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Information sources in the Spanish social media during the “Three Days of March” (11-13 March 2004)

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Abstract: This research tries to establish whether the Spanish public agenda during the period from 11 to 13 March, 2004, was set by the social media or the traditional media. Based on the content analysis of traditional media, such as *CadenaSer*, *El Mundo* and *El País*, and social media (mainly blogs and forums) it was concluded that the agenda of the social media, at a cognitive level, was actually established by the traditional media. It was also established that, during those three days, the social media worked as collectors of information from Spanish and foreign traditional media; as compilers of press releases from social organizations calling for demonstrations; and as diffusers of opinions linking the terrorist attack to the foreign policy of the Aznar Government, and of opinions that asked people to respond to terrorism through the polls. The agenda-setting, therefore, continued to be in the hands of the traditional media, not only at the basic level of the agenda -transfer of salience from the media to the public agenda-, but also at the attribute level -transfer of the specific attributes- and framing of the terrorist attacks.

Keywords: agenda-setting; social media; content analysis; terrorism; framing; influence.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Methodology. 3. Results 3.1. Outline of events. 3.2. Increased consumption of news. 3.3. Information in the media. 3.4. Scarce information on the social media. 3.5. Alternative websites. 3.6. Conclusions. 4. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

In March 2004 Spain suffered a terrorist attack that resulted in nearly 200 deaths and about 2,000 injured people. The proximity of the general election, three days after the bombing, produced a hitherto unknown social and political situation; a typical case of high uncertainty and extreme relevance, which made audiences' orientation needs very high. As we have seen, this is the situation in which the framing of certain information, the framing that the media or relevant information agents (Government, political parties, etc.) want to transmit, has a great influence on the public opinion.

This case of crisis communication situations (Vara Miguel, 2006), which involved a massive attack and its possible influence on election results (Meso Ayerdi, 2004), and a disoriented citizenry and civil mobilizations on the day of elections, seems an appropriate case to investigate whether a new situation was produced in Spain by the use of social media and whether the latter had influenced traditional media, either directly or through the public agenda.

"Social media" is an expression generally accepted to refer not only to *blogs*, but also to all kinds of *online* media platforms that share a series of features: participation, openness, conversation, community, connectivity (Mayfield, 2008), and an unprofessional informative work.

The aim of the study is to investigate the flow of influence over these three days, and the extent to what traditional media actually influenced the social media and the public agenda.

In particular, the study tried to verify the following hypothesis:

H: The media are the primary sources at a cognitive level within the social media

2. Methodology

The research seeks to clarify the effects of media discourses on society (Román Portas, 2009), in this case, through social media.

First, the study tries to prove whether the source of information at the cognitive level was the information from the mainstream media or the social media. The study also verified whether the social media created information or preferably linked information from traditional media.

"Content analysis is a method that allows investigating in depth and in details any material of human

communication" (Frutos Esteban 2008) and is the method chosen to investigate the flow of information, both about the relevance of the attacks (classic agenda-setting) and about the framing set out for the public opinion (attribute agenda-setting).

To achieve this, the media content analysis focuses on *Cadena Ser* (Ser Network), which in those three days was the leader in information and fixed the public agenda, which was in opposition to the Governmental agenda. In addition, *Cadena Ser* has two features that make its analysis necessary for this research: it is a radio medium, therefore is (like the Internet) one of the most used media for urgency news, and it is the network with the highest audience share in Spain. It should also be added that during the three days under study *Cadena Ser*'s website increased its audience level the most, in comparison to the websites from other traditional media. In fact, *Cadena Ser*'s Internet audience multiplied seven times in comparison to previous audience peaks.

Cadena Ser has an *online* audio archive that facilitates the recovery of the recordings of those days.

The digital versions of traditional media are difficult to analyse due to their "changing nature, and their lack of systematic archival". "In 2004, the Spanish cyber media offered few own archive resources. In most of them, the only archived version –if they had it– is the one corresponding to their printed editions" (Salaverría Aliaga, 2006).

With these limitations, therefore, the content analysis of this research studied the online versions of the traditional media, acknowledging that the dating of the information is perhaps earlier than the one that appears in the final archived version, that the wording and information of the archive could be different from the one originally presented, and that the only way one could reconstruct faithfully the information given in digital media between 11 and 14 March 2004 would be by collecting screenshots of the online news presented during the three days.

In the reconstruction of events the analysis focuses on the digital and printed editions of *El Mundo* and *El País* as well as on the audio archive of *Cadena Ser*. They are three media that based on audience shares and leadership had a remarkable role in the agenda setting during these three days.

The content analysis of *Cadena Ser* set the standard because it was the medium that promoted an agenda divergent with the Government, an agenda that was eventually imposed in the public agenda.

Another important source are the documents that the Aznar Government itself later declassified to rebuild its image in the public opinion.

Other media are cited only when they were the source of *El Mundo*, *El País* and *Cadena Ser*.

The research includes the analysis of social media, both *weblogs* and websites.

An interesting aspect was to establish how bloggers conceived their work during those three days, and to know, in their own words, how they reacted to the information which circulated across many Spanish blogs on those dates, and what had their visitors detected these days. The aim was not only to know the way an author behaves but also to detect how a participatory and active expert Internet user, an *early adopter* or *recognizer* (Beal & Bohlen, 1956), interacts online with other people and reacts to the information avalanche coming from the media, the political parties, and the Government.

Thus the article includes the results of a study that interviewed nine bloggers after the attacks in Madrid (Doval Avenida, 2004). These opinions of these bloggers can be considered important for several reasons: their audience, quality, and professional knowledge of the Internet. The results are not statistically relevant but are significant examples of the attitude of certain *bloggers* working in the field of communication towards information. The authors who kindly replied to the survey were: José Luis Orihuela, author of *eCuaderno* <http://www.ecuaderno.com>, Juan Varela, author of *Periodistas 21* <http://periodistas21.blogspot.com/>, Antonio Delgado, author of *Caspa TV* <http://www.caspa.tv>, Guillermo López, author of *Chapapote discursive* <http://www.lapaginadefinitiva.com/weblog/articulosglopez/>, Ignacio Escolar, author of *Escolar.net* <http://www.escolar.net>, Gemma Ferreres, author of *Tintachina* <http://www.tintachina.com/>, Eduardo Toledo, author of *Balance* <http://balance.blogs.com/>, Antonio José Chinchetru, author of *Sobre la Red 2.0* <http://www.chinchetru.com>, Franco Alemán, pseudonym of José Miguel Guardia, author of *Barcepundit* <http://barcepundit.blogspot.com/> and the collective blog *Hispalibertas* <http://www.hispalibertas.com/>.

The study also examined the contents of the three most active websites at that time regarding the movement against the war in Iraq, which as we shall see later is part of the *framing* of the attack, and the source of the mobilizations against the Popular Party's headquarters on 13th March, 2004 (López Martín, 2006). The posterior analysis of these three websites –*Nodo50* (www.nodo50.org), *La Haine* (www.lahaine.org) and *Indymedia* in Spanish (<http://www.indymedia.org/es/>)– was complicated because the archives of some of these sites disappeared and we had to use *Archive.org* (www.archive.org) to try to recover some of the information.

As *Archive.org* does not guarantee the capture of the totality of contents, nor the collection of all versions of each piece of information, the analysis was limited by the fact that certain contents cannot be recovered or have been modified. In some cases we had to forget the original information and resort to what other studies undertaken at that time tell us about the content of these websites.

3. Results

3.1. Outline of events

On 11 March 2004 there were several terrorist attacks that affected Madrid's *Cercanías* suburban train system. From 7:37 AM three bombs exploded in a commuter train that was about to enter Atocha station during the rush hour when people was commuting to work. More explosions occurred in the following minutes, and they took the lives of 191 people and injured more than 1,800 (Second section of the Criminal Division of the National Court, 2007).

The attack in Madrid provoked a situation of great need of guidance. The relevance of the event was extreme and so was the uncertainty because the identity of the perpetrators of the attack was unknown, and there was the possibility of more attacks, and because of the influence that the identification of the perpetrators could have on the outcome of the elections.

We could say that people's personal involvement in this tragedy was extended, in different degrees, s the concentric circles produced by a stone thrown in a Lake: the first wave hit the families and friends of the victims, the second great wave affected the population of the community of Madrid, while the third wave affected the whole Spanish population. The world's population, especially in Western countries, was also affected by the scale of the attack and soon the hypothesis that the perpetrators were Islamists became the most plausible.

The attention given to the media and to what they presented as the most relevant data, as well as the framing of the attacks was going to have a maximum impact on the population's perception of these unfortunate events.

Terrorism lives off the media (Nacos, 2006) and "its propaganda through the attacks" manages to break the barriers that the media put at the expression of its openly anti-establishment ideologies. Once the terrorist act takes over the media agenda, the terrorist group seeks to convey its message to the national and international public opinion, to national and international governments, in the so-called Triangle of Political Communication (Nacos, 2006).

The first media to give the news to the public were radio stations, which were broadcasting live their main news programmes. Radio was joined by television stations and the *online* media, which soon collected information about the massacre.

When learning the news, most Spaniards were on their way to work or already working. In this situation, the most accessible media for a large number of people are radios and Internet (Online Publisher Association, 2004).

It was written (Salido, 2006) and said on TV shows (Campo Vidal, 2004) that Internet traffic from 11 to 14 March multiplied eight times. However, there is no data to support that claim which was reproduced in the media. The source was a so-called Spanish Internet Observatory, a private entity that wrote press releases without providing the sources of its data.

Unfortunately, Espanix, which is the neutral access to the Internet in Spain, does not maintain a historical use of the Internet, so that the most reliable source for traffic data in those moments comes from the observations made by bloggers during those days. Antonio Delgado from caspa.TV reported that there had been an increase in traffic of 2% and that his source was Espanix. (Delgado, 2004)

3.2. Increased consumption of news

A significant increase in online news consumption from the websites of traditional media can be proven. For example, the following table collects the visits to some websites of traditional media from 9 to 14 March. You can see clearly a peak on the 11 and a lower one on the 14, the Election Day.

Internet Audience of several media

Number of visits *

	March 9	March 10	March 11	March 12	March 13	March 14
Vilaweb	46903	46285	93831	88440	65897	67375
Cadena SER	92970	108004	453539	234033	216251	231574
Antena 3	34483	33831	80237	70805	29001	45465
El Periódico	122237	125510	265665	256216	180636	241666

* Source: OJD November 2003 March 2004

Source: *Pont i Sorribes, 2004*

There were problems with mobile telephone communication so companies had to install mobile stations near the points with more traffic in Madrid and optimize the network to guarantee communication during the first hours after the attack

(Muñoz, 2004).

The large Spanish online media reacted quickly and offered special editions immediately, and some like *El País* even made paid-for information available free of charge, while others, like *El Mundo*, simplified their websites to text only, like *CNN* did on September 11. *Google News* showed its ability to act as a collection site for all the news about the attacks, although experiencing delays as it relied on what the media published online.

During March 2004 “atentado Madrid” (attack Madrid) was the third most searched for concept in Google Spain (Google, 2004).

Internet, radio and television stations were the media that managed to follow the informative rhythm imposed by the attack. Television channels also experienced an increase in the audience of news programmes, dedicated almost exclusively to the attacks.

Audience of TV news programmes from 11to 14 March

News Programme	11-M	12-M	13-M	14-M
Telediario 1 (TVE)	4.857.000 (35'1%)	4.385.000 (32'9%)	4.003.000 (29%)	3.659.000 (28'8%)
Telediario 2 (TVE)	3.977.000 (22'2%)	4.738.000 (28'6%)	4.072.000 (27'2%)	5.151.000 (28'9%)
Antena 3 Noticias – 1	3.386.000 (23'4%)	2.799.000 (20'4%)	3.776.000 (26'7%)	3.177.000 (24'9%)
Antena 3 Noticias – 2	3.406.000 (21'7%)	3.530.000 (22'8%)	3.020.000 (21'1%)	2.774.000 (17'2%)
Informativos Telecinco 1	2.669.000 (18'8%)	2.846.000 (21'4%)	3.094.000 (23'2%)	2.949.000 (24'4%)
Informativos Telecinco 2	-	2.220.000 (13'8%)	2.968.000 (22'4%)	2.821.000 (18'8%)

Source: LópezGarcía, 2004, with data from Sofres

El Navegante from *El Mundo* describes in the following way the increase in news consumption from traditional media on the Internet and the use of the chat rooms:

“The digital editions of national newspapers have been forced to take exceptional measures in order to remain operational in view of the avalanche of visitors they have received. *elmundo.es* has registered in the course of the morning an increase of 300% in comparison to its usual traffic at the same time other days. (...)

Existing thematic chat channels have become a vehicle through which people's indignation has been channelled. Many people have used online forums to express their condemnation of the attacks and their solidarity with the victims” (El Mundo, 2004).

The consumption of traditional media on the Internet also increased significantly from 4 to 14 March 2004 (López García, 2004).

This increase registered a peak on the 11th, which in the case of *El Mundo* almost tripled the number of visits in comparison to the same day in the previous week. In the case of *Cadena Ser* the number of visits multiplied six times. On the 13th the number of visits multiplied more than twice in *El Mundo*, when compared to the previous Saturday, while *Cadena Ser* multiplied more than three times. Although the numbers reflect the leadership of *El Mundo*, the impact that the attack and the subsequent information had on the visits to *Cadena Ser's* website is remarkable.

The protagonist role of *Cadena Ser* was not limited to the airwaves, since the access to its website increased dramatically during the three days of March, in comparison to other media, especially in the measurement of page views. The number of daily page views in the case of this radio network was around 3 million during the period from 11 to 14 March. The page views multiplied eight times on the 11th day and almost by nine on the 13th, in comparison to the pages views during the same days of the previous week. The case of *Cadena Ser* is unique, since other media only multiplied by five their page views (e.g. *El Mundo* on the 11th and *Abc* on the 13th) (Sampedro Blanco & López García, 2005).

Cadena Ser was also listened to live on the Internet: “the website of the radio station had 750,000 openings of the ‘player’ that lets people listen to live broadcast over the Internet. This service usually registers maximum audience levels with sports broadcasts, when the openings of the ‘player’ tend to be over 100,000” (Elpais.es, (2004).

“The increased use of information from *Cadena Ser* underlines its antagonistic role towards the information strategy of the Government. It goes from about 380,000 visited pages on the 4th to 3,200,000 on the 11th. These figures are maintained and even increased on the 14th. It should be stressed that the most established digital media, like *El Mundo* newspaper, suffered a fall in the consulted information” (Sampedro Blanco & López García, 2005).

In the case of other media, the access to their websites also experienced a more erratic behaviour.

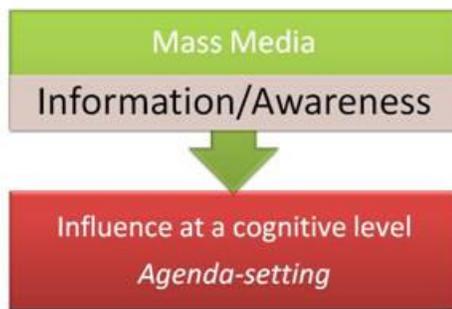
“In contrast, we can see that the website of *Antena 3* television had much more erratic audience levels”. Particularly on Saturday 13 when the author of the massacre of Madrid was confirmed to be Al-Qaeda and not ETA. The audience then collapsed to only 29.000 visits. Regarding the rest of analysed media, while it is true that they received less visits on the 13th day than in earlier days, it is also true that on 13 March they maintain visits levels higher than the average and of course higher than visits on other Saturdays of the year” (Pont i Sorribes, 2004).

3.3. Information in the media

The cognitive level of influence, establishing what is relevant, is a strength of the media (Meraz 2007). In *online* communication this is shown in the abundance of links and references to traditional media given by the social media (García Orosa & Capon García, 2004).

“Transferring the relevance of a news item on its agenda to society. Through the daily practice of structuring the social and political reality, the press influences the agenda-setting of the social issues around which political campaigns and the decisions of the voters are organized” (McCombs, Establishing the agenda, 2006).

Role of the media



Source: Author's elaboration

Now let's chronologically examine the news circulated during the 11, 12, and 13 March 2004 based on, fundamentally, the audio files of *Cadena Ser's* online digital audio archive available at: http://www.cadenaser.com/static/especiales/2005/sonidos11_14/.

This source is complemented with the printed and digital versions of *El País* and *El Mundo*. Other investigations have focused on the content analysis of the printed media (Toledano Buendía, 2004).

In *Cadena Ser's* programme *Hoy por hoy* of Iñaki Gabilondo several journalists examine live the scenarios of the attacks, and the dramatic repetition of information, which confirms the seriousness of the events. Gabilondo believes that the terrorists seek to spread fear and that the media are doing what the terrorists want, but at the same time notes that they cannot do anything else other than informing. At 8:50 AM José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero arrives to the channel to say that ETA has attempted to intervene in the election campaign (Audio archives from 11 to 14 March 2004. 08:00-09:00, 11 March, 2004).

At 10:30 AM, Arnaldo Otegi, the then leader of Batasuna, claims that ETA was not the author of the attack. Otegi did not believe “not even as a hypothesis” that ETA was responsible for the attacks in Madrid and pointed out the possibility that it was “an attack from the sectors of Arab resistance” based on the characteristics of the explosions, simultaneous and unannounced” (World, 2004).

At 11:00 AM from Atocha station the Home Secretary, Ángel Acebes, expresses his sympathy for the victims and announces that investigations are under way (Government of Spain, 2004).

11:54 Mariano Rajoy, the presidential candidate of the Popular Party, appears but does not mention ETA.

Aznar calls the directors of the major newspapers to tell them that ETA has been the author of the attack. There are discrepancies regarding the time: the Government's documents say that it was at 1:30 PM (Government of Spain, 2004) but *El Mundo* (El Mundo, 2004) and *El País* (Aznárez 2004) say it was at 1:00 PM.

In *Cadena Ser*, at around 1:20 PM, José Antonio Marcos makes reference to Arnaldo Otegi's statements denying ETA is the author of the attacks in a press conference without questions. Marcos said that as the conference did not involve questions no one could ask Otegi what were his reasons to believe that. He also gave information on previous attempts of the terrorist group ETA to put backpack-bombs on trains.

At 1:30 PM Acebes appears in the Moncloa Palace and affirms that “ETA has achieved its objective” and disallows

Araldo Otegi's statements saying that they are intolerable (*El Mundo*, 2004). Almost at the beginning of the conference, Acebes states: "this is why I think it is totally unacceptable any kind of intoxication directed by miserable people who want to divert the objective and the responsible for this tragedy". A foreign correspondent makes the first question, about the possibility that Al-Qaeda was the perpetrator. The Home Secretary says that there is no doubt that it was ETA and that at the same time the Spanish people were witnessing a "process of intoxication miserably initiated by Mr. Otegi to divert attention". There were more questions in this regard and Acebes reiterated that ETA was the only perpetrator.

José A. Olmeda describes the importance of Acebes' appearance: "the main contribution to the construction of the framing of ETA as the perpetrator came from the Home Secretary in his first press conference at around 1:00 PM". He said that "ETA was looking for a massacre, you have heard me say it months ago, days ago", the security forces have stopped them four times. (...) Here we see the two most important framing functions, according to Entman: the definition of the problem, which tends to virtually predetermine the rest of the framing, and its remedy, because it directly promotes support for a public policy, in this case the popular anti-terrorist policy" (Olmeda, 2005).

At the same time the Government calls and instructs the Spanish Mission in New York to present a resolution condemning the ETA attacks before the UN (Government of Spain, 2004).

Dedicated to the information on the attacks, *Cadena Ser* presents just before 2:00 PM a commentary on the similarity of the attacks and the Middle East's suicide attacks on buses. Before connecting with the correspondent in Jerusalem, *Cadena Ser's* correspondent in the US mentions that from the start *Fox* television stated that perhaps the attacks have something to do with *Al-Qaeda*.

At 2:40 PM the President José María Aznar appears and, without naming ETA, condemns terrorism, and invites people to demonstrate the next day with the slogan: "with the victims, with the Constitution and to the defeat of terrorism" and states textually: "Many people have been killed by the mere fact of being Spanish. We all know that this mass murder is not the first to be attempted. The security forces have prevented this tragedy several times before" (Europa Press, 2004).

The fact that, after Acebes's press conference, with a closed defence of the identification of ETA as the perpetrator, the President did not name ETA suggest that the government had already found clues that opened the possibility of identifying the Islamists as the perpetrators. This was an inexplicable change in the management of communication that made the success of the Government's framing of the attacks even more difficult.

At 8:05 PM in *Cadena Ser's* programme *Hora 20*, journalist Javier Álvarez claims to have black and white pictures of the 9 ETA suspects that the counter-terrorism experts identified as alleged perpetrators of the attacks. This is the first rumour that spreads without being proved.

At 8:10 PM Aznar calls the General Secretary of the Socialist Party, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and the directors of the major newspapers to warn them of the discovery of a suspicious van in which tape in Arabic language was found (Government of Spain, 2004).

At 8:20 Acebes appears to inform about the van found in Alcalá with timers and about the tape in Arabic with Qur'an verses: "this has made me command the Security forces to not rule out any line of research. I insist, the first line (...) is the terrorist group ETA". Later, he insists that ETA is the perpetrator because, according to Acebes, there had been previous confiscation of ETA's explosives intended to be used in trains and those explosives used the same type of dynamite used on the 11-M attack, and insists on qualifying the line of research that blames ETA as a "priority".

In response to a question about the contents of the tape in Arabic, he recalls that since the morning there have been many people interested in producing confusion and exonerating ETA and "this is one more element. Having said that, I believed that it was my responsibility (...) to start this line of research".

At 9:04 PM *Cadena Ser* says it is not sure whether the explosive is *tyladine* or other type of dynamite. At 9:20 PM Pedro Blanco, editor of *Cadena Ser*, gives the news about the false claims made by *Al-Qaeda* which were circulated by the Reuters Agency. The correspondent of *Reuters* in Spain recognizes that he does not know about the reliability of the *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* newspaper.

In fact, the Israeli expert Yigal Carmon wrote an article on 12 March in which he denied the authenticity of the document (Carmon, 2004).

The conversation focuses on commenting that it was regrettable not having asked the Congress to join forces, that the lack of references to ETA from Aznar and the King seemed to indicate that they already knew something, and that the King's intervention had been delayed several times. There were connections with the correspondent in Paris who reports that France has decreed the terrorism orange alert, whereas the deputy international director of *The Washington Post* says that the US is sceptical about ETA being the perpetrator, and it is reported that after the information about the Islamist track was circulated on the media *Wall Street* fell sharply. At 10:00 PM it is affirmed that according to investigation sources (up to three sources) a suicide terrorist was on one of wagons although the report recognises that this is not confirmed by the Home Office.

At 10:50 PM Carlos Llamas admits that the station is receiving calls from listeners who want to criticize and blame the Government for the attacks since it got Spain into a war. Llamas ensures that the station will not present those calls.

From 11:10 PM Carlos Llamas interviews Gaspar Llamazares, coordinator of the United Left, who states that their mouths have been silenced on several occasions throughout the day and “I hope that the Home Secretary will explain some things to us so that we will not have to continue shutting our mouths”. “I suppose that there will be time for the Home Secretary to explain some things”, Llamas responds. “Yes, but tomorrow, tomorrow before the elections I want the Home Secretary to explain to me why the version of the Home office is questioned internationally and by our own national audience and why the Home Secretary ruled out that version”, Llamazares answers and puts into question the information policy of the Secretary.

Llamazares, therefore, includes an essential element of the new *framing*: we all agree to condemn the attack but what we are putting into question is the information policy of the Home Secretary.

At 11:46 PM it is reported that the Israeli Embassy has confirmed that Spanish authorities have been in contact with the *Institute of Forensic Medicine L. Crinsberg* to ask for their expert advice in the identification of victims of terrorist attacks. The conversations suggest the possibility of the suicide bomber.

El Mundo newspaper entitles its *online* version for the night of 11 March: “The Government does not rule out that Islamic groups are responsible for the massacre” (*El Mundo*, 2004). And *El País* says: “In his first appearance, Acebes did not hesitate making ETA responsible for the massacre”. In the afternoon, there was the possibility that another terrorist group was behind the attacks after discovering in *Alcalá de Henares* a van with a tape with verses from the Qur’an. After Acebes’s appearance, an Arabic newspaper from London published a letter allegedly signed by *Al Qaeda* in which the Islamic terrorist organization claimed responsibility for the attacks” (*El País*, Agencias, 2004)

At 1:30 AM the Anatomical Institute of Forensics terminates the autopsy of the initial 192 victims. The Institute confirms that there are no signs or indicative data suggesting the existence of a suicide among the victims (Government of Spain, 2004).

On the 12th day, *El País* comes with an exclusive in which the main headline says: “Terrorist hell”. The subtitle collects research lines followed by the Government: “Home office investigates *Al Qaeda* without ruling out ETA”.

In its editorial the paper says “let’s hope that there has not been concealment or manipulation of information from the Government, as these are tragic events that have come to stain with blood the elections campaign only 72 hours before the polls are opened. The hypothesis that we are facing an attack from *Al Qaeda*, in an attempt to extend the Iraq war to Spanish territory, would place the Government in a complicated position. Especially after the controversy over the electoral use of terrorism that has occurred during the election campaign” (*El País*, 2004).

Juan Luis Cebrián, the CEO of *Prisa* and the first director of *El País*, writes an editorial that affirms:

“The possibility that the attack is the work of Islamic fundamentalist groups linked to *Al-Qaeda* floated yesterday as a ghost in all conversations among the political and journalistic circles. (...) If it is confirmed that there are elements of Islamic radicalism linked to the events, it will also be licit to suspect that official institutions have manipulated the information. (...) Furthermore, the political analysis of an *Al-Qaeda* attack to our country and Europe would entail very worrying added considerations, taking into account the protagonist role of José María Aznar and his Government at the Azores meeting that decided the invasion to Iraq”(Cebrián, 2004).

El Mundo newspaper, in its printed edition on 12 March, provides information from its correspondent in London about the letter where *Al-Qaeda* claims responsibility for the attack to: “The British Government and its intelligence services share the same caution as the US Department about the actors behind the massacre of Madrid. Neither the newspaper, nor much less its director, are credible sources for the Western intelligence services” (Romero, 2004).

Iñak Gabilondo’s programme *Hoy por hoy* informs at 6:16 AM about the discrepancies between *CadenaSer*’s information about the suicide terrorist and the refusal of the Home Secretary and the Government spokesperson, Eduardo Zaplana. A journalist points out that one of the victims wore three layers of underwear and had his body shaved, which was a common practice among Islamic suicides. The same sources say that in the van there were found remains of an explosive substance that is not *tyladine*, the one commonly used by ETA. It is also reported that a mobile phone was found in a bag with unused explosives. The information from the previous day is summarised.

At 6:33 AM Iñaki Gabilondo reminds people that the group that has claimed responsibility for the attacks on behalf of *Al-Qaeda* has made false claims in other occasions.

Gabilondo states at 8:38 AM: “Although surely everything will be different, who knows, I think it would be very dangerous to start aligning those who hope it is ETA, and those who hope it is *Al Qaeda*”. The commentators and Gabilondo ask for transparency to the Home Secretary, and Javier Pérez-Royo criticises the government’s precipitation to blame ETA from the start. Gabilondo praises Cebrián’s article. Later Pérez Royo says that the perpetrators are confirmed to be Islamist and referring to the Iraq war he states: “We have put ourselves into a predicament, and we have opened an extraordinary terrorist front”. From 9:14 AM Gabilondo interviews Zapatero who says that “the policy response must be different if it has been an *Al-Qaeda* or ETA attack”.

The way is a Government that encourages unity, that practices unity, that encourages dialogue, that avoids any element of tension, a Government that reports properly, and has an appropriate response every time, and that certainly does and practices what the vast majority of the population is asking for and demanding: the leadership aimed to encourage unity, dialogue and trust”.

Gabilondo adds: "it would be terrible, terrible to find out after the elections that it was Al-Qaeda and that it could have been known now". (...) Today and tomorrow we have to make sure that the Home Office is not postponing information". Pérez-Royo claims: "with the mistake yes, with manipulation no, and we have to know when they found out what they found out and whether it was aired what it was known or it was left for later".

On the 12th day, *El Mundo's* on line morning cover features a news piece titled: "The Spanish Socialist Labour Party suspects the Government hides information about the identity of the perpetrators". The piece reported about the discrepancies on the official version maintained by Zapatero and José Blanco, who said in *Antena 3* that "the obligation of the Government is telling the truth and not hiding information. Arenas talks almost exclusively about ETA being the perpetrator of the massacre. We believed so yesterday, but now it seems that it was a different attack".

El Mundo also included a statement by the spokesperson of the outlawed Batasuna, Arnaldo Otegi, who once again ruled out ETA was behind the attacks and claimed that the "Spanish Government also knows it". In statements to Germany's first public television network, ARD, Otegi also stated: "It is lying" when the government rejects the possibility that Spain's position on the Iraq war could have been the cause of the attacks (Elmundo.es Agencias, 2004).

"The rigidity of the governmental actors, who were not able to incorporate some flexibility in their framing of the attacks, should be highlighted, as well as the fracture of the climate of national unity provoked by the Catalan regional government which questioned the mentioning of the Constitution in the banner at the forefront of the demonstrations. However, the antagonistic framing began to be developed in a massive level by *Cadena Ser* and on the elite level by *El País* newspaper" (Olmeda, 2005).

Aznar appears for a second time at around 11:20 AM after the cabinet. Aznar makes a number of considerations: The federal security bodies and forces are making an enormous effort to clarify the identity of the perpetrators and I am sure that there will be results soon. "The Home Secretary - according to Aznar - has been reporting on time on the progress of the investigations, and I want to confirm that no line of research will be ruled out".

The first question is about the words of the socialist politician José Blanco, who expressed his suspicion that the Government is not telling the truth. Aznar replies that the Government has given out all the information that is available. "I am surprised someone can say, and who has said it should apologise, that the government is hiding information. Because yesterday I informed personally the general secretary of the Socialist Party and also his boss on two occasions". (...) "Does anyone think that a Government with half a brain, after 30 years of terrorism, should not logically think that the perpetrator has been that group, as it has happened to most citizens and institutional leaders?" (...) "Allow me to express my support to the Home Secretary whose work is excellent".

Aznar does not respond to a last journalist who asks if he ratifies all his decisions in the foreign policy of the past two years knowing that the identity of the perpetrators could be a result of his. "You are right when you say it is not the time to ask that".

Gabilondo: "We consider this a not very appropriate intervention at this time we are living because he was particularly rough, spicy, and susceptible when we all expected a more institutional intervention".

Gabilondo reflects and says that if Aznar considers that nationalists can feed the ETA terrorism, then also the political motivations of the Azores agreement feed Islamist terrorism if it is the case that they were the perpetrators of the 11-M attacks. He cares whether it was one or another kind of terrorism and ends the reasoning stating that "there are political decisions that can also feed another type of terrorism" referring to the support to the war in Iraq. Gabilondo adds that both events are unfair, to link nationalism to terrorism and the war in Iraq to Islamist terrorism.

José Antonio Marcos continues the news after 1:00 PM. Nine minutes later an editor brings the latest news and says that according to sources of the Home Office all artefacts were activated by mobile devices, that the police has retrieved a backpack with plastic explosive manufactured by the ECO brand in Spain and that based on its components and detonators they argue that the perpetrator does not seem to be ETA but *Al-Qaeda*, although the Ministry does not give details of the explosive's composition.

Rodríguez Zapatero makes a statement at 1:15 PM to ask assistance from the public to the evening manifestations and asks the Government "to report with the greatest possible diligence". Zapatero is asked about his two conversations with Aznar and whether he has a hypothesis about the identity of the perpetrators. He answers that the Government should inform a society that is entitled to know who the perpetrators of this barbarity are.

I know that there are many people who want to have quick information, I know that there are many people who want to know the details as soon as possible, and they have the right to demand so. I hope the Government meets those demands". (...) "If yesterday I had been the President I had gathered all the groups from parliament, to give and share live information (...) to make a joint declaration to the country". It would have been desirable to collect the anti-terrorism pact, and that is another issue on which Zapatero disagrees with the Government.

At 2:50 PM Joseba Azkarraga, the Basque Country's home office councillor, appears and accuses the Government of preferring ETA for electoral reasons and considers that it is an act of prevarication what the Popular Party's Government is doing (Audio archives from 11 to 14 March 2004. 14.00-15.00, 12 March, 2004).

Javier del Pino, correspondent in Washington, intervenes in the news programme at 5:00 PM and notes that in the US capital "the counter-terrorism experts do not seem to understand why 36 hours after the Madrid bombings there are still

no reliable trails, particularly when mobile phones were involved and they always leave traces". Felipe González is interviewed in the programme *La Ventana* (The Window). The former President states: "the most terrible thing would be that in four days, in one or another direction, we would know what, anyways, sooner or later is going to be known and that that is not what we have been led to believe".

At 6:15 PM Angel Acebes appears and reports that "overnight they found a sports bag containing Goma-2 Eco dynamite, a newer modality than the Goma-2 dynamite", and also a detonator and mobile phone. He emphasises that the *modus operandi* is similar to the previous attempts made by the terrorist group ETA. The bag has opened new avenues of investigation about the explosive. The detonator of the backpack and the one in the van are similar. ETA continues to be the main suspect and "there is no reason to doubt that (ETA) should be the main line of research and that ETA intended to make attacks of large dimensions before the elections".

At 6:30 PM the terrorist group ETA publishes a press release in *Garain* which it denies its involvement in the attacks (El Mundo, 2004).

At 7:00 PM *Cadena Ser* reports in exclusive that on the afternoon of 11 March the Minister of Foreign Affairs sent a circular to the Spanish ambassadors commanding them to confirm to the media and the authorities of the countries in which they were accredited that ETA was the perpetrator. The mass demonstrations throughout Spain are covered live (Sounds from 11 to 14 M 2004. 19.00-20.00, 12 March, 2004).

The *framing* of the attack began to be changed with the participation of *Cadena Ser*, *El País* newspaper, and political leaders during the night of 11 March and the morning of 12 March. It was inevitable that the hypothesis that ETA was the perpetrator would get deteriorated with the mere new findings: tape in Arabic and the letter of the Islamist group claiming responsibility for the attacks -which was later found to be false.

The voice of the investigations, and of an almost exclusive protagonist role, was Ángel Acebes, who in view of these new findings continued to maintain that the "priority" line was ETA. He reports the findings but tries to force a framing that is becoming more insubstantial, the same data are undermining his valuation, a frame that he tries to fix using one term: "priority", which could have been omitted.

This change of framing is reaffirmed with the fake news broadcast by *Cadena Ser* about the corpse of a suicide bomber found among the victims. The night of 11 March the containment of the morning relaxes, and paradoxically, not verified and false news are presented. *Cadena Ser* promotes a framing that is conflicting with the Government's (Olmeda, 2005).

An academic piece described the informative situation of Spain during these three days saying that "the public sphere was blocked by prudent lies. (...) Democracy was left without reliable voices, because during two days (11 and 12) no media of reference nor any political force denounced bluntly the official lie; that is with undisputed data without partisan antagonism" (Sampedro Blanco, 2005), which seems blurred taking into account the information and opinion provided by the media, particularly *Cadena Ser*, the most listened to in Spain, *El País*, the newspaper with the largest circulation, and the politicians from the opposition.

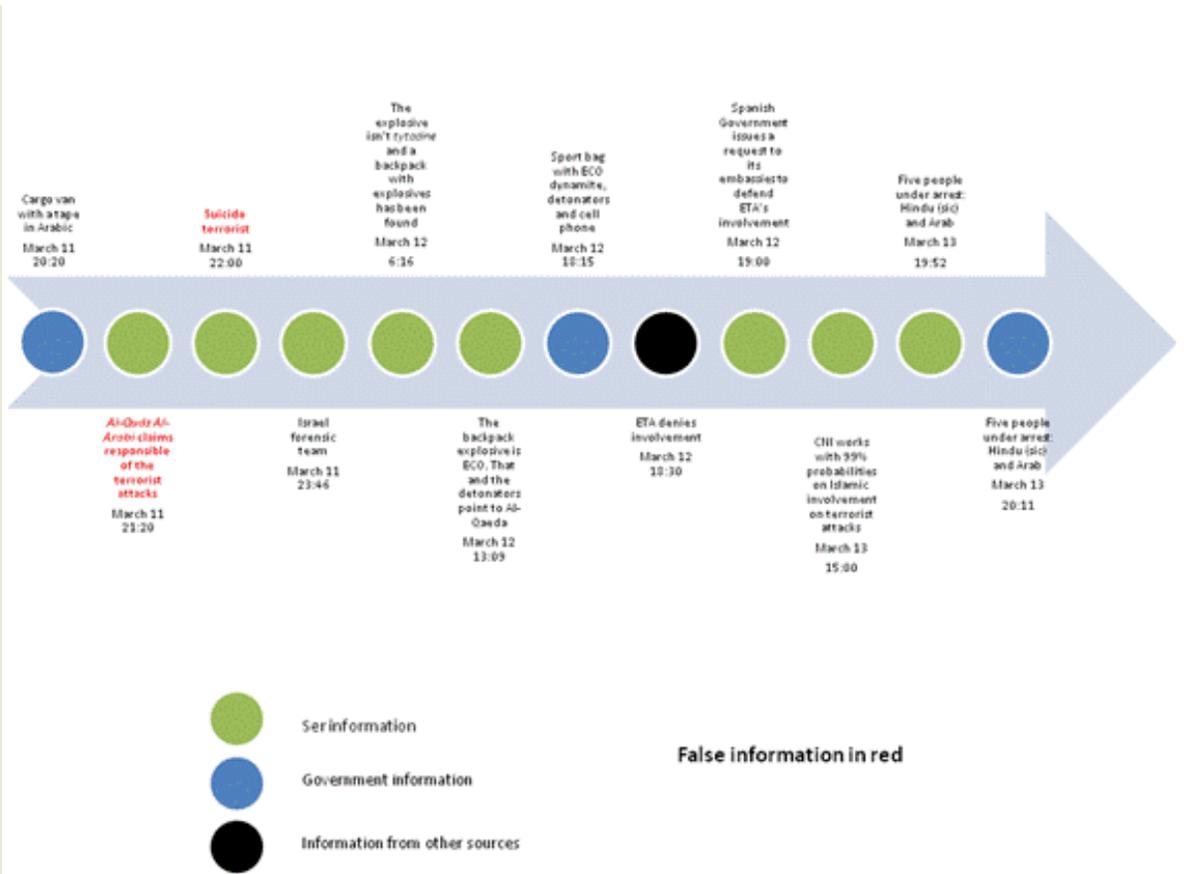
Cadena Ser, as we see, took the lead over the rest of the media and, even more surprising, over the Government itself, in the provision of relevant information on the attacks. At times it was pieces of information that later were proven false, but in other cases were completely accurate news that anticipated the information provided by the Government. Therefore it took the initiative in the reporting of the facts: "usually the crisis –or the election campaigns– are won by the player that takes the initiative and establishes the topics that the public opinion debates over, and thus forces the opponent to react" (López Quesada, 2005).

A second point is the divergent agenda between the framing of the radio network's information and the Government's, an agenda that matches for several hours, the first hours after the attack, and that diverges from the night of the 11th until the day of the elections. In this case, we are not talking about what topics are relevant, but about the attribute agenda-setting, i.e. that the media not only set the agenda of topics but also the attributes that those topics acquire, that is, the media will not only tell us "what to think about but also how to think" about these topics (McCombs, 2005).

This level of the *agenda-setting* is linked to theory of *framing*, i.e. the media's ability to select and frame certain aspects of reality and make them more important. In support of this view, McCombs quotes Robert Entman with its well-known definition of *framing*.

These pieces of information arranged in a timeline that compares the information supplied by *Cadena Ser* and the Government, in addition to information whose source is ETA, demonstrate that the radio network not only took the lead during the 11 and 12 March but also on 13 March.

Information reporting timeline from 11 to 13 March



Source: author's creation

Cadena Ser's informative work took the initiative most of the time. *Cadena Ser* set the agenda of topics in the field of the events.

3.4. Scarce information on the social media

"11-M demonstrated that the power to generate accurate information is in the hands of the traditional media. On the internet we could find insightful views, thirst for knowledge, the legendary conspiracy theories and the existence of a group of citizens (in particular young people) concerned about knowing more and willing to spend many hours and much work to achieve so" (Varela, 2004).

The general feeling on a large part of the Spanish public opinion that there were inconsistencies in the versions offered on the attacks (Toral Madariaga & Santiago Pozas, 2006) revived the interest in accessing alternative information or, even more, in confronting personal opinions or beliefs with those of other citizens, confirming suspicions or discussing the various versions that were given about the events, and sharing political assessments of the performance of the government and the opposition. The unilateral communication management –performed by Aznar's government– always had risks, but in this one in this case (previous credibility crisis such as the Prestige and Iraq, polarized media landscape, the emergence of social media and the formation of alternative groups connected by the Internet or mobile technology) was destined to fail, as it was proven on 14 March (Toral Madariaga & Santiago Pozas, 2006).

It could be argued that there was an attempt to supplement the information provided by the mass media, which did not rise to the occasion (Vara Miguel, 2006), and there was a use of a more horizontal discussion like the one used in the communities created around certain blogs, forums or alternative websites.

In the case of the 11-14 March events the pattern observed was the same to that already observed in other studies: the blog of current affairs or related to journalism widely cites and links the traditional media (Salaverría Aliaga, 2008).

The cognitive level of influence, establishing the events we are going to talk about, what is relevant, is one of the strengths of the media (Meraz, 2007). This is reflected in the online communication in the abundance of links and references to traditional media from blogs and other social media (García Orosa & Capon García, 2004). A first striking feature is the abundance of comments and a lower incidence of informative posts.

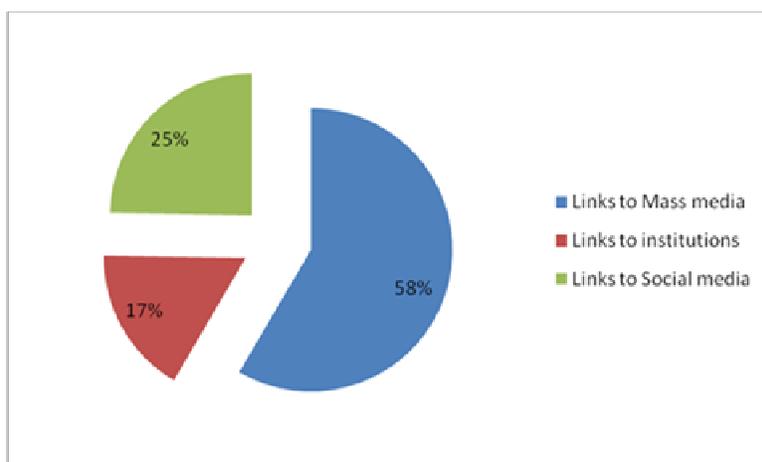
The following table shows a summary of the use of links during the period from 11 to 13 March 2004 in the blogs studied. This summary only includes those sites linked to in more than five links. The blogs *Balance* and *Sobre la Red* were not included because they did not use links.

Use of links in the sample of weblogs studied during the period from 11 to 13 March

	eCuaderno	Periodistas21	Chapapote	Escolar	Caspa.tv	Tintachina	TOTAL
<i>Cadena Ser</i>	1	5		2			8
Ministerio del Interior	3	1			1		5
<i>El País</i>	1			4			5
<i>El Mundo</i>		3		6		1	10
Resto de enlaces	32	14	1	9	5		61
Total de enlaces	37	23	1	21	6	1	89

Source: Author's creation

As we can see, most links are to websites of traditional media, which are those that provide information, and to the Home Office, primarily for lists of victims and resources available to them. From the rest of the links, 14 are to traditional media's websites and 10 to institutions.

Percentage of use of links according to the source**Source: author's creation****3.5. Alternative websites**

"The Traffic Rank went from over the 5,000 mark on the first days of March, to below 3,000 during the days of crisis (in the Traffic Rank, the smaller the number, the higher the traffic [...]). This shows the success of the alternative websites in terms of information dissemination during the attacks to Madrid. Indymedia.org was one of the websites that channelled some of the messages that were sent to the virtual page, and that is the reason why the site was able to report much better" (Pont i Sorribes, 2004).

The alternative or anti-system websites –*Nodo50* (www.nodo50.org), *La Haine* (www.lahaine.org) and *Indymedia* in Spanish (<http://www.indymedia.org/es/>)– increased their importance in the hours prior to the demonstrations of 13 March. The function of these websites, and blogs, was not to provide more information but to channel interpersonal communication, and discussions of the information published by the media, and to express opinions, which in some cases were openly partisan.

The analysis of the headlines of the news *Nodo50* was presenting from 11 to 14 March indicates that the following types of content were offered:

- Information from traditional media, both Spanish and foreign
- Press releases from social groups calling for the social mobilization
- Opinions linking the attack to the foreign policy of the Aznar government
- Opinion calling people to respond to attacks through the vote

3.6. Conclusions

1. The information provided, mainly by *Cadena Ser*, about the attacks and the identity of the perpetrators was crucial for establishing the framing of the information. Here we are talking about a frame based on information and facts and that

is different from the one promoted by the government.

2. Gaspar Llamazares, from the opposition, on the night of 11 March, includes an essential element of the new framing: we all agree to condemn the attack but what we are calling into question is the information policy of the Home Office. In this case, we are talking about a framing based on opinions.

3. The second term of Jose Maria Aznar had had previous communication problems that were accentuated in successive crises such as the Prestige, the support for the US strategy in Iraq against the Spanish public opinion, and the Yak-42 plane crash. All these crises, largely communication crisis, had provoked a climate of distrust in the public opinion and had polarized the media. The lack of trust undermines the core of any epistemological authority. If there is no epistemological authority, there is no influence. The Aznar government had its influence diminished by these previous communication crisis which led to the lack of trust.

4. We see that the media informed of discrepancies between the government and the opposition from the night of the 11th (Gaspar Llamazares in *Cadena Ser*) and that this was accentuated on the 12th day with the help of *El País* and leaders of the Spanish Socialist Labour Party that attempted a different framing:

- focusing not so much on the fact that the attack had an Islamic origin as on the fact that the Government was not telling the truth or was concealing information.
- The attack has a political reading: the Government is to blame for having supported the war in Iraq.

5. In this new framing of the attacks the real data were mixed with data that were subsequently proven false and, above all, we must bear in mind that the first point of the framing tried to affirm something that included the trial of intentions, which are difficult to prove, whereas the second point was a political trial about the causes of a terrorist attack, something that seemed overcome in the Spanish democracy.

6. The exclusives of *Cadena Ser*, some true and some false, gave it the protagonist role in information on the airwaves and the Internet, and gave it the initiative during the three days of March, allowing it to set the agenda of the terrorist attack in opposition to the government's framing. This informative importance allows us to conclude that the influence of *Cadena Ser* on the cognitive aspect of the attacks (perpetrators, causes, role of government and opposition) was decisive in shaping the public opinion. The audience appreciated the contradictory framing between the government and *Cadena Ser*, and eventually the latter prevailed.

7. *Cadena Ser* defined the problem differently than the Government (the Government is holding or hiding information on the 11-M attacks), through a divergent causal interpretation (we are facing Islamic terrorism not ETA terrorism), a moral evaluation that put over the Government the opacity and blame for attracting Islamist hostility with its foreign policy and the recommendation of a treatment or solution through the elections.

8. The news, with their frame, came from the traditional media which were the ones that influenced the public agenda, both in the classic sense of agenda-setting (events that are made relevant) and in the establishment of the second level the agenda, the framing of these events in the cognitive level.

9. Most bloggers made comments about the links to the news from the media, which shows that indeed there was no own production of information but only the production of opinion pieces. Most links are to websites of traditional media, which are those that provide information, and the Home Office, primarily for lists of victims and the resources available for them.

10. The media, especially *Cadena Ser*, disseminated information that dismantled the governmental framing, and was then widespread in the social media.

11. The use of weblogs and other social media increased in this situation of informational uncertainty, especially those sites that were frequently updated and had an agenda opposing the government.

12. Bloggers particularly emphasized the value of opinion and collection of links that these social media make.

13. During the three days of March the Social media served as tools to:

1. Select information.
2. Compare Opinions
3. Express peripheral discussion on actions to influence public opinion.

Therefore, the cognitive level of information was in the hands of the media. The social media served as platforms for the discussion between like-minded people, especially on websites whose point of view was similar to the user's.

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