

Stories of complementary therapies in the Spanish digital newspapers

Isabel Mendoza-Poudereux,
University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

Lorena Cano-Orón
University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

Carolina Moreno-Castro
University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

Introduction

Use and acceptance of complementary therapies in Spain has in recent years earned attention among the public opinion, due to the heavily charged controversy between sceptics and promoters (Moreno-Castro, & Lopera-Pareja, 2016; Casino, 2017). For that matter, the relevance of stories production on the matter is fundamental for the polarization of citizens' views. Official data available on the number and/or use of these therapies are scarce. Briefly, a study prepared in 2008 by the Observatory of Natural Therapies and the report prepared by the Spanish Government Health Division in 2011. In the latter, a list of 139 alternative therapy techniques present in Spain is reported, many of which are widely unknown and there are no data available on their use by the public.

The main objective of this research is to analyse the volume of news generated by the media on complementary therapies to be able to detect the more media-related therapies and, subsequently, in a broader study, to relate them to their use in Spain.

Methodology

From the list of natural therapies prepared by the Spanish Ministry of Health in 2011, a detailed search was made for all the news published in the digital newspapers with Spanish national coverage included in the *MyNews* database (391 media) that have any mention of the 139 therapies during a two years period (2015 and 2016).

The methodology followed here is a quantitative one (Figure 1). Files were downloaded and the corpus produced was subsequently cleaned from, for example, duplicated urls. By cleaning the huge corpus, we obtained the necessary data to be able to cross in future investigations the volume generated by the press with other indexes of interest such as the use of these therapies by the Spanish (OTN, 2008) and access for information on them from Google (Cano-Orón, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

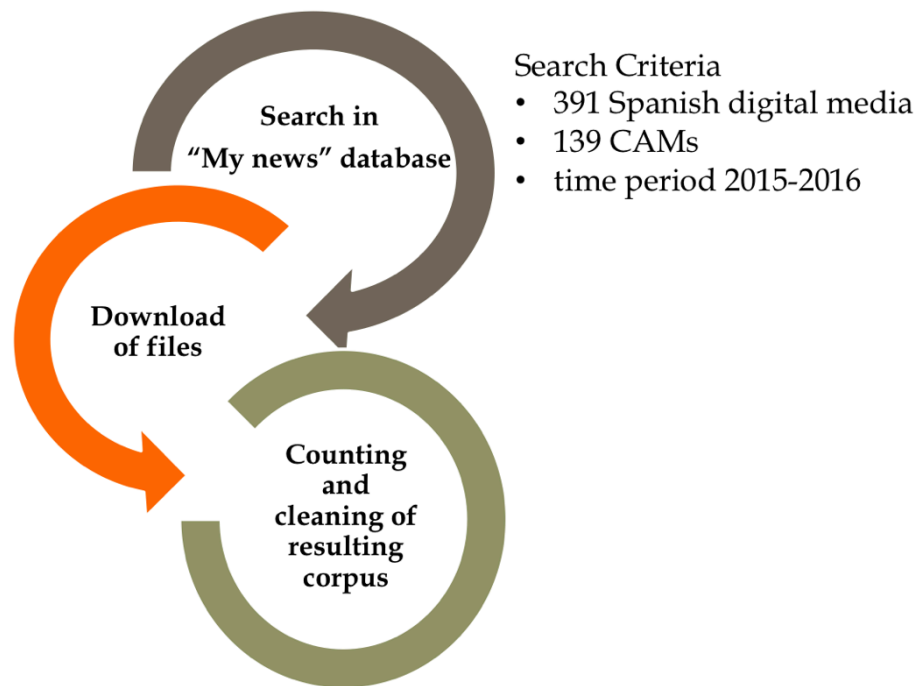


Fig. 1: Methodology followed for gathering the corpus

Results

The total recount of alternative therapies to be found in Spain is established as 139; however, the extent of their use and knowledge by Spaniards is still uncertain. A search of all the news published in 391 digital media gathered in *MyNews* database with any of the 139 therapies mentioned during 2015-2016 period was carried out, giving rise to a gross sample of 22,394 stories; this was carefully cleaned/analysed given a final count of 14,511 stories, although in some articles multiple therapies are mentioned, making it possible to a drop in the final count. Results obtained show that 35% of the therapies have absolute no media presence during the period studied and only 19% of them appear in more than 100 different stories.

Approximately 35% of therapies registered by the Ministry of Health, as 'Natural Therapies', do not appear even once mentioned in the digital press during the period studied. Only 19% of the therapies have more than 100 net impacts over the two years of the study. It also highlights that just 1.4% of the therapies analysed have an impact greater than the 1,000 news published by Spanish digital newspapers during 2015 and 2016. The therapy with more published stories during the period (2015-2016) is Meditation (2.960); followed by Music Therapy (1.125) and Homeopathy (857).

The amount of noise generated by these therapies is remarkable. That is, in many cases the presence of these therapies in the media fulfils a metaphorical function, as for example, the phrase 'homeopathic policy', or 'homeopathic solutions', appear as collateral in the text of the stories.

Conclusions

Of the 139 therapies listed in the report prepared by the Ministry of Health (2011), a media presence of 91 of them has been found, although only 27 have a notable presence with more than 100 informative pieces of news during the period analysed. Some of the therapies obtain an outstanding presence, with more than 1,000 impacts. In spite of homeopathy being the treatment more controversial in political debate, Meditation has 4 times more mentions. Our hypothesis for this phenomenon is that meditation is not really health-related, but associated to well-being and life-style.

It is known, that the promotion or diffusion of therapies without scientific / medical criteria support, can endanger the long-term health of citizens. In on-going studies, it is intended to analyse the stories in a qualitatively and semantic way. In this way, we will be able to quantify the extent to which the Spanish means of communication have supposed a normalization of their use in Spain.

References

1. Cano-Orón, L. (2016). Correlación entre las búsquedas sobre terapias complementarias en Google y su uso por parte de la población española. *Panacea@*, Vol. XVII, nº 44, 124-132. Available on: http://www.tremedica.org/panacea/IndiceGeneral/n44_tribuna-LCano-Oron.pdf.
2. Casino, G. (2017). Pseudociencia y mala ciencia en biomedicina. *Mètode Science Studies Journal* (2017). Universitat de València. DOI: 10.7203/metode.8.10019.
3. Ministry of Health (2011). Análisis de situación de las terapias naturales. Available on <https://www.msssi.gob.es/novedades/docs/analisisSituacionTNatu.pdf>
4. Moreno-Castro, C. y Lopera-Pareja, E. (2016). "Comparative study of the frequency of use of natural therapies among the Spanish population and the public image on digital media," in 14th Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST) Conference. Individual paper, 26-28, April. Istanbul. Turkey. Available on: http://scienceflows.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Comparative_study_of_the_frequency_of_us.pdf
5. Observatory of Natural Therapies (OTN) (2008). Presentación del primer estudio sobre uso y hábitos de consumo de las terapias naturales en España. Barcelona: OTN
6. Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS) (2013). Estrategia de la OMS sobre medicina tradicional 2014-2023. Available on: <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/documents/s21201es/s21201es.pdf>

Acknowledgements

The work presented in this paper was carried out as part of the project "Study, taxonomic and coverage of complementary, alternative, natural therapies on media and social networking. Ideas and values reported into the social imaginary" (CSO2014-57778-R), from the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness and co-financed with FEDER funds from the European Commission. Carolina Moreno-Castro (University of Valencia) led the project.