

“It actually works for me”: The presence of homeopathy in the Spanish digital press

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Introduction

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is the popular term for health and wellness therapies that have typically not been part of conventional Western medicine. CAM includes mind-body medicine (such as meditation, acupuncture and yoga), manipulative and body-based practices (such as massage therapy and spinal manipulation), and natural products (such as herbs and dietary supplements).

CAM are being questioned and analysed in Spain given the absence of hard scientific evidence to support them. The Ministry of Health in Spain (2011) lists 139 CAM, including homeopathy among others. Despite the scientific and academic fields categorizing CAM as pseudoscience, more than 50% of the Spanish population believes in the effectiveness of homeopathy (VIII Survey of Social Perception of Science and Technology of Spain, 2016).

The presence of CAM in both the written and digital press, television and radio is considerable. Nevertheless, there are no specific editorial guidelines/criteria regarding reporting on pseudoscientific phenomena in the Spanish media.

Pseudosciences have become integrated into society due to their presence in the media which tend to reinforce the idea that these practices are effective. If the information provided by the media is incomplete or equivocal consumers could form false expectations and even suffer adverse effects on their health.

Methodology

This work is part of an on-going research.

Search for stories about homeopathy from January 1st 2012 to December 31st 2016 in the main Spanish digital newspapers: *El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC*.

Analysis of content about homeopathy in these stories.

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Homeopatía	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	TOTAL
ABC	5	5	6	3	14	33
EL PAÍS	2	6	6	13	26	53
EL MUNDO	7	5	3	6	8	29
	14	16	15	22	48	115

Tab. 1: Number of stories about homeopathy in Spanish digital newspapers

Results

Piece of news is the most used genre to report about homeopathy, compare to article.

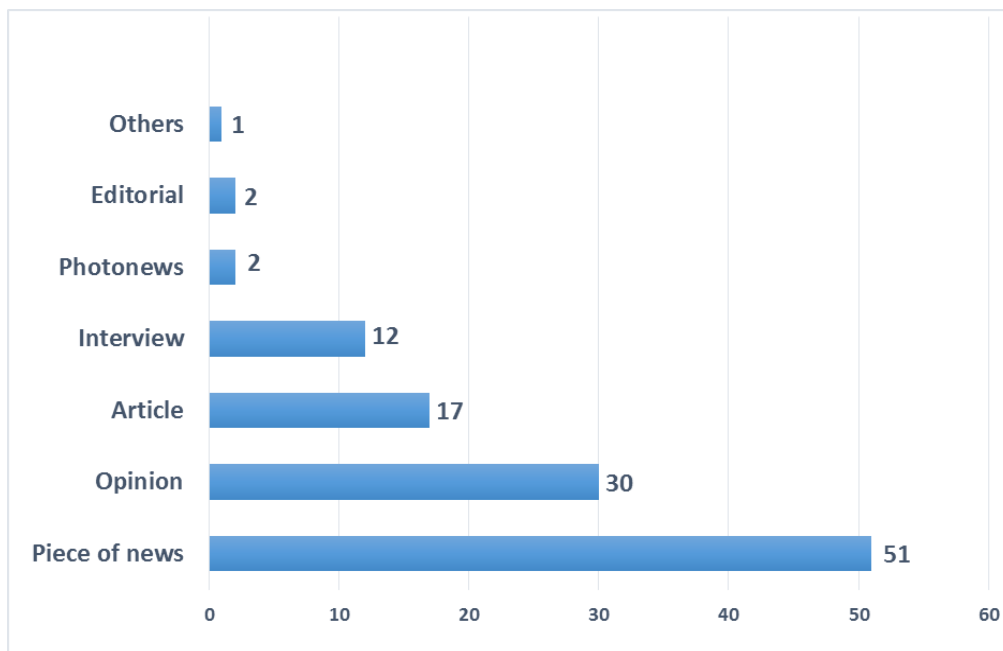


Figure 1: Number of stories by journalistic genre

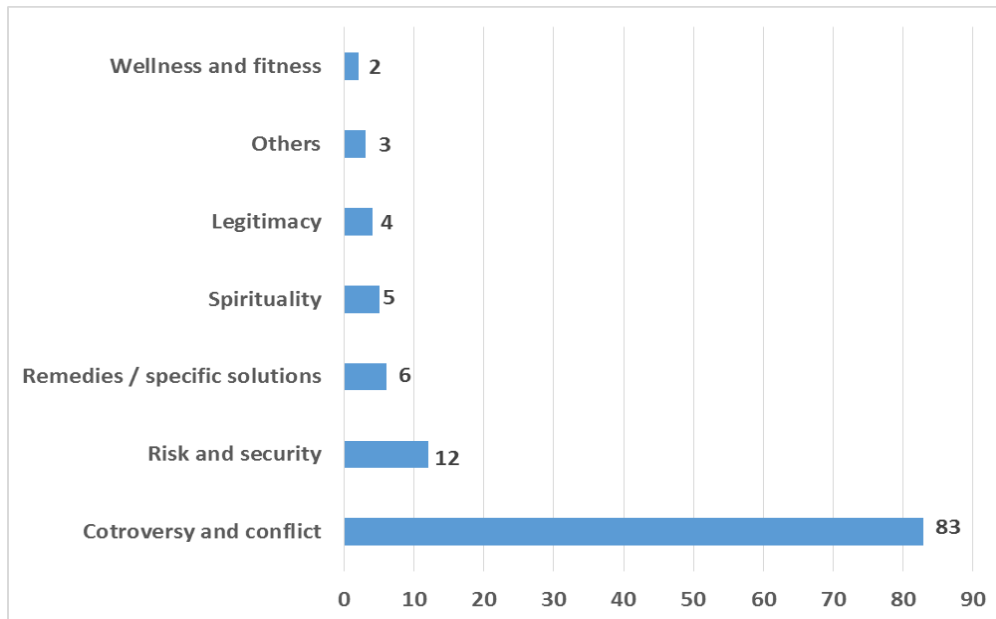


Figure 2: Number of stories by topic

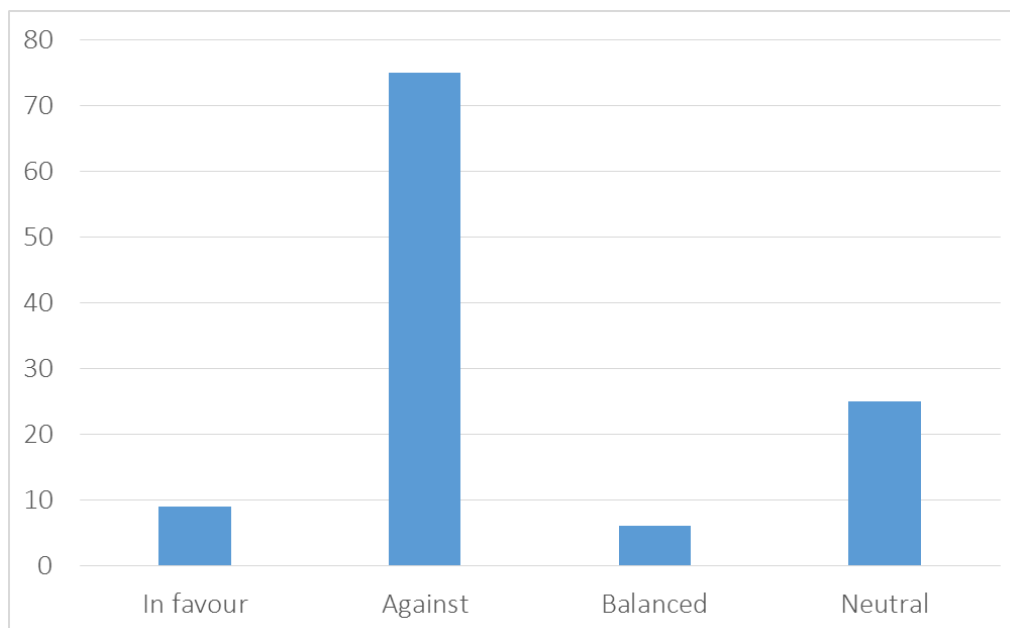


Figure 3: Opinions of digital press stories about homeopathy (%)

El País doesn't have contents in favour of homeopathy while the most conservative and also catholic one, *ABC*, includes contents in favour and neutral.

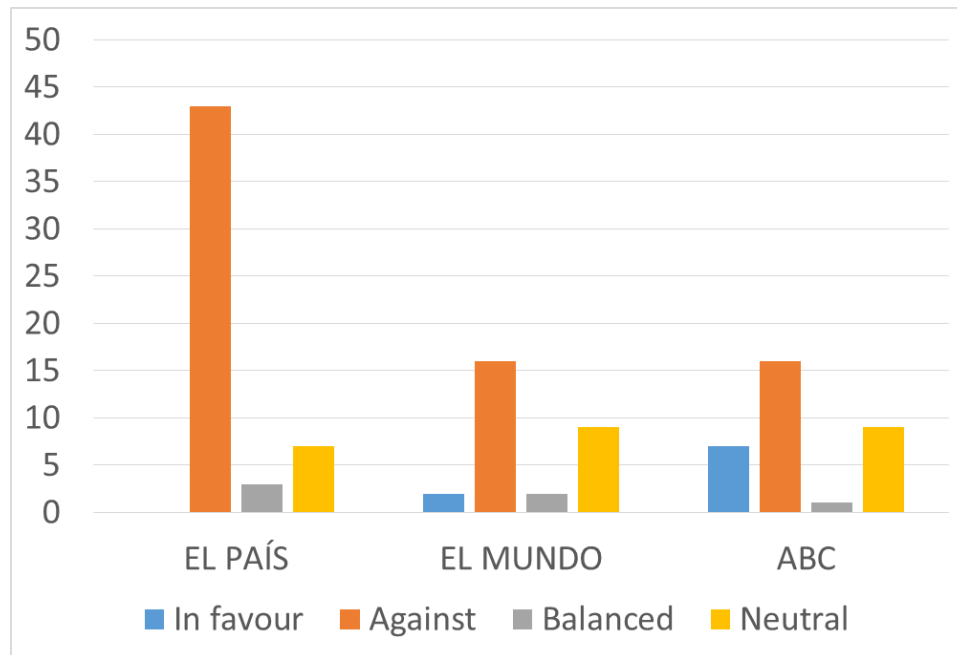


Figure 4: Number and opinion of digital press stories about homeopathy in each newspaper

Conclusions

The predominant discourse of the digital newspapers analyzed is contrary to the use of homeopathy. They prioritize the impact of stories and the conflict and controversy rather than the information and analysis. The media should inform about risks and effectiveness of homeopathy not only in the piece of news but in articles in order to provide the reader of facts and objective information.

Journalistic practice should include the validation of contents made by experts in the field in order to provide rigorous information concerning the use of CAM and avoid creating confusion in readers. The media should establish an editorial standard rules of good practice and a protocol to develop a rigorous analysis and explanation of health-related stories.

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