




Corruption and media surveillance of power in Argentina and Peru: The coverage of Clarín and El Comercio during the vaccination scandals against COVID 19

Corrupción y vigilancia mediática del poder en Argentina y Perú: La cobertura de Clarín y El Comercio durante los escándalos de la vacunación contra el COVID 19

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Abstract

In Argentina and Peru, the COVID-19 emergency brought corruption scandals related to skipping the line to access the vaccine and its illicit application to political authorities and other figures. Although the media systems of both Latin American countries have many similarities, they also present some differences, such as the relationship with the political system. In this context, El Comercio in Peru and El Clarín in Argentina are leading media outlets and protagonists of the high media concentration in their countries. Likewise, both have high readerships, both in print and in their web portal versions. From a methodology based on the comparative politics of case studies, on media frames and predominant information source types, this study analyzes how the leading online press media in Argentina and Peru, namely Clarín and El Comercio, reported the scandals, locally known as Vaccine VIP and Vacunagate, respectively. The results of this research show that both media have a vigilant role under power, while the biggest difference is regarding the opposition role with the respective governments. Media surveillance of power is one of the most important functions of the media in society. In the case of Latin America, having media with a greater role in monitoring political power is undoubtedly relevant for its democracies.

Keywords: COVID 19, media scandal, Latin America, Clarín, El Comercio

Resumen

En Argentina y Perú, la emergencia del COVID-19 trajo consigo escándalos de corrupción relacionados con el acceso y aplicación ilícita de la vacuna a autoridades políticas y otras figuras. Si bien, los sistemas mediáticos de ambos países latinoamericanos tienen muchas similitudes, también presentan algunas diferencias, como la relación con el sistema político. En este contexto, El Comercio en Perú y El Clarín en Argentina, son medios líderes y protagonistas de la alta concentración mediática en sus países. Asimismo, ambos cuentan con altos índices de lectura, tanto en versión impresa como en sus portales web. A partir de una metodología basada en la política comparada de estudios de caso, en los encuadres mediáticos y en los tipos de fuentes de información predominantes, este estudio analiza cómo los

principales medios de prensa online de Argentina y Perú, Clarín y El Comercio, informaron sobre los escándalos, conocidos localmente como Vacuna VIP y Vacunagate, respectivamente. Los resultados de esta investigación muestran que ambos medios tienen un rol de vigilancia ante el poder, mientras que la mayor diferencia está en el rol de oposición ante los respectivos gobiernos. La vigilancia mediática del poder es una de las funciones más importantes de los medios de comunicación en la sociedad. En el caso de América Latina, contar con medios de comunicación con un mayor rol en el monitoreo del poder político es sin duda relevante para sus democracias.

Palabras clave: COVID 19, escándalo mediático, América Latina, Clarín, El Comercio

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, as a global health emergency, has allowed societies to test their efficiency in facing challenges and finding solutions. An example of such a situation took place in early 2020 when one of the main responses to the virus began, following the manufacturing of vaccines by various laboratories, their acquisition by governments, and the beginning of the vaccination process. However, this massive response to the global health emergency was not free of corruption scandals related to skipping the immunization schedule line and illicit delivery of vaccines by political authorities and the social elite in Argentina and Peru.

This study analyzes how the online portals of the Argentine newspaper Clarín and the Peruvian newspaper El Comercio reported on two scandals, Vaccination VIP and Vacunagate, respectively. Their role gains prominence considering that news web portals currently feed social media and allow for debates and information sharing (Rowe, 2015; Ksiazek, Peer, and Lessard, 2016), the latter being particularly relevant regarding the communication of Covid-19-related issues (Cinelli et al. 2020; Chan et al. 2020).

Hallin and Mancini (2004), in their model for media systems comparison, established a bidirectional relation of influence between a country's political system and its mediatic system.

Accordingly, Argentina and Peru have substantial similarities in their political (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, 2014) and media (Digital Reuter, 2021) systems. However, there are also noticeable differences, especially in political parallelism (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). While the Argentinian case shows remarkable parallelism given by the political dispute between Kirchnerism and Clarín newspaper, the Peruvian case poses a much lower degree due to generalized discredit upon the local political class.

There is a limited amount of research addressing corruption scandals in Latin America and the role of media in a comparative manner (Tagle and Claro, 2018; Echeverría, Gonzalez, and Tagle, 2020; Peruzzotti, 2019; Mellado et al. 2017; Waisbord, 2000; 2012).

Alongside the subject relevance, it is crucial to consider corruption as a structural and persistent issue across Latin-American democracies (Latinobarómetro, 2022; Transparency International, 2022).

Therefore, this study undoubtedly contributes to understanding the role of the media in this critical topic.

The first part of this research is a theoretical review of media scandals, corruption frames and the use of journalistic sources, followed by a discussion of Latin American media systems.

In the second part, the methodological design and the results and analysis of the media coverage of El Comercio and Clarín on the VIP Vaccination and Vacunagate cases respectively are presented.

Literature review

The media scandal

While acts of corruption and justice run in tandem in one lane and citizen perception of corruption runs on another, these two lanes do not necessarily run parallel, according to Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016). Entman (2012) states that this difference is due to public opinion accessing media-mediated information on moral or legal transgressions, thus adopting new logic and forms of expression, which leads to what we currently term a media scandal. In this phenomenon, the media "are not a secondary or incidental feature, but rather partially constitutive of the scandal itself", asserts Thompson (2001, p. 92).

Zamora and Marín Albaladejo (2010) state that the commercial pull of media scandals pushes the media to sensationalize or dramatize reality by turning events into emotional stories, which incorporate their characters and arguments, and end up stigmatizing all those involved. Just and Crigler (2014, 2019) argue that when corruption acts are sensationalized and become scandals, the corrupt act itself becomes personalized, and in so doing, the audience's understanding of the structural problems involved in the situation itself is impeded. Bennett (2016) postulates that, given that scandal is about a drama, the presence of identifiable heroes and villains is necessary.

Two types of journalists or media, or both that revolve around the notion of scandal: those for whom scandal is entertainment, an opportunity to investigate stories of secret and illicit relationships involving public figures, and those for whom scandals are an opportunity to shed light on reality and the truth of facts, and who take upon themselves the role of social reformers who try to influence politicians by nurturing the moral indignation of their audience (Thompson, 2001).

The media of corruption

The framing theory gains relevance in the coverage of corrupt acts, given that, in this situation, the media "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition" (Entman, 1993, p.52).

Although the framing theory has its beginnings in psychology, it is from the seventies, when Goffman (1974) takes the framing theory to a sociological dimension, planning that society has its own frames of reality. In this way, in recent decades, this theory has become one of the most relevant in mass communication, especially in journalistic studies (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019; Saperas & Carrasco-Campos, 2015). Tuchman (1978) asserts that news is neither reality nor a mirror of society. The media provide a vision of reality that entails accepting journalistic objectivity when reporting will never be exempt from specific approaches, as explained by Sádaba et al. (2012).

There is a debate in communication: whether framing should be understood as an agenda-setting level or if it is a theory by itself (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), in a general way, frames will have the power to structure thought, "to shape the way we think about issues of public interest" (McCombs, 2006, p.173).

When reporting on scandals, the media apply frames that present corruption as something that challenges existing norms, requiring a solution (Entman, 2012), or, as it happens in drama, counts on the presence of villains and needs to conclude with a moral end (Zamora and Marín Albaladejo, 2010), or both. As Clemente and Gabbioneta (2017) point out, the corruption frames applied by the media "influence the perception of

a transgression, its magnitude, and consequences" (p. 287). In addition, given that these frames would have the power to structure public opinion, the media "usually provide a certain interpretation of corruption that influences the way in which they are discussed and evaluated in public debate" (Park, 2012, p.3).

Regarding theoretical proposals on frames of corruption, Entman (2012) not only postulates that frames can have a significant scope both for understanding and in the way in which society values or perceives this phenomenon, but he also establishes four types of frames that can operate in this scope:

1. Definition of the problem: A corrupt act is defined as a problem that prevents the proper operation of the government or society.
2. Analysis of the causes: Corrupt behavior is attributed to a particular individual or institution.
3. Moral judgment: The corrupt person and the corrupt act receive public moral condemnation.
4. Application of a solution: A solution that involves punishment is sought.

After decades of studies on framing, Cacciatore, Scheufele, and Iyengar (2016) point out that the major contributions to breakthroughs in the discipline were achieved deductively, that is, by replicating previous models to new realities.

Source of scandals

Sources are a fundamental element of news story construction, as they disclose relevant information and opinions, endowing a story with the credibility of facts (Tuchman, 1978), something particularly true when covering stories of corruption scandals (Márquez-Ramírez, et al. 2020).

Source selection is not random. Instead, it responds to a combination of routines and standards (Franklin and Carlson, 2010; Mellado et al. 2017; Reich, 2010), or as Berkowitz (2009) points out, news source selection is based on issues revolving around prejudices, power, and influence.

Generally, the use of journalistic sources sets up a bidirectional relationship, sometimes controlled by journalists, with their respective frames and ideologies, and other times by political power (Halling and Mancini, 2004; Ripollés and Rabadán, 2012). Among politicians, whether political authorities or elected officers, becoming a source can provide them with public support, which may allow them to remain in office and implement their intended policies (Berkowitz, 2009).

Thus, the use of sources in a journalistic story is rife with issues that threaten its quality. Studies have shown a high presence of official sources, which brings along two opposite effects: one affecting the preservation of the status quo, the other informative pluralism (Amado, 2015; Berkowitz, 2009; Mayoral, 2005; Nyhan, 2015; Reich, 2010; Ruiz and Albertini, 2008).

Multiple reasons explain the use of official sources, some derived from the journalistic companies themselves, others associated with the authority and legitimacy of official sources, and the ease of accessing them (Pérez Curiel et al. 2015). On the other hand, anonymous sources are recurrently used in news piece construction. However, their presence in news stories undermines the credibility and objectivity of the information (Carlson, 2010; Duncan et al., 2019).

The use of sources is critical in media scandals, given that sources encompass journalistic investigation, rumors, accusations, and power struggles (Thompson, 2001).

If the normative ideals spelled out by Christians et al. (2009) were honored, the media would report on scandals with equanimity as expected. This reference to equanimity brings into play the relevance of source

typology. Sources can fall into one of three types: sources belonging to the sectors involved in the scandal (these are politically akin to those whose reputation could be affected), sources belonging to adversary sectors (these include those whose image could benefit from a political standpoint), and sources of the case, (those whose significance do not respond to partisanism but to the building of the case and the incorporation of new evidence), (Mayoral, 2005; Ruiz Albertini, 2008; Díaz and Mellado, 2017; Pérez Curiel et al. 2015).

Digital communication media systems in Argentina and Peru

Taking the categories of the three models of media systems by Halin and Mancini (2004), it is possible to define Latin America as a set captured liberal media system, where, although democracy and freedom of expression have prevailed normatively for decades, media tempted to be captured by economic interests (Guerrero, 2014; Mellado, Humanes and Marquez-Ramires, 2018).

Latinobarómetro (2020) asserts that 62% of Argentinians declare having little or no trust in the media. Even though media in Peru and Argentina are comparatively better evaluated than other institutions such as the president and Congress, the case of Argentina stands out for the levels of polarization reached by Clarín, the leading journalistic group in the country, and Kirchnerism (Digital Reuter, 2021).

In Argentina, the media are highly concentrated (Monje et al. 2021). In terms of print media, Clarín has been the newspaper with the highest circulation for approximately forty years, with some fluctuation in 2001 (Becerra and Mastrini, 2017). In addition to the newspaper, The Grupo Clarín runs open and cable television channels, and radio stations, which make it the dominant conglomerate in the Argentinian media industry (MOM, 2019).

Online broadcasting began in 1995 in most Latin American countries, such as Argentina.

There, digital versions of Los Andes, La Nación, and *Ámbito Financiero* debuted that year. In 1996, newspapers such as Clarín, La Nueva Provincia, and El Cronista followed suit.

One media company, Infobae, stands out as an online media outlet that was born digital. Argentinian digital journalism is predominantly led by sites that belong to print media companies such as Clarín and La Nación (Rost and Bergero, 2016).

In the case of Peru, media concentration is also significant (Retis et al. 2021).

The El Comercio Group owns the country's oldest newspaper of the same name, which was founded in 1839, representing almost 80% of the national print circulation (Sánchez, 2019). This conglomerate also owns seven other media, namely Peru 21, Trome, Gestión, Depor and Publimetro, Canal N, and América Televisión (Santillán, 2017).

Digital communication media appeared in 1995, with the online version of *Caretas*, a weekly magazine. Subsequent online platforms then emerged.

The later La República became the first newspaper to have a digital edition, followed by El Peruano, El Tiempo, and El Comercio.

The appearance of online platforms has impacted the industry by decreasing the concentration of print media. However, a study by Sánchez (2019) suggests that newspaper portals have led to a "concentration of topics and strategies that limit (the options of) Peruvian readers" (p. 46).

Regarding the role of Clarín in Argentina, and El Comercio in Peru, Table 1 shows a comparison based on the categories of the Halin and Mancini (2004) model.

Table 1: Clarín y El Comercio in the media systems of Argentina and Peru based on the models of Hallin and Mancini (2004).

	Clarín	El Comercio
Press market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a highly concentrated system, the Clarín group is the lead conglomerate (Monje et al. 2021). As in the written press system, Clarín is the lead news website, although facing greater competition (Rost and Bergero, 2016; MOM, 2019). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> El Comercio leads the journalistic media system in Peru and its high concentration (Santillán, 2017). In the media system of news web portals, El Comercio is the most visited in the country (Digital Reuters, 2021).
Political parallelism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The degree of political parallelism is high. Clarín represents a political position essentially opposed to Kirchnerism (Digital Reuters, 2021; de Diego, 2018). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> El Comercio and the media system display a low degree of political parallelism mainly due to the great discredit of the political class (Protzel, 2014).
Journalistic professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to Rost and Bergero (2016), the digital journalist in Argentina fulfills multiple functions. In addition, the authors point out that digital media has included more interactivity and multimedia tools. However, "journalistic and commercial structures are still clearly focused on traditional media." Since 2008, El Clarín has established an integration plan for print and web news outlets to generate a multiplatform profile of writers and editors that can create content in different formats (Bergonzi et al. 2019). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> El Comercio (together with other leading media outlets in the industry) has been changing its infrastructure to encourage greater integration in journalistic teams and multiplatform work (Yezers'ka and de Pozo, 2016).
Role of the state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The split between El Clarín and Kirchnerism brought changes in communication policies in Argentina (Becerra and Mastrini 2017). With the application of the Audiovisual Communication Services Law in 2009 and other policies aimed to reduce media concentration, there were clashes between the government and the media, particularly with the Clarín group (Becerra and Mastrini 2017; Becerra 2014). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grupo El Comercio was involved in a debate in 2013 on media ownership in Peru. Beforehand, El Comercio group acquired 54% of the shares of EPENSA along with "control of 78% of the effective circulation of newspaper copies nationwide" (Acevedo, 2016). Concerning digital journalism, there are no specific regulations besides general policies regarding journalism, such as the Access to Public Information and the Radio and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regarding digital journalism, Rost and Bergero (2016) point out that there are no specific regulations, but general frameworks such as the 1946 Professional Journalist Statute (Law 12,908) and the 2008 Collective Agreement of National Work. 	<p>Television Law, among others (Yezer'ska and de Pozo, 2016).</p>
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Source: Own elaboration

The VIP Vaccination and Vacunagate scandals

VIP Vaccination: On February 19, 2020, in a radio interview, the Argentinian journalist Horacio Verbitsky revealed that he had received the COVID-19 vaccine after a call to the Argentinian Secretary of Health, Gines García. At that time, the vaccination plan in Argentina provided for the inoculation of at-risk groups, such as health personnel, teachers, and those over 80 years old, who had booked an appointment in December and lived in certain Argentinian provinces. Following Verbitsky's statement, President Alberto Fernández requested the resignation of the Secretary of Health. Thus, the scandal began as Argentinian media called it the "Vacunatorios VIP" (VIP Vaccination Centers in Spanish) scandal, operating from the second floor of the Department of Health. Subsequently, a list of 70 officials vaccinated out of sequence leaked, including the General Attorney, officials from different Departments, former presidents, and ambassadors.

Vacunagate scandals: On February 10, 2020, the Peruvian media revealed the Vacunagate scandal, which consisted of a list of 487 people who had received vaccines destined for phase III of a clinical trial being conducted at the time in Peru by the Chinese company Sinopharm. The list was headed by then-President Martín Vizcarra (2018-2020), his relatives, and high-ranking government officials. The scandal broke soon after Vizcarra had been removed from his position, and he claimed to have been vaccinated because he was part of a group of volunteers for a vaccine trial.

Methodology

The research objective is to study how the media regulate its system in Argentina and Peru while observing their coverage of the corruption scandals Vacunatorios VIP and Vacunagate. The similarities and differences aimed to be found could elucidate general insights about the media's role in Latin American democracies. From the media coverage of Vacunatorios VIP by Argentinian Clarín and Vacunagate by Peruvian El Comercio, both leading media outlets in their respective systems, the following research question arises:

Q: What is the relationship between the media coverage of these two media outlets, their respective media systems, and their role in monitoring power?

This study focuses on the coverage of corruption scandals Vacunatorios VIP in Argentina and Vacunagate in Peru, putting forward the following two hypotheses:

H1: Clarín and El Comercio used frameworks that only promoted a definition of the problem rather than analysis, judgments, and explanations of the causes of the respective scandals.

H2: There are differences between Clarín and El Comercio in the use of the type of sources with which they built the scandals, evidencing differences in the political parallelism of their information systems.

This research bases its methodology on the one of Chen and Zhang (2016) and Echeverría, González, and Tagle (2020). While the first analyzed media coverage of corruption scandals in China, the second was a comparative analysis of corruption scandals in Chile and Mexico. In both empirical investigations, they carried out content analyses that categorized the presence and preponderance in the coverage of the corruption frames of Entman (2012): (a) Definition of the problem, (b) Interpretation of the problem, (c) Moral evaluation of the problem and, (d) Recommendation for a solution to the problem. Following what this research produced, the type of sources used to construct the accounts of the scandals were categorized. Analyzing the frames and sources used in scandals is a strategy that makes it possible to determine aspects that go beyond the case itself and account for its relationship with power.

Regarding media frames, Tankard (2001) plays a relevant role in the systematization of the concept of framing, as this author claims that frames are the central or organizing idea of all the information presented in the news story: headlines, images, the lede, sources, quotes, statistics, charts, and graphs.

Likewise, following Tagle and Claro (2018) in their study on sources in corruption scandals, the quantitative analysis here presented considered biases in coverage in terms of the sources used to elaborate the news pieces. The goal is to show how the political or ideological inclinations of the portals affect source selection when building accusations and subsequent defenses. Sources were classified into two categories. One category states whether sources belonged to one of three types: whether they were involved in the corruption case, were adversaries of the sectors involved, or were involved in institutional processes related to the case (prosecutors or witnesses). The second category deals with the origin of the sources, namely governmental, opposition, or other institutions.

The two studied sites are among the most visited locally, with Clarín garnering the second most hits and El Comercio, coming in first (Alexa, 2021). Both belong to media companies that hold a significant role in their local media environment, both countries are characterized by having highly concentrated media and low trust ratings by readers (Reuter, 2021). To this end, the analysis covered the leading historical, political, and economic media outlets, rather than larger samples of each country's media. Peru and Argentina hold prominently concentrated media systems (Becerra and Mastrini, 2017). More data would have distorted the comparison objective, which is comparing these two countries' cases instead of the internal features of each media system.

The unit of analysis of the investigation is each published piece of news regarding the cases. Article collection began seven days after the illicit acts came to light. According to Entman (2012), five days is enough to start data collection in scandal analysis studies. For the Vacunagate case, the news was collected from February 19 to 25, 2021. For Vaccinatorios Vip, it was from February 12 to 19, 2021. The news was obtained from the search engine of the Clarín and El Comercio portals. The codebook for both cases was the same: it was built from the framing variables by the Entman (2012) model and from sources according to the typologies of the principal actor of the sources and the sources of the case (Amado, 2015; Berkowitz, 2009;

Mayoral, 2005; Nyhan, 2015; Reich, 2010; Ruiz and Albertini, 2008). Two graduates in Social Communication and with postgraduate studies were the coders of the sample, which was assisted by computer through data software. Also, two independent judges coded news items under the data reproducibility design (Krippendorff, 1990) to ensure the reliability of the results. The reliability coefficient was 0.8 in the case of Clarín and 0.9 in the case of El Comercio.

Results

A total of 271 news items were analyzed, 91 for the Argentinian case, and 180 for the Peruvian case, thus showing greater coverage in terms of news items in Peruvian portals compared to Argentinian ones.

The frames of scandals

Table 2 shows the results of applying Entman's (2012) frames to the sample. They indicate that the predominant framing in all two communication media was the "Definition of the problem." Such displays an eagerness of both the Argentinian and Peruvian web portals to promote a definition of the scandals based on what had happened, and who had been guilty and negatively affected, among other issues. These results seem to coincide with other studies that have used the same categorization of scandal cases and which would have allowed researchers to assert that the predominant frame aim at defining the scandal (Coombs and Holladat, 2021; Chen and Zhang, 2016; Echeverría, González and Tagle, 2021).

However, following Iyengar's (1991) definition of structural and episodic frames, one of the criticisms about how the media covers scandals has to do with the fact that the media tend to promote frames that neither connect corruption events to structural problems nor relate the studied corruption scandal to other similar cases. Instead, the media encourage frames that tend to establish these scandals as isolated events (Tagle, 2021, Park, 2012). In this sense, in both portals, the "Analysis of the causes" frame, which could have provided a richer context of what had happened, turned out to be the least commonly used frame.

Table 2: Percentages of each of Entman frames (2012) on the total news items collected from the web portals Clarín and El Comercio in the Vacunatorios VIP and Vacunagate cases, respectively.

	Definition of the problem	Analysis of the causes	Moral judgment	Application of a solution
Clarín	54%	14%	10%	19%
El Comercio	50%	8%	22%	17%

Source: Own elaboration

Likewise, the time distribution of the "Definition of a problem" frame shows it as mainly appearing in the first days of the scandal. Table 3 shows the percentages of this framework being the highest the first two days after the scandal broke out. As Zamora and Marín Albaladejo (2010) explain, the media create a story of corruption, and thus presentation of the facts of what is happening takes place early on.

The type of the second most relevant frame varies in each case; while in Clarín the frame “Application of a solution” prevailed, in El Comercio it was “Moral Judgment”. Following Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) typology on political parallelism, and as Schuliaquer (2021) explains, Grupo Clarín has had a long political conflict with Kirchnerism, which could account for this media choosing not to merely point at the Vacunatorios VIP scandal, but to promote a solution that involved punishing the guilty, either by publicly discrediting those involved or by requesting Argentinian justice to act harshly. In the Peruvian case, given the corruption scandals that have affected different leaders of the country in recent years, and the involvement of President Vizcaya in the case considered herein, El Comercio chose to associate the study case with previous scandals which, at the time, did lead to legal proceedings and resignations of former presidents from the presidency. This perspective allowed for this study case to have context within a superior problem of political morality affecting Peruvian politics.

Table 3: Percentages detail each of the Entman frames (2012) during the first two days after the Vacunatorios VIP and Vacunagate scandals, respectively.

	Clarín	El Comercio
Definition of the problem	44%	88%
Analysis of the causes	38%	0%
Moral judgment	6%	12%
Application of a solution	13%	0%

Source: Own elaboration

The sources of the scandals

Regarding the sources used to elaborate the stories, Table 4 shows that all media mainly chose government sources, while sources from political opponents were the least used. Waisbord (2000; 2012) points out that in the 1990s and 2000s, journalistic investigation in Latin America was relevant for publicizing corruption offenses by political power. However, some current studies have indicated that local journalists, despite having the normative journalistic ideal of watchdog, the reality of their daily practice is that they do not always carry out this role correctly (Márquez-Ramírez et al. 2020). For instance, this prevalent use of official sources would not be conducive to the ideals of media surveillance (Christan et al. 2009).

Table 4: Main actor of the sources used in the Argentinian and Peruvian web portals regarding the Vacunatorios VIP and Vacunagate cases, respectively.

	Government	Opposing party	Corporation (companies, unions, etc.)
Clarín	62%	15%	21%
El Comercio	47%	17%	37%

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the protagonists of the case, Table 5 shows that the most widely used source for the construction of the story of the scandal was “Those involved in the case.” While in the Argentinian portal, “Adversaries

of the sectors involved” ran second, in the Peruvian case, this position hosted sources “Involved in the corruption case.” As previously noted, the use of sources reproduces the polarization between Grupo Clarín and the government, and treats the scandal as a political dispute.

Table 5: Sources of the case used in the Argentinian and Peruvian portals regarding the Vacunagate and Vacunatorios VIP cases, respectively.

	Involved in the corruption case	Adversaries of the sectors involved	Involved in institutional processes related to the case (prosecutors or witnesses)
Clarín	51%	32%	15%
El Comercio	40%	22%	37%

Source: Own elaboration

Associations of the frames with the sources of the scandals

The contingency table between the frames and the principal actor of the sources shows that, in the “Definition of the problem” frame, and for both portals, the dominant source was “Government,” followed by “Corporations.” This type of source constructing what the scandal consists of is relevant, given the possible interpretation is that the cases studied did not stem from opposition claims to their respective governments but rather as problems whose origins and subsequent development started within the ruling party itself. The Chi Square statistic test reveals dependency between these two variables for Clarín (bilateral asymptotic sig.: 0.04) but not for El Comercio (bilateral asymptotic sig.: 0.06).

Table 6: Contingency table between the corruption frames and the principal actor of the sources in Clarín and El Comercio.

		Government	Opposition	Corporation (companies, unions, etc.)
		Clarín	Definition of the problem	34.1%
	Analysis of the causes	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
	Moral judgment	4.4%	5.5%	1.1%
	Application of a solution	9.9%	3.3%	6.6%
El Comercio	Definition of the problem	27.8%	9.4%	13.3%
	Analysis of the causes	4.4%	0.0%	4.4%
	Moral judgment	5.6%	3.9%	13.3%

	Application of a solution	9.4%	2.2%	6.1%
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Source: Own elaboration

The contingency table between the type of corruption frames and the types of sources is presented in Table 7. In the "Definition of the problem" frame, the most widely used source type was "Involved in the case of corruption" in both cases.

However, the second source type also differs depending on the study case: while in the Argentinian media "Adversaries of sectors involved" ranked second, in the Peruvian media, "Involved in institutional processes related to the case" came in second.

This confirms that the story construction of scandals in the Argentinian portal tended to be more political than those in the Peruvian portal. The Chi Square statistic test reveals dependency between these two variables for Clarín (bilateral asymptotic sig.: 0) but not for El Comercio (bilateral asymptotic sig.: 0.07).

Table 7: Contingency table between the corruption frames and the type of sources in Clarín and El Comercio.

		Involved in the corruption case	Adversaries of the sectors involved	Involved in institutional processes related to the case (prosecutors or witnesses)
Clarín	Definition of the problem	30.8%	19.8%	4.4%
	Analysis of the causes	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
	Moral judgment	3.3%	7.7%	0.0%
	Application of a solution	3.3%	5.5%	11.0%
El Comercio	Definition of the problem	23.9%	11.7%	15.0%
	Analysis of the causes	3.3%	.6%	5.0%
	Moral judgment	3.9%	6.1%	12.8%
	Application of a solution	8.9%	4.4%	4.4%

Source: Own elaboration

Results discussion

Media's eagerness to define scandals and to provide underlying reasons and the agents involved were prevalent features. However, there was no evidence of a frame predominance displaying a structural analysis of corruption, such as "Analysis of causes" or "Moral judgment." In this context, the high predominance of the "Definition of the problem" frame shows that both media promoted rather informative aspects of the corruption cases, without going deeper and interrelating with other aspects that could give their readers a greater understanding of what was happening.

It is striking, in the case of Clarín, how the "Analysis of the causes" frame, over the days, lost relevance to "Definition of the problem". This could be due to its confrontation with Kirchnerism, in which, rather than investigating the case, it was about denouncing the "enemy" before public opinion (Schuliaquer, 2021).

As Thompson (2001) explains, media scandals serve the media to politically influence their audiences.

Likewise, regarding sources, the marked preference for official sources casts doubts on whether the efforts made to investigate by both media outlets go beyond sensationalism, a commonly detected method in scandal reporting.

The main difference between Clarín and El Comercio was the use of adversary sources. While prosecutors and witnesses prevailed in the Peruvian portal, the Argentinian outlet carried the story using politically adverse sources.

Accordingly, as El Clarín is considered as opposed to Kirchnerism (Schuliaquer, 2021), their report could be interpreted as a political attack. Hence, the political system should be a significant variable when observing media coverage and treatment of a scandal (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

The contingency tables between Entman's (2012) frames and the sources used in the cases, first, show how the use of official sources was predominant for the report of the "Definition of the problem" frame, which raises, as has been pointed out, the possibility of a low surveillance role. Second, as an important difference, there is the use of adversarial sources in the "Definition of the problem" frame, which in the case of Clarín was much greater than in El Comercio, showing a preponderance of a political approach in the reporting of the case, which in terms of Hallin and Mancini (2004) would be a political parallelism.

Conclusion

Trend generalization is commonly used in social sciences and communications to compare realities (Sartori, 2011). There were similarities and differences in the coverage of web portals of the leading newspapers in Argentina and Peru here analyzed. Accordingly, similar features exist among the media systems of both Latin American countries. The treatment of such corruption scandals by these leading media outlets reveals two aspects: a mutual deficit in the role of surveillance of power and a different relationship with political power. Regarding the research question, we can point out that both media systems present an important similarity and a difference. Regarding the first, the media that are protagonists of their systems have a low role of monitoring power, while the second is related to the fact that, if the media has a more adversarial role of the government, as in the case of Clarín, which is not necessarily more vigilant, it will construct the story of the scandal in a different way than if it were more indifferent, like El Comercio. In this way, the bidirectionality of influences between the political and media systems postulated by Hallin and Mancini (2004) is confirmed. In this sense, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 are confirmed, both because the media

promoted the "Definition of the problem" framework more, and because of their differences in political parallelism.

The normative function of media surveillance is one of the most highly desired in democratic societies. However, its analysis must always encompass the reality in which media are inserted, and their lights and shades regarding their connection to power.

The return to democracy in Latin America granted the media a decisive role in monitoring power in corruption cases in some cases (Waisbord, 2000; 2012; Tagle, 2017); however, non-structural explanations of illicit acts, the construction of stories heavily based on official sources and the politicization of scandals are relevant aspects that cannot go unnoticed and need to be taken into consideration when studying how the media in the region cover corruption.

Considering the widespread perception of corruption in the countries of the study cases (International Transparency, 2021), understanding such illicit acts as somehow interrelated events that are part of a greater issue affecting the entire society becomes critical

Understanding how media get related to power through the analysis of corruption and misguidance scandals is crucial in a region such as Latin America with a democratic deficit in the mechanism of checks and balances (Murillo, Levitsky, and Brinks, 2021).

Such makes it possible to advance and deepen studies of this topic. Future research could address the comparison with other countries in the region to find new generalizations and analysis perspectives. It is also important to open to the use of qualitative analysis methodologies, which could provide greater depth to understanding media coverage of scandals.

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