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## **News coverage and treatment on television media during the Salafist jihadist attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils in 2017. A case of study: Antena 3 and Telecinco**

### **La cobertura y el tratamiento informativo en las cadenas de televisión durante los atentados salafistas yihadistas de Barcelona y Cambrils de 2017. Un caso de estudio: Antena 3 y Telecinco**

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#### **Abstract**

Terrorism is one of the great global threats to peace and security. In this regard, news coverage of terrorist attacks is a notorious challenge for the media. Based on what has been said, this article analyzes the coverage and informative treatment that the television networks Antena 3 and Telecinco carried out on the jihadist attacks in Barcelona in 2017. The methodology has been qualitative and a content analysis sheet has been designed that allows quantifying associated values to professional ethics. As main conclusions, it can be advanced that both television channels incurred errors and attitudes contrary to the parameters of professional ethics.

#### **Keywords**

mass media; ethics; television channels; news coverage; jihadist attacks

#### **Resumen**

*El terrorismo es una de las grandes amenazas mundiales que existen para la paz y la seguridad. Al respecto, la cobertura informativa de atentados terroristas supone para los medios de comunicación un desafío notorio. Sobre lo dicho, este artículo analiza la cobertura y el tratamiento informativo que las cadenas de televisión Antena 3 y Telecinco realizaron sobre los atentados yihadistas de Barcelona en 2017. La metodología ha sido cualitativa y diseñándose una ficha de análisis de contenido que permita cuantificar valores asociados a la ética profesional. Como principales conclusiones puede avanzarse que ambas cadenas de televisión incurrieron en errores y actitudes contrarias a los parámetros de la deontología profesional.*

#### **Palabras clave**

*Medios de comunicación; ética; cadenas de televisión; cobertura informativa; atentados yihadistas*

## 1. Introduction

The present research analyzes the coverage and informative treatment carried out by the media during the 2017 attacks in Catalonia. For this purpose, the television channels Antena 3 and Telecinco have been taken as case studies. The subject matter has a key relevance. It is necessary to remember that during the 1980s and 1990s our country experienced a wave of multiple attacks organized by the armed gang ETA.

However, it was not until the beginning of the 21st century that Spain suffered one of the bloodiest episodes of the black chronicle. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004, four trains of the Madrid commuter train network exploded almost simultaneously, leaving behind more than 2,000 injured people and a total of 193 dead. The first hypotheses handled by the media mixed information and rumors in equal parts in search of a perpetrator or perpetrators of the massacre. All eyes were on ETA. However, in a brief communiqué issued in *Gara* newspaper, the Basque band denied any involvement in what happened.

Meanwhile, the media published news based on multiple incriminating approaches. Some newspapers such as *El Mundo* or *ABC* repeated the official thesis maintained by the executive of José María Aznar, Popular Party leader and president of the Government, which questioned the null involvement of ETA. Others such as *El País* and *La Vanguardia* advanced an investigation linking the attacks with a possible jihadist cell. Hours later, and by means of a video recorded with rudimentary equipment, Al Qaeda and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group claimed the material authorship of Madrid bombings.

Fourteen years later, Catalonia became a terrorist scenario. After a succession of different assaults initiated at 11.15 pm on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Tarragona, continued at 16.50 pm in the city of Barcelona and extended until 1.15 am on August 17<sup>th</sup> in Cambrils, Salafist jihadist terrorism acquired the dimension of news for more than ten days. Several media went to the scene of the events as it had already happened on 11-M.

The coverage of news related to tragedies of this nature is a challenge for information professionals. For this reason, it has been considered relevant to analyze the information treatment in an event that shook the country and revived the dark shadow of Salafist Jihadist terrorism in Spain.

The justification for this work is based on the interest that the attack generated in the media agenda. In addition to this, Elcano Real Institute Barometer, conducted in January 2018, reflected a change in the citizen opinion about Moroccans after Barcelona and Cambrils events increasing distrust towards them.

On the one hand, the theoretical contributions made by Al Najjar and Arévalo (2019), scrutinizing the news coverage of the 2017 Barcelona and Cambrils attacks by analyzing the digital newspaper *Eldiario.es*, have been taken into consideration for this paper. Carpio (2018) has carried out an empirical analysis from the security sciences on the attacks in Catalonia, without forgetting the report designed by the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (2018) in relation to the informative treatment of the attacks in Catalonia.

On the other hand, Díaz-Campo, Chaparro-Domínguez and Rodríguez-Martínez (2018) have described the informative treatment that *El periódico*, *El País* and *The Guardian* papers offered on the aforementioned attacks. Other research reviewed have been the works of López-Merí, Rodríguez-Martínez and Ramón Vegas (2020) who address journalistic ethics and the use of images in the attacks through a comparative analysis of 14 national and international digital media, without forgetting Trujillo and Salinas (2019) who scrutinize the media coverage carried out by *Eldiario.es* on the terrorist attacks under study. All the references mentioned have been of crucial importance to effectively analyze and develop the research.

Once contextualized the present object of study, it is relevant to offer a definition of the concept of terrorism. Castro (2013) argues that terrorism is a social phenomenon of complex definition. In this regard, the author believes that media use the term terrorism inappropriately because, among other reasons, there is no clear consensus among political scientists, sociologists, journalists and philosophers on this concept's meaning.

Bueno (2009) states that the term *terrorism* appeared in history during the French Revolution with the emergence of the Public Health Committee led by Robespierre and Saint Just, between 1791 and 1794. The concept was included for the first time in a scientific work in 1930. Horgan (2006) expands on Bueno's (2009) definition and describes that any existing debate on terrorism generates controversy stating that the only clear fact about terrorism is that it symbolizes pain, frustration and suffering for no reason.

In this regard, Spain's recent history could not be understood without terrorist attacks: first with the armed group ETA and, subsequently, with Salafist jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda and Daesh. In this regard, Rodríguez and Odriazola (2012) point out that terrorist criminal organizations use extreme violence and promote generalized alert among the population.

There are an infinite number of variables determining the convergence of multiple terrorist manifestations. Elorza (2020) adds that the socio-historical context and the doctrinal foundations of the organizations are two of the most evident features of terrorist groups. In view of the above, there may be differences between the manifestations of terrorism if we bear in mind the way of acting of extinct gangs such as IRA or ETA versus still active groups in certain areas of the globe such as Boko Haram, the Al-Aqsa Foundation or Al Qaeda, among others.

Aulestia (2005) says that the ideological substratum, the geographical area where these organizations act, plus the number of victims they cause are some of the identity signs all terrorist organizations share. Frieyro (2019) states that, in recent years, Salafist Jihadist terrorism is one of the great challenges to solve in democratic societies. The aforementioned author determines that the alliances made between Al Qeda and Daesh in areas such as the Sahel and the Middle East, the violent methods employed by both organizations, new followers' recruitment, in addition to Islamic radicalization, only generate an additional problem: the consecutive increase of refugees fleeing from areas dominated by terrorists.

In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirms that Salafist Jihadist terrorism threatens the national security of Spaniards and Europeans' national security. This organism undoubtedly states that, although Al Qaeda's hard core weakening has occurred after Osama Bin Laden's death and Daesh has lost key positions in territories of great political symbolism for Islamist radicals such as Syria or Iraq, it cannot and should not be considered that jihadist terrorism has ended, quite the contrary.

The world population is currently witnessing a new scenario characterized by a proliferation and subsequent extension of various international jihadist groups that, to varying degrees and more or less led by identified leaders, symbolize a renewed spirit of Al Qaeda and Daesh. In line with this, Carpio (2018) endorses that most of the Salafist jihadist attacks have the potential objective of attacking countries with a Muslim population majority. However, these terrorist organizations' strategy also includes the export and subsequent replication of violent attacks in Europe, being these more or less intensified according to the loss of territories. A specific example was the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils during August 2017 that took the lives of 10 people leaving behind more than 140 injured.

Toledano and Ardèvol-Abreu (2013) do not hesitate to consider that extreme news coverage related to the attacks generate episodes of confusion and professional malpractice among the media. Authors state that the information professional barely has a few hours to confirm the first data before publishing them, working in a situation when they must combine the freedom of expression with the citizens' freedom of information rights. On-site journalists must not only cover the information following ethical and deontological principles established by organizations such as the Federation of Spanish Journalists Associations (FAPE, hereinafter), but also, each media has an informative treatment code that workers must comply with.

Scott (1921) said that journalists should act on the basis that events should be more important than opinions. Therefore, information professionals should refrain from making value judgments, rumors and other types of considerations that could confuse the audience or generate greater alarm than that caused by the facts already described. Therefore, it is necessary for the media to act in a critical and conscious manner even in a convulsive context such as a terrorist attack.

### **1.1. Factors that turn an attack into a news item.**

Antona (1991) has investigated the possible reasons why this type of event arouses interest among media and audiences. The author establishes a series of factors that transform an event into a media event, as follows:

- Current events. They are part of the news as they are events that have just taken place. The immediacy of what happened and its continuation in time are crucial for the news broadcast.
- Proximity and closeness. The place where the tragic event takes place will determine the media interest. It is not only geographical, but also emotional and psychological proximity.
- Notoriety and public transcendence. Clearly recognizable people and environments by the public and the media are of increasing interest to the media.
- Exceptionality. The extraordinary and infrequent is likely to become news, especially if the news involves a tragedy whose center of action takes place in an exotic or distant country.
- Conflict and confrontation. The disagreements and possible frictions between groups serve to feed a communicative situation susceptible of becoming a news broadcast.

- Suspense and mystery. Suspense enhances the natural attraction that a news item already has as it is a current event, making it stay with audiences for a longer time period.
- Human interest. Events with an emotional consequence on the audience (either because they stimulate the feeling of rage or their extraordinary nature) are broadcast by the media.

Rodríguez and Odriozola (2012) point out that the media are not facilitating agents of the work carried out by health workers, but hinder the emergency and rescue teams' good work due to their attempt to capture and recount all the event's details during a tragedy. For this reason, authorities on the scene try to keep the media away from the center of the information.

Journalists are desperately seeking information, and sometimes there are survivors, victims' relatives or witnesses to the events whose testimonies are very valuable. This initial news coverage is not usually characterized by compliance with the precepts that the deontological ethics of information professionals presuppose. According to the aforementioned authors, survivors must face the drama of having experienced an attack in first person by sharing their pain with the media. Camps (2017) reminds that the media should not publish rumors or increase the already existing tension in a tragic event. Faced with complicated situations, information professionals must comply with certain competencies such as the following.

- Calming the victims and their families. The dissemination of the survivors' names, with their express consent, helps direct relatives to recover their peace of mind after what has happened, promoting a direct information channel.
- Guiding the victims and their environment. It is key to obtain truthful and reliable information by disseminating established protocols that serve as a means of collaboration with society and the State.
- To distribute the aid offered in solidarity among society. Journalists can disseminate information to subjects requiring specific services such as assistance, housing and food, as well as putting victims in contact with other citizens willing to listen to survivors.
- Prevent increased confusion. The confusion inherent to an incident such as an attack, a catastrophe or a tragedy cannot tarnish the good work of the journalist who must show temperance, tranquility and security in the information broadcasting.

## 1.2. An approach to the International Salafist and Jihadist Terrorism Phenomenon

Determining the exact causes that have given rise to the birth of religious fundamentalisms linked to Islam has been one of the objects of study most addressed by different sociologists, historians and political scientists in recent times. In this regard, Estarellas y López points out that:

it is important to know diverse geographical and temporal data, as well as historical data, about when and where the radical Wahhabi and Salafi doctrines appeared in order to treat, study, evaluate, analyze and identify any type of Islamist radicalism and jihad, (...), to know what type of threats and radical Islamist elements we could be facing (...) and to understand the different meanings that the term jihad represents in Muslim societies (2012:41).

Pérez-Idiart (1993) complements the point of view addressed by Estarellas and López (2012) by adding that the conflict of civilizations is key to understanding the birth of jihadist Salafism. In this regard, the author recalls that the modernizations undertaken in the Middle East in the economic-social sphere have eroded local identities, in addition to promoting a progressive weakening of the concept of the nation-state. In this continued loss of the nation-state, religion has found a prone scenario to settle in fundamentalist movements.

On the one hand, Talens (2012) points out the jihadist inspiration approach to terrorism, highlighting the importance of differentiating political Islam from jihadism as an inspiration cause for organizations using violence in the name of God. The aforementioned author recalls that Islam has two ramifications. On the one hand, the Sunni, based on the reading and interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna, i.e. the tradition whereby the caliph is the prophet's direct successor. On the other hand, the Shia, motivated by the direct relationship with the prophet, thus configuring it. In addition, the sunna or tradition has four ideological-legal currents from which two radical interpretations are born: Wahhabism and Salafism. Both sharing a strict application of the Koran.

On the other hand, the jihadist Salafist terrorism's development is not a recent phenomenon. Authors such as Frieyro (2019) ratify that, from the 1970s on, and after the failure of the socialist movements carried out in the Middle East by different groups of progressive character, the most radical interpretations of

Islam returned stronger than ever. For this author, the Muslim Brotherhood were the first to legitimize violence as a means to achieve political ends in Egypt.

There was an event in the 1970s that marked a turning point. Quesada (2021) notes that in 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan supporting the government led by the mujahideen (fighters for Allah's faith). After nine years of fighting between Afghans and Russians, the USSR not only lost this conflict, leading to the subsequent dismemberment of the great communist-Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, but also facilitated the rise to power of the Taliban and the establishment of a new international political order after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Related to this, the birth of Al Qaeda occurred in 1979, when Osama Bin Laden, a young Saudi insurgent, created a haven for Arab fighters to rest after clashes with Soviet troops. Subsequently, Al Qaeda, whose meaning in Arabic is "the base", ceased to be a simple meeting point for Islam followers and became an armed group. The Russian intervention in Afghanistan determined the need to expand the radical precepts of Al Qaeda internationally, initiating an anti-Western struggle manifested through various attacks such as the attack on the Twin Towers on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

Borrego (2012) highlights that it is important to mention the new generation of jihadists emerging after 9/11 in the analysis of Salafist jihadist terrorism. This batch of young rebels has sown panic among Western societies. The recent formations have very specific identity codes. Firstly, they are small groups responding to the system model. Secondly, these groups are resisting the West. Thirdly, they need to carry out individual acts of terrorism with the presence of lone wolves.

Returning to 9/11, this attack not only inaugurated a new era in terms of Salafist Jihadist terrorism, but also turned Islam into a problem of international dimensions. After the severe impact of 9/11, Salafist groups replicated other attacks through independent cells. Although al-Qaeda tried to readapt its modus operandi in the face of international pressure from Western societies, new groups emerged without a defined organizational structure, without a leader to follow, but with a well-recognized purpose: the perpetration of larger-scale attacks. This strategy has been adapted by formations such as Daesh.

Frieyro (2019) maintains that Saddam Hussein's defeat and the subsequent infighting in Iraq were essential to understand the birth and subsequent rise of Daesh. In 2014, Al Baghdadi, leader of the jihadist group Islamic State (ISIS), proclaimed himself caliph of all Muslims in Mosul (Iraq) creating the well-known Islamic Caliphate established in Syria and Iraq. In only three years, Daesh displaced Al Qaeda in the jihad leadership at a global level. ISIS lost part of its possessions in the Middle East due to a military offensive led by Sunni, Kurdish and Russian troops. However, although Daesh international relevance has been decreasing, Europe has been one of the most important terrorist targets for Islamic fundamentalists since 1990. In this respect, Díez

After 9/11, the number of terrorist actions coordinated, or at least instigated, by al-Qaeda has multiplied worldwide. The attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 dramatically reflected the jihadism expansion in Europe, as did the numerous arrests of individuals linked to global terrorist groups, or the dismantling of international jihadist networks in countries such as Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany or Spain (2021: 9).

In addition to the various attacks, it would be worth highlighting the recruiting action that Salafist Jihadist terrorist groups have carried out in the West and in Middle Eastern countries. On the one hand, the attacks in Nice, Berlin, Paris or Barcelona executed in 2015 and 2017 respectively, only show an increasingly evident presence of Salafist jihadist groups in the democratic societies of Europe.

On the other hand, for authors such as Nesser (2008), Salafist Jihadist terrorism has gone through different stages in its spread throughout Europe, and in particular, in Spain. The establishment phase took place between 1980 and 1995. This first time unit includes the arrival in Spain of war veterans living peacefully together. In the second phase, between 1995 and 2001, Osama Bin Laden addresses a message to all Muslims in the world with the creation of the World Islamic Front.

In the third phase, between 2001 and 2005, terrorist attacks of global proportions took place, such as the 11-M attacks in Madrid. Finally, between 2005 and 2015, Al Qaeda's consolidation stage in Spain and Europe was generated under the pretext of creating a new order based on the imposition of Islam.

It is necessary to analyze how the informative coverage has been by audiovisual media in what has to do with the dissemination of Salafist jihadist terrorist attacks. Riera (2018) considers that the 9/11 attacks set a precedent in the live broadcasting of tragedies. George Bush's attempt to control information meant a new understanding of information accountability. Four years later, the 2005 London bombings were broadcast with extreme caution by television channels such as the BBC. The absence of images of the injured and the audiovisual treatment of the events differed from the sensationalist approach of the New York attacks.

Castro (2013) highlights that media use imprecise and inaccurate language in the course of a jihadist attack, confusing concepts such as Islam, Islamism, Muslim, jihad and jihadism. Misunderstanding generates a distortion of information among audiences.

Montero and Ferré-Pavía (2017) describe that television channels opt for the spectacularization of the facts with a deployment of technical resources much higher than usual. Faced with this situation, live connections lose the journalistic essence of rigor, acquiring a tabloid approach. The authors illustrate this reality with Telecinco news coverage during Charlie Hebdo attack. The network orchestrated a television spectacle instead of being governed by the veracity of the facts.

### 1.3. Chronology of the attacks in Catalonia

It has been considered appropriate to recreate a chronology of the attacks in Catalonia to understand the media relevance of this event. On the night of August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017 an explosion ripped apart a chalet located in a housing development in Alcanar (Tarragona) causing the death of two men and one injured. The explosion was caused by the manipulation of different compounds used in the manufacture of bombs. The three men were part of a jihadist cell formed by other terrorists who managed to survive. The following day, Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalonian police) found several cars and motorcycles around the accident site, as well as different identification documents belonging to several men of Moroccan nationality.

At 3 p.m. on August 17<sup>th</sup>, the Mossos called Younes Abouyaaqoub, one of the North Africans living in Alcanar and whose residence card had been found during the preliminary investigation carried out by the Catalan police. At the time, Abouyaaqoub was driving a van on the Barcelona ring road southbound from Tarragona. Minutes after the call ended, Younes and other terrorists traveling with him assumed that police had found suspicious remains linking the vehicle's driver to the Alcanar explosion.

At 4:50 p.m., the van driven by Younes burst into Las Ramblas area of Barcelona at high speed, zigzagging along a stretch from Plaza Catalunya to La Boqueria market. The hit-and-run left behind more than 130 injured, both nationals and internationals, in addition to 14 fatalities.

Taking advantage of the panic and the confusion created, Younes got out of the van and headed towards Avinguda Diagonal. Once there, the terrorist slit the throat of a man who was driving a vehicle, keeping the body in the trunk and fleeing. In the same Diagonal avenue, Abouyaaqoub met the special operation organized by the Mossos d' Esquadra that he managed to dodge. The terrorist abandoned his car in Sant Just Desvern and his trail was lost until August 21<sup>st</sup>.

At 01.15 a.m. on August 18<sup>th</sup>, five terrorists were driving a vehicle along Cambrils promenade and ran into a police checkpoint. The terrorists crashed the car into a Mossos' car, but not before driving in a zigzag direction to run over as many pedestrians as possible. As a result of the impact between the two vehicles, the five terrorists left the car in different directions showing the guns they were carrying.

The five occupants were killed due to the quick action of the State Security Forces. Days after the disappearance of Younes Abouyaaqoub, the Mossos received unofficial information from some inhabitants of Subirats (a town located in upper Penedès) alerting of the presence of a man of Maghrebi appearance. It was Younes Abouyaaqoub. The police intercepted the terrorist, but before shooting him down, Younes showed an explosives belt and shouted in favor of the jihadist Salafist cause (Allah is great), dying as a martyr.

Barcelona and Cambrils attacks were claimed by Daesh through the news broadcasting in media used by the Islamic Caliphate. The terrorists intended to attack places of great symbolism in Barcelona such as the Sagrada Família Cathedral, Camp Nou or Montjuïc Olympic Stadium, among other places. However, rapid police action was decisive in preventing an attack of magnitude comparable to that of 11-M.

## 2. Objectives

The objective of this research is to deepen into the journalistic coverage and information treatment that Antena 3 and Telecinco television channels, carried out during the Salafist jihadist attacks in Catalonia that occurred in August 2017. On this fundamental objective of the present work, different questions have been formulated, such as the following.

Q1 Was the information treatment carried out by the media during the news coverage of the 2017 Barcelona and Cambrils attacks adequate?

Q2 Did the media comply with the precepts included in the deontological codes of the journalistic profession during the retransmission of news and contents linked to the attacks or, on the contrary, were some principles violated?

Q3. Did the television channels increase the duration of current affairs programs when covering tragic events, repeating news data already broadcast in order to generate a strategy of economic profitability by taking advantage of the audience's need to know?

### 3. Methodology

The research methodology is qualitative. For this purpose, the content analysis technique has been chosen through the design of a sheet with items or variables to describe the coverage and subsequent information treatment on this event by the television channels under study. The Ethical and Deontological Recommendations for the journalistic and media treatment of tragedies and catastrophes, published by the FAPE's Commission of Arbitration, Complaints and Deontology, have been taken into consideration in the preparation of the file. The study sheet applied in this work is attached below.

**Table 1. Content Analysis Sheet used in Research**

	Antena3	Telecinco
The media broadcasts information in an objective manner.		
A distinction is made between information and opinion in the media.		
The information sources shown are contrasted.		
Broadcast testimonies are contrasted.		
Broadcasting of images that hurt the viewer's sensibility is avoided.		
Language used in the informative transmission is adequate.		
The broadcasting of victims or protagonists' private data is avoided.		
Media does not extend broadcasts longer than necessary.		
The media broadcasts experts' recommendations.		
The dissemination of false or inadequately documented news is avoided.		

*Source: Own elaboration based on data provided by FAPE.*

In relation to the media chosen, the only and main selection requirement was the audience. For this purpose, different documentary supports from reports prepared by expert companies and institutions in the field have been contrasted. In this regard, television was chosen because it is the platform that generates the greatest impact on society. According to data provided by the General Media Study1 (EGM, hereinafter), in the second wave of 2017, television achieved 85.2% penetration, followed by radio gathering 54.5%, during the time when the attacks in Catalonia took place.

Once the choice of television as the media under study has been justified, it is necessary to explain the reason why Antena 3 and Telecinco channels were selected. According to the audience study conducted by Barlovento Comunicación2 (2017), Antena 3 and Telecinco were the two most watched television channels in August, the month when the terrorist acts in Cambrils and Barcelona occurred. On the aforementioned, Antena 3 achieved an 11.5% share, while Telecinco reaped a 12.5% screen share. Both TV channels accounted for 24% in total of the monthly audience.

Specifically, the morning magazines *Espejo Público de Verano (Summer Public Mirror)*, broadcast on Antena 3, and *El programa del verano (Summer Program)* (also known as *El programa de AR (AR's programe)* because it is presented by journalist Ana Rosa Quintana), broadcast on Telecinco, were chosen. According to the monthly audience report prepared by Fórmula TV3, both TV programs were the most watched during August 2017 achieving a 14.5% and 16.1% screen share respectively.

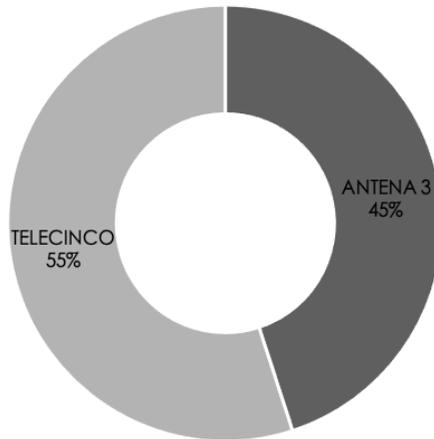
As for the temporal sample, the television programs contents broadcast have been analyzed from August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the date when the media addressed in this research published the news of the attack, until August 28<sup>th</sup>, the day when the news ceased in the analyzed programs. Therefore, the sample temporality is justified by the criteria of newsworthiness. In this regard, all the programs' editions described above have been viewed, for a total of 100 recorded hours. Similarly, it is appropriate to describe that the coding of the data obtained in the research has been carried out in a unitary way, one of the authors being responsible for documentary analysis.

#### 4. Results

Following our research methodology application, conclusive data have been obtained that require analysis. In this regard, the two programs under study, *Espejo Público de Verano*, broadcast on Antena 3, and *El programa de verano*, broadcast on Telecinco, devoted full days to the analysis of the political, economic and social consequences of the attacks in the middle of the summer season for Catalonia. Susanna Grisso, presenter of *Espejo Público* and Ana Rosa Quintana, head of *El programa de AR*, interrupted their summer vacations to make special programs in the scene of events.

-Application of the content variables sheet in *Espejo Público de Verano* and *El programa del verano*, in *Antena 3* and *Telecinco*, respectively.

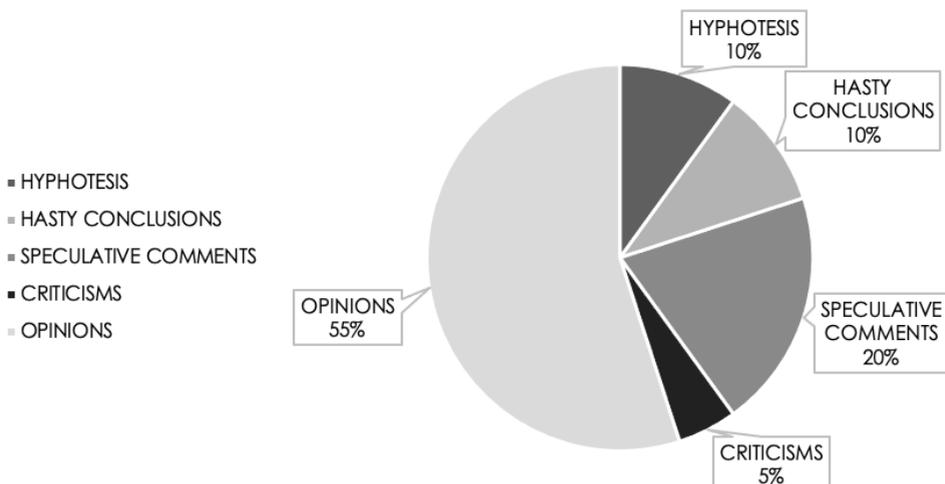
**Graph 1: The media conveys information objectively**



Source: prepared by authors

According to FAPE's recommendations on the tragic events coverage, media should report in a cautious manner, avoiding the proliferation of rumors, theories or alleged unverified information. In this regard, during the programs analyzed, both television channels could be seen failing to comply with this FAPE precept, broadcasting information closer to rumorology than to documentary confirmation. Information was not very rigorous and objective in specifically 55% of the contexts analyzed in *El programa del Verano*, compared to 45% of *Espejo Público de Verano*'s contents.

**Graph 1.1.: Typology of non-rigorous content**



Source: prepared by authors

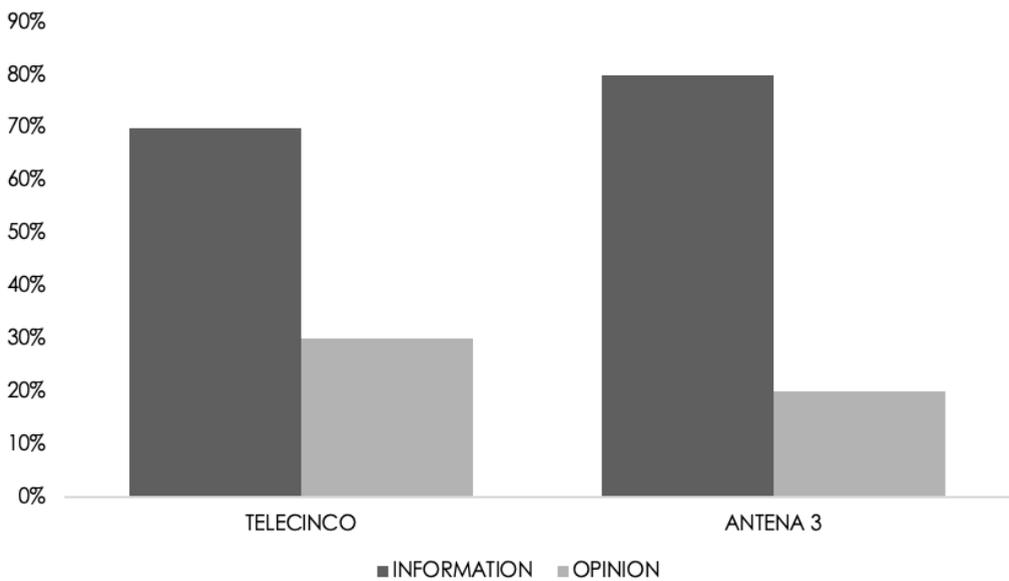
This graph provides information related to graph 1 on the programs under study' content, which was not very objective. In this regard, 55% of the times, opinions were broadcast without any basis in factual data. Some examples of this type of content were sentences such as "There are times when it does not pay to stop these barbarities" (*El programa de verano*), "There should be more institutional support in all tributes" (*Espejo Público de Verano*), "They could have wanted to give us a scare" (*Espejo Público de Verano*) and "They wanted to implant hatred in society" (*El programa de verano*).

This percentage was followed by speculative comments, which in 20% of the occasions were broadcast through statements such as "There was a US alert about a possible attack in Barcelona" (*Espejo Público de Verano*) or "Information is trickling in, but we must keep on informing to find out what has happened" (*El programa de verano*).

Other contents are similarly classified as starting hypotheses and hasty conclusions, with 10% and 10% respectively. Some specific examples of hypotheses were expressions such as "It may be that they are related to the 11M attacks" (*Espejo Público de Verano*), "What if we had been warned and we ignored it?" (*El programa de AR*). Among the examples of hasty conclusions, the following stand out: "Now it has happened in Spain, but maybe these attacks are being planned in other European cities" (*El programa de verano*) and "Politics is being made with the attacks" (*Espejo Público de Verano*).

Finally, there is open criticism of both the national government and the Generalitat (Catalonian government) for the attacks' management in 5% of times, with statements such as: "The government should have been suspicious of these individuals' movements" (*El programa de verano*); "If things had been done right, the subsequent attack in Cambrils could have been stopped" (*Espejo Público de Verano*); "We'll see if pain is not used to make politics" (*Espejo Público de Verano*); "The Generalitat should have applied monitoring and integration protocols on these Maghrebi origin immigrants" (*El programa de verano*).

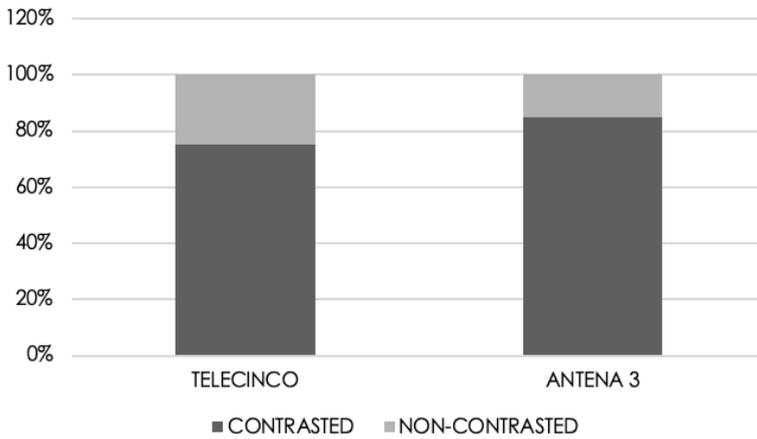
**Graph 2: Differences between information and opinion showed in analyzed media**



Source: prepared by authors

FAPE stresses the importance of separating objective information from opinion. In this regard, both programs prioritized information over opinion in days full of current affairs and news. However, the two television channels, through the contents analyzed, included opinionated messages expressed by presenters and contributors, mixing opinion with information from the latest news reported in the program without clearly distinguishing between one type of content and the other.

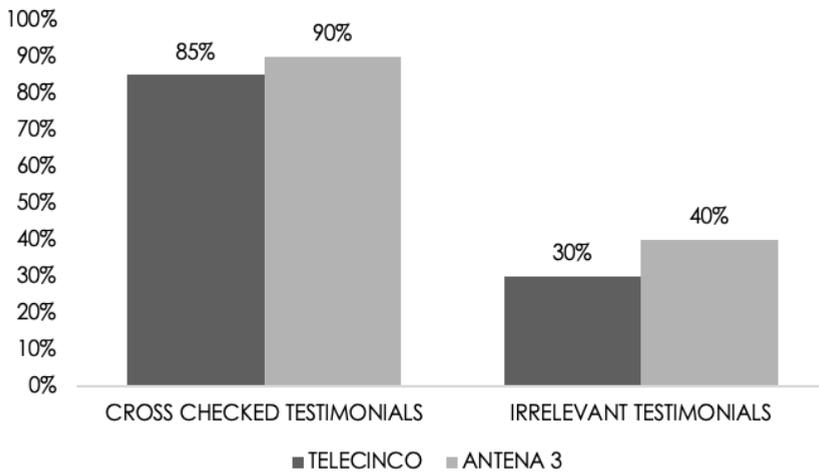
**Graph 3: Broadcast from contrast and non-contrast sources of information**



Source: Prepared by authors

The next item analyzed deals with the sources of information' verification and contrast. According to the provisions, both television channels made an adequate use of the information in terms of documentary contrast, using official sources from competent authorities. Likewise, programs connected live with the press conferences organized by the President of the Government, Mariano Rajoy, or the Major of the Mossos d'Esquadra, Josep Luis Trapero, in order to provide accurate information.

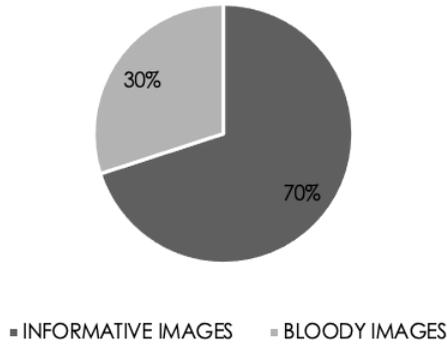
**Graph 4: Broadcast of relevant and irrelevant information**



Source: Prepared by authors

As for the inclusion of data from secondary information sources, it can be seen how the two television channels offered 85% of the broadcasts with information based on valuable testimonies, in the case of Telecinco, and 90% in the case of Antena 3. Experts on Salafist and Jihadist terrorism and witnesses of the attacks were interviewed. However, other included contents lacked informative relevance as they did not offer data linked to the police investigation or to the victims of the attacks. For example, some testimonies full of heroism were broadcasted on camera, such as that of a manager running a cafeteria which served as a hiding place for different passers-by during Las Ramblas collision.

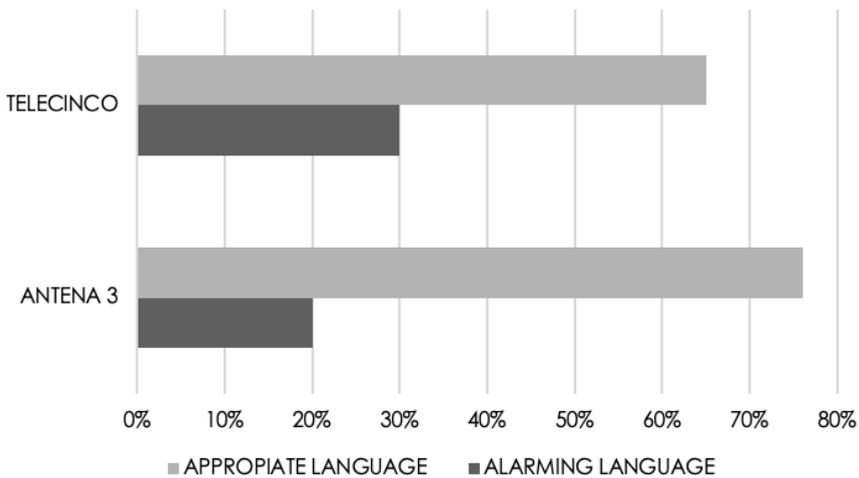
**Graph 5: Broadcast of informative and non-informative bloody image**



Source: Prepared by authors

FAPE established precepts determine that media must avoid the repeated or occasional broadcasting of images that are cruel or violent for the viewers. However, both Antena 3 and Telecinco exceeded FAPE's recommendations by showing images of anonymous citizens showing grief, sadness, anger and frustration at the loss of their loved ones. Images were also very disrespectfully broadcast, both in queues and in video-walls, violating the right to honor, privacy and self-image of both victims and their relatives.

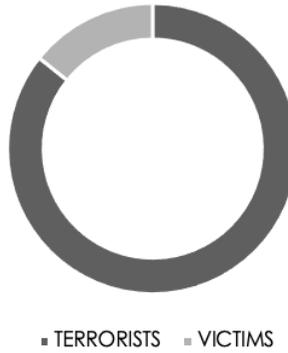
**Graph 6: Typology of language used in the media**



Source: Prepared by authors

Both Antena 3 and Telecinco provided adequate news coverage from the use of language standpoint, avoiding as far as possible sensationalist messages and content, prioritizing informative language, based on the inclusion of facts and figures, impartial and objective information, in 75% of the content, in the case of Antena 3, and in 65% in the case of Telecinco. However, both television channels also gave credibility to certain comments, rumors and other loose content through the inclusion of inappropriate and tabloid discourse. They included biased statements identifying Islam as an extreme religion, preached by terrorists who kill in the name of Allah, as well as reinforcing stereotypes linked to immigrants' lack of integration in Western societies.

**Graph 7: Broadcast of personal and private information about terrorists and victims**

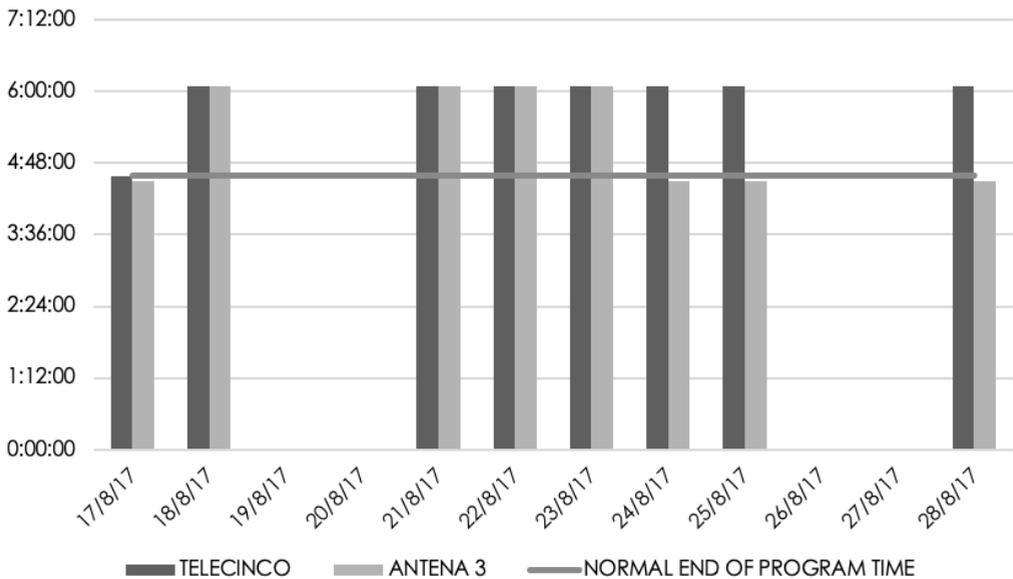


Source: Prepared by authors

FAPE recalls the importance of respecting the right to honor, privacy and self-image, enshrined in Article 18 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, by the media that in the exercise of journalistic work perform news coverage. In this regard, neither Antena 3 nor Telecinco complied with this recommendation given by the journalists' federation.

Information related both to the victims (number, origin, country of origin, ages) and to the terrorists (ages, names, country of birth, place of residence) was broadcast, in addition to including data related to the terrorists' postal addresses in the two programs under study. Likewise, both *Espejo Público de Verano* and *El programa de verano* did not hesitate to share clear images and videos showing with accurate precision the terrorists' physical appearance with the whole audience.

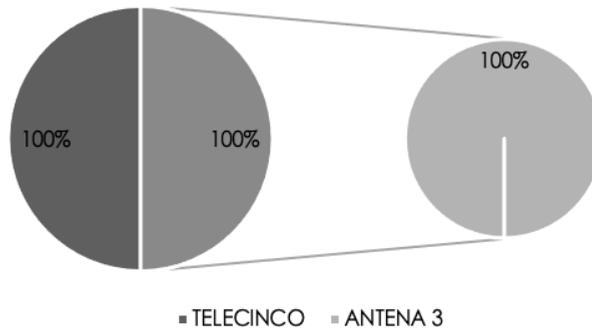
**Graph 8: Broadcast media are not longer than necessary**



Source: Prepared by authors

Both TV channels, through their analyzed programs, extended their broadcasts beyond the broadcasting time end in order to offer canned, repeated and already explained information, thus extending in time. In the case of Telecinco, Mediaset channel could be seen offering a much longer extension than Antena 3, repeating itself throughout the more than ten days of news coverage of the attacks in Catalonia.

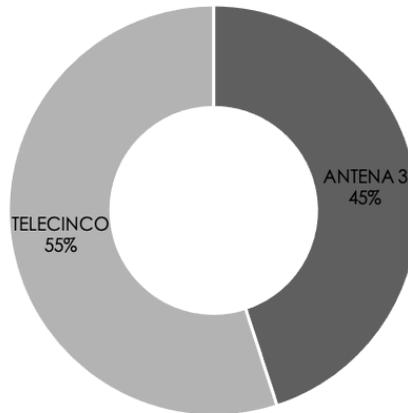
**Graph 9: Media Disseminates Experts Recommendations**



Source: Prepared by authors

Both Antena 3 and Telecinco broadcast specific information in the programs under study including competent authorities' recommendations (telephone numbers in case of identifying some of the suspected terrorists, contact emails or addresses to find information on missing persons or victims, hospitals and health centers to donate blood), thus carrying out a communication and public service task with citizenship.

**Graph 10: Fake News Broadcasting**



Source: Prepared by authors

FAPE considers that media should avoid fake news dissemination as they only generate confusion in society, especially in times of great social tension such as in terrorist attacks. Antena 3 and Telecinco were guilty of disseminating unverified, poorly documented and false content. This information came from alleged witnesses of the attacks, from the talk-show hosts themselves, who sought an express protagonism by broadcasting last-minute information from confidential sources, and even from both programs' editorial staff, disseminating information and data without any assurance.

## 5. Discussion

After the results presentation, it is necessary to analyze the work's relevant discussion by linking it to the research questions collected in this study. In this regard, the first question asks whether the treatment of the information that the media carried out during the news coverage of Barcelona and Cambrils attacks in 2017 had been adequate or inadequate.

Given the results achieved in the research, it can be stated that the media selected in this research can be stated to show an incorrect information treatment. Both television channels, through the programs under study not only mixed information and opinion in their broadcasts, but also disseminated false news, rumors and other information without contrasting them completely. This generated confusion in an event of extensive dimensions as a terrorist act. Another evidence of professional malpractice was observed in the broadcasting of testimonies without value or related to the terrorist acts, such as the one described in the results section above and other similar ones, which only emphasized irrelevant details.

Although it is true that these programs also included official information sources through live connections with Moncloa or Mossos d'Esquadra's management press conferences. They similarly contributed to the dissemination of telephone numbers created so that eyewitnesses could provide information on the terrorists' possible whereabouts, addresses of hospitals and health centers requiring blood transfusions, as well as other useful numbers and addresses.

The second question asked whether the media complied with the precepts contained in the Ethic codes of the journalistic profession during the news broadcasting related to the attacks or whether, on the contrary, some principles were violated. It can be confirmed that both Antena 3 with *Espejo Público de Verano*, and Telecinco with *El programa de verano*, not only failed to comply with some of the most relevant premises for FAPE, regarding the information treatment and news coverage of tragic events such as the attacks, but also had an impact on the broadcasting of different contents susceptible to hurt viewers' sensitivity.

Both programs showed dramatic images, bloody and full of pain, starring witnesses, survivors of Las Ramblas attack or desperate relatives searching for their loved ones. The violation of the right to honor, privacy and self-image was clear in the continuous broadcasting of images of the victims' bloodied bodies. Personal data related to the terrorists' identity were also broadcast, in addition to providing very specific information such as age, address, how long the terrorists had been living in Catalonia and what they did for a living.

The dubious quality of the journalistic work exercised by on-site media in Barcelona and Cambrils during the 2017 attacks did not go unnoticed by Elsa González<sup>4</sup>, FAPE president. In October 2017, González made a statement to Servimedia, pointing out that both the coverage and information treatment were not adequate. Regarding this, the FAPE president recalled that images were published with little respect for both victims and their families, in addition to stressing that any citizen, whether victim or executioner, has the right to be treated with all the dignity that is presupposed without being incompatible with the citizen's right to information and the media's right to freedom of information.

FAPE's head recalled that media were carried away by the gale of rumors, unverified information and other hoaxes circulating on the network spread by the media. In this regard, it is essential that information should be well contrasted and it should not generate unnecessary damage to both the audience and victims in general.

It is worth remembering that, despite the existing anti-bullshit mechanisms in the TV programs' newsrooms, both *Espejo Público de Verano* and *El programa de verano* published news without full assurance, comments based on assumptions and other information that did not come from official or unofficial sources. González recalled that bad journalism generates direct credibility losses among citizens, damaging democracy. Thus, the respectful, conscious and adequate information treatment is what should differentiate journalistic work of information professionals against the propagation of false news through social networks where it is difficult to establish limits to truth and supposition. Therefore, media can be stated to have violated some principles recommended by FAPE.

Finally, the third research question, whether television channels lengthened the duration of current affairs programs when covering tragic events by repeating news data already broadcast in order to generate a strategy of economic profitability by taking advantage of the audience's need to know. In view of this question and based on the data obtained, the media under study are confirmed to deliberately extend the duration of the programs analyzed in the research without offering news, contents or connections with updated information.

In this regard, and as can be seen in graph 8, on August 18<sup>th</sup> and subsequent days, both programs analyzed extended their duration beyond their normal broadcasting time end. It is logical to understand this anomalous duration if we take into consideration that from August 17<sup>th</sup> to August 21<sup>st</sup>, several news events took place (Las Ramblas attack, the chase on the Cambrils promenade or Younes Abouyaqoub's death) requiring an extraordinary informative extension. In this sense, it is obvious that media offered special coverage, given the circumstances.

However, from August 21<sup>st</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, when broadcasts related to the attacks in Catalonia ceased, both *Espejo Público de Verano* and *El programa de verano* continued to extend the programs offering vacuous, anecdotal information, lacking in depth. Some examples showing this reality are the live interviews with eye witnesses showing a heroism typical of an adventure story. There were also live connections with on-site reporters without offering new news, advances in the investigation or changes in the data already broadcast, repeating the same information during the program.

Similarly, both television programs included on screen labels with blatant capitalized titles such as last minute, new news, exclusive testimonies, but in reality they were already explained contents and comments from witnesses of what happened that did not stand out for offering new data with respect to the already coverage.

Therefore, the analyzed media can be said to have repeated the programs' length, taking advantage of the audience's need, typical of the attacks' specific moment, to know more about the tragedy. In the days following the attacks, television programs did not offer new contextual data that would justify a longer duration of live news coverage, generating a dynamic of canned content broadcasting.

## 6. Conclusions

Firstly, both *Espejo Público de Verano* and *El programa de verano* can be concluded to exceed different deontological limits (such as unverified content broadcasting, sensitive images dissemination not protecting the victims' privacy, as well as terrorists and victims' personal information publication) over more than ten days that Barcelona and Cambrils attacks were in the news.

In relation to the above, the statements made by Elsa Gonzalez, president of FAPE, confirm that media should have carried out a journalistic work with more documentary contrast, in addition to having been more cautious with the information published. Secondly, it is striking how seasoned and experienced in news coverage media, made different mistakes that should have no place in the newsrooms. In this regard, media have different instruments that guarantee ethics and deontology in the information treatment, such as ethics codes, in addition to FAPE recommendations and other organizations such as the autonomous press federations. The coverage and broadcasting of complex news such as a terrorist attack is a challenge for the news professional who, faced with situations of emotional stress, despair and frustration experienced by the tragedy's victims, must add the need to obtain information almost immediately.

For Himmelstein and Faithorn (2002), the state of stress and emotional pressure, journalists are subjected to, in the face of events of this nature, only serves to highlight a key reality: Media require multidisciplinary journalists who attract the audience through the credibility they generate, in addition to being profiles with a critical capacity to discern information from opinion and feeling. These authors maintain that journalists should not lean towards the information's morbid side but should prioritize objectivity and impartiality in the face of tragic events.

Thirdly and finally, it is worth highlighting the importance that the media plays not only in the dissemination of news, but also in the configuration of the world among audiences. In this sense, it is appropriate to recall that media contribute to the collective imaginary creation. Lathion (2017) and Piquer (2015) argue that the press, radio and television have shaped a negative image of Islam as a violent, barbaric and irrational religion. For Van Dijk (2008) this situation has intensified in terrorist attacks' news coverage, especially by the use of inappropriate terminology creating a very close relationship between Islam and terrorism with the multiple consequences that this entails.

To this effect, the Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media, created in 2017, has evidenced that most of the news published in the conventional media possess a pejorative, biased and manipulative approach regarding Islam, its believers, the Koran, the principles governing this creed in relation to terrorist acts. In recent years, new independent news media have emerged, as Negreira and Lopez (2016) point out. Therefore, it would be necessary to determine in further research, if there is a difference in the information treatment between conventional media and the new communication formats represented in newspapers such as *Eldiario.es*, *La Marea*, *Infolibre* or *Revista5W*, among others. It has to be addressed whether the news coverage and journalistic information treatment is carried out in accordance with ethical requirements in terms of both audiences and in the construction and subsequent proper dissemination of Islamic culture by disassociating it from terrorist attacks.

## 7. Acknowledgement

Translator: María Isabel Mansilla Blanco.

## 8. Each Author's Specific Contribution

Contributions	Signer
Work conception and design	Signer 1
Documentary search	Signer 1
Data collection	Signer 2
Data Critical analysis and interpretation	Signer 1 & 2
Drafting, formatting, revision and approval of versions	Signer 1

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## 8. Notes

1. EGM is the main national organism that analyses media audiences in different media and communication channels. <https://n9.cl/7awey>

2. Barlovento Communication is an audiovisual consultancy expert in the study of media audiences, in particular TV programs. <https://n9.cl/wz9x1>

3. Fórmula TV is the leader website carrying-out audience studies and audience measurement related to the diffusion and contents emission. <https://n9.cl/0w5t4>

4. The FAPE president recognized in a public statement that the information coverage during the Catalanian attacks was not proper. There were some stress episodes that symbolized a bad example of the journalistic profession putting at risk the journalism credibility that the profession has in the society. <https://cutt.ly/jlYWAQx>



