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Treatment of cannabis in the Spanish press

El tratamiento del cannabis en la prensa española

O tratamento dado à cannabis pela imprensa espanhola

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ABSTRACT

This article is the result of an investigation that analyzes the treatment that the Spanish newspapers *La Razón*, *El Mundo*, *El País* and *ABC* gave to cannabis from the 1st of January to the 31st of December of 2015. Applying the methodology of content analysis, this paper quantifies, analyzes and compares the news treatment performed by the above mentioned media. The results show that cannabis is an issue of interest in the newspapers agenda. It receives an eminently informative treatment, with abundant descriptive news, in detriment of opinion and analysis. The main topics of the news that deal with cannabis are police, judicial and criminal aspects.

Keywords: clave: cannabis, media, content analysis, coverage, news treatment, subjects.

RESUMEN

Este artículo es el resultado de una investigación que analiza el tratamiento que los diarios españoles La Razón, El Mundo, El País y ABC dieron al cannabis desde el 1 de enero al 31 de diciembre de 2015. Aplicando la metodología de análisis de contenido, se cuantifica, analiza y compara el tratamiento informativo que realizan los diarios mencionados. Las conclusiones muestran que el cannabis es un tema de interés en la agenda de los periódicos, aunque recibe un tratamiento eminentemente informativo, con abundancia de noticias descriptivas, en relación con las de opinión y análisis. Los temas principales de las noticias que tratan el cannabis se refieren a aspectos policiales, judiciales y delictivos.

***Palabras clave**: cannabis, prensa, análisis de contenido, cobertura, tratamiento, temáticas.*

RESUMO

Este artigo é resultado de uma investigação que analisa o tratamento que os diários espanhóis *La Razón*, *El Mundo*, *El País* e *ABC* deram à cannabis entre 1º de janeiro de 2015 e 31 de dezembro de 2015. Aplicando a metodologia de análise de conteúdo, quantifica-se, analisa-se e compara-se o tratamento ao tema dado pelos jornais mencionados. As conclusões mostram que a cannabis é um tema de interesse na agenda dos jornais, ainda que receba um tratamento eminentemente informativo, com abundância de notícias descritivas, em relação com as de opinião e análise. Os temas principais das notícias que tratam a cannabis se referem a aspectos policiais, judiciais e de delitos.

Palavras-chave: cannabis, imprensa, análise de conteúdo, cobertura, tratamento, temáticas.

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INTRODUCTION

Cannabis or marijuana is extracted from the Cannabis sativa plant, an annual plant that comes from hemp and belongs to the family of cannabaceae (Markez, Poo, Merino & Romera, 2002, p.14). It is a dioecious plant, so it has male and female specimens that grow apart. Females contain the active substance Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which comes from the end of flowering plants (THC concentration between 0.3 and 3) and is what is used for smoking, while dark green or brown powder (THC concentration between 4 and 13), is consumed inhaled (Markez et al., 2002, p.15). Some 400 chemical components of the plant have been isolated and identified, of which about 60 have a cannabinoid structure. Among them, the main one is Tetrahydrocannabinol, responsible for most of the effects (Comisión Clínica de la Delegación del Gobierno para el Plan Nacional Sobre Drogas, 2009, page 35).

Cannabis is the most widely used illegal substance in the world –with 181.8 million consumers (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2015, p. 57)– as well as in the Spanish state, where there has been an upward trend in the prevalence of its use at least once in a lifetime, reaching 30.4% in 2013 (Observatorio Español de la Droga y las Toxicomanías [OEDT], 2015, p.71). The use of cannabis generates a great social controversy, with very clear positions in the growing public debate on the advantages and disadvantages of its legalization.

Despite the social relevance of cannabis, the treatment of this substance in the media is an issue that has been investigated very little from the academic field, especially in the area of communication. It seems important to us to increase research on this area, considering that the media seems to be the first source of information on drugs in the Spanish state, as well as being the mean that receives more confidence from the population to receive better and more objective information on drug use, as well as on the effects and problems associated with them and their forms of consumption (OEDT, 2015, p.105). The last research that analyzes only this substance in the Spanish press was conducted more than a decade ago (Ballesteros, Dader & Muñiz, 2015). This work aims to contribute to research on this topic, analyzing the treatment that Spanish general information newspapers *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Razón* and *ABC* did on cannabis during 2015.

THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF CANNABIS

The messages issued from the institutions coincide in pointing out that society does not properly perceive the risks and negative consequences of cannabis abuse and that it is necessary to change the general perception that it is a drug without serious consequences for health. This is especially true when the current market for cannabis is much more complex and sophisticated than in the past, and there is a greater variety of derivatives, some of which appear to be more harmful than their predecessors (UNODC, 2015, p.76). In addition, they point to the need to value non-consumption, emphasizing positive prevention to avoid mental disorders associated with consumption (Delegación del Gobierno para el Plan Nacional sobre Drogas, 2013, p.76).

Cannabis byproducts, in particular THC, are classified as prohibited by the United Nations International Conventions on the Control of Narcotic Drugs of 1961, 1971 and 1998 because of their content of toxic substances. These substances are susceptible to abuse, which can cause dependence and lead to serious mental illness (Comisión Clínica de la Delegación del Gobierno para el Plan Nacional Sobre Drogas, 2009, p.34).

There are numerous studies in academic fields, such as those related to medicine, which have analyzed the effects of cannabis worldwide and relate their consumption to the occurrence or increase of mental illness, including anxiety disorders and depression (Beautrais, Joyce & Mulder, 1999; Bovasso, 2001; Choi, DiNitto, Marti & Choi, 2016; Patton et al., 2002; Thomas, 1996) or psychosis (Arseneault, Cannon, Witton & Murray, 2004; Di Forti et al., 2015; Hall & Solowij, 1998; Henquet et al., 2005; Thomas, 1996; Semple, McIntosh & Lawrie, 2005). In general, there is a significant risk for the user and for the health system (Johns, 2001; Kalant, 2004; Ramos, 2007).

On the other hand, there is also numerous scientific literature that demonstrates the therapeutic potential of cannabis (Abanades, Cabrero, Fiz & Farré, 2005; Ashton, 2008; Callado, 2012; Ditchfield & Thomas,

2014; Durán, Laporte & Capellà, 2004; Elphick & Egertova, 2001). Studies on the medical applications of marijuana have increased significantly during the last years, a process that, according to Ramos and Fernández (2000), is more closely related to "the recent discovery of the existence of an endogenous cannabinoid system than with the descriptions made by some consumers on such healing properties" (p.20).

We must emphasize that "of all substances classified as illicit trafficking by the UN, the debates related to cannabis remain the most controversial" (Comisión Clínica de la Delegación del Gobierno para el Plan Nacional Sobre Drogas, 2009, 34). Marijuana is a substance deeply rooted in society, so it is present in social, cultural, health and recreational areas, among others; therefore, society is very divided between its proponents and detractors. Contrary to polarized positions, Calafat et al. (2000) defend the need to "develop critical elements from outside the battlefield, moving away from dogmas, to take cultural distance, to shed light and strengthen the links of dialogue and elements of controversy" (p.236). This idea is shared by other authors like Barriuso (2012), for whom "between total prohibition and total liberalization as only alternatives, there are many other possibilities of doing things and it seems that the time has come to test them in practice" (p.181); or Sallés, Mato and Renobales (1998), who consider that the intense debate on the use of cannabis that has taken place in the West during decades has generated a polemic based "more on the rhetoric and the passionate than on objective scientific data, so the controversy over a health issue has been based on values, beliefs and political convictions" (p.35).

In many countries there are social groups working for the legalization and normalization of cannabis use on equal terms with tobacco and alcohol. This movement in favor of cannabis has succeeded in decriminalizing personal and private consumption in more and more countries, although the administrative and legislative situations are very different. In America, the political debate over the legal status of marijuana is far advanced (Youngers, 2013), and the idea that the prohibitionist model has failed in its attempt to reduce the cannabis market, with negative impacts on society and public health, and by fostering the creation of criminal markets that support organized crime, violence and corruption, is imposing itself (Blickman, 2014, p.1). Since the 20 December 2013, when Uruguay became the first country in the world to legalize and regulate recreational marijuana use, several others –such as Canada, Chile, Colombia and Mexico– have modified their legislation to allow the use of this substance for therapeutic, scientific and/or recreational purposes. The US situation is somewhat paradoxical: although within its "war on drugs" strategy, federal law considers marijuana illegal without exception, some states are making progress on reform efforts (Youngers, 2013, p. 14) and have legalized their cultivation, sale and use, with different stages and degrees of acceptance of consumption.

Meanwhile, in Europe, state governments are in a state of denial about the changing political landscape in America, ignoring the growing demands for legislative change from local and regional authorities and popular movements (Blickman, 2014, P.1). The policies are very different between countries, but none have taken any significant steps towards the legalization of cannabis, with the exception of the Netherlands, where it is permitted to sell it in specialized premises and the generalized policy of governments is that of tolerance, although its legal status is still diffuse. In Portugal and the Czech Republic, possession and consumption for personal use are decriminalized, Croatia has legalized the sale and consumption of medical marijuana and Germany plans to do so in 2017. In the case of the Spanish state, the Citizen Security Law, of March 26, 2015, does not penalize the possession of cannabis for own consumption, nor its consumption in private, although it can constitute an administrative fault.

THE PRO-CANNABIS MOVEMENT

Anti-prohibitionist movements have emerged around the world, with the support of famous people who give their testimony on cannabis. Some examples are scientists and artists such as Allen Ginsberg, Alexander Shulguin and Albert Hofmann (the discoverer of LSD), the philosopher Ernst Jünger, the psychiatrist Thomas Tsasz or the writer Burroughs (Calafat et al., 2000, p.224). In the Spanish state, the cannabis movement originated in the 1990s and has been promoted by associations, professionals and the media, which use various strategies to legitimize their consumption socially and legalize it. In a few years this movement has grown dramatically,

which has made our country one of those where it has gained more strength and is more active (Calafat et al., 2000, p. 241).

The anti-prohibitionist groups organize fairs, publish books and maintain periodical publications of public sale with important runs and great fidelity of the clients. Among them, we can highlight the magazine *High Times*[1], that originated in New York in 1974, *Soft Secrets*[2], born in 1985 and published in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, United States, Chile and Argentina; *Cáñamo*[3], which emerged in 1997; *Cannabis Magazine*[4], created in 2004; *Yerba*[5], which began in 2001, and *El Cultivador*[6], a free magazine published since 2012. These are specialized magazines aimed at people and groups related to cannabis, for who they offer useful contents regarding the cultivation, preparation and use of both recreational and therapeutic marijuana. They also offer very extensive information on the Internet, and are the pages most consulted by young people and those that have the highest level of reliability for them (Comisión Clínica de la Delegación del Gobierno para el Plan Nacional Sobre Drogas, 2009, p. 35). In their portals they present contents on science, medicine, gastronomic recipes, along with information regarding associations, clubs, testimonies, legislation, news, shopping, online stores, videos, entertainment, movies, TV, humor, newspapers, books and music. Nor do they forget about the cultivation of cannabis, with indications on seeds, plants, irrigation, manure and utensils. On the other hand, there is a commercial aspect with the inclusion of guides, interactive maps with the localization of distribution companies, commercialization of fertilizers, banks of seeds near the customer, and online sales websites of seeds, fertilizers, irrigations and articles related to cannabis, such as dinafem.org, of the company Dinafem Seeds, or lamarihuana.com.

In the ludic aspect, there is a tourism market offering holiday destinations associated with cannabis consumption, such as the Netherlands, the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, the state of Himachal Pradesh in India, Jamaica, the beaches of Florida or Thailand (Belhassen, Santos & Uriely, 2007). This type of tourism also benefits travel companies such as Eldertreks, or the specialized websites WeBeHigh.org and Greenline, which offer specific programs with hotels, restaurants, bars and clinics. They also include guides, tours, maps, directions, advice and legislation of the corresponding country.

Within the anti-prohibitionist strategy, associations of people who use cannabis play a key role, as they provide the stability and the means to carry out their activities (Calafat et al., 2000, p. 244). In the Spanish state, the first associations were born in the nineties, with the aim of cultivating collectively and not having to resort to the black market. Many of them have been transformed into what are known as Social Cannabis Clubs, which have been spreading throughout the territory, with special incidence in Euskadi and Catalonia. Since its inception around 2002, clubs have allowed thousands of people to stop financing the black market and to know the quality and origin of what they consume, generating jobs and collecting taxes (Barriuso, 2012, p. 169). In addition, they have established themselves as a valid interlocutor in the political debate and their presence on the political agenda has managed to pass regulations in three autonomy parliaments –Euskadi, Comunidad Foral de Navarra and Catalonia–as well as in some municipalities of these territories (Martínez, 2015, p.108).

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Students of the cognitive effects of mass communication agree that the mass media not only inform, but construct reality (Entman, 1993; Luhmann, 1996; Noelle-Neumann, 1995) and influence the opinions and attitudes of society (Lippmann, 2003; McQuail, 2000; Rodrigo, 1995; Wolf, 1994), modeling people's attitudes, beliefs and values (Montero, 1993). The events that the media show are presented to the audience as authentic and natural, as part of the way of being things, which makes us believe that reality is as it appears in them and that we have no option to act in another way (Ramos, 1995, p. 110). Thus, the media model our perception of the world and make us part of its way of understanding it, determining the image we have of reality.

This thesis is part of the theory of the social construction of reality formulated by Berger and Luckmann (1972), which defends that everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and that for them has the subjective meaning of a coherent world. Therefore, reality would be built socially and, although these authors do not refer in their work to the news media,

it is understood that these are today the most important factor in the social construction of everyday reality, since "the kind of image of reality that will eventually become known to the public will dependen on its ultimate orientations"(Dader, 1990).

The influence of the media in the construction of reality has been developed, among others, by the theory of the agenda-setting, which defends that the media –with their selection and prioritization of information– direct our attention and influence our perception of what are the most important issues of the day. Following McCombs (2006, p.25), the public uses the messages of the media to organize their own agenda and decide which are the subjects on which to focus their attention and their thinking, and perhaps their action, so that the media agenda becomes the social agenda.

Among the consequences of the effects of setting the agenda, it is worth noting the previous preparation of the points of view that later guide the opinion of the society, which leads the influence of the media as a setter of the agenda to the very center of the arena of public opinion (McCombs, 2006, p. 231). Knowing the media agenda is therefore a key factor to inform ourselves about the thematic nuclei of social interest, the most relevant social problems and the dominant mentality in the citizenship on these issues and problems.

Many investigations that address the treatment of drugs in the media (Costa & Pérez, 1989; García, Menor & Perales, 1987; González, 1992; Gonzenbach, 1993; Martín, 1998; Mastroianni & Noto, 2008; Núñez, Patricio & Rodríguez, 2012; Oliva, 1986; Romaní, 2004; Van Trigt et al., 1995) confirm the correspondence between media messages and hegemonic representations and dominant stereotypes in society, which have been the same since the 1980s; they share aspects like being very generic information, the association between drugs and drama, and events and drug trafficking; use police information as sources; are predominantly descriptive news instead of opinion or are analysis masked by apparent objectivity (Romaní, 2004, pp. 54-55). In short, most drug news has a marked sensationalist nature, which produces intense public sentiment or emotion and causes reality to be constructed from oversized parameters (García del Castillo, López-Sánchez & García del Castillo-López, 2008, p.27). Thus, the media have collaborated in the social construction of the so-called "drug problem", disseminating a negative view of them and silencing the arguments and positions that challenge this view (Congil et al., 2004).

The studies mentioned –like most of those who have analyzed this topic– refer to the media treatment of drugs in general. If we focus on cannabis, the subject of this research, its treatment in the media has been scarcely investigated. Paricio, Sanfeliu and Peyró (2012) analyzed the journalistic treatment received by cannabis, cocaine and alcohol in *El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC*, and concluded that these three substances have a very scarce presence in newspapers, especially cannabis, with a much smaller presence than the other two, and that the predominant journalistic genre is informative, with shallow texts. Montané, Durán, Capellà and Figueras (2005), after analyzing the news about the therapeutic use of cannabis in ten state newspapers, showed that the scientific quality of the information contained in the news was mostly scarce, that the news were sensationalist and in a third of cases could lead to personal behavior incompatible with the conclusions of the original articles published in scientific journals. Cunningham, Blomqvist, Koski-Jännes and Raitasalo (2012) conducted surveys among the population of Finland, Sweden, and Canada, and found differences among the three countries in the social perception of cannabis, which make them determine that the beliefs of the citizenship towards it may be in part a social construction and appear to be related to how the substance is presented in the media. Sznitman and Lewis (2015) analyzed the news on cannabis published in the three largest newspapers in Israel, and found that in two-thirds of the articles cannabis was presented as a drug and only in one-third as an illicit drug, concluding that this high proportion of news that speak of cannabis as a drug is in line with growing social support for the cannabis legalization program for therapeutic purposes in that country. Ballesteros et al. (2015), in their analysis of cannabis information published in 2003 in major state newspapers and magazines, concluded that the majority of sources employed were police, judges and politicians, and their actions were positively evaluated,

while consumers and pro-cannabis sector were hardly used as a source of information and consumption was almost always presented negatively.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This article aims to analyze the treatment of cannabis in the Spanish general information press. The sample of newspapers chosen is formed by *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Razón* and *ABC*. They are quality newspapers with state coverage that represent editorial lines that cover all sociological spaces. *El País* (1976) is considered left-center; *El Mundo* (1989) is liberal and close to the right; *La Razón* (1998) is of conservative tendency and *ABC* (1903) has a conservative monarchical and catholic ideology. They are, in short, media of relevance in the information landscape, which allow us to establish the similarities and significant differences that appear in the information that they offer their readers and to show the media importance that each one grants to the subject under study.

We analyzed the digital editions of the chosen newspapers[7], that is to say, the web portals of each one of them. We chose as a temporary space for the study from January 1 to December 31, 2015. This year was chosen because it covers the period in which Spain passed the Citizen Security Law; when production, sale and consumption were legalized in Argentina, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico; when the Chilean government authorized the manufacture of medicines derived from cannabis; and when Croatia allowed its prescription.

The research starts with the following objectives:

1. Quantify the information on cannabis published in each newspaper.

2. Determine the topics addressed by the newspapers in this information.

3. Compare the treatment of information made by each newspaper.

In order to reach the proposed objectives, we start from the following hypotheses:

- H1. Information on cannabis is often news, that is, it is part of the agenda of the written press.

- H2. The texts on cannabis have an informative style, with little journalistic depth.

- H3. Among the contents on cannabis published in the newspapers there is a clear predominance of topics related to police, judicial and criminal aspects.

In order to conduct the research, we used the quantitative content analysis method, a technique usually applied to the analysis of newspaper content, which allows the study of published texts in a systematic, objective and quantitative way (Wimmer & Dominick, 1996, p.170), and at the same time offers the researcher the fecundity of subjectivity to find the hidden, the latent, the non-apparent contained in every message (Bardin, 2002, p.7). It is a technique used over the last decades by authors of reference –in addition to the aforementioned–such as Berelson (1952), Holsti (1969), Krippendorff (1980), Piñuel and Gaitán (1995), among others.

The chosen unit of analysis has been every piece published in the newspapers, in any journalistic genre –whether informative, interpretative or opinion– that included the word marijuana, cannabis or both. The monitoring of news, from these terms, was done using the search engines of the media themselves. Among the results of the engines, all the texts of 2015 of which cannabis was the main topic were collected and those who approached the issue in a circumstantial way, were discarded, as well as letters to the director. After the revision, we ended up with 785 journalistic pieces, distributed as follows: 249 of *ABC*, 238 of *El País*, 176 of *El Mundo* and 122 of *La Razón*.

For the analysis of the texts it was necessary to design a specific code-sheet destined to codify the data, that includes the following variables: name of the newspaper; publication date; author: editorial team, agency, unsigned, journalist, other; news genre: news, article, interview, opinion; section: national, international, society, health, justice, culture, people/music, opinion, other; topics: detention, celebrities, dismantling, medical/health, legalization, justice, politics, confiscations, associations/clubs, traffic/road safety, other.

The coding of the data was conducting using the Excel software. In order to estimate the reliability of the coding process (intercoder reliability), 78 pieces (10% of the total) were randomly selected, which were coded

separately by the two authors of this article. Cohen's Kappa coefficient (K), which gave a reliability of 0.84% and a confidence index of 92%, was used to calculate the concordance, which guarantees the reliability of the results obtained (Landis & Koch, 1977, p. 33).

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

COVERAGE AND TREATMENT

During the analyzed period, a total of 785 journalistic pieces on cannabis were distributed in the studied newspapers: *ABC*, 249 (31.7%), *El País*, 238 (30.3%), *El Mundo*, 176 (22.4%) and *La Razón*, 122 (15.6%).

The months of November (with 82 texts), June (81), March (80), July (79) and October (78) accumulate the largest number of news items published. January is the month in which a smaller number of pieces were collected (42). *La Razón* published the greatest number of texts on the subject in the months of June (16), February (13), April and November (12); while *El Mundo* does it in August (21), March (18) and July (17); *El País*, in November (40), December (33) and March (28); and *ABC*, in October (39), June (35) and July (31).

As for the journalistic genres used, in all newspapers the news prevails (*La Razón*, 80.3%, *El Mundo*, 77.4%, *El País*, 85.4% and *ABC*, 87.6%), results that coincide with those obtained by Ballesteros et al. (2015, p. 75) in his analysis of the 2003 press. Opinions follow at great distance (*La Razón*, 15.7%, *El Mundo*, 11.3%, *El País*, 8.8% and *ABC*, 7.7%). To a lesser extent, other genres used are articles (*La Razón*, 2.4%, *El Mundo*, 6.8%, *El País*, 4.2% and *ABC*, 3.2%) –in this case with a much lower percentage than those obtained by Ballesteros et al. (2015, p. 75), which reached 14.8%– and interviews (*La Razón*, 1.6%, *El Mundo*, 4.5%, *El País*, 1.6% and *ABC*, 1.6%).

As can be observed, in the analyzed newspapers, there is a clear predominance of the informational style, vis-a-vis opinion and, above all, the interpretive genres (articles and interviews).

Regarding the authorship of the texts, those signed by the journalists or habitual collaborators predominate, although in different proportion according to the different newspapers (*La Razón*, 39,1%, *El Mundo*, 47,2%, *El País*, 83,6% and *ABC*, 58.3%), followed by agency information (*La Razón*, 24.7%, *El Mundo*, 37.7%, *El País*, 5.5% and *ABC*, 19.6%). A significant data is the high number of texts published without signature (*La Razón*, 26%, *El Mundo*, 3.3%, *El País*, 3.1% and *ABC*, 4.2%) or under the name of the newspaper (*La Razón*, 5.7%, *El Mundo*, 8%, *El País*, 7.8% and *ABC*, 17.9%).

It is well known that the information published without signature and the ones signed by the newspaper are often, actually, information in which it is concealed that they have been elaborated by one or several news agencies and that are published practically without any intervention on the part of the journalists who write them (Iceado, 2009, pp. 266-267). In all the newspapers, the number of texts that are not signed by journalists (anonymous, signed by agencies or signed by the newspaper or others) is a considerable amount, 39.3% of the total, while that of the signed by journalists remains at 60.7%.

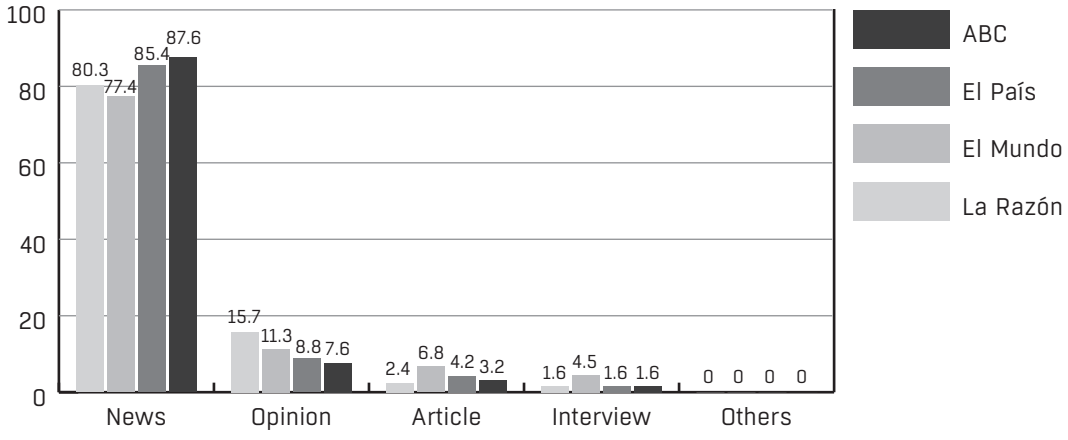

Chart 1: Genre

Source: Own elaboration.

On the other hand, newspapers place most news on cannabis in the society section (*El País*, 40.1%, *El Mundo*, 38.6%, *ABC*, 35.8% and *La Razón*, 32.1%), which appears followed by the national section (*ABC*, 21.7%, *El País*, 19.2%, *El Mundo*, 12%, *La Razón*, 11%) and the international section (*El Mundo*, 16.5%, *El País*, 16.2%, *ABC*, 12,3% and *La Razón*, 11.9%). Also, it should be noted that sections such as health, justice and opinion reach much lower percentages. These results present some differences with those obtained by Ballesteros et al. (2015, p. 75), in which the section of society appeared in second place, with 17.5% of the texts, after the local section (39.7%), followed by others with less presence, such as events (5.4%), health (5.1%) or national (3.5%).

Place	La Razón	El Mundo	El País	ABC	Total de textos
Spain (general)	26.5	21.15	14.1	14.1	206
Catalonia	6.3	10.3	13.4	3.2	65
Madrid	4.1	3.6	6.7	9.2	50
Valencian Community	4.9	5.6	1.6	8.4	39
Castilla-La Mancha	4.1	1.5	1.6	6.8	28
Ceuta	1.6	2.5	3.7	2.8	23
Navarre	3.3	2.5	2.5	2.1	20
Andalusia	3.7	5.6	1.1	1.4	19
Basque Country	1.6	3.1	1.6	2	17
Castilla-Leon	4.1	1	1.6	2.8	17
Galicia	1.6	1	1.1	2.8	14
Balearic Islands	1.6	4.1	1.1	0.4	13
R. Murcia	4.1	1.5	1.6	0.8	13
Cantabria	1.6	2	1.6	0.4	8
TOTAL SPAIN	69.1	65.4	53	84.6	532
Latin America Countries	8.2	11.8	29.3	3	107
USA	4.1	9.4	5	3.6	43
United Kingdom	4.9	3.6	1.1	2.8	21
Canada	1.6	1.5	1.6	2	13
France	1.6	1	2.3	0.8	11
Jamaica	1.6	1.5	1.5	0.8	10
New Zealand	1.6	1	1.1	0.4	8
The Netherlands	1.6	1	1.1	0.4	8
Belgium	1.6	1	1.1	0.4	8
Israel	1.3	0.7	0	0.4	6
Czech Republic	1.3	0.7	0.5	0	5
Sweden	1.3	0	0.8	0.4	5
Croatia	0	0	0.8	0.4	3
Indonesia	0	0.7	0.8	0	3
Philippines	0.2	0.7	0	0	2
TOTAL INTERNATIONAL	30.9	34.6	47	15.4	253

Table 1: Geographical origin of texts (in %)

Source: Own elaboration.

When analyzing the origin of the information, we observed the state has an important supremacy over the international news, although again with differences between newspapers, with 84.6% of the texts in *ABC*, 65.4% in *El Mundo*, 69.1% in *La Razón* and 53% in *El País*. Within the Spanish state, the autonomous communities that receive the most coverage in the total of the newspapers are Catalonia and Madrid, although with unequal data according to each newspaper: in *La Razón*, the Valencian Community surpasses Madrid; in *El Mundo*, Madrid is surpassed by the Valencian Community, Andalusia and Baleares; and in *ABC* the Valencian Community and Castilla-La Mancha surpass Catalonia.

At the international level, Latin American countries account for more information on cannabis (*El País*, 29.3%, *El Mundo*, 11.8%, *La Razón*, 8.2% and *ABC*, 3%), followed by the USA (*El Mundo*, 9.4%, *El País*, 5%, *La Razón*, 4.1% and *ABC*, 3.6%) and the United Kingdom (*La Razón*, 4.9%, *El Mundo*, 3.6%, *ABC*, 2.8% and *El País*, 1.1%). It is noteworthy that in this area Mexico is the country to which most news refer (*El País*, 23.9%, *El Mundo*, 3.6%, *La Razón*, 3.3% and *ABC*, 0.8%). In the following table we see these results disaggregated by autonomous communities and countries.

TOPICS COVERED

The three most important topics in the newspapers analyzed are: detentions (168 pieces), celebrities (126) and plantation dismantling (94). The remaining topics are: medical/health (87), legalization (81), justice (61), politics (51), confiscation (45), associations/clubs (22), traffic/road safety (29).

As for the most outstanding issues, there are differences between the four newspapers. *La Razón* publishes the largest number of texts on detentions (31), celebrities (19) and medicine and health (16); *El Mundo* does it on detentions (42), celebrities (34) and dismantling (28); *El País* prioritizes legalization (49), followed by celebrities and medicine/health (38 each) and detentions (36). *ABC* highlights the detentions (59) the dismantlement (49) and celebrities (35).

In the ensemble of newspapers, the news on detentions are published mainly in October (11.7% of the texts on this subject), July (10.7%) and June (9.5%); The ones about celebrities, in August (15%), February (11.9%) and July (10.3%); plantation dismantling in June (17%), July (15.9%) and October (12.7%); those of medicine/health, in March (14.9%), July (11.4%) and May (10.3%); legalization in November (23.6%), December (22.4%) and March (12.5%); those of Justice

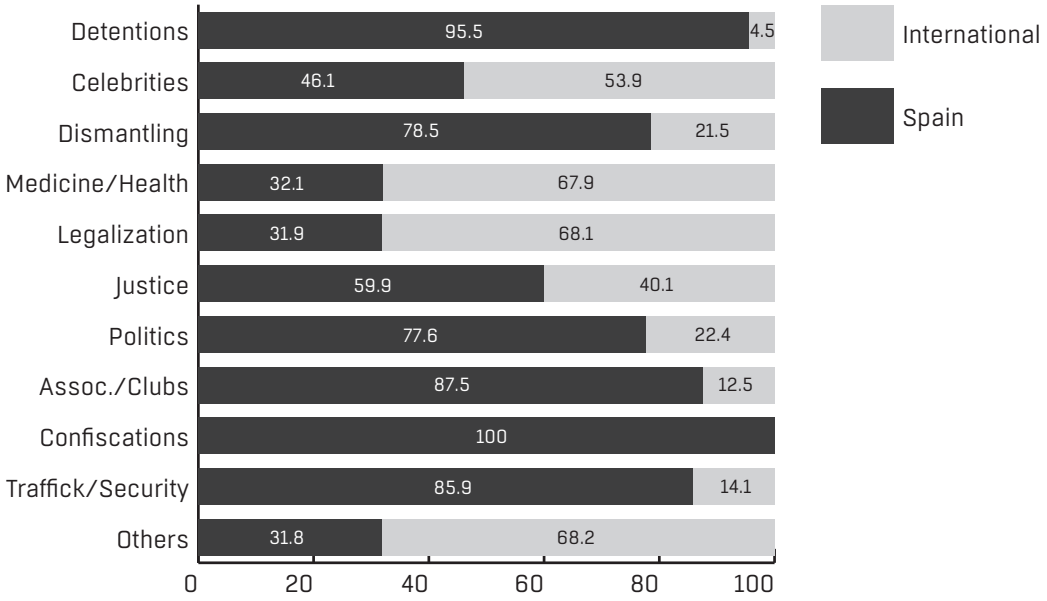

Chart 2: Distribution of topics according to their geographical origin

Source: Own elaboration.

in March (23.6%), October (14.7%), April and November (9.8% in both months); those of Politics, in May (13.7%), November (13.7%) and September (13.2%); confiscations in March (20.5%), November (13.3%), September and October (11.1% in both months); associations/clubs on May (22.7%), June (22.7%) and October (14.1%); and those of traffic/road safety, are published mainly in July and August (19% respectively).

Chart 2 shows the different topics according to their geographical origin, state or international. If we deal only with the news regarding the Spanish state, the main contents in *ABC* are detentions (58 pieces) and dismantling (47), as in *El Mundo*: detentions (39) and dismantling (15). In turn, *La Razón* focuses its interest in detentions (30) and traffic/security (9) and *El País*, in detentions (36) and legalization (26).

Detentions

The contents with more presence in the ensemble of newspapers are those related to arrests as a result of operations of the Security Forces. It is the most abundant theme in *La Razón* (23.6%), *El Mundo* (23.9%) and *ABC* (23.3%), and the fourth in *El País* (15%). This type of text includes the arrests of members of bands dedicated to the trafficking of cannabis –usually along with other drugs–and the arrests by cultivation of marijuana plants. In the operations they seize equipment to cultivate and manipulate marijuana, in addition to narcotic substances, cash and arms, among other objects. Detained persons are charged with alleged crimes against public health (drug trafficking), money laundering, documentary misrepresentation and illicit possession of weapons.

The news on detentions come almost entirely from the state: 100% in *El País*, 96.7% in *La Razón*, 93.8% in *ABC* and 86.2% in *El Mundo*. It should be noted that these contents are published throughout the year, although they stand out especially in the months of October (11.7%) and July (10.7%). There are differences between newspapers. *El País* publishes this news mainly in April and November, *La Razón* in April and August, *ABC* in July and October, and *El Mundo* in May and November.

Some of the news on this subject are: "Arrested nine members of a youth band in Valdemoro" (*El País*, 12/29/2015), "Two arrested for growing 117 marijuana plants in Gerona" (*La Razón*, 7/17/ 2015), "Police detain 22 people in a macro-operation against drug trafficking" (*El Mundo*, 12/21/2015), "One of the ten most wanted British fugitives is detained in Alicante" (*ABC*, 11/2015).

Celebrities

The relationship of celebrities with marijuana has been a constant in all newspapers, reaching high percentages in all of them (19.4% in *El Mundo*, 15.6% in *La Razón* and *El País*, and 14.7% in *ABC*). Most of the news of this subject are published in the month of August in all the newspapers. In addition, the majority comes from the international level in all newspapers, except in *ABC*, where 57.6% of the texts are from the state (in *El Mundo*, 44.3%, in *La Razón*, 42.8% and in *El País*, 39.8%). In the international news on this subject, the USA predominates (*ABC*, 14.2%, *El Mundo*, 32.3%, *La Razón*, 10.4% and *El País* 26.3%).

These contents refer, in particular, to celebrities who consume cannabis, as in the news entitled "Jennifer Lawrence smoked marijuana before going to the Oscars" (*El País*, 12/23/2015) or "Morgan Freeman, on marijuana: 'I eat it, I drink it, I smoke it, I sniff it'" (*ABC*, 05/05/2015). In other cases, in addition to consuming it, celebrities enter the business after the legalization of marijuana in some state, as is the case recorded in the news "Cheryl Shuman, the queen of marijuana in Hollywood" (*El Mundo*, 11/14/2015) or in "Rihanna will launch its own line of marijuana" (*La Razón*, 11/18/2015).

Dismantling

Another issue of interest in all the newspapers is the dismantling of illegal plantations of marijuana in different places of the state by the National Police, especially in *ABC* (19%) and *El Mundo* (16%), and with a lower presence in *La Razón* (5.8%) and *El País* (4.6%). The texts on this subject come mainly from the state level in all newspapers, with 96% in *ABC*, 89.5% in *El Mundo*, 60% in *El País* and 57.1% in *La Razón*. In the international information Mexico stands out, with 28.5% of the pieces of this theme in *La Razón*. These are contents that have a presence throughout the year, although a greater number of dismantling is published on *ABC* in the months of June (14 pieces) and July (11), and in *El País*, in July (6 pieces) and in November (7).

According to the latest State Attorney General's Report[8], a veritable proliferation of cannabis plantations was observed in 2014, and between January 1 and October 31, 749 actions were conducted on facilities or plantations of all kinds, with a result of 100,313 cannabis plants seized and 1,051 people detained/imputed. Some examples of news of this type are the following: "Dismantled ten clans that controlled the drug traffic in La Mina and Besòs" (*La Razón*, 12/12/2015), "A Guinness marijuana plant was dismantled in Albacete" (*El País*, 09/4/2015), "Dismantled a plantation of 300 marijuana plants in l'Alcora" (*El Mundo*, 08/27/2015), "The police dismantled a plantation of marijuana in an industrial warehouse in Valencia" (*ABC*, 12/26/2015).

Medicine/Health

The presence of this topic is 15.7% in *El País* –which focuses it mainly on Mexico (with 20 pieces)–, 12.8% in *La Razón*, 8.3% in *El Mundo* and a 7.3% on *ABC*. The majority of the news on this subject belongs to the international sphere in the ensemble of newspapers (67.9%), leaving the state news in 50.5% of the texts of *La Razón*, 20% in *El País* and *El Mundo*, and 10% on *ABC*. The months of March (14.9%) and June (13.7%) are the ones that hold the largest amount of news on medicine and health.

The texts included in this section refer to the medical use of cannabis and results of scientific research, as in "An epileptic child opens the medicinal use of cannabis in Mexico" (*ABC*, 09/09/2015), "Cannabinoids to defeat the Melanoma "(*La Razón*, 06/24/2015)," I give marijuana to my baby to save his life "(*El Mundo*, 05/19/2015), or "What marijuana can do for your health "(*El País*, 07/28/2015).

Legalization/Legislation

In this topic are the news related to the situation and legislative changes on the consumption of cannabis that occur in the different countries. It is worth noting the wide coverage offered by *El País* (18%) –mainly during November and December– compared to the rest of the newspapers analyzed (*La Razón*, 6.8%, *El Mundo*, 4.3% and *ABC*, 6.9%). The texts coming from the international sphere predominate, with 68.1%. *El País* has a wide coverage of Mexico, with 52.6% of its texts on this subject during November (12 pieces) and December (17 pieces). *La Razón* devotes 14.2% of its texts to Mexico, *El Mundo* 12.2% and *ABC* 5.9%.

Some examples of news on this subject, "The Mexican Supreme Court endorses the use of marijuana for recreational purposes" (*La Razón*, 11/04/2015), "Colombia approves the use of marijuana for therapeutic purposes" (*ABC*, 12/23/2015), "The legalization of marijuana makes its way in Texas" (*El País*, 07/08/2015), and "Ohio rejects legalizing marijuana" (*El Mundo*, 11/04/2015).

Justice

The news that deal with this issue refer to judicial decisions that determine whether or not there is a crime in the complaints related to cannabis. *El Mundo* (11.6%), followed by *El País* (7.5%), *ABC* (6.9%) and *La Razón* (6.8%). Most of the news on this subject belongs to the state (59.9%), although there are many differences in the different newspapers (100% in *ABC*, 85.8% in *La Razón*, 35% in *El Mundo* and only 17.5% in *El País*). Those that come from the international sphere mainly refer to Latin American countries, which in *El País* reach 70.5% (all referred to Mexico), in *El Mundo*, 35% and in *La Razón*, 14.2%. The news on justice are published mainly in the months of March (23.6%) and October (14.7%).

On this subject we found news like these: "Justice takes away the king of drug dealers' Rafael Caro Quintero" (*El País*, 11/19/2015), "The Justice Court of Barcelona endorses cannabis clubs if the partners consume it in the local "(*La Razón*, 03/12/2015)," The Supreme Court condemns the directive of a club of cannabis of Bilbao "(*El Mundo*, 12/28/2015),"Absolved the director of Rototom after being accused of promoting marijuana use" (*ABC*, 05/13/2015).

Politics

The newspapers also include in their pages the political debate on cannabis (*El País*, 8.3%, *La Razón*, 6.9%, *El Mundo*, 3.4% and *ABC*, 6.4%). Most news on this subject correspond to the state level (77.6%). The breakdown by newspapers is as follows: in *El Mundo* and in *ABC* 100% are at state level, in *La Razón*, 66.7% and in *El País*, 58%. In the international sphere, *El País* dedicates 21% to Mexico and *ABC*, 6% to Canada.

The news "In search of the joint voter " (*La Razón*, 04/19/2015) alludes to the proposal of the Citizens

party to legalize soft drugs, a measure that could serve to reduce its consumption and, at the same time, prosecute the crimes related to drug trafficking. Along the same lines is the news "Pablo Iglesias sees 'reasonable' legalizing marijuana" (*ABC*, 05/14/2015), arguing that cannabis is no more harmful to health than many alcoholic beverages.

The possibility of legalizing marijuana enters the electoral campaign for general elections, with citizen platforms that urge political parties to include in their electoral programs the legal regulation of the substance, which was reflected in news such as "La Marijuana enters the campaign" (*El País*, 11/27/2015) or" Cannabis enters politics "(*El Mundo*, 11/26/2015).

Confiscations

Another source of information attention is the confiscation of property by the authority, as a consequence of its relation to a crime associated with cannabis (*La Razón*, 8.9%, *ABC*, 8.6%, *El Mundo*, 3.8%, *El País*, 3.7%). The news refers to operations on confiscation of marijuana and detention of clans that control the sale of these substances, in which they intervene from plants to narcotic substances. All of them are located at the state level and are published mainly in March (20.5%), in November (13.3%), and in September and October (11.1%).

In the texts on this subject, there are headlines such as "Anti-drug raid with seven detainees in the center of Lleida" (*El País*, 07/17/2015), "The Civil Guard conducts the largest seizure of marijuana plants in Spain" (*La Razón*, 09/04/2015), "More than 80 kilos of marijuana and 130,000 euros intervened in Malaga and Granada" (*El Mundo*, 08/26/2015), or "Confiscated 250 kilos of cocaine and more than 3 million Euros to a drug-trafficking organization" (*ABC*, 12/17/2015).

Cannabis clubs/Associations

Cannabis associations and clubs also receive attention from the newspapers, although with very low percentages (*El País*, 3.3%, *El Mundo*, 2.9%, *La Razón*, 1.9% and *ABC*, 1.2%). The texts on this subject are published mainly during the months of May and June (with 22.7% of the texts in each month).

The news of this type are dedicated to inform about the activities of the cannabis clubs in the Spanish state, like "This is how cannabis clubs work in Spain" (*El País*, 11/11/2015), or to spread another series of positive aspects of them, such as "The Barcelona Justice Court believes that cannabis clubs are advantageous" (*La Razón*, 10/05/2015). However, the increased presence of cannabis clubs in newspapers is due to news related to crimes against public health, such as "The National Police dismantle a smoking club where they sold marijuana" (*El Mundo*, 10/9/2015), or "Four detainees running a Cannabis Club, and distributing drugs to young people" (*ABC*, 01/12/2015).

Traffic/road safety

Information related to traffic and road accidents reached a higher percentage in *La Razón* (6.9%), followed closely by *ABC* (2.1%), *El País* (1.7%) and *El Mundo* (1.4%). It is information that corresponds to the state sphere (85.9%) and focuses mainly on the months of July and August (19% in each month). It is important to emphasize the scarce information published on this subject in the newspapers analyzed —9 texts in *La Razón*, 5 in *ABC*, 4 in *El País* and 3 in *El Mundo*—, although traffic accidents are often related to consumption of narcotic substances, which may interfere with motor skills (Bobes & Calafat, 2000, p.11).

The low presence of these issues in the media agenda does not correspond to reality, since, for example, in Spain, the General Direction of Traffic (DGT) in a week detected that more than 2,600 motorists drove drunk or drugged, which in 449 cases had used cannabis and 200 had ingested cocaine and cannabis (*El País*, 06/12/2015). According to the latest National Drug Plan Report for 2013 (Delegación del Gobierno para el Plan Nacional sobre Drogas [DGPNSD], 2014, p.23), of the 784 people killed by traffic accidents in 2013 (557 drivers, 161 pedestrians and 66 companions), 43.1% of drivers and 44.1% of pedestrians had some psychoactive substance, and among those who were positive for drugs, 43.5% of the cases detected cannabis.

This issue includes news such as "The DGT detected more than 2,600 drivers driving under the effects of alcohol and drugs" (*La Razón*, 06/12/2015), "Detained for driving without a license, drunk, in the opposite direction and with the lights off "(*ABC*, 05/29/2015)," The 39 of the drivers died in 2014 consumed drugs or alcohol "(*El País*, 05/8/2015) and "'Chased' 2,405 drivers under the influence of alcohol or drugs in a week" (*El Mundo*, 08/20/2015).

Others

In this last section are collected the news whose topic did not coincide with any of the previous ones and, in turn, did not contain a significant amount of texts to form a theme of their own. Here we have included some news that stand out for their curious character, such as "The drug dealer captured in a prison in Costa Rica will be in captivity" (*El Mundo*, 08/13/2015) and others related to gastronomy and playfulness of the marijuana, as "Ten intoxicated in Conil for taking a sponge cake with marijuana" (*El País*, 07/28/2015), "Seven people are intoxicated by eating a marijuana cake in a restaurant" (*ABC*, 11/10/2015), or "Marijuana intoxicated pets soar 200 percent in five years" (*La Razón*, 06/30/2015).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article aims to analyze the treatment of cannabis in the Spanish general press. Its relevance is justified in the need to know the role of cannabis in the thematic agenda of the media and, as a consequence, to know if it is an issue of interest within the agenda of citizenship, if we attend to the similarity between the media and social agendas advocated by McCombs (2006). This relevance is even greater if we consider that the media are the first source of information on drugs in the Spanish state and that the latest research that only analyzes and in depth this substance in the Spanish press is from 2003 (Ballesteros et al., 2015).

The analysis conducted finds that cannabis is an issue of interest in the state press, as all newspapers publish news pieces on it throughout all the months of the year. This confirms the first hypothesis (H1) and concludes that information on cannabis is part of the media agenda. However, there are many differences in the number of texts published by each newspaper during the months of the year, and there is not a common pattern as to when the issue of cannabis is treated in each newspaper. Rather, it seems that each of them is guided by different criteria when deciding that the topic is news. We can say, therefore, that this is not a seasonal theme, linked to a specific time of the year, and that, in addition, the media agenda on cannabis is not coincident between different newspapers. There are also differences between newspapers in terms of the origin of information, that is, whether they belong to the state or the international sphere. And within each of these areas, the autonomous communities (in the case of the state) and the countries (in the case of the international sphere) that receive more attention from each newspaper are different.

The treatment received by this substance is characterized by an eminently informative style, similar to the one it received a decade ago (Ballesteros, 2015, p.75) and to which drugs in general receive (Romaní, 2004, p.54). The abundance of descriptive news to the detriment of opinions or analyzes, indicate that there is no concern for drafting elaborate texts, to deepen and offer diverse explanations and opinions on cannabis. These results also confirm the second of the established hypotheses (H2), that is, that there is hardly a journalistic deepening in the information, and that these are generic texts that do not deal comprehensively with the cannabis problem. We can relate this scarce deepening of the texts with the fact that many of them are signed by an agency, do not have a signature or have the signature of the newspaper itself. Authorship offers clear clues to reflect the importance each media attaches to the news it publishes. Thus, the fact that a substantial part of the news on cannabis is not signed by a journalist reinforces the conclusion that the newspapers do not worry too much about the elaboration of the information on this subject.

As for the topics, the results indicate that half of the news on cannabis are related to police, judicial and criminal aspects. The issues related to these aspects (detentions, dismantling, justice, confiscations and road safety) make up 49.5% of the total texts. In the opposite sense, only 19.6% of the pieces refer to aspects related to legalization and normalization of cannabis use (collected in the topics: legalization, politics and clubs). The fact that the Citizen Security Law, which decriminalizes consumption in private, was approved in 2015, does not appear to reflect a more standardized treatment of cannabis by the press, although to confirm this perception other studies that analyze the evolution of the treatment of the subject in the press over several years to see if there are changes in this direction should be conducted.

It has also been verified that the subjects related to medicine and health account for 11% of the total, results similar to those obtained in other investigations related to drugs in general (Congil et al., 2004), ranging from 8.6% and 12.4%. However, they disagree with the conclusions of Sznitman and Lewis (2015)

analysis of news published in Israeli newspapers, where two-thirds of cannabis news was presented as medicine, indicating a clear difference between treatment of cannabis by the press in countries where it is not legally contemplated (such as the Spanish state) and in others where its therapeutic use is permitted, and reflects the correspondence between the media and social agendas that McCombs (2006) argues. The journals analyzed deal with the topic of medicine from an informative point of view, with no arguments and scarce scientific data on whether the substance is beneficial or harmful to the health or about the perception that the readers receive of their consumption. On the other hand, 16% of texts refers to news about celebrities, a remarkable amount on a subject that is usually closely linked to the sensationalism of portraying celebrities consuming drugs.

In the light of these results, the third hypothesis (H3) is also confirmed, that is, there is a clear predominance of the issues related to police, judicial and criminal aspects. The reality that reflects the Spanish press on cannabis and, consequently, on the vision of this substance that the Spanish society has, is the equalization of cannabis with the rest of illegal drugs. It offers a monolithic conception of all types of drugs, according to which the drug is a whole and its effects are the same in all cases. In turn, a vision of the drug in general, and of cannabis in particular, is added to the collective imagination as something frightening, with unsuspected consequences, thus constructing a reality that does not correspond to the effects of consumption (Arellano, González, Orsola & Pavletic 2003, p.149). However, further research would need to study the framing of cannabis news in order to delve into the thematic aspects of the texts and to be able to talk about the dominant frameworks, something that has been left out of the research objectives of this work.

FOOTNOTES

1. http://www.hightimes.com/

2. http://www.cannabis.info/es/soft-secrets

3. http://canamo.net/

4. http://www.cannabismagazine.es/

5. http://www.revistayerba.com/

6. http://elcultivador.com/

7. http://elpais.com; http://www.elmundo.es; http://www.larazon.es; http://www.larazon.es

8. Memoria de la Fiscalía General del Estado 2015, p. 280.

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