

Sexual Educommunication in Spanish Media. Analysis of Consent Media Coverage on Instagram and TikTok

La educomunicación sexual en medios españoles. Análisis de la cobertura mediática del consentimiento en Instagram y TikTok

Educomunicação sexual na mídia espanhola. Análise da cobertura da mídia sobre consentimento no Instagram e no TikTok

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Received: 19/02/2024; **Revised:** 24/02/2024; **Accepted:** 01/06/2024;
Published: 19/08/2024

Translation to English: Traducciones Tridiom

To cite this article: Estéfano Sancho, María; & Iranzo-Cabrera, María. (2024). Sexual Educommunication in Spanish Media. Analysis of Consent Media Coverage on Instagram and TikTok. *ICONO 14. Scientific Journal of Communication and Emerging Technologies*, 22(2): e2155. <https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v22i2.2155>

Abstract

This article explores how Spanish media address the ethics of sexual relationships and influence the construction and perception of sexuality among the younger audiences - referred to as Generation Z or Zoomers - through their social media platforms. This observation coincides with the legislative process of the 'Yes Means Yes' Law, a normative change of social and media relevance that places consent at the forefront of relationships following an increase in group sexual assaults by men against a woman. Using a qualitative methodology based on content and discourse analysis, 13 media outlets on Instagram and TikTok were examined, comprising a total of 13,585 published pieces of content. The results show that media coverage focuses on political and temporal controversies, with no intention to delve into or contextualize the various aspects surrounding sexual relationships and consent. It is concluded that the media do not assume an educommunicative function around sexuality despite the potential of the new narratives of both social networks to raise awareness about affective-sexual relationships. Informative and gender-inclusive content, based on reasoned argumentation, are the ones that arouse the greatest interest among the youngest audiences. Precisely through them, journalistic companies could assume an informative and interpretative commitment aimed at raising awareness of an issue about which young people are uninformed and which affects society as a whole on a cultural and political level.

Keywords:

educommunication; generation Z; Instagram; journalism; sexuality; TikTok

Resumen

Este artículo explora cómo medios de comunicación españoles abordan la ética de las relaciones sexuales e influyen en la construcción y percepción de la sexualidad de la audiencia más joven -denominada generación Z o zoomers- a través de sus redes sociales. Esta observación coincide con el proceso legislativo de la Ley del 'solo sí es sí', un cambio normativo de relevancia social y mediática que pone el consentimiento en el punto de mira de las relaciones tras el incremento de agresiones sexuales en grupo de hombres contra una mujer. A través de una metodología cualitativa, basada en análisis del contenido y el discurso, se exploran 13585 contenidos publicados por 13 medios de comunicación en Instagram y TikTok. Los resultados evidencian que la cobertura mediática se ciñe a polémicas políticas y temporales, sin pretensión de profundizar y contextualizar en los diferentes aspectos que envuelven las relaciones sexuales y el consentimiento. Se concluye que los medios no asumen una función educomunicativa en torno a la sexualidad a pesar del potencial de las nuevas narrativas de ambas redes sociales para la concienciación en torno a las relaciones afectivo-sexuales. Los contenidos de carácter divulgativo e inclusivos por lo que respecta al género, basados en una argumentación razonada, son los que despiertan mayor interés entre las audiencias más jóvenes. Precisamente, a través de ellos, las empresas periodísticas podrían asumir un compromiso informativo e interpretativo orientado a la concienciación sobre un tema del que los y las jóvenes carecen de información y que afecta al conjunto de la sociedad a nivel cultural y político.

Palabras clave:

educomunicación; generación Z; Instagram; periodismo; sexualidad; TikTok

Resumo

Este artigo explora a forma como os meios de comunicação social espanhóis abordam a ética das relações sexuais e influenciam a construção e a percepção da sexualidade do público mais jovem - a chamada Geração Z ou Zoomers - através das suas redes sociais. Esta observação coincide com o processo legislativo da Lei "Solo sí es sí", uma alteração regulamentar relevante do ponto de vista social e mediático que

coloca o consentimento no centro das relações após o aumento das agressões sexuais em grupo de homens contra mulheres. Através de uma metodologia qualitativa, baseada na análise de conteúdo e de discurso, são explorados 13585 conteúdos publicados por 13 meios de comunicação social no Instagram e no TikTok. Os resultados mostram que a cobertura mediática se limita a controvérsias políticas e temporais, sem qualquer tentativa de aprofundar e contextualizar os diferentes aspetos das relações sexuais e do consentimento. Conclui-se que os media não assumem uma função educomunicativa em torno da sexualidade, apesar do potencial das novas narrativas de ambas as redes sociais para sensibilizar para as relações afetivo-sexuais. Os conteúdos informativos e inclusivos em termos de género, baseados em argumentação fundamentada, são os que despertam maior interesse entre os públicos mais jovens. Precisamente através deles, as empresas jornalísticas poderiam assumir um compromisso informativo e interpretativo com vista à sensibilização para um tema sobre o qual os jovens têm falta de informação e que afecta toda a sociedade a nível cultural e político.

Palavras-chave:

educomunicação; geração Z; Instagram; jornalismo; sexualidade; TikTok

1. Introduction

Regulatory changes and their capacity to transform reality need to be preceded by well-argued political debate, particularly when this means questioning moral and ethical aspects. This has been the case with Organic Law 10/2022 of 6 September, on the Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom, popularly known as the 'Only yes means yes law' or 'Montero's law' [named after its promoter, Irene Montero, the Minister for Equality]. The new regulation has been implemented in Spain as a result of public concern provoked by the sexual assault on a woman by a group of men. Based on the cornerstone of sexual consent, this law involves a reform of the criminal code. It removes the distinction between aggression and sexual abuse; it prohibits any act of sexual violence using technological means, pornographic advertisements and sexual extortion; and includes mandatory sexual education for underage offenders.

However, suggesting this was controversial before the draft bill even came into existence when it was proposed by the Government on 19 July 2022. It divided public opinion and produced outright opposition from the PP and VOX parliamentary groups (Europa Press, 2022). This sparked media, political and judicial interest, which was fuelled when it came into force on 7 October 2022.

The social significance of this regulatory change, affecting sexuality that is trivialised by part of the general public, prompted this research. Its main goal is to analyse how, in the midst of the debate on the need to regulate sexual consent, the media address the ethics of sexual relations. It aims to explore the journalistic frame and narratives used to present these relations to the youngest members of their audience, who require ‘knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; [and] develop respectful social and sexual relationships’ (UNESCO, 2018, p. 16).

In Spain, Generation Z (born from the 90s onwards) is composed of 7,800,000 young people (Concejo, 2018). Considering that the 2022 Digital News Report for Spain (Vara-Miguel et al., 2022) maintains that people under 35 years old mainly get their information from social media—Twitter (31%), Instagram (25%), Telegram (10%), TikTok (8%) and Twitch (5%)—we decided to focus on the media accounts on these platforms, specifically those that enable educommunication using audio-visual content, such as Instagram and TikTok.

1.1. Health versus sexual violence

The literature review in the last three decades proves the effectiveness of a sexual education that uses a positive, affirmative and inclusive approach. (Goldfarb and Lieberman, 2021). The World Health Organisation (2018, p. 3) states that sexuality:

encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. It is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships [...]. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

It can be considered that a person has sexual health when they present 'a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality' (WHO, 2018, p. 3). This means not only the absence of sexual illness, malfunction or weakness, but rather requires 'a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence' (p. 3).

To achieve a society with sexual health, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled. Even so, according to the report 'La sexualidad de las mujeres jóvenes en el contexto español. Percepciones subjetivas e impacto de la formación' [Young women's sexuality in Spain. Subjective perceptions and impact of training] (Instituto de las Mujeres [Institute of Women], 2022), in Spain 67.4% of women between 16 and 25 years old have been subjected to inappropriate sexual or sexist comments in public places; 46% have received images or comments of a sexual nature on social media without their consent; and 36.2% have suffered unwanted sexual touching. Furthermore, the 2019 Macroencuesta de Violencia contra la Mujer [Macro-survey on Violence against Women], conducted by the Delegación del Gobierno contra la Violencia de Género [Government Delegate's Office against Gender-Based Violence], indicates that 40.4 % (8,240,537 women living in Spain aged 16 years or over) have suffered sexual harassment at some time in their lives. And one in every ten, aged between 15 and 49 years old, who are married or in a relationship, have experienced sexual violence in the last 12 months from their partner (ONUSIDA, 2022).

Comprehensive sexual education under the rule of law involves educational and health institutions, and the media (Gozálvez-Pérez and Contreras-Pulido, 2014). Referring to the latter, whether they are traditional media or the new digital channels, adolescents learn about their developing sexuality by acquiring concepts relating to sexual attractiveness, romantic relationships and sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, 'much of existing media content, unfortunately, is not designed to result in healthy sexuality', nor is it inclusive (Brown et al., 2009, p. 15).

Along these lines, denial is a problem that is not only difficult to prevent but that also favours biased, stereotypical or alarmist coverage as a consequence of the lack of resources to properly address this matter (Sánchez-Muros and Jiménez-Rodrigo, 2021). In particular, sexual violence is now 'a topic that is marked by silence and

denial' and sex crimes have become 'a highly controversial and contested area, and media coverage reflects this' (Serisier, 2017, p. 1); at times supporting social and cultural change and at others representing an obstacle to this change, producing 'backlash sentiments' (Serisier, 2017, p. 26). This would seem to demonstrate, among other aspects, 'male privilege' in the action of naming sexuality and how it is experienced (Lorca, 2023, p. 172).

One of the factors obstructing quality journalism (Gómez Mompert et al., 2013) is ideological polarisation (Barberá, 2020). These days, political discourse is dominated by 'moral absolutism', that is to say, the conviction that one's own beliefs have an objective basis and are superior to those of other people (Viciano et al., 2019; Arias-Maldonado, 2020). On occasions this leads to misinterpretation, disinformation (Olmo, 2019) and/or an invitation to hatred (Benassini, 2022), in order to foster feelings of intolerance, hostility, discrimination and violence.

In this respect, it is important to address agenda-setting in the media, as 'the amount of space or time that they spend on an issue correlates to the public's assessment of its importance', (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020, p. 3). Given that the internet has provided a partial solution to the problem of available space for news, whether a topic is addressed or not acquires even greater significance, as space is no longer an issue. If we add to this the fact that 'a greater need for orientation on a topic produces a greater vulnerability or responsiveness to the effects of the media's agenda' (McCombs, 2002, p. 7).

In the same vein regarding the quality of the media's coverage of sexuality, Boynton and Callaghan (2006, p. 333) highlight that the 'lack of training and understanding of sex and relationships results in misunderstanding or misreporting of stories by journalists, and perpetuating poor media coverage of sex'. Moreover, the poor coverage of sex also means that the profession does not have examples of reporting on sex to serve as a model of quality journalism.

1.2. New communication platforms

In parallel to the lack of attention to sexuality in the media, there is an emphasis on the unsatisfied needs of contemporary adolescents concerning the acquisition of suitable skills to understand sexuality and sexual behaviour (Dudek et al., 2021),

especially in referring to the female anatomy and sexual pleasure—the female body and arousal (Fowler et al., 2021).

In this scenario, the upsurge and current success of audio-visual platforms offering on-demand content have boosted educommunication using these new information technologies; this is also true in the field of sexuality. For example, the British series *Sex Education* (2019) has become a worldwide phenomenon as it has captured the attention of adolescents by demolishing traditional roles and stereotypes through quality sexual education (Forteza-Martínez and Córdova-Tapia, 2021).

However, the other side of the coin is that technology has also helped the spread of pornography among preadolescents. The report '(Des)información sexual: pornografía y adolescencia' [Sexual (dis)information: pornography and adolescence] (Sanjuán, 2020), edited by Save The Children España, highlights that children first access pornography at the age of 12 years and almost 7 out of 10 adolescents consume it regularly. In this respect, 52% of those who view pornography frequently think that watching it has had a significant or fairly significant impact on their relationships. For Pérez (2016), this consumption of free, online content based mainly on violence and inequality has become a substitute for sexual education.

On Instagram and TikTok viewing is based on algorithmic calculations according to the user's preferences (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). This is the specific reason for the consumption of information by young people, who consider news to be part of a whole or a constant, broader content flow (Boczkowski et al., 2018; García-Rivero et al., 2022). They are particularly drawn to audio-visual publications. As regards the dissemination of contents concerning sexual education on TikTok, Fowler et al. (2021) conclude that most of them are created by users and that they lack objective information. Added to this is the fact that the application 'neither regulates nor supervises the content, nor does it warn about incorrect information or unconfirmed claims beyond banning and moderating the production of pornographic or inappropriate content' (Fowler et al., 2021, p. 741).

After this literature review, this study aims to answer the following research questions relating to media coverage of sexuality and consent:

RQ1: What is the total number of publications on sexuality and sexual health compared to the rest of the content that is created and disseminated by the media on their Instagram and TikTok accounts?

RQ2: Who are the people featured in information on sexuality?

RQ3: Which topics and frames are predominant in the coverage of sexuality and consent?

RQ4: Do the most prominent topics coincide with the hashtags that are most widely used by companies—labels used to frame these contents and aimed at achieving views.

RQ5: Are topical issues or timeless ones more noticeable?

RQ6: Does textual information or audio-visual/graphic information carry more weight?

RQ7: What formats are used to create these items of content?

RQ8: Is there polarisation in favour or against sexual rights in these items of content?

RQ9: Do they include elements that are typical of disinformation or hate speech in these items?

RQ10: Which content on issues relating to sexuality has produced the greatest reaction in audiences, in 'likes', comments and views?

2. Material and methods

To conduct this investigation, the methodology involved content analysis and critical analysis of the discourse in the items published on Instagram and TikTok by 13 Spanish media outlets. We selected the five media companies with the largest online audiences according to the 2022 Digital News Report (*El País, Okdiario, Antena 3, El Mundo, 20 minutos*), two state news agencies (*EFE and Europa Press*) and five media cooperatives (*El Salto, La Marea, La Directa, CTXT, Pikara Magazine*), media run by journalists 'who have found in entrepreneurship a way to safeguard their autonomy and remain viable' (Barranquero and Sánchez, 2018, p. 54). Additionally, we explored the media platform *Freeda*, aimed 'at the new generations who feel underrepresented', which is exclusively digital, as it only distributes its content on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn and Facebook (table 1).

We personally collected the content published by these media between 19 July 2022 and 8 March 2023. The start date for the analysis was the day that the Government published the draft for the Law on the Comprehensive Guarantee of

Table 1. Content on general topics and on sexuality published by the selected media on Instagram and TikTok

Medium	Instagram		TikTok		Total	
	General content	Content on sexuality	General content	Content on sexuality	General content	Content on sexuality
Antena 3	@antena3noticias		@antena3noticias		Antena 3	
	789	12 (1.52%)	112	5 (4.46%)	901	17(1.89%)
El País	@el_pais		@elpais		El País	
	1509	47 (3.11%)	328	6 (1.83%)	1837	53 (2.89%)
El Mundo	@elmundo_es		@elmundo.es		El Mundo	
	1299	42 (3.23%)	422	12 (2.84%)	1721	54 (3.14%)
20 Minutos	@20m		@20m		20 Minutos	
	1008	12 (1.19%)	228	2 (0.88%)	1236	14(1.13%)
Okdiario	@okdiario		@okdiario_oficial		Okdiario	
	1350	99 (7.33%)	163	12 (7.36%)	1513	111 (7.34%)
EFE	@efe_noticias		@efenoticias		EFE	
	617	2(0.32%)	152	2(1.31%)	769	4(0.52%)
Europa Press	@europapress		@europapress		Europa Press	
	1651	70 (4.24%)	373	29 (7.77%)	2024	99(4.89%)
La Directa	@directa.cat				La Directa	
	132	8 (6.06%)	0	0 (0%)	132	8(6.06%)
CTXT	@ctxt_es				CTXT	
	188	6 (3.19%)	0	0 (0%)	188	6(3.19%)
El Salto	@elsaltodiario		@elsaltodiario		El Salto	
	626	23 (3.67%)	70	2 (2.86%)	696	25(3.59%)
La Marea	@lamarea.com				La Marea	
	258	3 (1.16%)	0	0 (0%)	258	3(1.16%)

Table 1. Content on general topics and on sexuality published by the selected media on Instagram and TikTok (continued)

Medium	Instagram		TikTok		Total	
Pikara Magazine	@pikara_magazine				Pikara Magazine	
	297	10 (3.37%)	0	0 (0%)	297	10(3.37%)
Freeda	@freeda_es		@freeda_es		Freeda	
	1213	61 (5.03%)	800	35 (4.37%)	2013	96(4.77%)
	Total on Instagram		Total on TikTok		Total	
	10937	395 (3.61%)	2648	105 (3.96%)	13585	500 (3.68%)

Source: authors' own compilation

Sexual Freedom. The data extraction process ended a day after the comprehensive reform of article 178 of this law was presented to the Congress (7 March 2023). As this coincided with 8 March, International Women's Day, we decided to consider publications produced on this day for the defence of women's rights, among them sexual rights. Over these 7 months and 17 days, the 'Only yes means yes law' was the focus of much discussion among the general public. Overall, the corpus is composed of a total sample of 13,585 journalistic publications.

Within this sample, a subsample of 500 publications (352 from conventional media, 52 from alternative media and 96 from the specialist medium) were identified, which addressed issues related to sexuality and can be accessed in the Zenodo repository (<https://zenodo.org/records/10681477>). They were analysed using an analysis template composed of 15 quantitative and categorical variables (Hernández et al., 2014), to which numerical measurement and descriptive statistics were subsequently applied:

- Total number of publications and number of publications that referred to sexuality
- Number of 'likes'
- Number of comments
- Number of views

- Position of main weight of information: graphic part, textual part, both.
- Content format: infographic, illustration, video, photograph, multiple
 - In the case of video: declaration of source, explanation by the journalist, audio-visual editing (with or without a voiceover).
- Subject of the information. The content analysed may focus on the actions of: the holder of a political position, the holder of a judicial position, the holder of religious position, a victim, a sex offender, a journalist, a young person (person aged between 16 and 30 years who cannot be identified by any of the aforementioned roles), other.
- Topic: sexual relations, 'Only yes means yes law', both.
- Relevance: topical or timeless issue.
- Frame for dissemination of sexuality: educational, social controversy, political controversy, legal controversy, religious controversy.
- Polarisation: positive (in favour of the regulation of consent), negative (against the regulation of consent), non-existent (neither in favour nor against), neutral (presents aspects in favour and against).
- Type of disinformation: unverifiable claim, misrepresentation of words, not applicable.
- Type of hate speech: dehumanisation (denial of human characteristics), insults (offensive or vulgar expressions), othering (us versus them), promotion of stereotypes/prejudices (schematic, simplified representation of a group of people), not applicable.

3. Results

To answer RQ1, we analysed the overall count of content publications on sexuality. Of the total number of items posted on Instagram and TikTok, no medium achieved interest of over 10% for issues related to sexual relations. *Okdiario* has published the most content on this topic (7.34%, 111 out of 1513), followed by *Europa Press* (4.89%, 99 out of 2024). *Freeda*, a medium that specialises in social issues, with a special focus on women's information needs, stood at 4.77% (96 out of 2013).

Turning to the subsample, that is to say, the content items referring to sexuality and sexual education, the conventional media used both sites indiscriminately.

However, the media cooperatives are not present on the TikTok platform. It is quite the opposite case regarding *Freeda*, which has twice as many publications on TikTok than on Instagram. In the period analysed, 8 March 2023 was the day on which most content referring to sexuality (N=25) was published on these sites. And, in second place, is 6 October (N=12), just one day before the ‘Only yes means yes law’ came into effect.

In the response to RQ2, the protagonists of this information were analysed (table 2). Politicians are prominent (40.6%, 203); and the most conspicuous among them is the Minister for Equality, Irene Montero (94), the promoter of the law. Secondly, the focus is on the victims of sexual assault (19%, N=95). While in most media the presence of the minister Irene Montero is predominant, *Freeda* chooses different subjects for its content: victims (34), journalists from the medium who explain different issues relating to sexual education (28), young people (14) and politicians—including Montero (12).

As regards the topics and frames that dominate the coverage of sexuality and consent (RQ3), the conventional media published 72% of the items dedicated to the new law (206 publications). This position coincides with the three hashtags

Table 2. *Content main subjects by topic*

	Both	The ‘Only yes means yes law’	Sexual relations	Total
Sex offender	-	6	22	28
Artistic position holder	-	3	14	17
Judicial office holder	-	14	4	18
Political office holder	1	91	17	109
Religious office holder	-	1	3	4
Irene Montero	8	63	23	94
Young people	2	17	41	60
Journalist	3	21	41	65
People with functional diversity	-	-	10	10
Victims	3	12	80	95
Total	17	228	255	500

Source: authors’ own compilation

that are most widely used to give their content visibility, focusing on the legislative controversy and the attack on the ministry that drove the regulatory change. They are #IreneMontero, #SoloSiEsSí [only yes means yes] and #Igualdad [Equality] (RQ4).

The media cooperatives focus, by contrast, on the implications for sexual relations. And on *Freeda*, with 90 publications, 92.4% of its items address different aspects of sexuality, such as false myths, female pleasure, communication in a sexual relationship or the different forms that consent or sexual harassment take. In these cases, there is a predominance of labels that call for #EducacionSexual [Sexual Education] and #Sexualidad [Sexuality] to gain greater visibility among the audience.

The most frequent frame in the content on the 'Only yes means yes law' (table 3) was the political controversy over the new regulation (81.20%, 216 out of 266 items about the law). Specifically, *Okdiario* is the medium that focuses most on this frame; it signs 44.3% of these publications. However, the content items that address the law from an educommunicational approach barely amount to 50 (18.80%). Once again, in this aspect *Freeda* is the medium that is distinctive for drawing attention to the social change involved in this regulation in terms of the need for agreement in sexual relations. The platform analyses the law from the point of view of sexual education, as can be seen in image 1.

As for the temporality of content (RQ5), *Freeda* is noticeable for registering the greatest volume of atemporal news items of special interest to young women (68 out of the 96 publications analysed). By contrast, 84% of the conventional media publish topics linked to the present. In these new narratives, most of the information weight (RQ6) mainly lies in the graphic part of the publication (69.2%,

Table 3. Frame of the 'Only yes means yes law' by type of medium

	Educommunicational	Political	Total
Alternative	4	17	219
Conventional	41	198	239
Specialist	5	1	6
Total	50	216	266

Source: authors' own compilation

Image 1. Publication by Freeda on consent [Sentence in photo: Consent can take different forms...]



Source: Freeda, 28/10/2022 (<https://bit.ly/48bXbCu>)

N=346), according to the formal requirements of the two social networking sites. In only 107 publications on Instagram (21.4%) was there a greater load of information in the text.

The most widely used format by Spanish media for this type of content (RQ7) is video (62%, 309), followed by photography (25.6%, 128). When the publication is a video—an optional format on Instagram, whereas it is obligatory on TikTok—most content weight is inserted into the graphic part and different communicative resources are used to build information. In just over half of their publications, the conventional media use a declaration by a source (66.8%), whilst the specialist media *Freeda* prefers to use the format of analysis or well-argued interpretation by a member of its team (53.6%). The media cooperatives, in turn, are not notable for their use of videos (8 items out of 52) and half of the time (50%) they opt to publish dynamic audio-visual presentation without a voiceover.

With reference to the polarisation regarding the Law on the Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom (RQ8), 74 publications by conventional media reveal a position against this regulation; these media are *Okdiario* (N=64), *Europa Press* (5), *El País* (2) and *El Mundo* (3). These publications generally focus on the political controversy in parliament. 8 March 2023 was the day when most negative publications were published about the change in legislation. 7 publications in favour of the law were identified. They are by *Freeda* (3), *El Salto* (2), *Pikara Magazine* (1) and *El País* (1). The other posts analysed show non-existent or neutral positions regarding the law. In this sense, *Europa Press* is by far the most neutral medium on the subject of the law and *CTXT* is the only medium to present non-existent polarisation about the law. If we analyse the existence of polarisation in video declarations, *Okdiario* has the greatest number of publications with verbal quotations against it (N=49). *Europa Press* is the medium that has posted the most declarations in favour of 'Montero's law' on its social media regarding this regulation (N=24). And *Freeda* opts for declarations with non-existent polarisation (N=51).

In terms of the presence of disinformation in these content items (RQ9), it is important to note that there are different typologies of disinformation in publications by *Okdiario* (42). They are to be found in the publications that focus on the political controversy surrounding the new law (31) and words are misrepresented to a greater extent (as can be seen in this example, <https://bit.ly/3GDgqsP>). Likewise, *Okdiario* is the only medium analysed that disseminates hate speech in its texts (N=7): othering (3), dehumanisation (2) and insults (2). When we analysed whether hate speech is present in the declarations taken from sources, it was detected in 137 publications; of these, 77 were based on othering. This was followed by insults (36) and dehumanisation (9). The media that have published most declarations containing hate speech are *Okdiario* and *Europa Press* (<https://bit.ly/48fYS1B>).

Finally, in answering RQ10, the performance indicators analysed show that content items about sexual relations attract the most interest among the audience on these two social networking sites. Publications on sexuality generate 5 million more views than those referring to the 'Only yes means yes' law'; and in the case of Instagram—where the audience reacts with a 'like'—this number increases four-fold. The same is true for the number of comments, which is 21% higher for journalistic items that concentrate on sexual relations. By medium, *El Mundo* collected

the most comments, over 30,000, followed by *El País*, which registered more than 20,000 comments on Instagram.

In particular, the TikTok publication by *El Mundo* about the social controversy caused by the sexual assault involving penetration by the right-back football player Dani Alves on a young woman in the toilets of a nightclub in December 2022 (<https://bit.ly/47UHRnB>) is the content with the highest number of views, standing at 3 million. This post includes the declaration of the footballer's ex-wife, who published a text on her official Instagram account after the event, and the reaction of surprise from a world-famous footballer, one of the alleged offender's colleagues. This news is presented with a tone of morbid curiosity and a sensationalist approach.

Although the total number of posts by *Freeda* is lower than in the conventional media, it represents 30% of all the 'likes' on Instagram. And when we analysed the total number of views on TikTok, *Freeda* is the most-viewed medium on this platform, with over 2 million views, followed by *Europa Press*, with more than one million views in total. Specifically, the publication with the highest number of views—over one million visits—is a video featuring a female couple who are talking about periods and sex between women (<https://bit.ly/47XPsvIv>).

4. Discussion

On the basis of the theoretical framework proposed regarding the media's influence on public opinion and in view of the results of this research, which focuses on the media coverage of aspects related to sexual relations and consent, it is evident that journalism in Spain does not currently prioritise the topic of sexuality, particularly when it is aimed at the younger members of their audience.

An analysis of the total number of publications over 7 months and 17 days, shows that the mass media, also known as conventional media, have reported the most on issues relating to sexual relations. Nevertheless, this newsworthiness stems from the political debate regarding the Law on the Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom, which was created specifically in order to place non-consensual sexual relations in the spotlight. This concerns content items on sexuality that are temporary, linked to the present, controversial and in a sensationalist tone, far

from the respectful, positive approach towards sexuality advocated by the World Health Organisation (2018).

Additionally, this type of publication is usually related to days of protest such as International Women's Day or in connection to significant days in parliamentary debate. In general, these figures demonstrate that the media's agenda-setting analysed on Instagram and TikTok does not regard sexual topics as a priority, whereas the younger audience do consider them to be so (Dudek et al., 2021), which is seen in specialist media for these audiences such as *Freeda*. The lack of information in the Spanish media represents greater 'vulnerability' for adolescents (McCombs, 2002), who feel that their information needs are not being met by this type of journalism company.

In the period analysed, instead of clarifying key concepts in sexual health, the conventional media stuck to the controversy in the Lower House. They concentrated on a law that was brought to the Congress in order to regulate sexual violence but in their publications on social media they did not question the reason underlying the need for a structural law to address not only sexual assault but also, above all, to prevent it through sexual education.

Moreover, one of the companies with the largest audience, *Okdiario*, published false information and/or misinterpretations by distorting words and making unverifiable claims. It is also distinctive for the number of publications that include hate speech, especially against a member of the Government, with the purpose of damaging her politically as a result of the law on sexual consent. The content published by *Okdiario* could therefore be intended to promote its ideological agenda and influence users' political or social identity (Barberá, 2020). In fact, as it infringes the criteria of journalistic quality and ethics (Gómez Mompert et al., 2013), it could be defined as a pseudo-medium (Palau-Sampio and Carratalá, 2022).

However, items of content on sexuality of an interpretive or informative nature, based on context and well-reasoned arguments—those that meet the requirements of quality journalism—are those that arouse the greatest interest among audiences, which is shown in 'likes' and views. The work by *Freeda* is particularly noteworthy due to its focus on gender in favour of sexual rights such as equality, dignity and freedom.

This is not the case for the comments, particularly on content published by conventional media. These comments tend to indulge in political squabbling,

reflecting the media's political segmentation. There is a predominance of a so-called 'sentimental democracy' (Arias-Maldonado, 2016).

The conventional media's neglect of issues related to sexual relations could be due to three possible causes: the lack of knowledge and education regarding sex and relationships (Boynton and Callaghan, 2006) in Spanish society, and specifically among professionals in the journalism sector; the scientific sphere's lack of proactivity in promoting information-sharing about sexuality (Mebane et al., 2006), in particular aimed at women; and the influence of conservatism among the senior management of the conventional media analysed.

In order to identify the significance of each of these reasons, we suggest that future research be conducted based on in-depth interviews with the professionals who address these topics in the media analysed. Another interesting aspect arising from this study is the analysis of compliance from the perspective of gender in these news pieces. We should bear in mind that two of the 13 media analysed have a female gender editor—*El País* and *EFE*—a new professional role created to ensure gender equality in the approaches used by the media, and in their sources (Iranzo-Cabrera et al., 2023). Similarly, and with the focus on the audience, it would be interesting to assess reception and diagnose the lack of information among young people.

As regards the limitations of this study, it should be noted that the research was conducted in parallel to the parliamentary process, and consequently it has not involved a time perspective that would provide greater knowledge of the changes that it represented and therefore enable us to create a bibliography to that effect. Additionally, four of the five media associations still do not use TikTok as an information channel, which has made it more difficult to analyse their media coverage in comparison to the five conventional media, the two news agencies and the specialist medium *Freeda*.

Author Contribution Statement

María Estéfano Sancho: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Visualization; Writing – original draft. **María Iranzo-Cabrera:** Conceptualization; Methodology; Supervision; Writing – review and editing. The authors have read and agree with the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Funding sources

This research is part of the project 'Desconcierto informativo: calidad precarizada, sobre(des)información y polarización' [Information turmoil: precarious quality, (dis)information overload and polarisation], funded by the Generalitat Valenciana [Regional Government of the Region of Valencia] (Ref. CIAIC02021-125).

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