journalism and media

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Ideological Battle in Spain's Television Access Prime Time: Analysis of *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta* Representations

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Abstract

This study examines how ideological polarisation in Spanish society is reflected and amplified in press coverage of the competition between *El Hormiguero* (Antena3) and *La Revuelta* (TVE) in the access prime time television slot. Situated within debates on audience fragmentation, the attention economy, and the politicisation of entertainment, the research seeks to determine whether media ideology shapes journalistic narratives surrounding this television rivalry. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis. A total of 385 news articles published between April 2024 and March 2025 in five leading Spanish digital newspapers with different ideological orientations (*20 Minutos*, *ABC*, *El HuffPost*, *El Mundo* and *El País*) were analysed. The results reveal clear ideological patterns in coverage, affecting the intensity of attention, the selection of sources, and the framing of both programmes. *El Hormiguero* is predominantly associated with leadership and competitive strength, while *La Revuelta* is framed around innovation, youth appeal, and politicisation linked to public broadcasting. Overall, the findings indicate that Spanish newspapers do not merely report on a television competition but actively contribute to its symbolic and ideological polarisation, reinforcing entertainment as a central arena of contemporary cultural conflict.

Keywords: access prime time; affective polarisation; audience fragmentation; ideological framing; media television competition; press coverage; Spanish media system

1. Introduction

Understanding the contemporary media ecosystem requires an in-depth analysis of audience fragmentation, a disruptive phenomenon that for at least two decades has destabilised the traditional structures of the television industry and has completely reconfigured the logics of audiovisual production, distribution, and consumption (Álvarez Monzoncillo, 2011; Álzaga & Roller, 2023). The monolithic paradigm of television, characterised by a limited supply and large, relatively homogeneous audiences, has gradually given way to a complex multiplatform environment. This environment is defined by what Jenkins (2006) termed media convergence: a constant flow of content across multiple technological platforms that has, to some extent, empowered the viewer and redefined their role within the communicative process.

This transformation has generated clear tensions between the linear television model, based on sequential scheduling, and non-linear subscription video-on-demand (SVoD) services. This coexistence has been examined by scholars such as Lotz (2014) and, more recently, Johnson (2025), from the perspectives of tension and continuity, respectively.

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Academic Editors: Andreu Casero-Ripollés, Eglée Ortega Fernández and Carmen Llovet

Received: 31 December 2025
Revised: 17 April 2026
Accepted: 19 May 2026
Published: 22 May 2026

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Within this new scenario, previously non-existent consumption practices have emerged, such as second-screen viewing, that is, the simultaneous use of mobile devices while watching television, as noted by Grandío and Bonaut (2012), as well as binge-watching (Habes et al., 2025a), understood as the intensive and continuous consumption of multiple episodes of a television series. This latter practice is intrinsically linked to the logic of streaming platforms (Johnson et al., 2025) and is also associated with transformations in the narrative and cultural experience of TV watching (Boyle, 2025). The direct consequence of this proliferation of screens and modes of access is an unprecedented dispersion of audience attention, which necessitates a reconsideration of the metrics that have historically been used to measure the success of a product within industry.

This dispersion has triggered a profound crisis in traditional audience measurement systems (TAM, or *Total Addressable Market*). The audience metre, which for decades served as the industry standard for linear television, bases its methodology on monitoring media consumption within a representative panel of households, recording which channel is tuned in, who is watching, and for how long (Jauset, 2008; Portilla, 2015). However, this system, designed for a closed media ecosystem, has proven insufficient to capture the complexity of contemporary watching practices, which now extend to streaming platforms, mobile devices, and out-of-home consumption.

The industry therefore faces the challenge of quantifying value in an environment in which traditional ratings are no longer the sole indicator of success, particularly in contexts characterised by high levels of segmentation in media consumption (Broockman & Kalla, 2024). As a result, new analytical dimensions have emerged, such as expressions of demand or engagement, which measure both the impact of content and the social conversation surrounding it (Neira et al., 2021; Gallardo-Camacho, 2024). As Napoli (2012) argued, the focus has shifted from audiences as a merchandise sold to advertisers toward the profitability of the full life cycle of an audiovisual product, emphasising its capacity to attract and retain subscribers.

The difficulty of measuring audiences in a unified manner, together with their migration toward new services, has in turn forced a radical transformation of business models. The traditional model, largely financed through advertising, is being challenged by the rise in the aforementioned SVoD services. This shift has been driven by global players such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and HBO, whose strategies are based on user-funded financing, non-linear distribution, increasing vertical integration, and new logics for the economic exploitation of content catalogues (Pérez-Rufí et al., 2020). This new paradigm has triggered what Lobato (2019) has described as the "streaming wars", a state of hypercompetition in which major media corporations compete for a share of the attention market.

As an adaptive response, traditional television networks themselves have been compelled to diversify their revenue streams. This has been an evolutionary process that began with the launch of websites that merely hosted content previously broadcast on linear channels and later, under competitive pressure, evolved into the implementation of paid platforms such as *Atresplayer* (Atresmedia) and *Mitele* (Mediaset) in Spain (Fernández Herruzo, 2024; Moreno Albarracín & Blanco Sánchez, 2025).

Competitive pressure and the need to maximise profitability in a fragmented market have decisively shaped programming strategies, particularly those targeting younger audiences, who are no longer primarily engaged with traditional television consumption. In a context of commercial hypercompetitiveness, the macro-genre of the infoshow has been promoted; a hybrid format that blends information and entertainment and directly responds to the demands of this type of audience by prioritising their preferences in order to secure loyal audience (Nevado & Fernández-Ramírez, 2024; Zamora-Martínez & González-Neira, 2022), as well as facilitate its extended circulation across social media and digital environments (Peris-Blanes et al., 2021).

This approach has led to a progressive homogenisation of offerings in prime-time slots, where commercial entertainment formats dominate the schedule. As a counterpart, cultural programming has been relegated to marginal time slots, losing both visibility and impact. A comparative analysis of Spanish television schedules highlights this trend, showing that the share of cultural and educational programming declined from 3% in 2016 to just 2% in 2025 (Rodríguez Trigo, 2025). A market-driven logic has thus prevailed, progressively sidelining content that does not guarantee immediate profitability. This development poses serious challenges, particularly for the mission of public service broadcasters.

Indeed, this transformation of the media ecosystem has entailed a kind of existential crisis specific to public service television, whose social function and institutional identity have been profoundly questioned in an environment in which audiences have access to an almost unlimited range of content (Kevin, 2015; Goyanes et al., 2021), as well as by the growing technological and organisational pressure placed on traditional production models (Maroto González & Prieto Arosa, 2023).

In order to maintain legitimacy and fulfil their public service mandate, innovation in formats, languages, and modes of production has become a crucial strategic necessity. Public media organisations must experiment with new narratives and explore the possibilities of digital platforms to connect with younger generations and to justify their existence within a society that no longer perceives them as the sole informational and cultural reference point (Azurmendi et al., 2015; Eguzkitza Mestraitua, 2023; Etura Hernández et al., 2023). Consequently, we are witnessing increasingly intense competition to capture the attention of specific audience segments, redefining the rules of the game for all market actors.

The aforementioned crisis of legitimacy and the consequent homogenisation of programming are not merely symptoms of audience fragmentation but act as the primary driving force compelling both public service and commercial broadcasters to reorient their strategies. As they lose the ability to congregate large and homogeneous audiences, these operators are forced into a high-intensity battle for the attention of more specific and segmented publics. The macrostructural problem of audience dispersion thus translates into a microstrategic response: the transition from a mass broadcasting model toward a logic of narrowcasting, or niche-based distribution (Moreno Albarracín & Blanco Sánchez, 2025). This reordering of the media competition space, where the struggle is no longer for the totality of the audience but for valuable audience segments, becomes the central axis defining the new competitive paradigm within which this research is situated, a process closely linked to transformations in programming strategies and strategic audience management (Díaz Monsalvo et al., 2025).

The reconfiguration of the audiovisual market has not only dispersed the mass audience but has also restructured it into a multiplicity of specific niches, intensifying competition to capture and retain audience attention. This process marks the transition from mass broadcasting aimed at an undifferentiated public to a model in which programming becomes increasingly specialised in order to attract audience segments with clearly defined sociocultural and economic profiles (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012; Napoli, 2012). This segmentation is a direct consequence of both the proliferation of content and the specialisation of channels, which seek to differentiate themselves in a saturated environment by appealing to audiences with particular interests (Balnaves et al., 2011; Izquierdo Castillo, 2016), as well as of transmedia content strategies developed by public service broadcasters (Hidalgo-Marí & Segarra-Saavedra, 2020). The prevailing logic is no longer to reach the largest possible number of TV viewers, but rather to establish effective connections with specific demographic groups that are valuable to advertisers or that are willing to pay for content that meets their particular preferences.

As suggested earlier, within this niche-driven dynamics, the youth target audience has become one of the most coveted and, at the same time, most elusive segments for traditional television, given its distinctive patterns of audiovisual consumption. This demographic group shows a declining interest in linear television and its rigid programming schedules (Crusafon et al., 2020; Casado et al., 2023), thus preferring the on-demand consumption offered by digital platforms. In its identity-building phase, young people tend to reject mass-produced content and seek out media that reflect their own experiences and subcultures, as argued by Asmar et al. (2025) and Eguzkitza Mestraitua (2023). The preference of the so-called Generation Z for interactive and on-demand content, where the user has full control over what, how, and when to consume, has compelled broadcasters to rethink their strategies and to develop platforms and content specifically designed for this audience, acknowledging that traditional programming models are no longer effective for reaching them. This shift became symbolically evident during the COVID-19 health crisis (Silva-Torres et al., 2022).

The competition for the attention of young audiences is framed within what has been termed the attention economy, a concept that emphasises that, in an environment of information and content overload, the viewer's attention becomes the scarcest resource and, therefore, the primary economic asset (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012; Napoli, 2012). Digital platforms have developed increasingly sophisticated strategies to capture and retain this attention. On the one hand, they use recommendation algorithms to personalise content offerings, creating tailored user experiences and reducing search costs (Johnson et al., 2025; Ribke & Wayne, 2025). On the other hand, they invest substantial resources in the production of tentpole contents, high-budget audiovisual events designed to attract large numbers of subscribers and generate high levels of engagement, a key indicator that measures the degree of audience involvement and loyalty toward a platform or a specific piece of content (Neira et al., 2021; Johnson, 2025).

The pinnacle of these dynamics of fragmentation, niche competition, and struggles for attention is the phenomenon of the platformisation of the media ecosystem. Global players such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and HBO not only act as content distributors, but also have redefined the rules of production, promotion, and consumption on a transnational scale (Lobato, 2019; Johnson, 2025). This process has consolidated a highly competitive market, not only among new platforms, but also with traditional operators. The latter, far from being mere passive observers, have actively contributed to platformisation through the creation of their own streaming services, in an effort not to lose its relevance in the new paradigm and compete for a share of the digital market (Fernández Herruzo, 2024; Moreno Albarracín & Blanco Sánchez, 2025). The result is a hybrid ecosystem where diverse and often conflicting business models, programming strategies, and consumption patterns coexist (López-Martín & Mora de la Torre, 2025).

Finally, it is relevant to incorporate gender as a factor that cuts across both audience composition and content strategies in this new scenario. Research has shown that variables such as gender can moderate the acceptance and use of social television (Habes et al., 2025b), and that the audience profiles of programmes competing in highly competitive time slots often display clearly defined gender biases (Mata-Núñez, 2024). Likewise, the new platforms have made the representation of gender diversity and queer identities a central element of their transnational branding strategies, seeking to connect with global audiences through values of inclusion and progressivism (Lovera Choque & Rocha Guzmán, 2023; Asmar et al., 2025). Audience segmentation, therefore, is not only demographic or psychographic in nature, but also responds to identities and cultural sensibilities that platforms seek to capitalise in some way.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this study is to examine whether this division within Spanish society is reproduced in the country's leading newspapers. To this end,

this research aims to answer questions such as whether the ideological orientation of each media outlet influences the narrative of the 'battle' for audiences between the two late-night television shows (RQ1). As specific objectives, the study aims to observe the role played by news sources in the construction of different discourses (SO1), to identify the main arguments for and against each programme advanced by each newspaper (SO2), and to determine the principal themes or issues that structure the narrative surrounding the confrontation between the two programmes to capture the access prime-time slot (SO3)—something that in Spain may have become a matter of state concern.

The findings show that the press does not act as a neutral observer of this television rivalry, but rather contributes to its symbolic construction through selective framing, argumentative emphasis, and omission. As a result, entertainment television emerges as a key site for ideological alignment and affective polarisation, where audience competition is reinterpreted as cultural and political conflict. These conclusions underscore the growing role of infotainment in structuring public debate and suggest that media polarisation in Spain extends beyond explicitly political content, permeating the coverage of popular culture and reinforcing fragmented, identity-based media consumption.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Spanish Television Ecosystem

The analysis of the Spanish case emerges as a quintessential microcosm for observing the materialisation of these tensions. The particular trajectory of Spain's audiovisual market, from a strict state monopoly to a highly concentrated private duopoly that only competes with regional television stations, offers a particularly fertile ground for examining, in a real-world, high-pressure environment, the dynamics described above, the struggles in the context of attention economy, and the strategic segmentation of audiences. The ways in which Spanish operators have responded to competition for key niches, such as youth audiences and gender-segmented publics, should not be understood as a merely regional example, but rather as the necessary empirical validation of a global framework of media consumption.

Applying theoretical frameworks on fragmentation and competition to the Spanish television ecosystem clearly illustrates how these global dynamics have shaped the country's audiovisual industry. The evolution of programming in Spain directly reflects this transformation. From the monopoly of *Radiotelevisión Española* (RTVE), whose programming was structured under State ideology (Kevin, 2015), to the current system dominated by the private duopoly of Atresmedia and Mediaset (Casado et al., 2023), competition for audiences has been the primary driver of change in television content. This rivalry has historically manifested itself in battles for leadership in key time slots, such as the late-night competition between formats such as *La Sonrisa del Pelícano* (*The Pelican's Smile*) (*Antena 3*) and *Crónicas Marcianas* (*Martian Chronicles*) (*Telecinco*) in the late 1990s (Quintas-Froufe & González-Neira, 2015). More recently, this competitive pressure has consolidated infoshow formats in the access prime-time slot, as exemplified by *El Intermedio* (*The Intermission*) (*La Sexta*), a programme that has successfully combined satire and current affairs to sustain its success for nearly two decades by adapting to the demands of audiences seeking both information and entertainment (Nevado & Fernández-Ramírez, 2024), as well as *El Hormiguero* (*The Anthill*), hosted by Pablo Motos, which has been on air since 2006, launched initially on *Cuatro* and later on *Antena 3*.

In this highly competitive commercial environment, Spanish public television, led by RTVE, has been compelled to redefine its role in order to maintain its legitimacy and connect with new audiences that have moved away from linear television. One of RTVE's most decisive commitments has been innovation through its Audiovisual Innovation Lab (Lab RTVE), a unit dedicated to experimenting with new narratives and formats

(Eguzkitza Mestraitua et al., 2023). The public corporation has sought to explore new languages and platforms in order to fulfil its public service mission within the digital environment. Alongside RTVE, the regional public television stations grouped together in FORTA (Federation of Regional Radio and Television Organisations) have also played a fundamental role in promoting the culture and languages of their respective territories, in some cases, such as *TV3* in Catalonia, achieving highly significant audience figures that directly compete with national networks.

In this context, competition for young audiences has perhaps been the battleground on which the adaptive strategies of Spanish media operators have been most clearly articulated. The confirmation of the Millennial and Generation Z exodus from linear television (Crusafon et al., 2020; Casado et al., 2023) has led audiovisual media groups to launch initiatives specifically aimed at this target audience. As a result, the Spanish case perfectly encapsulates the tensions and transformations that define the contemporary television ecosystem. The creation of dedicated platforms such as *Playz*, *Flooxer*, and *MTMAD* constitutes a direct manifestation of niche competition within a multiplatform context in which linear television has lost its centrality, especially among younger audiences. In addition, the evolution of formats such as *El Intermedio*, as well as historical rivalries in prime-time and late-night slots, illustrates the transformation of programming strategies under the pressure of a new business model marked by hypercompetition and the pursuit of profitability. The situation in the Spanish market, with constant tension between the private duopoly, the public service mission of RTVE and regional television stations, and the disruptive emergence of global platforms, offers a microcosm that faithfully reflects the macro trends of fragmentation and competition that characterise the audiovisual industry in the digital age.

While this study draws on multiple theoretical perspectives, it is primarily guided by the concept of affective polarisation within fragmented media systems (Levendusky, 2013; Iyengar et al., 2019), which provides the central explanatory lens for interpreting the rivalry between the two programmes. In this regard, the access prime-time confrontation analysed here is approached not merely as an industrial dispute over ratings, but as a symbolic arena in which structural media transformations intersect with processes of ideological alignment and emotional segmentation.

2.2. Access Prime Time in Spain as a Strategic Space of Cultural Competition

The access prime time television slot in Spain has become established in recent years as a space of highly competitive intensity for the attention of the audience. This relevance is largely explained by the singularity of the Spanish prime-time schedule, which begins relatively late, at around 10:30 p.m. This circumstance makes the previous period a key strategic window, in which generalist channels attempt to build viewer loyalty before their possible migration to on-demand platforms (Sotelo-González et al., 2020; Fernández Herruzo, 2024). Within this context, the start of the 2025 television season revealed a convergent strategy among the main media groups, RTVE, Atresmedia, and Mediaset, centred on the talk show format (Fontán Allen, 2025). The rapid cancellation of Mediaset's proposal only reinforced the perception of a highly competitive scenario that, in practice, has come to be defined by the confrontation between two formats: *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta*.

This confrontation cannot be understood merely as a struggle for audience share, but rather as a paradigmatic case of the transformation of the television ecosystem within the context of complexity described thus far (Lobato, 2019; Johnson, 2025). Access prime time is thus configured as a space of symbolic influence in which hybrid entertainment blurs the boundaries between information, opinion, and spectacle, and where the figure of the host conductor of the show assumes a central role in the articulation of discourses

and values (Nevado & Fernández-Ramírez, 2024; Pérez-Sánchez & Llorca-Abad, 2025). A comparison between the two programmes makes it possible to identify a clash between two distinct television models that compete to define the emotional and cultural tone of public debate. Each format, through its host conductor, narrative structure, and selection of guests, projects a particular value system and addresses specific demographic segments, thereby turning programming into an instrument of ideological positioning (Zamora-Martínez & González-Neira, 2022).

El Hormiguero (*The Anthill*), broadcast on *Antena 3*, represents the hegemonic and well-established model of the talk show within Spanish commercial television. Its long trajectory has enabled it to build a stable and cross-sectional audience, with clear leadership among female viewers and older age segments, without giving up a notable child presence (Barlovento Comunicación, 2025; Casado et al., 2023). This balance is sustained by a recognisable formula that combines humour, spectacle, and interviews with high-profile media figures of high media prominence. The selection of guest profiles associated with traditional institutions reinforces a model of entertainment that tends to reproduce widely accepted values, positioning the host conductor as a figure of reference and a guarantor of continuity within a public sphere that is emotionally driven yet fundamentally conservative in symbolic terms (Nevado & Fernández-Ramírez, 2024; Pérez-Sánchez & Llorca-Abad, 2025).

By contrast, *La Revuelta* (*The Revolt*), broadcast on *La 1* (Channel 1) and produced by RTVE, embodies a clearly disruptive strategy. Originating in pay television, the format conducted by David Brocano adapts an irreverent tone and a less conventional narrative to the context of generalist broadcasting. Its initial success can be explained by its ability to attract younger more masculine audiences, who have traditionally been alienated from public free-to-air television offerings (Eguzkitza Mestraitua, 2023; Moreno Albarracín & Blanco Sánchez, 2025). The selection of guests associated with values such as inclusion, personal resilience, and cultural diversity reveals an explicit intention to differentiate the programme and to re-signify television entertainment through alternative parameters (Asmar et al., 2025; Fontán Allen, 2025).

According to FormulaTV (2025), during the first full season of the ratings battle between the two programmes, there was a clear difference in the evolution of the two formats. *La Revuelta* recorded a downward monthly trend in its audience share: in September 2024, it started at around 17%, but as the season progressed, it lost viewers, falling to 11.3% in May 2025, with no recovery in between. Meanwhile, Pablo Motos' *El Hormiguero* averaged a 15.3% share with nearly 2 million viewers across its 142 episodes, consolidating its position as the most-watched programme of the season and remaining in that position for seven consecutive months. Although *La Revuelta* surpassed *El Hormiguero* in some months, such as October and December 2024, from the beginning of 2025, *El Hormiguero* maintained a trend of recovery and leadership, increasing its share until May and progressively outperforming its competitor in the weekly time slot. Overall, *La Revuelta* remained the most watched daily programme on *La 1* and represented significant competition, but with a lower average performance than *El Hormiguero* this season.

2.3. A 'War' for Audiences That Encourages Affective Polarisation

The rivalry between the two television programmes transcends audience logic and enters the realm of cultural and generational dispute. Far from constituting a zero-sum battle, an analysis of their audience profiles suggests the coexistence of two differentiated emotional spheres that respond to distinct expectations, sensitivities, and symbolic frameworks (Crusafon et al., 2020; Mata-Núñez, 2024). In this regard, access prime time consolidates as a strategic space for the construction of cultural hegemony, where host conductors act as privileged mediators between entertainment and social discourse (Pérez-Sánchez &

Llorca-Abad, 2025). The struggle between these two formats not only determines which programmes lead the time slot, but also which values, narratives, and emotions come to occupy a central place in contemporary public discourse in Spain.

In this regard, the struggle for audiences that unfolds daily on Spanish television can be interpreted as a media update of the classic metaphor of the "two Spains", as stated by the British newspaper *The Times* (Hayward, 2024). This expression was popularised by the poet Antonio Machado to refer to the traditional left–right cleavage in the country, which, according to Dalton (2021), has experienced one of the highest recent growth rates of polarisation. This interpretation is justified insofar as both formats have been progressively resignified by broad sectors of the public as emblems of opposing cultural, political and generational sensibilities. Beyond their formal or stylistic differences, the confrontation between the two programmes operates as a device of identity alignment: watching one or the other not only implies an entertainment preference, but also a symbolic positioning that refers to differentiated values, moral frameworks and visions of the country. Thus, television consumption acts as a marker of group belonging that reproduces dichotomous logics deeply rooted in Spanish cultural history, where the public sphere is recurrently structured in terms of opposing blocs that are more emotional than programmatic.

This dynamic fits precisely within the concept of affective polarisation, understood as a process in which social division is articulated less around substantive ideological disagreements than around emotions of affinity towards *one's own group* and rejection of the group perceived as the "*other*" (Iyengar et al., 2019; Mason, 2022). According to Torcal (2023), this phenomenon has increased significantly in Spain since 2015. In the case under examination, followers of *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta* may reproduce a pattern of behaviour akin to that of opposing symbolic communities, in which one's own programme is valued uncritically while the rival is subjected to emotional delegitimisation, mockery or moral suspicion. In this way, television rivalry not only reflects existing polarisation within Spanish society, but also actively contributes to intensifying it, transferring into the realm of entertainment an emotional fracture that exceeds the strictly political sphere.

3. Materials and Methods

In order to address the objectives and research questions outlined above, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies of a descriptive scope was adopted, with the aim of conducting an exploratory investigation. The process comprises two distinct stages: the first involves a statistical approach, using a frequency table to show the number of news items on the subject under study across different newspapers; the second consists of a content analysis of these news items, examining a range of variables through a coding sheet.

3.1. Sample

To determine the newspaper sample for this study, a threefold criterion was applied: audience reach, ideological positioning, and historical tradition (the latter understood as legacy media that also publish a print edition and have transitioned to the digital ecosystem). Accordingly, five digital newspapers were selected from among the ten most-read outlets in Spain according to the October 2024 GfK DAM ranking, one of the leading current online audience measurement systems (Del-Castillo, 2021).

Ideological orientation was operationalised based on prior empirical studies measuring the political leaning of Spanish news media (Guerrero-Solé, 2022). Accordingly, two left-wing-progressive outlets (*El HuffPost* and *El País*), two right-wing-conservative outlets (*ABC* and *El Mundo*), and one centrist-moderate outlet (*20 Minutos*) were included in the sample. While such classification reflects general editorial positioning and audience

alignment patterns identified in previous research, it does not preclude internal pluralism or variability of viewpoints within each outlet.

With regard to the third criterion, all of these outlets also have a print edition except *El HuffPost*. It was included in the sample because, aside from *El País*, there was no other progressive outlet among the most-read newspapers that also publishes in print, and among digital-native outlets, it has the strongest audience figures and the longest tradition (it has been published in Spain since 2012).

The temporal sample covers a full year, from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. Several factors informed this selection. First, 10 April 2024 marked the date on which RTVE's Board of Directors approved the signing of David Broncano and his show for two seasons (Lourido, 2024). Second, in September 2024 both TV shows began competing for the same audience slot. Finally, this period captures the first controversies and confrontations arising from the coexistence of the two shows.

3.2. Methodological Process

In the first stage of the research, a statistical analysis was conducted of news items addressing the object of study. To obtain the corpus of full texts for analysis, the Factiva press database provided by the US-based Dow Jones group was used; this database has been employed in similar studies (López-Carrión & Llorca-Abad, 2025). Factiva provides access to more than 33,000 publications and 400 news agencies from 200 countries in 33 languages (Factiva, n.d.) and, in the specific case of Spain, offers online access to approximately 250 licenced media outlets.

To select the corpus contents, a Boolean search was conducted using the combination ("*El Hormiguero*" *OR* "*Pablo Motos*" *OR* "*Motos*") *AND* ("*La Revuelta*" *OR* "*David Broncano*" *OR* "*Broncano*"), which brings together the main keywords referring to the names of both TV shows and their respective host conductors. Only items containing any of these terms in the headline and the first paragraph were selected, as these elements contain and condense the informational essence of journalistic texts (Iranzo-Montés & Latorre-Lázaro, 2019). Following this procedure, a total of 625 news items were retrieved. After excluding duplicate items or those not addressing the object of study, the final analytical corpus comprised 385 items: 104 from *20 Minutos* (27.01%), 130 from *ABC* (33.77%), 71 from *El HuffPost* (18.44%), 54 from *El Mundo* (14.03%) and 26 from *El País* (6.75%).

In the second phase, a content analysis was conducted on the selected units of analysis. A codebook was developed, comprising categories and variables operationalised based on previous methodological patterns. The instrument was iteratively refined through pre-tests carried out by independent coders. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff's Alpha (Krippendorff, 2004), and following the final adjustment of the codebook, all variables reached satisfactory levels ($\alpha \geq 0.8$). The categories and variables included in the codebook were as follows:

1. Basic identification information of the news item: publication date, newspaper, and headline.
2. Construction and origin of discourse ($\alpha = 0.88$). The following categories were distinguished to capture different viewpoints: journalist (news reports), editorial (opinion pieces), *El Hormiguero* (news on the programme's development or focused on its host conductor or collaborators), *La Revuelta* (news on the programme's development or focused on its host conductor or collaborators), and other news sources (with their identification specified).
3. Positioning of the news item ($\alpha = 0.84$). For both programmes, the following categories were distinguished: explicit criticism, implicit criticism, explicit support, and implicit support. More than one category could be selected in items displaying multiple forms

of positioning. A 'neutral' category was also established for factual narratives in which no support for or criticism of these television programmes was observed.

4. Main arguments for and against both programmes ($\alpha = 0.81$), specifying when none were included in a given item.
5. Main themes or issues identified in the news items ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Given the high volume and semantic redundancy observed in the results corresponding to variables 4 (arguments for and against) and 5 (main topics and issues), an inductive semantic–conceptual clustering procedure was applied. First, individual textual units identified during coding were examined through an open coding process to detect recurrent semantic patterns, lexical similarities, and thematic affinities. These initial codes were subsequently grouped into higher-order conceptual clusters based on shared argumentative logic rather than merely lexical coincidence. The objective of this procedure was to reduce dispersion while preserving analytical nuance, allowing the construction of stable interpretative categories that captured the dominant discursive trends across outlets. The clustering process was iterative and involved comparison between coders until conceptual agreement was reached. This approach ensured that the resulting clusters reflected consistent semantic structures within the corpus rather than arbitrary aggregation.

4. Results

4.1. General Statistics

The analysis of the sample, comprising a total of 385 news items published between April 2024 and March 2025, reveals an uneven distribution of media coverage in both editorial and temporal terms. With regard to distribution by newspaper, outlets with a conservative ideological orientation—*ABC* and *El Mundo*—account for a substantial share (47.79%) of the total volume of news items. In contrast, the most progressive newspapers (*El HuffPost* and *El País*) display more moderate output and together account for 25.19%, failing short to reach the figures of the sole moderately conservative outlet, *20 Minutos* (27.01%).

The monthly evolution shown in Figure 1 indicates that media attention is not evenly distributed across the period analysed, but rather concentrated at specific moments of high informational intensity, particularly at two points during the autumn of 2024 (September and November), coinciding with the first weeks of competition between *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta*.

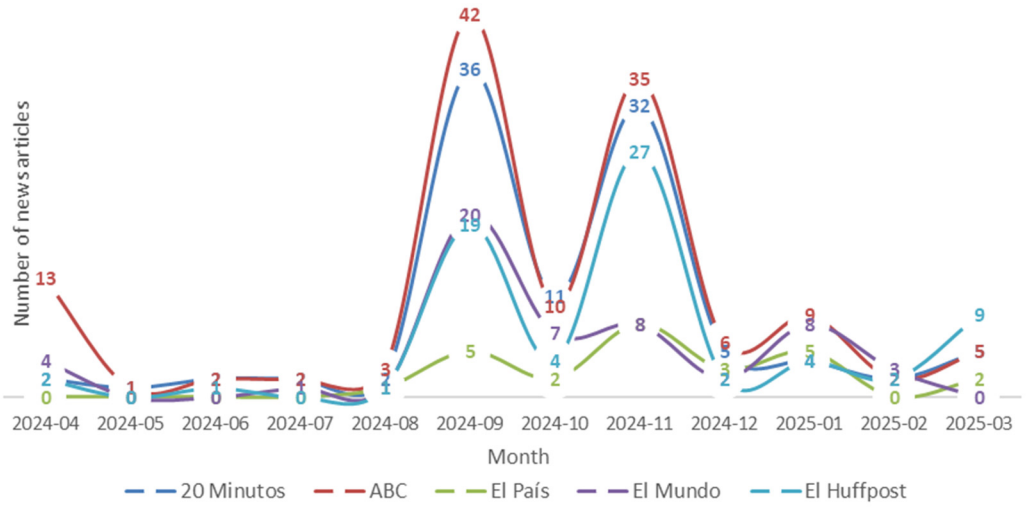


Figure 1. Monthly evolution of news articles by newspaper (April 2024–March 2025).

4.2. Construction and Origin of the Discourse

Table 1 presents the results obtained after classifying the different viewpoints in relation to how the discourse of news coverage on the rivalry between *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta* is constructed in the newspapers analysed. First, the outlet that most frequently adopts its own journalistic perspective on this issue is *El País* (61.54%), which prioritises its viewpoint by a wide margin over the other categories, followed by *El Mundo* (48.15%) and *20 Minutos* (34.62%). With regard to the newspaper that provides the greatest editorial load on this topic, *ABC* stands out (14.62%), having published up to 19 items in the form of columns, opinion articles and other formats in which opinion prevails over information. In this category, *El Mundo* (12.96%) and *El País* (11.54%) follow.

Table 1. Distribution by newspapers and different points of view on the construction and origin of discourse.

Point of View	*20 Minutos*	*ABC*	*El HuffPost*	*El Mundo*	*El País*	TOTAL
Newspaper	34.62% (36)	26.92% (35)	8.45% (6)	48.15% (26)	61.54% (16)	**30.91% (119)**
Editorial	1.92% (2)	14.62% (19)	2.82% (2)	12.96% (7)	11.54% (3)	**8.57% (33)**
El Hormiguero	9.62% (10)	5.38% (7)	7.04% (5)	11.11% (6)	7.69% (2)	**7.79% (30)**
La Revuelta	29.81% (31)	25.38% (33)	12.68% (9)	25.93% (14)	15.38% (4)	**23.64% (91)**
Sources *	24.04% (25)	27.69% (36)	69.01% (49)	1.85% (1)	3.85% (1)	**29.09% (112)**

** Details of sources, by newspaper.*
***20 Minutos*:** RTVE [Andreu Buenafuente, Concepción Carcajosa, Inés Hernand, Marc Giró, Silvia Intxaurrondo] (7), Mediaset [Ana Rosa Quintana, Carlos Sobera, Jorge Javier Vázquez] (4), Atresmedia [Gran Wyoming, Jordi Évole] (2), Ni que fuéramos Shhh (2), Antonio Resines (1), EITB-Vaya Semanita (1), Ibai Llanos (1), Jordi González (1), Jordi Wild (1), Mercedes Milá (1), Óscar Puente (1), Pedro Piqueras (1), Pepe Navarro & Xavier Sardà (1), Miguel Ángel Revilla (1).
***ABC*:** RTVE [Andreu Buenafuente, Pedro Ruiz, Silvia Intxaurrondo] (8), Atresmedia [Alberto Chicote, Cristina Pardo, Iñaki López, Jordi Évole, Sonsoles Ónega, Susanna Griso] (8), Mediaset [Ana Rosa Quintana, Jorge Javier Vázquez, Carlos Franganillo, Carlos Latre, Risto Mejide] (6), Ni que fuéramos Shhh (5), COPE [Carlos Herrera] (1), Emilio Aragón (1), José Manuel Soto (1), Luis Figo (1), Mercedes Milá (1), Pepe Navarro (1), Partido Popular (1), Nacho Pla (1), Willy Toledo (1).
***El HuffPost*:** RTVE [Gonzalo Miró, Isaías Lafuente, Marc Giró, Paloma del Río, Paula Vázquez, Silvia Intxaurrondo] (10), Atresmedia [Alberto Chicote, Carlos Alsina, Andrea Ropero, Iñaki López, Jordi Évole] (7), Dani Rovira (2), Gabriel Rufián (2), Mediaset [Jorge Javier Vázquez, Santi Millán] (2), Anna Gurguí (1), Antón Losada (1), Antonio Resines (1), Bob Pop (1), Carmen Lomana (1), David Jiménez (1), José Ramón de la Morena (1), Ferran Monegal (1), Ibai Llanos (1), Javier Ares (1), Javier Aroca (1), Jordi Wild (1), José Elías (1), José Manuel Soto (1), José María García (1), Juan José Millás (1), Karra Elejalde (1), Lola Índigo (1), Lorena Castell (1), Mario Vaquerizo (1), Máximo Pradera (1), Nawja Nimri (1), Ni que fuéramos Shhh (1), Oskar Matute (1), Miguel Ángel Revilla (1), Yolanda Díaz (1).
***El Mundo*:** Miguel Ángel Revilla (1).
***El País*:** Mario Vaquerizo (1).

Source: own elaboration.

In news items functioning as chronicles or narratives of the programmes themselves, or of statements by host conductors and collaborators, *La Revuelta* prevails, with 91 items, compared to 30 for *El Hormiguero*. This suggests that, in general, the newspapers analysed show greater interest in what happens on the set of the newer programme. This pattern is observed across all five newspapers, albeit with lower incidence in those with a progressive ideological orientation. Nevertheless, the programmes' own viewpoints do not constitute the category with the highest values in any newspaper, although they do rank among the main categories in *20 Minutos* and *ABC*.

Finally, the construction of news items from the perspective of external news sources is particularly relevant in *El HuffPost* (69.01%), and also in *ABC* (27.69%) and *20 Minutos* (24.04%). In these three cases, the majority of testimonies come from programmes and public figures associated with the main media groups: RTVE, Atresmedia and Mediaset. By contrast, this perspective is largely irrelevant in *El País* and *El Mundo*, each of which

publishes only one item addressing the rivalry between the two programmes through a testimonial source.

4.3. Positioning of the News Items

Table 2 presents the distribution of news items according to their positioning in the rivalry between *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta*, distinguishing between explicit support, implicit support, neutrality, implicit criticism and explicit criticism. The data are disaggregated by newspaper, alongside the overall totals observed. One of the most striking findings is the greater prominence of *La Revuelta*, which—whether through support or criticism—mobilises a higher proportion of news coverage (almost 50%) than its rival, *El Hormiguero* (just over 28%). In the case of the programme marking two decades on air, the most frequent type of evaluation is implicit support, accounting for 18.18% of the total (70 items). The same applies to its rival on public broadcasting, although in this case implicit support is almost double, amounting to 35.32% (136 items).

Table 2. Positioning on the subject of study. Distribution by programmes, newspapers and positions.

		20 Minutos	*ABC*	*El HuffPost*	*El Mundo*	*El País*	**TOTAL**
El Hormiguero 28.31% (109)	Explicit support	0.96% (1)	9.23% (12)	-	7.41% (4)	3.85% (1)	4.68% (18)
	Implicit support	21.15% (22)	16.15% (21)	11.27% (8)	29.63% (16)	11.54% (3)	18.18% (70)
	Implicit criticism	3.85% (4)	3.85% (5)	5.63% (4)	-	-	3.38% (13)
	Explicit criticism	-	4.62% (6)	-	1.85% (1)	3.85% (1)	2.08% (8)
Neutrality		37.5% (39)	21.54% (28)	29.58% (21)	24.07% (13)	26.92% (7)	28.05% (108)
La Revuelta 49.87% (192)	Explicit support	-	7.69% (10)	1.41% (1)	5.56% (3)	7.69% (2)	4.16% (16)
	Implicit support	36.54% (38)	27.69% (36)	52.11% (37)	22.22% (12)	50% (13)	35.32% (136)
	Implicit criticism	1.92% (2)	4.62% (6)	2.82% (2)	3.7% (2)	-	3.12% (12)
	Explicit criticism	1.92% (2)	16.15% (21)	-	7.41% (4)	3.85% (1)	7.27% (28)

Source: own elaboration.

When disaggregated by newspaper, *20 Minutos* is characterised by a predominance of neutral evaluations of both programmes, accounting for 37.5% (39 items). It is also noteworthy that this outlet records no explicit criticism of *El Hormiguero*, but does include explicit criticism of *La Revuelta* (2 items). Regarding explicit support, it offers only one instance in favour of the 'ants show'.

As for *ABC*, it is the newspaper that most explicitly adopts a position: on the one hand, it provides the greatest level of support for the programme presented by Pablo Motos (9.23%), while at the same time being the outlet that criticises it most, although this percentage does not reach 5%. Regarding its stance on David Broncano's show, it is—along with *El País*—the newspaper that offers the most praise (7.69%), but also the one that criticises it most, and in a relatively high proportion of cases (over 16%). Nevertheless, in line with the general trend observed across the media sample analysed, the dominant positioning in *ABC*'s discourse on the confrontation between the two programmes is implicit support for *La Revuelta*.

About *El HuffPost*, it is noteworthy that it seeks to avoid explicit positions (only one instance of explicit support for the RTVE programme was observed). However, it is the outlet that provides the highest level of implicit support for Broncano's show (over 52%) and, conversely, the one that supports *El Hormiguero* the least. The opposite pattern is observed in *El Mundo*, which is the outlet most mobilised in favour of Pablo Motos' show when implicit and explicit support are combined (37.04%), leaving very little room for criticism. With respect to its stance on *La Revuelta*, it is the outlet that supports it the least and, although at some distance from *ABC*, one of those that criticises it most.

Finally, *El País* is the newspaper that most strongly supports the new public television offering for the access prime-time slot and, at the same time, the one that criticises it least. Regarding its positioning towards *El Hormiguero*, which it explicitly criticises on one occasion, its levels of support are slightly higher than those of *El HuffPost*, although still far below those of the conservative outlets.

4.4. Arguments for and Against the Programmes

This section presents the results of the main arguments for and against the television programmes analysed in this study as identified in the corpus. The results are shown in the following tables, which present the principal findings after applying an inductive semantic–conceptual clustering technique. The percentage of cases in which no arguments are identified in the news content is also specified, considering the total volume of news items published by each newspaper.

Table 3 presents the arguments for and against the programme *El Hormiguero*, hosted and conducted by Pablo Motos and produced by the Atresmedia group. Overall, a fairly consistent pattern can be observed: across the five newspapers, arguments in favour are mainly concentrated on performance (historical leadership, competitive strength and resilience) and on the programme's status as a benchmark in the access prime time slot, whereas arguments against are articulated around two dominant axes: competitive practices perceived as aggressive (especially in the management of guests and exclusives) and the politicisation associated with the media conflict. In other words, the general framing tends to acknowledge the industrial and audience strength of the format, while also highlighting reputational and legitimacy costs linked to the way it competes and to the public narrative constructed around that competition.

In conservative media outlets (ABC and *El Mundo*), a more pronounced emphasis is placed on attributes linked to leadership and the programme's "brand", although with clear nuances between the two. ABC particularly highlights the centrality of the host conductor and relationships with guests as the main favourable argument (43.2%), even ahead of historical leadership (27.1%), suggesting a more personalistic and relational-capital-based approach. *El Mundo*, by contrast, structures its support primarily around historical leadership (44.9%) and professional management/sector standards (23.5%), reinforcing a more "industrial" reading and the normalisation of competitive routines. At the same time, both agree that the main criticism concerns the perception of obstructive or unethical practices (41.2% in ABC; 34% in *El Mundo*), although *El Mundo* assigns substantial weight to "loss of leadership" as a criticism (28.7%), aligning part of the negativity with a performance and competition frame.

In progressive media (*El País* and *El HuffPost*), the balance is also dual, but the structure of criticism shifts slightly: the relative weight of politicisation increases, as does, above all, the reputational/conflict-management component. *El HuffPost* concentrates a significant share of negativity on politicisation (27.5%) and reputational deterioration due to defensive conflict management (20.4%), while also maintaining strong criticism of aggressive competitive practices (36.6%). *El País*, for its part, places competitive weakening/loss of leadership as the main criticism (32.6%), but assigns very prominent positions to both politicisation (23.6%) and reputational deterioration (19.1%), while aggressive competitive practices carry less relative weight (15.7%) than in the other newspapers.

The case of *20 Minutos*, as a more moderate/neutral outlet, functions almost as a synthesis of the two frames: on the one hand, the dominant favourable argument is historical leadership (40.4%) and centrality as a benchmark (24.2%); on the other, the most intense critical argument is the perception of aggressive competitive practices (33.7%), followed by politicisation (20.9%) and cultural/content-related delegitimisation (18.2%). In other words, it maintains a relatively balanced approach between "market merit" (audiences/position) and "cost of competition"

(ethical practices and a polarised climate), without a single ideological axis fully displacing the analysis towards either propaganda or vindication of leadership.

Table 3. Distribution of arguments regarding *El Hormiguero*, by newspaper.

Newspaper	Arguments in Favour of *El Hormiguero*	Arguments Against *El Hormiguero*
20 Minutos	• Historical audience leadership and competitive strength (40.4%) • Symbolic centrality and status as a cultural and competitive benchmark (24.2%) • Professional quality, industrial solidity and excellence of the format (15.4%) • Relational capital, guests and promotional function (13.8%) • Reputational governance, rigour and competitive pluralism (6.2%) N = 356 No data: 13 news items (12.5%)	• Competitive practices perceived as aggressive, obstructive or unethical (33.7%) • Politicisation of the conflict and ideological polarisation/culture war (20.9%) • Symbolic warfare, cultural delegitimisation and content-related criticism (18.2%) • Loss of leadership and competitive weakening of the format (16.6%) • Defensive management of the conflict and reputational deterioration of the format and presenter (10.6%) N = 187 No data: 45 news items (43.27%)
ABC	• Presenter, brand and relationship with guests (43.2%) • Historical audience leadership and competitive strength (27.1%) • Management of guests and exclusives (18.2%) • Professional quality, industrial solidity and excellence of the format (6.7%) • Media influence and market/political positioning (4.8%) N = 521 No data: 17 news items (13.08%)	• Competitive practices perceived as aggressive, obstructive or unethical (41.2%) • Politicisation of the conflict and ideological polarisation/culture war (24.5%) • Loss of leadership and competitive weakening of the format (18.9%) • Symbolic warfare, cultural delegitimisation and content-related criticism (10.4%) • Structural rigidity and exhaustion of the format's classic model (5%) N = 318 No data: 52 news items (40%)
El HuffPost	• Historical audience leadership and competitive strength (37.5%) • Symbolic centrality and status as a cultural and competitive benchmark (22.6%) • Professionalism, work ethic and internal cohesion (19%) • Relational capital, guest management and promotional value (12.5%) • Figure of the host conductor and long-term solidity of the format (8.3%) N = 168 No data: 20 news items (28.17%)	• Competitive practices perceived as aggressive, obstructive or unethical (36.6%) • Politicisation of the conflict and ideological polarisation/culture war (27.5%) • Defensive management of the conflict and reputational deterioration of the format and host conductor (20.4%) • Loss of leadership and competitive weakening of the format (9.9%) • Symbolic warfare, cultural delegitimisation and content-related criticism (5.6%) N = 142 No data: 13 news items (18.31%)
El Mundo	• Historical audience leadership and competitive strength (44.9%) • Professional management, guest planning and sector standards (23.5%) • Current competitive capacity and resilience in the face of *La Revuelta* (17.3%) • Attractiveness for guests and symbolic–cultural capital (10.2%) • Conflict management, conciliation and narrative control (4.1%) N = 196 No data: 10 news items (18.52%)	• Competitive practices perceived as aggressive, obstructive or unethical (34%) • Loss of leadership and competitive weakening of the format (28.7%) • Politicisation of the conflict and ideological polarisation/culture war (19.1%) • Defensive management of the conflict and reputational deterioration of the format and presenter (11.7%) • Structural rigidity and exhaustion of the format's classic model (6.4%) N = 94 No data: 14 news items (25.93%)
El País	• Historical audience leadership and competitive strength (41.9%) • Symbolic centrality and status as a cultural and competitive benchmark (24.2%) • Professional quality, industrial solidity and excellence of the format (18.5%) • Relational capital, guest management and promotional value (9.7%) • Discursive management of competition and deactivation of the conflict (5.7%) N = 124 No data: 1 news item (3.85%)	• Loss of leadership and competitive weakening of the format (32.6%) • Politicisation of the conflict and ideological polarisation/culture war (23.6%) • Competitive practices perceived as aggressive, obstructive or unethical (15.7%) • Defensive management of the conflict and reputational deterioration of the format and host conductor (19.1%) • Structural rigidity and exhaustion of the format's classic model (9%) N = 89 No data: 6 news items (23.08%)

Source: own elaboration.

From the percentages of argument omission, it can be observed that coverage of Motos's programme shows a relatively clear tendency towards differentiated editorial selection according to the ideological orientation of the outlets. Conservative newspapers present high levels of omission of arguments against the programme: ABC does not present critical arguments in 40% of its news items and *El Mundo* in 25.93%, while both omit favourable arguments to a lesser extent (13.08% and 18.52%, respectively). By contrast, progressive media show the opposite pattern: *El HuffPost* omits arguments in favour in 28.17% of cases and *El País* in 3.85%, while reducing the omission of criticism (18.31% and 23.08%). *20 Minutos*, with a more moderate line, presents an intermediate profile, although it stands out for a relatively high omission of arguments against (43.27%), pointing more to fragmentary coverage than to a clear ideological orientation.

Regarding the analysis of *La Revuelta*, hosted and conducted by David Broncano and produced by Spanish public broadcasting, Table 4 shows that coverage of this programme is structured around a double tension: on the one hand, recognition of the format as an authorial product (humour, distinctive style, innovation), and on the other, dispute over its institutional fit within RTVE, especially when public debate draws it into politicisation and cost. Across all five newspapers, arguments "in favour" tend to concentrate on proposal attributes (identity, tone, innovation) and performance (audiences, competitiveness), while arguments "against" are frequently organised around structural controversies (politicisation, spending, sustainability) and operational problems (guest management, logistics, programme structure).

When the ideological axis is introduced, patterns become clearer. In ABC and *El Mundo* (both conservative), the most substantial negative arguments are precisely located in "politicisation and ideological instrumentalisation" and "cost/legitimacy of spending", which together account for significant proportions of the critical block. At the same time, when they assess the programme positively, they emphasise "hard" indicators (audience, competitive leadership) and, very visibly in *El Mundo*, "relational capital, guests and industrial infrastructure", that is, the programme's ability to compete with major formats in terms of guests, resources and competitive positioning.

In *El País* and *El HuffPost* (both progressive), the distribution of favourable arguments is more oriented towards the programme's authorial identity and its social/digital impact, with comparatively greater weight given to cultural, generational and public conversation value (youth ecosystem, social networks, time-shifted viewing). Even so, it is significant that in both outlets the cluster of "politicisation/instrumentalisation" also appears strongly among the arguments against: not so much as a rejection of the content itself, but as an acknowledgement that the programme becomes trapped in an external dispute frame (culture war, partisan readings) that may distort its reception and condition the media conversation about its legitimacy.

20 Minutos, as a more neutral outlet, presents a profile especially concentrated on the "format" dimension in positive terms: authorial identity accounts for the vast majority of favourable arguments, ahead of audience figures and digital impact, suggesting a framing more focused on what the programme is and what it contributes as a proposition. Negatively, by contrast, the focus clearly shifts towards "operational/structural weaknesses/guest management" as the main source of criticism, ahead of audience sustainability and conflict fatigue; this aligns with a less ideologised and more pragmatic treatment (functioning, performance, effects of the media narrative).

Table 4. Distribution of arguments regarding *La Revuelta*, by newspaper.

Newspaper	Arguments in Favour of *La Revuelta*	Arguments Against *La Revuelta*
20 Minutos	• Authorial identity of the format: humour, distinctive style, and cultural innovation (70.5%) • Audience success and competitive leadership in its time slot (15.9%) • Social and media impact within the digital and youth ecosystem (6.3%) • Institutional, professional, and public service value of the format (4.6%) • Conflict management, transparency, and moral legitimation (2.7%) N = 477 No data: 10 news items (9.62%)	• Operational weaknesses of the format, structure, and guest management (45.7%) • Audience performance and competitive sustainability (23.3%) • Management of media conflict and erosion of the public narrative (17.4%) • Economic cost, contract conditions, and legitimacy of spending at RTVE (7.0%) • Politicisation and ideological instrumentalisation of the project (6.6%) N = 258 No data: 31 news items (29.81%)
ABC	• Audience success and competitive leadership in its time slot (33.9%) • Authorial identity of the format: humour, distinctive style, and cultural innovation (22.0%) • Social and media impact within the digital and youth ecosystem (17.8%) • Relational capital, guests, and industrial infrastructure (13.2%) • Conflict management, transparency, and moral legitimation (8.5%) N = 186 No data: 12 news items (18.46%)	• Politicisation and ideological instrumentalisation of the project (35.6%) • Economic cost, contract conditions, and legitimacy of spending at RTVE (21.7%) • Operational weaknesses of the format, structure, and guest management (17.8%) • Audience performance and competitive sustainability (15.8%) • Management of media conflict and erosion of the public narrative (9.1%) N = 152 No data: 24 news items (18.46%)
El HuffPost	• Authorial identity of the format: humour, distinctive style, and cultural innovation (49.0%) • Audience success and competitive leadership in its time slot (16.9%) • Conflict management, transparency, and moral legitimation (13.1%) • Relational capital, guests, and industrial infrastructure (12.1%) • Institutional, professional, and public service value of the format (8.9%) N = 314 No data: 6 news items (8.45%)	• Politicisation and ideological instrumentalisation of the project (32.3%) • Economic cost, contract conditions, and legitimacy of spending at RTVE (19.8%) • Operational weaknesses of the format, structure, and guest management (28.1%) • Relationship with guests and relative attractiveness compared to alternatives (13.2%) • Management of media conflict and erosion of the public narrative (6.6%) N = 167 No data: 17 news items (23.94%)
El Mundo	• Audience success and competitive leadership in its time slot (31.6%) • Relational capital, guests, and industrial infrastructure (39.5%) • Conflict management, transparency, and moral legitimation (11.0%) • Authorial identity of the format: humour, distinctive style, and cultural innovation (10.0%) • Social and media impact within the digital and youth ecosystem (7.9%) N = 291 No data: 6 news items (11.11%)	• Politicisation and ideological instrumentalisation of the project (27.9%) • Audience performance and competitive sustainability (26.4%) • Management of media conflict and erosion of the public narrative (18.5%) • Operational weaknesses of the format, structure, and guest management (15.7%) • Economic cost, contract conditions, and legitimacy of spending at RTVE (11.5%) N = 146 No data: 3 news items (5.56%)
El País	• Audience success and competitive leadership in its time slot (31.8%) • Authorial identity of the format: humour, distinctive style, and cultural innovation (25.6%) • Social and media impact within the digital and youth ecosystem (19.3%) • Conflict management, transparency, and moral legitimation (13.1%) • Institutional, professional, and public service value of the format (10.2%) N = 176 No data: 0 news item (0%)	• Politicisation and ideological instrumentalisation of the project (29.7%) • Audience performance and competitive sustainability (25.7%) • Operational weaknesses of the format, structure, and guest management (17.6%) • Management of media conflict and erosion of the public narrative (14.9%) • Industrial, institutional, and medium-term sustainability uncertainty (12.1%) N = 74 No data: 8 news items (30.77%)

Source: own elaboration.

Finally, for Broncano's programme, omission percentages are generally lower and less asymmetrical, suggesting somewhat more homogeneous coverage. Even so, relevant

nuances emerge: conservative outlets omit few favourable arguments (ABC 9.23% and *El Mundo* 11.11%), but differ in their omission of criticism, which is notable in ABC (18.46%) and very limited in *El Mundo* (5.56%). In progressive outlets, a greater omission of arguments against is observed, especially in *El País* (30.77%) and *El HuffPost* (23.94%), while the absence of favourable arguments is low, reaching 0% in *El País*. *20 Minutos* once again occupies an intermediate position, with moderate omission of both favourable (9.62%) and unfavourable arguments (29.81%).

4.5. Topics and Issues

The final section of the results of this study refers to the topics and issues observed in the narratives of Spain's main newspapers regarding the struggle between *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta*. Table 5 shows the clustering of textual units relating to this part of the analysis, as counted in each outlet.

Table 5. Distribution by newspapers of the main topics and issues appearing in the corpus.

Topics and Issues	*20 Minutos* (N = 362)	*ABC* (N = 999)	*El HuffPost* (N = 318)	*El Mundo* (N = 214)	*El País* (N = 227)
Television competition and access prime time dynamics	51.7%	38.8%	45.2%	56.1%	36.4%
Audiences, metrics and television viewing habits	21.3%	25.1%	15.6%	14.8%	27.3%
Politicisation of entertainment and ideological frameworks	13.5%	12%	25.7%	12.1%	11.9%
Guest management and professional practices in television	10.8%	6.5%	9.6%	9.3%	7.7%
Humour, metadiscourse and the cultural dimension of conflict	2.7%	17.6%	3.9%	7.7%	16.7%

Source: own elaboration.

Overall, regardless of each outlet's ideological positioning, "television competition and access prime time dynamics" constitutes the structuring axis of the news narrative about the "battle" between *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta*. This cluster, dominant across all outlets, brings together references to the time-slot duel, scheduling strategies, simultaneous broadcasting and the logic of competitive leadership. Its weight is particularly high in *El Mundo* (56.1%) and *20 Minutos* (51.7%), pointing to a framing in which the conflict is presented primarily as a television market phenomenon, relatively autonomous from political or cultural dimensions. In these cases, rivalry is constructed as a professional and strategic contest centred on who dominates the slot and how the television system is reconfigured. In *ABC* (38.8%) and *El País* (36.4%), although this category remains the main one, its lower relative weight suggests greater openness to alternative interpretative frames that complicate the narrative beyond simple competitive confrontation.

The second major difference between outlets appears in "audiences, metrics and television consumption habits", which introduces a more analytical reading of the conflict. This cluster includes not only share and viewer data, but also interpretations of trends, targets and transformations in consumption modes (linear, time-shifted or digital). It is particularly relevant in *El País* (27.3%) and *ABC* (25.1%), where data act as indicators of structural changes in the audiovisual ecosystem rather than merely as short-term markers of victory or defeat. In *El País*, this dimension is clearly linked to the linear–digital transition and audience rejuvenation, whereas in *ABC* it is more associated with redefining television success and leadership stability. In *20 Minutos* (21.3%), the approach is more descriptive, while in *El Mundo* (14.8%) and *El HuffPost* (15.6%) metrics are more subordinate to other dominant frames.

The ideological divide is most clearly expressed in the category "politicisation of entertainment and ideological frames". This cluster brings together references to institutional

intervention, the role of RTVE, ideological readings of Broncano's hiring and interpretations of entertainment as a space of political dispute. Its weight is significantly higher in *El HuffPost* (25.7%), consistent with a progressive approach that tends to problematise the conflict in terms of political use of entertainment and ideological confrontation. In *ABC* (12.0%), *El Mundo* (12.1%), *El País* (11.9%) and *20 Minutos* (13.5%), this dimension remains within a very similar range, indicating that politicisation is a shared frame, though not necessarily a dominant one. The difference lies less in its presence than in its narrative centrality.

The dimension of "guest management and professional practices in television" shows more moderate but still informative differences. This cluster encompasses issues such as exclusives, vetoes, editorial routines and tensions between programmes. It has a moderate and relatively stable weight, somewhat higher in *20 Minutos* (10.8%), *El HuffPost* (9.6%) and *El Mundo* (9.3%), and lower in *El País* (7.7%) and *ABC* (6.5%). Its presence points to interest in the backstage of the conflict—that is, the professional dynamics that explain rivalry beyond the public narrative.

The most distinctive finding, however, lies in "humour, metadiscourse and the cultural dimension of the conflict", despite this being quantitatively the smallest category. This cluster includes cultural readings of the confrontation, analysis of humour as a language, televisual self-referentiality and the symbolic construction of conflict. Its weight is very low in *20 Minutos* (2.7%) and *El HuffPost* (3.9%), intermediate in *El Mundo* (7.7%), and notably high in *El País* (16.7%) and *ABC* (17.6%).

5. Discussion

This study confirms that the confrontation between *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta* constitutes a particularly fertile case for observing how the structural dynamics of the contemporary media ecosystem (audience fragmentation, niche competition, and the attention economy) are translated into journalistic narratives shaped by logics of polarisation and ideological segmentation. As set out in the introduction, the progressive loss of centrality of linear television and the intensification of symbolic competition between entertainment formats have turned certain time slots and programmes into spaces with a high cultural and political charge (Jenkins, 2006; Napoli, 2012; Johnson, 2025). In response to the research question posed, the findings show that the Spanish press not only reflects this process but also actively contributes to amplifying it, constructing the television contest as a meaning-laden conflict that transcends the mere logic of ratings.

Beyond the specific Spanish case, this dynamic suggests that entertainment journalism may operate as a secondary arena of ideological articulation within fragmented media systems (Levendusky, 2013; Iyengar et al., 2019). The press does not merely mirror pre-existing divisions but actively recontextualises cultural competition through frames that align with broader political and identity-based cleavages. In doing so, journalistic narratives transform a ratings-based television rivalry into a symbolic confrontation over values, legitimacy, and cultural authority. This finding expands existing scholarship on affective polarisation (Iyengar et al., 2019; Mason, 2022) by demonstrating that processes of emotional alignment and out-group differentiation are not confined to explicitly political news coverage, but may also permeate the reporting of entertainment content. In highly segmented media environments, cultural products thus become vehicles for identity signalling, and journalistic mediation functions as a multiplier of symbolic conflict. The case analysed here indicates that the boundaries between political communication and cultural journalism are increasingly porous, reinforcing the idea that contemporary polarisation must be understood as a cross-domain phenomenon embedded in the broader logics of the attention economy and audience segmentation.

Accordingly, the principal findings demonstrate that the ideological division of Spanish society is clearly reproduced in journalistic coverage of the confrontation between the two programmes. The uneven distribution—and, above all, the temporal evolution—of the news indicates that media attention is activated with particular intensity at moments of heightened symbolic confrontation, coinciding with episodes of controversy, exchanges of statements, or public disputes. This pattern suggests that coverage responds less to a logic of continuous news follow-up and more to media activation dynamics typical of polarised contexts, in which certain events act as catalysts for conflict (Iyengar et al., 2019; Levendusky, 2013). In this regard, the concentration of coverage at specific moments of symbolic confrontation indicates that media attention operates as a catalyst of conflict rather than as a neutral monitoring mechanism. Such activation patterns point to differentiated editorial strategies in narrative construction and reinforce the idea that a newspaper's ideology conditions both the intensity and the timing of journalistic attention.

This aggregate behaviour by ideological blocs is consistent with the theoretical frameworks on affective polarisation and audience segmentation developed in the introduction. The re-signification of cultural products as emblems of opposing values aligns with the notion that, in highly fragmented contexts, media consumption operates as an identity marker rather than as a straightforward entertainment choice (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012; Broockman & Kalla, 2024). Coverage of the television confrontation thus reproduces logics similar to those characterising the political sphere, transferring dynamics of symbolic confrontation into the entertainment domain. These dynamics are particularly salient in contexts where left–right identification becomes a central axis of social identity, intensifying in-group attachment and out-group rejection beyond strictly programmatic disagreements (Torcal & Comellas, 2022; Torcal, 2023). In this sense, the journalistic mediation of the rivalry reinforces ideological and generational cleavages that are deeply embedded in the Spanish context.

With respect to SO1, focused on the role of information sources in discourse construction, the results reveal significant differences across outlets. While some newspapers, such as *El País* or *El Mundo*, tend to privilege the journalist's or outlet's own standpoint, others, such as *El HuffPost* or *ABC*, draw far more intensively on external sources, especially statements by media figures and actors within the television system itself. This strategic use of sources is not neutral: it contributes to legitimising particular frames and to reinforcing the reading of the conflict as a salient dispute within the cultural and political field. In line with Napoli (2012) and Neira et al. (2021), sources operate here as devices for amplifying engagement and social conversation rather than as mere informational inputs, thereby strengthening the performative dimension of journalistic narrative.

The analysis of arguments for and against each programme makes it possible to address SO2 and offers a particularly illuminating account of how discursive polarisation is articulated. In the case of *El Hormiguero*, the findings indicate that the media conversation revolves less around its relevance (widely taken for granted across outlets) than around the reputational cost of its dominant position in a context of intensified competition. Favourable clusters converge across outlets on historical leadership, competitive strength, and the format's symbolic centrality, suggesting a basic consensus regarding its structural weight within the Spanish television system. However, differences between outlets emerge clearly in the emphasis placed on critical arguments. Conservative outlets tend to normalise the programme's industrial and competitive logic, whereas progressive outlets increase the weight given to politicisation, conflict management, and reputational deterioration, in line with more critical readings of the symbolic use of media power (Nevado & Fernández-Ramírez, 2024; Pérez-Sánchez & Llorca-Abad, 2025). The moderately oriented outlet

adopts a more balanced position, combining recognition of the format's strength with the identification of controversies associated with its competitive practices.

In the case of *La Revuelta*, the discursive pattern is more ambivalent, seemingly linked both to the format's novelty and to its status as a strategic bet by public service television. Favourable arguments concentrate on authorial identity, cultural innovation, and the capacity to connect with younger audiences, consistent with the rejuvenation and experimentation strategies that the literature attributes to public broadcasters in contexts of legitimacy crisis (Azurmendi et al., 2015; Eguzkitza Mestraitua, 2023). However, this positive valuation coexists with a substantial critical block centred on politicisation, economic cost, and the project's institutional sustainability. Controversy thus operates as a double-edged vector: it can perform as a reputational asset when framed in terms of transparency, humour, or moral legitimation, but also as a liability when it shifts the focus from entertainment to political–institutional confrontation. This ambivalence helps to explain why the programme is simultaneously presented as innovative and attractive to younger audiences, and as an object of ideological scrutiny depending on the outlet's editorial line.

The analysis of argument omission reinforces this reading and adds relevant nuances to SO2. Although the results are not fully conclusive, patterns consistent with outlets' ideological orientation can be observed, sharper in the treatment of *El Hormiguero* than in that of *La Revuelta*. In the former case, the selective omission of criticism or support contributes to reinforcing interpretative frames consistent with the editorial line, whereas in the latter case differences are less pronounced, probably due to the relative indeterminacy of the media narrative at an early stage in the format's life cycle. This finding suggests that discursive polarisation consolidates more strongly around media products that are already established and symbolically charged.

Finally, in relation to SO3, focused on the main topics and issues structuring the media narrative, the findings show that rivalry between the two programmes rests on a shared competitive ground, yet unfolds through differentiated emphases according to editorial orientation. Television competition and access prime time dynamics constitute the structuring axis across all outlets, confirming the centrality of market and audience logics described in the introduction (Lotz, 2014; Sotelo-González et al., 2020). However, from this common core, significant differences emerge: *El Mundo* intensifies the competitive frame; *ABC* combines metrics with a more elaborated cultural reading; *El HuffPost* places politicisation at the centre; and *El País* opts for a more structural and metadiscursive interpretation of the conflict. *20 Minutos*, once again, occupies an intermediate position, prioritising description of competition and audiences over deeper ideological readings.

Taken together, the findings suggest that affective polarisation operates not only through partisan political journalism but also through the framing of cultural competition in entertainment contexts. In this sense, the rivalry between the two programmes functions as a proxy arena for ideological alignment, where media outlets selectively emphasise arguments, sources, and evaluative frames in ways consistent with their broader editorial positioning. This extends existing research on affective polarisation (Iyengar et al., 2019; Mason, 2022) by demonstrating that polarisation processes permeate hybrid genres such as infotainment coverage, thereby blurring the boundary between political communication and cultural journalism. The results also nuance media framing theory by showing that framing does not merely interpret events but actively re-signifies entertainment products as symbolic markers of identity within fragmented audience markets.

6. Conclusions

The findings allow us to conclude that journalistic coverage of the confrontation between *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta* cannot be understood solely as the reflection of a

television struggle for audience share. Rather, it constitutes a process of media construction in which the press reproduces and amplifies the logics of segmentation, affective polarisation, and cultural re-signification that characterise Spain's contemporary media ecosystem. By transferring dynamics akin to those of the political sphere into the entertainment domain, the media contribute to consolidating an increasingly fragmented public space in which even cultural products operate as identity markers and as arenas for symbolic confrontation. This reinforces the relevance of analysing television entertainment not as a terrain separate from politics, but as a central space in the dispute over cultural and emotional hegemony in contemporary Spain.

This study contributes to scholarship on media polarisation by empirically demonstrating that ideological amplification is not confined to overtly political content, but extends to the coverage of entertainment formats within competitive television ecosystems. By situating affective polarisation within the dynamics of audience fragmentation and platformisation, the study offers a cross-domain perspective that integrates political communication and media industry research.

At the same time, these conclusions should be interpreted with caution. While the findings demonstrate that the press symbolically constructs and ideologically amplifies the rivalry between *El Hormiguero* and *La Revuelta*, they do not allow us to determine how audiences actually receive, negotiate, or reproduce these mediated meanings. In this sense, press coverage may operate through a logic of mirroring, reflecting back to viewers an emotionally charged representation of cultural conflict that resonates with pre-existing identities and oppositions. However, whether such mediated mirroring produces measurable effects in terms of affective polarisation among audiences remains an open empirical question. This issue is particularly relevant in fragmented media environments, where entertainment content may become a proxy arena for broader ideological and emotional alignments.

Limitations and Future Research

This study presents several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the corpus was constructed exclusively through the Factiva database. While this ensures systematic access and replicability, reliance on a single repository may exclude certain digital-native contents or non-indexed formats. Future research could complement database retrieval with direct website or digital archive analysis to broaden coverage.

This limitation is especially relevant when considering the possible effects of mirroring in relation to affective polarisation. Although the present study shows that newspapers frame the rivalry through ideologically differentiated narratives, it cannot establish whether audiences internalise these representations as markers of group identity, nor whether repeated exposure to such coverage strengthens in-group attachment or negative perceptions of the rival programme and its viewers. Future research should therefore test these possible effects directly through audience-centred designs, such as surveys, focus groups, experiments, or social media reception analysis. Such approaches would make it possible to examine whether media framing merely reflects existing symbolic divisions or whether it actively contributes to intensifying affective polarisation in the field of entertainment.

Finally, the study is situated within the Spanish media system. Although the results cannot be statistically generalised beyond this context, they offer analytical insights applicable to other fragmented media environments characterised by ideological segmentation. Comparative research would be necessary to assess the transferability of these dynamics across different national settings.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; methodology, A.E.L.-C.; software, A.E.L.-C.; validation, A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; formal analysis, A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; investigation,

A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; resources, A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; data curation, A.E.L.-C.; writing—original draft preparation, A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; writing—review and editing, A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; visualization, A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; supervision, A.E.L.-C. and G.L.-A.; project administration, A.E.L.-C.; funding acquisition, A.E.L.-C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors on request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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