

DOSSIER

SERVICE JOURNALISM AND STIGMATIZATION ON OBESITY NEW:

individual solutions to a collective and transversal problem



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ABSTRACT – Obesity is a major public health issue. This study aims to analyze how obesity is represented in the media. To this end, a content analysis was conducted on 385 news articles published in 2021 in six Spanish online newspapers, where obesity was the main topic. The objective was to examine how these articles approached service journalism. The findings reveal a shifting trend: obesity is increasingly framed as a social issue rather than an individual one. However, when focusing solely on articles classified under service journalism, the individual perspective remains dominant – placing responsibility for excess weight on the individual. The covid-19 pandemic appears to have reinforced this individualistic framing. Additionally, references to obese women and celebrities in digital media undermine the informative function of service journalism. In conclusion, service journalism tends to stigmatize individuals with obesity and overlooks socioeconomic and educational perspectives on a problem – obesity – that social groups increasingly define as transversal and systemic within an obesogenic society. Key words: Obesity. Framing. Online newspapers. Stigmatization. Covid-19.

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O JORNALISMO DE SERVIÇO NO NOTICIÁRIO SOBRE A OBESIDADE: soluções individuais e estigmatização ante um problema coletivo e transversal

RESUMO – A obesidade é um problema de saúde pública. O objetivo desta investigação é conhecer o tratamento da obesidade nos meios de comunicação. Foram analisadas notícias (n=385) publicadas em seis diários online espanhóis em 2021, tendo a obesidade como tema principal, por meio da análise de conteúdo com o objetivo de estudar sua relação com o jornalismo de serviço. Os resultados mostram que se produziu uma mudança de tendência histórica: a obesidade é enfocada mais por sua perspectiva social que individual. Entretanto, quando se analisam exclusivamente as notícias agrupadas no jornalismo de serviço, prevalece a perspectiva individual, ou seja, se atribuiu à pessoa afetada pela obesidade a responsabilidade por seu excesso de peso. A epidemia da covid-19 parece ser um dos fatores que impulsionam a visão individualista. Além disso, as referências nos diários online a mulheres ou famosos com obesidade reduz o caráter de serviço das informações enfocadas. Pode-se concluir que o jornalismo de serviço estigmatiza as pessoas com obesidade e relega a segundo plano soluções socioeconômicas ou educacionais para um problema que coletivos sociais definem como transversal e sistêmico em uma sociedade obesogênica.

Palavras-chave: Obesidade. Framing. Diários online. Estigmatização. Covid-19.

EL PERIODISMO DE SERVICIOS EN LAS NOTICIAS SOBRE OBESIDAD: soluciones individuales y estigmatización ante un problema colectivo y transversal

RESUMEN – La obesidad es un problema de salud pública. El objetivo de esta investigación es conocer el tratamiento de la obesidad en los medios. Se han analizado las noticias de seis diarios online españoles, publicadas en 2021 en las que el tema principal es la obesidad (n= 385), y se ha recurrido al análisis de contenido para estudiar su relación con el periodismo de servicios. Los resultados muestran que se ha producido un cambio de tendencia histórica: la obesidad se enfoca más con una perspectiva social que individual. Sin embargo, cuando se analizan exclusivamente las noticias agrupadas en el periodismo de servicios, prima la perspectiva individual: es decir, se atribuye al afectado de obesidad la responsabilidad de su exceso de peso. La epidemia del covid-19 parece ser uno de los factores que impulsa la visión individual. Además, las referencias en los ciberdiarios a las mujeres o a los famosos con obesidad reduce el carácter de servicio de esas informaciones. Se puede concluir que el periodismo de servicios estigmatiza a las personas con obesidad y relega las soluciones socioeconómicas o educacionales ante un problema que los colectivos sociales definen como transversal y sistêmico en una sociedad obesogénica.

Palabras clave: Obesidad. Framing. Ciberdiarios. Estigmatización. Covid-19.

1 Introduction

Obesity is defined as a serious and growing global public health problem, affecting both developed and developing countries (Arroyo-Johnson & Mincey, 2016). In 2013, the American Medical Association (AMA) declared obesity a chronic illness. Concern about obesity is rooted in the fact that from 1980 to 2015, the number of people affected by it doubled (Kim & Willis, 2007). It has come to be described as a “self-regulated epidemic” (Sun et al., 2021). In Spain,

the number of overweight people reached 23 million in 2018, and it is estimated that if the same trend continues, there will be 3.1 million new cases by 2030 (Hernández et al., 2019).

It is an issue with economic, political, and social implications which, according to the WHO, is associated with premature death, respiratory difficulties, risk of fractures and high blood pressure, as well as early markers of cardiovascular disease, insulin resistance and psychological effects (García-Cortés, 2016). Furthermore, the covid-19 pandemic has increased the level of risk to the health of people with obesity, as they are more prone to infection (Tartof et al., 2020).

Since the start of the 21st century, and with the number of cases of obesity increasing steadily, there has been a marked increase in news articles on this issue, suggesting that the topic has moved higher up the news agenda (Hilton et al., 2012). The importance of studies such as this one stems from the major role of journalism in the media construction of reality, through which people know a great deal about the world around them (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), and which is explained in the agenda-setting theory: cumulative exposure to the media eventually shapes the collective imagination (McCombs & Evatt, 1995).

Health communication, defined as the study and application of methods to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health, was first recognized as a subfield of communication in 1975, with the founding of the Health Communication Division of the International Communication Association (Freimuth & Quinn, 2004).

Academic research has confirmed that the audience adopts the media as their main source of scientific and medical information (Hilton et al., 2012; Parrot, 2004). The effect of the media in changing eating habits has been confirmed, provided that the informative content is appropriate (Aranceta-Bartrina, 2016).

1.1 Service journalism

The term service journalism is attributed to Edwin Meredith (Diezhandino, 1994). It emerged in the increasingly commercialized, mediatized, and globalized media landscape of the post-World War II period, and especially during the 1980s and 1990s, when the media assumed the role of providing citizens with knowledge and advice

about everyday life (From & Kristensen, 2018). In short, it reports on what is useful (Casals, 2005).

Beyond the interpretation of facts, service journalism must offer, implicitly or explicitly, alternatives, proposals, solutions, or useful elements to improve the daily life of the individual, who is allowed to take action (Diezhandino, 1994). The newspaper's interaction with the audience is through individual relationships with each reader (Borrat, 1989; Diezhandino, 1994).

In contrast to the idea of service journalism, in the singular, understood as an activity that is generically presented as a guarantee of a democratic society, service journalism, in the plural, focuses on the individual rather than the citizen. It is more personalizing than socializing. The focus is on usefulness in personal rather than social life, although one does have an impact on the other. It is a way of publicly addressing the concerns of people's private lives (Eide & Knight, 1999). It thus manages to empower the individual, providing orientation in a highly complex world (Giddens 1991).

Service journalism was also a way of attracting advertisers in a time when growing competition, especially from television, demanded new business (From & Kristensen, 2018). It is therefore understandable that this type of journalism is characterized by the way it addresses the public: as consumers more than citizens. Journalists express that they are at the service of their audience and underline that they are willing to contribute to solving everyday problems and providing the pleasures of consumption (Eide, 2017).

It adheres less to the key questions of "what", "where", "when", "who", and more to tips, lists, rankings, or useful news (Eide, 2017). The variable "to whom" (to whom the reader can turn) becomes important and the "where" is no longer just the place where the event takes place but where information can be obtained so that the citizen can act accordingly; "when" or "how" also have this behavior (Diezhandino, 1994).

Another peculiarity is the synchronic contextualization (Borrat, 1989), to understand the information "here and now" to anticipate or prevent. It includes detailed descriptions that introduce the reader to the subject and create the stimulus to go to the place described, to act. For this purpose, guides, itineraries, maps, graphic support material, lists, etc. can be useful (Diezhandino, 1994).

With these guidelines, service journalism, although it has covered many topics, has included a proliferation of issues related to

consumption – cars, fashion, food –, cultural, events and even more abstract issues such as wellbeing, psychology, gender, or sexuality (Kristensen & From, 2012; Argiñano & Oliveira-Araujo, 2024).

In the current digital context, the online media ecosystem provides unique circumstances for service journalism (Kristensen & From, 2012). Online content (blogs, lists, chats, etc.) related to obesity prevention and its implications for citizens' health, lifestyle, and physical appearance fit perfectly into this type of journalism (Eide & Knight, 1999; Armentia-Vizueté et al., 2002).

However, the possibilities offered by the online space, with the multiplication of information producers, have led to the role of journalists being limited to mere information watchdogs because politicians, celebrities, or even ordinary citizens can communicate through social networks without the mediation of professionals and, consequently, can bypass the institutionalized media (Salvador & Ramírez, 2016).

In the face of this challenge, the solutions provided by service journalism can be seen as a response to the very loss of the institution of news and professional journalism. Academic research has identified a variant of service journalism in the digital world, called constructive or solutions journalism (Lough & McIntyre, 2021), the foundations of which were put forward by two authors (Haagerup, 2017; Gyldensted, 2015), and in which the constructive aspect is proposed to be the referent in the elaboration of informative content.

This variant, a consequence of the digitalized society, in which the authority and gatekeeping role of professional journalism is being challenged and is in crisis (From & Kristensen, 2018), could revitalize journalism's obligation to society by more explicitly assuming a public-, future-, action- and solution-oriented service role (Hermans & Drok, 2018).

As Meier (2018) explains, the purpose of constructive journalism is to achieve a positive effect on three levels: on the micro level (the emotional impact on users when receiving information); on the meso level (loyalty towards a media company); and on the macro level (social progress). This practice dovetails with framing in that it invokes journalists to frame their news in ways that lead to productive change (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018), with an emphasis on the solutions framework, including data to support that journalistic discourse.

The reception of these news articles produced under the criteria of constructive journalism has the capacity to promote

optimism in the audience, who become active in addressing problems and, as a result, social cohesion is strengthened (Jackson, 2016).

1.2 Framing: the vision of obesity

Framing, i.e., the way in which certain aspects of the news story are emphasized and thus convey a particular meaning to the information, has also been extensively studied (Entman, 1993; Reese, 2001; Goffman, 2006; Chong & Druckman, 2007). The framing methodology has been applied to the analysis of news coverage on environmental issues (Andrus & Waters, 2025) and feminist protests (Galarza-Fernández et al., 2022).

Framing in health journalism refers to the way information about health issues is presented, structured, and contextualized by the media. According to Schiavo (2013), the media play a key role not only in disseminating public health messages but also in shaping how the public understands and prioritizes health problems (Schiavo, 2013).

Academic studies on obesity have been approached from a variety of perspectives, such as topic-based (Ortiz-Barreda et al., 2012; Armentia-Vizuete et al., 2019) or by considering the media as a kind of food guide (Aranceta-Bartrina, 2016), including the voice of food experts (Oliveira-Costa et al., 2019). Gastronomy and restaurant advice in the media has also attracted interest (Fusté-Forné & Masip, 2019). In other cases, the sample gathers news articles about the ecological footprint (Brüggemann et al., 2022), the consumption of foods such as meat (Mroz & Painter, 2022), energy drinks (Argiñano, 2021), or advice on food scares due to “mad cow” disease or salmonella (Vodanovic, 2019). Some studies offer comparisons with constructive journalism (From & Kristensen, 2018). Another angle of analysis relates service journalism to lifestyle journalism (Hanusch, 2019), based on its nexus with consumerism (Vodanovic, 2019).

Obesity, for example, can be represented as an illness, a way of marginalizing those who weigh more than the socially accepted weight or, from a different perspective, as the personal freedom of following the diet of one’s own choosing (Kwan, 2009).

Most academic studies confirm that the media have engaged in a personalizing view of obesity, holding the individual responsible for the situation, often because of their biological inheritance (Nimegeer et al., 2019), their parents (Losada et al., 2020) or more specifically, the

mothers (Maher et al., 2010), presenting the solutions to excess weight as a series of options that the person concerned can consider, such as changing their lifestyle and eating habits (Sun et al., 2021; L'Hote et al., 2018; Boero, 2007; Serdula et al., 1999), or undergoing medical treatment (Choban et al., 1996). This same approach was found in the corporate communication of large food brands (Jenkin et al., 2011).

The concept of healthism was introduced by the Australian sociologist Robert Crawford as a critique of the trend, starting in the 1970s and 1980s, to understand health as an individual responsibility, disconnecting it from its social, economic, and political determinants. Crawford warns that this ideology turns health into a moral duty, promoting a view in which citizens must constantly work on themselves to stay healthy, which can lead to guilt or the stigmatization of those who fail to do so. In Crawford's view, individual responsibility is highly problematic. He argues that healthism risks promoting the illusion that individual responsibility is enough. Thus, failure to maintain health is attributed to some kind of unwillingness to be well, an unconscious desire to be ill, or simply a failure of willpower (Crawford, 1980).

However, a progressive increase in the social focus of the media has been observed since 2007 (Kim & Willis, 2007). With this vision of obesity, journalists emphasized environmental factors (Busam & Solomon-Moore, 2021), on educational differences and on the social and economic divide (Mathieu-Bolh, 2021; Armentia-Vizueté & Marín, 2018), on the economic cost for public health services (Hernández et al., 2019), on the responsibility of the global food system (WHO, 2016) or on solutions from changes in policies (Ryan, 1976; Hilton et al., 2012), such as taxing unhealthy foods, adopting education policies that promote healthy lifestyles or addressing social inequalities (Hernández et al., 2019; Jenkin et al., 2011).

A shift in the prevailing narrative can be observed, with obesity increasingly framed as a social rather than an individual issue. As a result, the stigmatization of individuals with obesity appears to be diminishing, while greater responsibility is being attributed to structural factors – such as government policies, the educational system, and the food industry – for fostering an obesogenic environment. The study by Argiñano and Gurrutxaga-Rekondo (2024) supports this trend, emphasizing that the covid-19 lockdown played a significant role in promoting a more socially oriented discourse on obesity in the media.

From this perspective, proposed solutions aim to reach and engage population groups that are disproportionately affected by low levels of health literacy (Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021).

One of the characteristics of the news on obesity is the recurring presence of women, as they are the main target of brands that promote slimming (Boero, 2007). Furthermore, the feminization of information is a common pattern in the media, according to the conflict's newsworthiness criterion, in the same way that celebrities are common in the agenda-setting (Nownes, 2019).

Although both obesity in the media and service journalism have been studied sufficiently, yet separately, there is hardly any research in which the two are confronted.

1.3 Objectives and hypotheses

The general objective of this study is to analyze the treatment of obesity in the information on obesity published in six Spanish online newspapers during the year 2021 and their relationship with service journalism.

The secondary objectives are:

- a. Analyze the framing and the topics in news articles about obesity.
- b. Match the results of objective (a) with news articles within the framework of service journalism.
- c. Study if references to women or celebrities increase the percentage of news articles that fall into the category of service journalism.

These are the hypotheses established:

1. Fitness, covid, and aesthetics are the main topics of service journalism.
2. In the news on obesity, the solutions provided by the media are presented from an individual rather than a collective perspective, and this trend is increasing in service journalism.
3. Most news about obesity with references to women or celebrities is not part of service journalism.

2 Methodology

To answer the above hypotheses, content analysis was chosen, defined as a research technique designed to formulate reproducible and valid inferences from certain data that can be applied to their context (Krippendorff, 2004).

2.1 Sample

The sample has been extracted from six national digital newspapers: abc.es, elpais.es, lavanguardia.com, elmundo.es, elconfidencial.com, and eldiario.es. In 2020, the first four were the most widely read general-information Spanish newspapers with a print version, according to data from the 3rd wave of the EGM (Estudio General de Medios: a survey on media consumption in Spain): El País, El Mundo, La Vanguardia, and ABC. The last two are leading digital natives. The period analyzed covers the years 2020 and 2021.

After a preliminary analysis of the information, it was found that in order to obtain a representative corpus of news on obesity, the most appropriate method was to filter the search engines of the online newspapers themselves with these two key words: obesity and overweight. As a result, 2.760 news articles were found. In addition, for a more detailed analysis, a second sample was obtained from the first one, selecting only those reports in which obesity was the main topic and restricting the time scope to the most recent year: 2021. A total of 385 news articles were found.

2.2 Instruments

Each textual reference must match a full reference in the reference list at the end of the text body. Before sending the article, check to see if the quotations have references. The quotations must be made in the article's language. For the whole sample ($n=2.760$), the coders analyzed two variables: the year of publication and whether obesity is the main topic in each of the reports.

For the sample restricted to news articles from 2021 in which obesity is the main topic ($n=385$), five variables were analyzed: topic, framing, service journalism, women, and celebrities. In the codebook,

the criteria for coding the following six variables are explained:

A. Service Journalism. In this group, news articles that present tangible and concrete solutions to the audience, regardless of their format, will be coded. It can be a narrative text or a kind of consultation, a question-and-answer space where the reader finds answers to his or her questions, lists, guides, itineraries, maps, graphic support material, etc. In this type of service, it is typical to find news articles in which the second-person personal pronoun, you, is used. They are pieces which encourage action, making decisions, “here and now”. They specify “where” and “when” the action can be taken.

B. Topic: with the idea that knowledge must be organized in blocks (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983), eight sub-variables of exclusion were identified (the news articles that could not be coded into the eight specific items have been grouped into Other).

Table 1

Definition of the thematic areas identified for this research

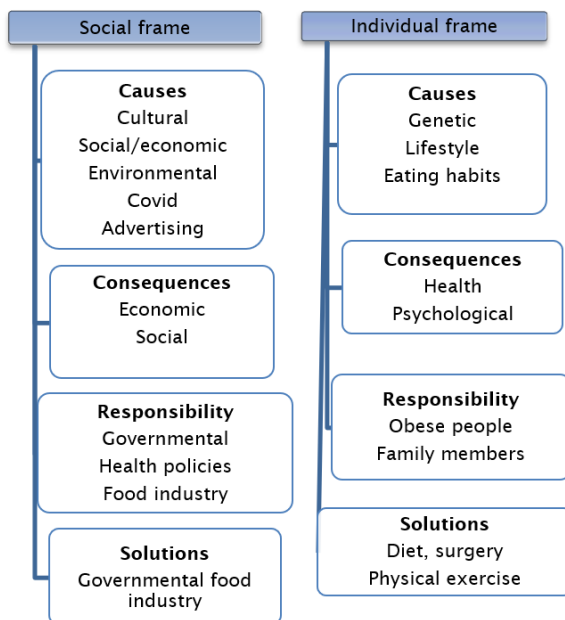
1. Food	· The news item focuses on one specific food
2. Covid	· The pandemic is the subject of the information
3. Physical exercise	· The main focus is on sporting activities or going for a walk
4. Aesthetics	· The focus is on people's physical appearance, figure or fashion sense
5. Genetic factors	· The constitutional biological circumstances of the person
6. Research	· The results of scientific or academic studies
7. Health	· The focus is on the health effects of obesity
8. Government measures	· Government decisions about food advertising and distribution

C. Framing: research on obesity in the media has been taken into account from the perspective of the framing theory (Miralles et al., 2021; Nimegeer et al., 2019; Van Hooft et.al., 2017) and four non-mutually-exclusive frames, or sub-variables, have been considered using a deductive methodology from the general frames established by Eilders and Lüter (2000) and by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000): causes, consequences, responsibility, and solutions. Subsequently, for each of

these frames, coders have assessed whether they respond to a social or individual approach, i.e., to distinguish whether obesity is treated by the media as an illness or as a social problem (García-Arnaiz, 2011). In the first case, the news would need to identify the causes of obesity as a social problem, i.e., with cultural, environmental, or socio-economic aspects. The consequences would allude to economic and/or social issues. Furthermore, the measures or recommendations would be legislative as well as political or administrative initiatives. This section would also include actions from the agri-food sector aimed at reducing the incidence of childhood obesity. Lastly, they would allude to social responsibility, either directly or indirectly. As for the individual approach, coders will include news articles in this group when the causes of obesity are related to lifestyle (diet, sedentary lifestyle) or genetic factors (Breilh, 2008), or the consequences are the individual's illnesses (physical or mental). The solutions recommend changes in diet or sporting activities. In addition, all the responsibility would lie with the affected individuals themselves or their environment (family, etc.). From this dual perspective, the following definitions have been developed for each of the four frameworks:

Table 2

Description of the type of frames



D. Women. Reference is made to women.

E. Celebrities. If they include personalities known to the public for their relationship with the arts, television, etc. Personalities from politics, economics, science, etc., are excluded.

2.3 Procedure

Once the sample was obtained, we proceeded with the coding. This process was carried out by two coders who were trained on 15% of the sample. To ensure the reliability of the results, an intercoder reliability test was performed with another 7% of the sample, obtaining, on average, a 0.81 (SD = 0.11) Kappa coefficient. Contrast statistics, such as Chi-square, were used for the analysis to ensure that all variable crosstabs shown in this paper are representative.

3 Results

In the two years studied, 2020 and 2021, a total of 2.760 texts referring to obesity were published across the six digital newspapers sampled for this research. The two with the highest number of articles were abc.es (920) and eldiario.es (847). With just over half was lavanguardia.com (451), followed by elmundo.es (302). In the last place we found elpais.es (192) and elconfidencial.com (48).

If the sample is limited to news articles in which obesity is the main topic, and not just merely mentioned in passing, then 824 news articles were found during the 24 months analyzed.

The year 2020 was marked by the pandemic and confinement, very special circumstances that led, among other things, to concerns about weight gain in both children and adults. The lack of physical activity or the change in nutritional habits led both educators and nutritionists to warn the population of the negative consequences for their health. The media's interest in food, and especially in obesity, was boosted, among other things, by the measures taken by the Spanish Minister for Consumer Affairs, Alberto Garzón, against food companies and the controversy in the Community of Madrid over the meals provided to children in families receiving the Renta Mínima de Inserción (Guaranteed Minimum Income).

3.1 News articles with obesity as the main topic (in 2021)

In order to carry out an exhaustive analysis of service journalism, framing, and topics, a new sample was created exclusively with information published in 2021, in which obesity was the main topic. A total of 385 news articles were found.

In this sample, the coders found 90 news articles (23.38%) that fulfilled the requirements to be framed in the category of service journalism. This is higher than the number of news articles mentioning women (51 news articles; 13.2%) and celebrities (28; 7.3%).

Cross-referencing these variables shows that in the 90 news articles coded as service journalism, only five (5.6%) refer to women. The amount is even lower when analyzing the mention of celebrities: only one news article (1.1%) of the 90 identified as service journalism was found.

3.2 Services and online newspapers

Abc.es is the newspaper with the highest number of publications (see table 3). It accounts for one-third of the 385 news articles from 2021 in which obesity is the main topic. Some distance behind in second and third place are lavanguardia.es and eldiario.es. Far less prolific are the publications in elmundo.es and elpais.com. Finally, elconfidencial.com is in last place in this classification.

Table 3

Service journalism by media outlet

Framing	Service yes	Service no	Total
abc.es	19 (4.2%)	115 (85.8%)	134 (100%)
elconfidencial.com	4 (25%)	12 (75%)	16 (100%)
elmundo.es	9 (24.3%)	28 (75.7%)	37 (100%)
elpais.es	6 (17.1%)	29 (82.9%)	35 (100%)
eldiario.es	11 (15.1%)	62 (84.9%)	73 (100%)
lavanguardia.es	41 (45.6%)	49 (54.4%)	90 (100%)

When we study only the news articles coded as service journalism (n=90), we find that lavanguardia.es is the medium that devotes the greatest proportion to this format of journalism: almost half of its news reports, closely followed by elconfidencial.com and

elmundo.es. Behind them are elpais.es and eldiario.es, and in last position, abc.es, precisely the newspaper with the most publications in the 2021 sample, with obesity as the main topic (n=385).

3.3 Topics

In the whole sample (n=385), Health is by far the most common topic (28.83%) ("*Diez consejos para cuidar tu corazón*" [Ten tips for taking care of your heart], abc.es, 29th September). The second topic most mentioned is Government measures (13.25%) ("*Cataluña crea un nuevo impuesto a los alimentos ultraprocesados*" [Catalonia creates a new tax for ultra-processed foods], abc.es, 8th December). In third place, we find Research (12.9%). The rest of the topics are much less common: Food, covid, Aesthetics, Physical exercise, and, lastly, genetic factors (9) ("*Obesidad: esto es lo que pasa cuando las células grasas toman el control del cuerpo*" [Obesity: this is what happens when fat cells take control of the body], elmundo.es, 6th November). It was not possible to classify 11.4% of the news articles in any of these topics, and they have been included in Other

Table 4

Service journalism according to topic

Topic	Service	yes	Service	No	Total
Food	16	(38.1%)	26	(61.9%)	42
Covid	10	(31.25%)	22	(68.75%)	32
Physical exercise	12	(60%)	8	(40%)	20
Aesthetics	0	(0%)	26	(100%)	26
Genetic factors	4	(44.4%)	5	(55.6%)	9
Research	6	(12%)	44	(88%)	50
Government measures	4	(7.8%)	47	(92.2%)	51
Health	32	(28.8%)	79	(71.2%)	111
Other	6	(13.6%)	38	(86.4%)	44
Total service (yes/no)	90	(23.3%)	295	(76.6%)	385

Note: the percentages correspond to each topic. The sum of the two amounts to 100%. They make it possible to compare the preeminence of each topic in relation to the others.

When only analyzing the news articles grouped in service journalism (n=90), we can see that the most common topic is, again, Health ("*Cinco consejos para cuidar tu corazón*" [Five tips for taking care of your heart]; abc.es, 1st December), followed by Food ("*Las personas que no deben tomar café ni té, según un nuevo estudio*" [People who shouldn't drink tea or coffee, according to a new study], lavanguardia.com, 16th December). But the biggest change occurs with Physical exercise, which now occupies third place, and is also the most likely of all to be related to Services, as 60 out of every 100 news articles on the subject of Physical exercise include a Service ("*Así puedes quemar calorías durante tu jornada laboral*" [This is how you can burn calories during your working day], lavanguardia.com, 14th September). This percentage of preeminence of service journalism also remains high in Genetic factors, Food, and Covid (see table 4). It is slightly lower in Health, while in Government Measures, there are only 8 news articles out of 100 that have been coded ("*El Ministerio de Garzón presenta un recetario para combatir la obesidad*" [Garzón's ministry presents a cookbook to help combat obesity], lavanguardia.com, 11th November). And in Aesthetics, not one single news article has been coded with Services.

3.4 Women and celebrities

As previously mentioned, in the 2021 sample (n=385), a total of 51 news articles (13.2%) that refer to women were found. When the search is limited to the 90 news articles framed within service journalism, the number of references to women in the texts is reduced to 5 articles (5.56%). It is a practically non-existent presence and, what is more, it is scattered across thematic areas: Food, Genetic factors, Research, Government measures, and Health.

The data is even more extreme with respect to celebrities. If in the 2021 sample their presence was already lower than that of women (28 news articles; 7.3%), when we only consider the 90 service journalism news articles, we find just one news

article featuring celebrities. It is located in the Health section in *lavanguardia.com*, in which the actress Gwyneth Paltrow talks about clean eating, food without carbohydrates, rice, milk, or eggs (“*Entre la comida ‘limpia’ y la obesidad, el difícil equilibrio de la alimentación de los hijos*” [Between ‘clean’ eating and obesity, the tricky balance of feeding children]; *lavanguardia.com*, 7th January).

3.5 Framing

Among the news articles published in 2021 in which obesity is the main topic (n=385), the most common frame is Solutions (it appears in 272 articles; 70.6% of the total: 385 news articles-), followed by Causes (67.7%), Responsibility (64.6%), and Consequences (61.5%). It is important to remember that the frames are not mutually exclusive: there can be more than one in each news item.

In this set of news articles, the social perspective prevails over the individual. In fact, the personal view only prevails in the Consequences frame (134 out of 237 news articles; 56.5%), while the social perspective is in the majority in the frames of Causes (146 out of 261; 55.9%), Responsibility (137 out of 239; 57.3%) and Solutions (150 out of 272; 55.1%) (these percentages do not take into account news articles in which none of the four frames defined in the theoretical framework were found).

3.5.1 Framing and service journalism

When from this whole sample (n= 385) only the news articles in which there are services (n= 90) are analyzed, the results change substantially (see table 5). In each of the four frames (Causes, Consequences, Responsibility, and Solutions), the individual perspective clearly prevails over the social one.

Table 5*Service journalism according to the framing*

<i>Framing</i>	Individual perspective	Social perspective	Total
Causes	41 (59.4%)	28 (40.6%)	69 (100%)
Consequences	41 (66.1%)	21 (33.9%)	62 (100%)
Responsibility	45 (66.1%)	23 (33.9%)	68 (100%)
Solutions	70 (77.8%)	20 (22.2%)	90 (100%)

The relationship established in the theoretical framework between service journalism and the solutions that this news format proposes for citizens invites us to delve deeper into the results of the Solutions framing.

Coders identified that in each one of the 90 news articles grouped under service journalism, there is a Solutions framing. Furthermore, among these news articles, just over a third of the solutions put forward are from an individual perspective, relegating collective solutions for obesity to second place.

The inclination towards the individual view is equally strong in the Responsibility and Consequences frames, and slightly weaker in Causes.

It is important to remember that the Consequences frame is the only one in which the individual perspective is in the majority when examining the whole sample (n=385), so it is noteworthy that in this case, the trend is completely reversed.

4 Discussion

The most common topic in the news articles about obesity is Health. It reflects the direct link that journalists make between body weight and healthy conditions. The second topic, Government measures, is influenced by the frequent presence in the media of Alberto Garzón, the Spanish Minister for Consumer Affairs, in his campaign to control the power of food companies, warn of the dangers of consuming energy drinks and ultra-processed food, and trying to encourage healthy consumption habits.

The Research topic reflects the interest of the press in collecting academic or scientific work, in addition to the material that governments

or companies in the sector make available to the media so that they can complete their agenda-setting (Penkler et al., 2015). Food, which refers to the intake of food, whether adequate or inadequate, is the fourth most common topic. And in fifth place comes covid-19, a topic that has been inferred for this work, and which makes the results genuine and makes comparison impossible. Lastly, issues about Aesthetics, Physical exercise, and Genetic factors are much less common in these news articles.

When analyzing service journalism, we can see that it has a greater preeminence in the topic of Physical exercise: six out of every ten news articles on this topic have been coded within service journalism. They are texts that explicitly respond to the definition of service journalism as a list of tips to follow. Nevertheless, the second most common topic, Genetic factors, has a very different component. In this case, they are more serious issues that require the intervention of specialists, doctors, or dietitians. In this way, very often the news articles contain hidden advertising in which the source, or expert, is the same person who offers solutions to obesity in their private clinics. It can be hypothesized that, although scientifically based, this information is not fully collated and, above all, it responds to the service journalism maxim that the reader is a customer, a consumer (Eide, 2017).

Food, covid, and health are also topics in which the percentage of news articles with services is above average, but only very slightly. In a large part of the news, the solutions proposed in these three areas are general, aimed, for example, at health care, and are not included in service journalism ("*Piden que se priorice a las personas obesas en la vacunación*") [The call for obese people to be given priority in the vaccination process], abc.es, 4th March). The same thing occurs with Research and with Government measures.

On the one hand, in Aesthetics, the absence of service journalism stems from the fact that the news is merely descriptive, in many cases based on denunciation ("*Mauritania, donde la obesidad es el ideal de belleza*") ["Mauritania, where obesity is the beauty ideal"], elpais.es, 3rd June) or from the presentation of alternatives to the usual canons ("*Vuelven a la televisión las modelos con kilos para democratizar la moda*") ["Models with extra pounds return to TV to democratise fashion"], eldiario.es, 15th January).

Therefore, the first hypothesis is partially confirmed because, although service journalism is very present in Physical exercise and slightly above average in covid, it is non-existent in Aesthetics.

In relation to the second hypothesis, the framing analysis shows

that in the 2021 sample as a whole (n=385), the social perspective prevails over the individual view, and this is the case in three of the four general frames defined in the methodology (Causes, Responsibility and Solutions), while in Consequences the individualized view is in the majority, in line with other studies focused on framing and obesity (Argiñano & Gurrutxaga-Rekondo, 2024).

This approach to obesity represents a historical turning point, as previous research had shown that in the media, the causes, responsibility and solutions to excess weight were attributed to the individual, i.e., the person affected (Sun et al., 2021; Nimegeer et al., 2019; L'Hote et al., 2018; Bastian, 2011; Boero, 2007).

On the other hand, when the analysis focuses solely on the news articles grouped in the service journalism format (n=90), the results of this research show that the individual perspective is the majority, both overall and in each of the four general frames. Therefore, there is no repetition of the change in the trend noted above. In contrast, the personalized focus is strengthened, in concordance with the definition of service journalism as being personalizing (Eide & Knight, 1999). This specialized perspective is more intense in Solutions, a frame that, by its very definition, is directly related to service journalism. The explanation is also related to the identification of the reader/audience as a consumer (Eide, 2017) who must be offered products (solutions), in this case, to lose weight: gyms, slimming substances, "miracle" foods, dietitian's consultations, etc. It is a type of journalism that has been shown to accommodate the contents of online newspapers (Armentia-Vizuetete et al., 2002).

In service journalism, therefore, the burden of the solution for obesity is placed on the individual, and his or her lifestyle (L'Hote et al., 2018) and collective solutions, such as economic (Armentia-Vizuetete & Marín, 2018), psychological, social, environmental (Busam & Solomon-Moore, 2021), or educational solutions (Mathieu-Bolh, 2021) are excluded.

It can be argued that news coverage of obesity, when framed through the lens of service journalism, tends to reinforce the illusion that individual responsibility alone is sufficient to address the issue. In doing so, it undermines a political and structural understanding of obesity as a public health problem, as Crawford (1980) warned in his critique.

Moreover, by treating the reader as an individual and as a consumer, service journalism moves away from constructive journalism, which focuses on the roots of solutions to society's problems, and instead remains in commercially-driven proposals and happy news (Serrano-Puche, 2020). The second hypothesis is partially fulfilled: in the group of

news articles on obesity, there has been a historical change by approaching the subject from a collective perspective, while in the texts included in service journalism, the individualized perspective is maintained.

Conversely, the third hypothesis is not supported: references to women and celebrities do not lead to an increase in service journalism. In this case, the usual feminization of news coverage observed when an issue is addressed in a conflictive manner – such as in reporting on obesity (Argiñano & Gurrutxaga-Rekondo, 2024) or sex (Olveira-Araujo & Argiñano, 2021) – is not evident. The news articles with celebrities don't provide solutions either. They remain as caricatured texts ("*Neymar se toma con humor los comentarios sobre su peso*" [Neymar takes comments about his weight in stride], abc.es, 3rd September) or personal accounts ("*Rosa López se confiesa sobre su problema de sobrepeso*" [Rosa López confesses all about her weight problem], abc.es, 17th December) which, although they are not "useful here and now" from the strict point of view of service journalism, they serve to make people with obesity feel that they can identify with a well-known person in the public eye (Castelló-Martínez et al., 2016).

5 Conclusions

While journalism as a whole shows a change of trend by focusing on obesity as a collective issue, in the news articles framed within service journalism, there is still an individualized view, i.e., solutions are put forward that appeal exclusively to the affected party, and which exonerate society as a whole, particularly governments or the food industry, from this 21st century pandemic. The perspective imposed by these news articles is individualistic, in concordance with the definition of service journalism as a format in which the reader can obtain a guide of practical and almost immediate solutions. But they are solutions specific to one issue, obesity, which experts recommend treating as a transversal topic that affects society as a whole. With this "maximum" utility journalism, by making the affected person solely responsible for their situation, the importance of socio-economic, environmental, or educational factors is eliminated. The public is treated as a mere consumer, and the media offers solutions that encourage consumption: gyms, dieticians, or medical operations. The shortcomings of service journalism are also reflected in the absence of a female perspective and in the failure to use celebrities to set standards and present them as role models who could combat

stigmatizing messages in an obesogenic society.

It can be concluded that service journalism moves away from constructive journalism, which understands problems as group-based and systemic. In reports on obesity, service journalism individualizes the issues and moves away from its ability to “politicize” everyday issues –obesity, in our case– by sharing the cross-cutting solutions proposed by social movements and activists against the stigmatization of people with obesity.

6 Strengths, weaknesses, and future research

In this study, the six most significant Spanish online newspapers have been included. From a sample of 2.760 articles, a second sample has been extracted, which includes 385 news articles from 2021 with obesity as the main topic. The methodology used allows comparisons with other studies on obesity, but there are hardly any specific studies that confront obesity and service journalism. In this sense, the results are genuine.

The service journalism sample of 90 news articles seems sufficient, not so much because of the volume of news articles but because the results extracted were conclusive.

As a weakness, it can be said that searching for news articles for the sample by using keywords marginalizes information that could also be directly related to obesity.

For future research, it seems necessary to confirm whether the historical change of trend in the approach to obesity as a collective issue is sustained or conjunctural, and influenced, among other factors, by the covid-19 epidemic, which broke out a year before the sample of this study.

It would also be interesting to make content analysis comparisons in other countries and to delve deeper into the conceptualization of service journalism, since its definition and practice limit the work of journalists to offering a product that is closer to constructive journalism and, therefore, to journalism as a service, in the singular.

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