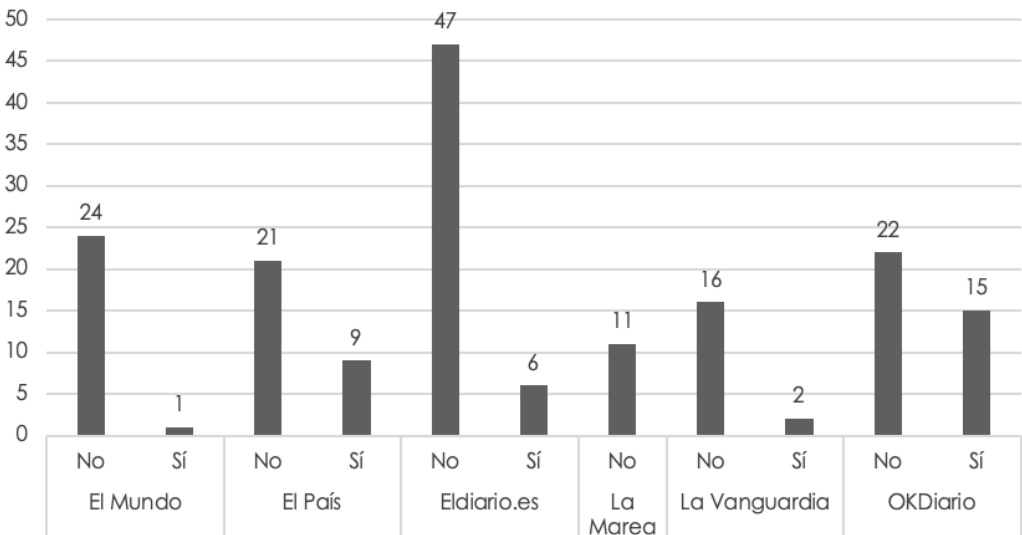


Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, the mentions of each company were counted. Iberdrola accounted for 47.70% of the texts, while 36.21% of the texts mentioned Endesa exclusively. Both companies were mentioned in 16.09% of the texts. It should be noted that, of the 83 texts that referred exclusively to Iberdrola, a significant percentage (48%) dealt with the Villarejo case (most of the publications in November were related to this issue).

In the sample analysed, only 37 out of 174 texts mentioning the companies (21.3%) also mentioned the COP25. The newspaper with the highest proportion of references to the summit was *La Marea*, which included mentions of the event in almost 82% of its texts. The next newspaper with the highest percentage of mentions of the event was *Okdiario*, with almost 38%, followed by *Eldiario.es*, with 15%, and *El País* with 13%. The newspapers that mentioned the summit the least in their texts on Endesa and Iberdrola were *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*, with 4% and 6% of mentions, respectively.

**Figure 5: Number of texts with greenwashing frames in each newspaper (n=174)**

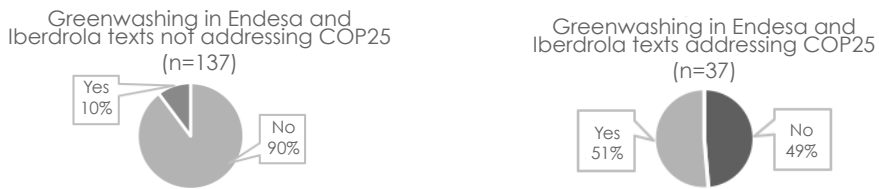


Source: Own elaboration.

If we look at the greenwashing implemented by these companies (Figure 5), almost two out of every ten pieces have carried out this practice in the total sample (n=174, 19% have carried out greenwashing, compared to 81% of pieces without greenwashing). The newspaper that carried out greenwashing in most texts was *Okdiario*, 41%, followed by *El País* (30%), *Eldiario.es* (11%), *La Vanguardia* (11%) and *El Mundo* (4%). For its part, *La Marea* did not carry out greenwashing in any of the eleven texts analysed. The low proportion of texts with greenwashing in *La Vanguardia* and *El Mundo* is due to the fact that these newspapers have devoted more attention to the Villarejo case related to Iberdrola, and less to the environmental aspects of the companies analysed. In *Eldiario.es*, despite the appearance of greenwashing in various texts, the final proportion is low because it publishes a lot about these companies.

Looking more closely at the publications that greenwash the companies sponsoring COP25 (Figure 6), it should be noted that most of the texts do not mention the summit. If we exclusively analyse the texts that deal with companies but not with the summit (n=137), only 10% contain a greenwashing frame. However, this percentage rises significantly to 51% in the texts about Endesa and Iberdrola that do mention COP25 (n=37).

**Figure 6: Proportion of texts with greenwashing framing in texts on COP25**



Source: Own elaboration.

Greenwashing in the texts that mention the climate summit is much more frequent than in the information that does not mention the event. In *El Mundo* there is only one text on the COP25 and it has greenwashing features, while in the rest of its texts there is no greenwashing; in *La Vanguardia* there is no greenwashing in the only piece in which it mentions the COP25, but there is in two texts that are not about the summit, while *La Marea* does not carry out greenwashing in any of the texts collected. In *El País*, 75% of the texts on the summit use greenwashing, compared to 23% of texts with greenwashing but which do not allude to the event. In the case of *Eldiario.es*, greenwashing appears in 62.5% of the pieces on COP25, compared to 2.22% of those that do not refer to the summit. Finally, *Okdiario* uses greenwashing in 71.43% of the texts about the event and in 21.74% of the news items that do not mention it. To illustrate these texts that contain a greenwashing frame, various extracts from the texts can be found below.

The text *Companies call for more partnerships to boost green economy* (*El País*, 2019), published on 28 November, the week before the summit, offers a solutionist perspective on climate change based on trust in technology and presents Iberdrola as a standard-bearer for the environment:

Gonzalo Sáenz de Miera, Director of Climate Change at Iberdrola, recalled that fossil fuels are responsible for 80% of emissions, but that the technological revolution that began a decade ago will make it possible to achieve a hydrocarbon-free economy that will generate great opportunities. "Before, the key was to have oil, now natural resources," he said, and stressed that the change has to come from policies. "We need alliances. Companies cannot do everything," he said.

Another noteworthy text is *Casas (Endesa)*: "We have identified up to 16,000 MW of possible renewable projects in Spain until 2030", published in *Okdiario* (2019) on 3 December, at the beginning of the summit. This news item is found in a section on climate change sponsored by Endesa and, right from the headline, it is possible to glimpse its futuristic character and lack of facts in expressions such as "we have identified", "possible projects" and "until 2030". Moreover, the text arises from the visit of the company's own Director of Institutional Relations and Regulation to his own stand at the summit.

Finally, another text that exemplifies this notion of greenwashing in information is *Teresa Ribera gets to know Endesa's just transition plans at the COP25 stand*, published in *Eldiario.es* (2019) on 5 December. This text was considered to be greenwashing because the fact that the Minister of Ecological Transition visits a company's stand is not newsworthy, it does not meet the news values that traditionally guide journalistic criteria. All the information comes from an Endesa press release which states that the minister has learned about "the company's plans for energy transition". Terms such as "ambitious plan", "boost for renewables" or "commitment to energy transition", among others, are used.

As for the texts that talk about COP25 and do not engage in greenwashing, the critical publications of the newspaper *La Marea* in its *Climática* section stand out. As early as 22 November, the newspaper warned of the situation in headlines such as: *IBEX 35 sponsors this Climate Summit* (Dominguez, 2019). During the summit, while the press that had been sponsored published information that came from the energy companies' own showcases at the event, *La Marea* headlined on 4 December: *COP 25 [Day 3]: The most polluting companies have their stand at COP 25* (Villadiego, 2019). Another striking case among the critical texts is that of *El País*, which, despite having texts with greenwashing frames during the summit and even opinion articles by the president of Iberdrola, on 3 January 2020, a month after COP25, published a text critical of the sponsors of the event. The text, entitled *A green showcase for polluting companies* (Sevillano, 2020), explicitly criticises the greenwashing carried out by the electricity companies. However, it later adds the vision of these companies and emphasizes a particular viewpoint by saying that they are taking steps to become greener. This late, nuanced reaction, outside the special news report on the summit in the face of a "paradox" that "was not lost on anyone who visited the COP", according to the text, exemplifies the reaction of the sponsored media to an event in need of rigorous and critical information.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The findings of this research invite reflection on journalistic business models, with an emphasis on advertising and sponsorship, and the activity of stakeholders seeking to influence climate change discourse, such as energy companies. The research questions posed are answered below.

In answer to the first question, the media coverage of the COP25 corporate sponsors before, during and after the summit is dominated by favourable views. During the World Climate Summit, there was a significant increase in the greenwashing of these companies in the press. Information that did not deal with the summit contained greenwashing in one out of ten pieces, which was not too remarkable since these texts were not so much related to environmental issues and dealt with economic issues or other aspects of the companies. However, half of the texts about Endesa and Iberdrola mentioning COP25 had elements of greenwashing. This presence of greenwashing in the coverage of Endesa and Iberdrola in relation to COP25 represents a missed opportunity to provide the public with a critical reflection on the activity of two of the companies that emit the most GHGs in Spain.

As for the second question, there are differences in the coverage of Endesa and Iberdrola in the newspapers analysed. In *El País* there is a considerable amount of greenwashing, where two opinion pieces signed by Iberdrola's chairman himself stand out. *El Mundo* pays much more attention to events in the Villarejo case related to Iberdrola than to the participation of these companies in COP25, which only has one text and is framed as greenwashing. Something similar occurs in *La Vanguardia*, with only one other text on the summit. In the case of *Okdiario*, there are texts on COP25, and these usually contain greenwashing frames. *Eldiario.es*, on the other hand, has a similar level of criticism to *El País*, above *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* and *Okdiario*. However, there is a remarkable presence of texts with greenwashing frames in *Eldiario.es* in texts that mention COP25 and the companies analysed, although at a lower level than in *El País* and *Okdiario*. Finally, *La Marea* stands out for being the only media whose references to Endesa and Iberdrola were critical in all the texts published during the three months analysed, and which also avoided greenwashing in all the published pieces.

All the newspapers analysed, except *La Marea*, have received sponsorship from Endesa and Iberdrola, ranging from news bulletins to specific texts, special coverage, front pages of printed newspapers or entire sections in digital newspapers. The results of this study confirm a trend towards hybridisation between news and advertising genres (Labio, 2006). The sponsorship of sections, coverage and bulletins represents this lack of clarity between what is information and what is advertising. A proposal for improvement would be that of the observatory ReCambia (2019) more visibly labelling which pieces of media are paid for. In this sense, alerting the audience to the conflict of interest between the sponsor and the spaces it pays for, inoculating the audience against the bad practices of interest groups, would make information consumption more critical and favourable to the climate consensus (van der Linden et al., 2017). Going further, it would be desirable for the media to avoid sponsorship of entire sections, especially on such sensitive topics as climate change.

The newspapers analysed are also characterised by journalistic genres in which information with little depth and contextualisation predominates. Only *La Marea* stands out, which is by far the newspaper with the highest number of reports in its total number of texts. It has a specialised section on climate change and in most of the texts it has recalled that these companies are the ones that emit the most GHGs. Nogales-Bocio (2020) points to the emergence of initiatives that are committed to slow journalism, which uses genres such as reportage, where *La Marea* could fit in. Adopting slow journalism is essential for reporting on the climate crisis, as this trend consists of using "a theoretical scaffolding for journalism that warns of the unsustainability of dizzying technological rhythms and advocates ideals of calm, critical and quality information" (Nogales-Bocio, 2020, p.86).

Regarding the third and last question, this study shows how, of the six newspapers analysed, the five that received sponsorship presented elements of greenwashing in information about the COP25 sponsors. Only *La Marea*, which has a business model whose income comes mostly from subscriptions (Canela, 2019) and which has a strict advertising code of ethics, has been the newspaper that has maintained an eminently critical line with the COP25 sponsors. Although *Eldiario.es* also has a funding model that gives importance to subscribers funding, advertising has a significant weight in it (Canela, 2019) and has had numerous sponsorships during COP25. The rest of the media have a traditional funding model (Reig, 2011).

Advertising acts as a conditioning factor in news coverage (Reig, 2015). COP25 has gone a step further, since, in addition to the existence of traditional advertising insertions, news sponsorships of sections and special coverage have stood out. According to Serrano (2019), "the advertising model of our media will have ensured that the celebration of a World Summit on Climate Change will become the moment in which we read more advertising for polluting companies in the press". Sponsorships during COP25 are in line with the research of Brulle *et al.* (2020), which indicates a greater investment in advertising by polluting companies at times when global warming appears in the political or media debate. The findings of this paper constitute a case study of how the public relations strategies of interest groups in polluting sectors have an impact on news coverage, in line with Almiron & Xifra (2020). This correlation is in line with Mancinas-Chávez (2013) and invites reflection on the need to rethink the business models of journalism today, which are hyper-concentrated, financialised and dependent on advertising revenue (Almiron 2010; Reig 2015; Reig and Labio 2017).

Media business formulas weaken the journalistic profession, which is vulnerable to large power structures and discursive coalitions such as the climate counter-movement described by Brulle (2019; 2020). This research fills a knowledge gap on the relationship between media sponsorship and greenwashing. A limitation of this research is that it addresses the analysis of six newspapers, so more research along these lines is needed, with other case studies or large-scale analyses that expand these findings to other media, issues, and media systems. This paper analyses the advertising activity of energy companies. Future research could be aimed at assessing the media impact of other types of interest groups such as think tanks or lobbies from other polluting sectors.

## 6. Specific contribution of each author

Contributions	Name and surname
Conception and design of the work	Jose A. Moreno
Documentary search	Jose A. Moreno & Noelia Ruiz-Alba
Data collection	Jose A. Moreno & Noelia Ruiz-Alba
Critical data analysis and interpretation	Jose A. Moreno & Noelia Ruiz-Alba
Version review and approval	Jose A. Moreno & Noelia Ruiz-Alba

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