



The Media Construction of the International Political Agenda on Instagram

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyse how international affairs are represented and prioritised on Instagram by Spanish news media, through an examination of the accounts of RTVE Noticias and Antena 3 Noticias. Drawing on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of posts published over a 90-day period, the study examines the levels of prominence granted to the principal global actors, the dominant narrative frames, and the issues shaping the international agenda. The findings reveal an overrepresentation of the United States, generally associated with narratives of conflict, alongside an underrepresentation of China and other BRICS members, even when these actors play strategic roles on the global stage. The European Union emerges as a reactive and fragmented actor, consistent with the European information deficit identified in previous research. The analysis also reveals a strong emphasis on narratives of crisis and geopolitical rivalry, to the detriment of themes related to cooperation and diplomacy. The study concludes that Instagram reproduces and amplifies hierarchies of visibility and simplified narrative frames, thereby limiting public understanding of the complexity of the contemporary international order. These findings invite further reflection on the role of the media within digital ecosystems shaped by short-form content and algorithmic logics.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Transformation of the International Sphere

Over the last two decades, the international system has undergone a profound transformation marked by the questioning of the liberal order and the emergence of new dynamics of competition and cooperation among global powers. Various authors describe this process as a phase of deglobalisation, understood not as the disappearance of interdependence, but rather as a renegotiation of relations between actors, institutions, and markets on the basis of national, strategic, and technological interests (Chávez-Escobedo et al., 2022; Sanahuja & López-Burian, 2023; Manfredi, 2024). This shift has been driven by factors such as economic crises, the rise of nationalist movements, the reconfiguration of alliances, and the impact of recent armed conflicts.

As a result, the international structure has evolved towards a multipolar scenario in which a variety of actors — and not only the United States or the European Union — compete for economic, military, diplomatic, and symbolic influence (Castaño, 2023). Emerging powers such as Brazil, India, Russia, China, and South Africa (BRICS) have assumed an increasingly prominent role in shaping global agendas, promoting strategies aimed at reducing dependencies, diversifying supply chains, and competing for leadership in key areas such as energy, technology, and security (del Amo, 2025). The rise of the BRICS bloc points towards an increasingly multipolar context, one that could become even more pronounced if the anticipated incorporation of partners such as Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Iran materialises.

This new framework has intensified geopolitical tensions, both between states and among supranational organisations, while simultaneously eroding some of the global consensuses that characterised earlier phases of globalisation. The reconfiguration of alliances is being shaped by geopolitical strategies promoted by actors seeking to lead responses to major contemporary challenges, including migration, climate change, and technological competition (Morton-Gutiérrez, 2024).

At the same time, traditional actors such as the United States and the European Union face internal challenges linked to the rise of nationalism, populism, and political polarisation (Gejo et al., 2022; Tabío, 2024). These developments have contributed to the fragmentation of long-standing alliances — including the transatlantic relationship between both powers (Rizzi, 2025) — while encouraging protectionism, unilateral decision-making (Cavicchioli, 2018), and the redefinition of strategic priorities (Delage, 2023).

The result is a more complex, competitive, and heterogeneous international landscape, in which the ability of political actors to project narratives, shape public perception, and legitimise their actions has become a key geopolitical resource. These dynamics highlight the strategic role of the media, which not only report on the global order but also participate in its symbolic representation and legitimisation through processes of agenda selection, narrative framing, and unequal visibility.

1.2 Media, Agenda Setting and Framing in International Affairs

The media construction of the international agenda has traditionally been examined through the paradigms of agenda-setting theory, which argues that the media shape public perception by determining which issues are considered relevant, and framing theory, which suggests that the media not only select topics but also present them through specific interpretative frameworks that condition their meaning (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993). In the international sphere, these processes acquire particular significance, as the media act as symbolic mediators of the global order by selecting actors, events, and conflicts, while offering narratives that influence the ways in which audiences interpret the role and status of different powers (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018).

Today, these dynamics unfold within a context marked by the structural transformation of the international system and the rise of new powers and coalitions competing for influence, legitimacy, and the capacity to shape global agendas (Nolte, 2006; Stuenkel, 2017). However, the

emergence of a multipolar geopolitical order does not necessarily imply informational or discursive pluralism. The literature shows that Western media continue to overrepresent the United States and Europe, whereas emerging powers such as China, India, Brazil, or South–South coalitions receive less attention or are framed through narratives associated with threat, risk, or exceptionalism (Paterson & Nothias, 2016).

This informational asymmetry generates a global visibility gap in which certain international powers receive disproportionate and recurrent prominence, while others remain peripheral, invisible, or represented only in contexts of crisis (Hamelink, 2015). Unequal visibility not only shapes public perceptions regarding which actors are considered globally relevant, but also affects the attribution of power and legitimacy at the international level. In this way, the media contribute to consolidating symbolic hierarchies that reinforce the hegemony of certain actors while marginalising the agendas, interests, and narratives of others, even when the latter play significant roles in shaping the global order.

Within this context, the case of Europe introduces an additional layer of complexity. The literature has identified the existence of a European information deficit that hinders the construction of a transnational public sphere and limits citizens' understanding of the European project. De Vreese (2007) outlined this panorama at the beginning of the century, arguing that media coverage of the European Union was limited, episodic, and heavily nationalised, thereby generating a communication deficit and, consequently, a knowledge gap regarding its functioning and international relevance. More recent studies confirm both the EU's limited media prominence and its fragmented representation in the media (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). This dynamic not only obscures the EU's role within the global system, but also reinforces narratives of structural weakness and undermines its perception as an autonomous geopolitical actor.

These imbalances in media attention and public visibility may be amplified by the mass migration of news consumption to platforms such as Instagram. A growing body of research has shown that the algorithmic logics and formal characteristics of these platforms — visuality, brevity, and emotionality — tend to favour narratives centred on conflict, crisis, or threat, to the detriment of more complex or institutional approaches (Wohn & Bowe, 2016; Napoli, 2020).

Changes in citizens' news consumption habits, particularly among younger generations, are linked to preferences for personalisation, immediacy, and opportunities for participation, all of which social media platforms facilitate more effectively than traditional media outlets (Cancelo Sanmartín & González Márquez, 2015; López Vidales & Gómez Rubio, 2021). In response to this transformation, media organisations have adopted transmedia strategies in order to adapt their news production to digital formats and maintain relevance within an ecosystem dominated by new communicative actors and hybrid narratives (Marcos-García et al., 2021; Santín-Picoita et al., 2024). On Instagram, this adaptation is reflected in the use of visual resources, short texts, hashtags, and interactive elements, as well as in strategies designed to generate engagement and differentiate professional journalism from non-professional content production (Fernández, 2020; Carrasco-Polaino et al., 2021).

Consequently, visual platforms such as Instagram introduce specific dynamics into the construction of the international agenda. Rather than simply reproducing the traditional media agenda, these platforms reconfigure content through algorithmic, aesthetic, and affective logics that privilege simplified visual narratives, emotionally engaging content, and interaction-oriented communication (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Wohn & Bowe, 2016). In addition, the platform's algorithmic design incorporates filtering and ranking mechanisms that further shape perceptions of relevance and representativeness, a phenomenon that some authors have conceptualised as algorithmic agenda setting (Napoli, 2020).

These dynamics expand the phenomenon of the global visibility gap and contribute to the consolidation of asymmetrical information ecosystems that affect public knowledge and attitudes

towards the international order, the legitimacy of emerging powers, and perceptions of conflict (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018).

Added to this is the rise of disinformation as a direct consequence of armed conflict. According to Barón (2024), fifth-generation conflicts are fought not only on land, sea, and air, but also in cyberspace, where states are no longer the sole actors involved, as private companies operating in the security sector also play an increasingly important role. Those participating in this new front do so with the aim of “controlling the flows of information reaching public opinion in order to maintain the legitimacy of wars” (Barón, 2024, p. 57).

Within this framework, studying the media construction of the international agenda on Instagram makes it possible to observe how complex geopolitical processes are translated into visual formats, how actors are selected and hierarchised, and what impact these representations may have on fragmented and highly digitalised public spheres. Far from being a neutral process, differential visibility and the narrative frames applied to each actor contribute to organising the global imaginary, reinforcing certain geopolitical narratives while weakening others.

1.3 Objectives

The general objective of this study is to compare the coverage and treatment of international politics provided by two of Spain’s leading news media outlets — RTVE Noticias (@rtvenoticias) and Antena 3 Noticias (@a3noticias) — through their Instagram accounts.

The analysis focuses on five actors: the United States, China, the European Union, Russia, and Israel. This selection is based on their position within the G20 according to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which makes them central actors in the global economy. The United States, China, and the European Union top this ranking and represent the core group of superpowers shaping the contemporary international order. The BRICS countries were included because of the growing economic and geopolitical weight they hold collectively as an emerging bloc.

Within the BRICS group, Russia and China were analysed separately. Russia was considered independently because of its central role in the armed conflict with Ukraine and its capacity for influence beyond the bloc itself. China, meanwhile, was examined separately due to its status as a global superpower, which positions it as the principal counterweight to the United States and gives it far greater prominence than the other BRICS members. Similarly, Israel was included because of its central role in the military escalation involving Palestine.

Based on this selection, the study pursued two specific objectives: (1) to determine whether both media outlets provide comparable levels of visibility to these international actors in their Instagram posts, and (2) to analyse the roles and narrative frames attributed to them, in order to examine how the international agenda is constructed and hierarchised within a visual and algorithm-driven environment.

2. Methodology

To achieve this objective, the study employed content analysis methodology, understood as a procedure that makes it possible to “infer knowledge concerning the conditions of production (or, eventually, reception) through the use of indicators (whether quantitative or otherwise)” (Bardin, 1996, p. 29). As Bernete (2013) notes, this approach requires the construction of “specific variables and categories that correspond both to the characteristics of the materials analysed and to the objectives and theoretical framework of each study” (p. 209).

In this study, the units of analysis correspond to posts published on the official Instagram accounts of @rtvenoticias and @a3noticias. The corpus comprises all posts published by both accounts over a 90-day period, from 13 January to 12 April 2025. The selected timeframe begins in the week preceding Donald Trump’s inauguration as President of the United States in order to include both the media attention devoted to this transfer of power and the beginning of the Republican

president's second term, widely recognised for its media impact, among other factors (Vellón-Lahoz, 2022). The analysis was limited to posts related to international political issues. A total of 2,287 posts were examined, of which 1,002 corresponded to @rtvenoticias and 1,285 to @a3noticias. From this sample, 739 posts containing political content were identified and constituted the final corpus of analysis: 458 from @rtvenoticias and 281 from @a3noticias.

A set of analytical variables and categories was designed, as shown in Table 1, in order to examine the degree of prominence granted to each geopolitical actor and the type of news treatment through which they were represented.

The variable relating to the tone of the news item was classified as follows: negative (victims, threats, or harmful consequences), positive (opportunities, conflict resolution, achievements, or favourable outcomes), and neutral (descriptive information without explicit evaluation). Given the potential subjectivity involved in this variable, and in order to ensure the reliability of the analysis and minimise empirical bias, an intercoder reliability test was conducted. A second independent researcher, previously trained in the use of the codebook, blindly analysed a random subsample equivalent to 15% of the total corpus (111 posts, of which 56 belonged to @rtvenoticias and 55 to @a3noticias). The reliability of the coding process was assessed by calculating Krippendorff's Alpha, obtaining a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.90$. This result exceeds the minimum threshold of 0.80 established by Krippendorff (2004) for a highly reliable level of agreement.

The contextualisation variable identifies whether a post situates events within a broader explanatory framework that facilitates understanding, or whether it merely presents new information without explanatory references.

The variable concerning the actors present includes both the territories mentioned and their representatives (presidents, vice-presidents, ministers, leaders, or other relevant figures). In turn, the level of prominence distinguishes between protagonist actors (when the news item focuses directly on them) and secondary actors (when they appear in an accessory or subordinate role to another central actor).

Regarding the role attributed to each actor, the following categories were established through an expansion of the different positions generated through framing processes, as described by Entman (1993): responsible (causing a problem), affected (harmed by another actor), beneficiary (favoured by certain circumstances), third party (involved without playing a prominent role), saviour (responsible for an improvement), informant (an explanatory source without direct agency), and irrelevant (an accessory mention without meaningful involvement in the narrative).

Finally, the political scenario variable classifies the thematic framework of each news item into one of the following categories: economy; strategic or geographical resources; immigration and LGBTQ+ issues; diplomacy and activism; armed conflicts; technology and disinformation; justice; or others. These categories were selected because they represent political contexts that frequently generate disagreement among the actors involved.

Table 1.
Variables and categories of study.

Variable Number	Variable	Categories
1	Publication date	- Day/month/year
2	Publication format	- Video - Still image
3	Impact of the news item within the Instagram user community	- Total number of likes received - Total number of comments received
4	Tone of the news item	- Positive - Negative - Neutral
5	The news item is contextualised through previous information	- Yes - No
6	Actors appearing in the news item or representatives associated with them (presidents, ministers, and territorial representatives)	- United States - China - European Union - BRICS (also analysed individually) - Russia - Israel - Others
7	Degree of prominence within the news item	- Protagonist - Secondary actor
8	Role attributed within the news item	- Responsible for the problem or threat - Affected by the problem - Beneficiary - Third party - Saviour/hero - Informant - Irrelevant
9	Political scenario in which the news item takes place	- Economy - Resources (strategic or geographical) - Immigration and LGBTQ+ issues - Diplomacy and activism - Armed conflicts - ICTs and disinformation - Justice - Others

Source: Author's own elaboration.

3. Results

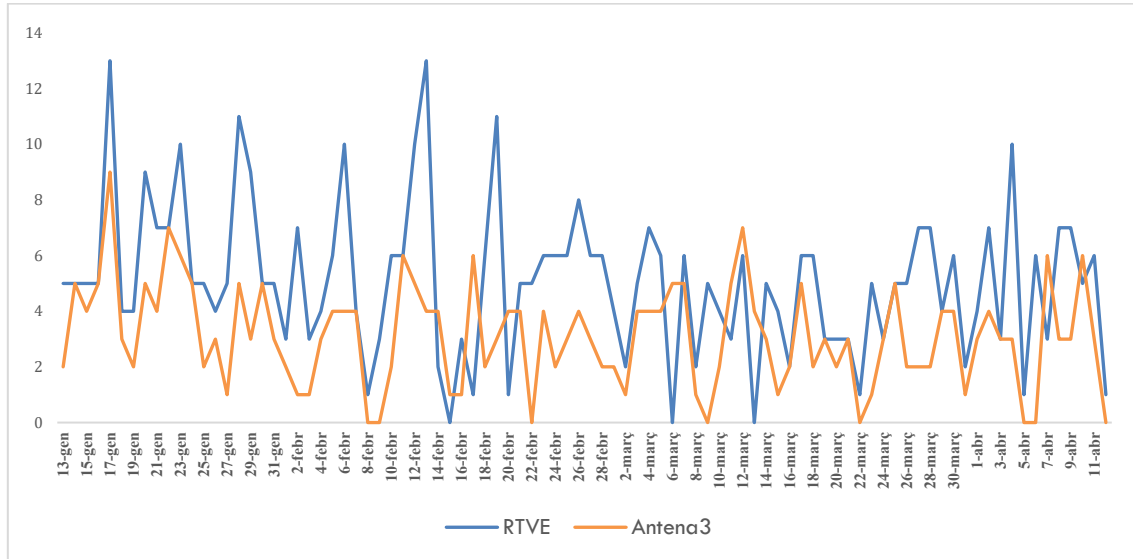
3.1 Media Temporality and Responses to Geopolitical Events

A total of 739 posts containing political content were identified, constituting the final corpus of analysis: 458 from @rtvenoticias and 281 from @a3noticias.

Although @a3noticias published a greater overall volume of content during the period analysed (1,285 out of 2,287 posts), @rtvenoticias produced a higher number of posts specifically related to international politics, suggesting a greater editorial commitment to this area on that account.

Figure 1 presents the daily temporal distribution of politically related posts published by both broadcasters over the 90-day period of the study through their Instagram profiles.

Figure 1.
Total number of daily political news posts published on instagram



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The temporal analysis of the posts shows that both profiles experienced coinciding peaks in news activity, particularly during events of major geopolitical significance. The peaks observed on 17 and 21 January, for example, coincide with the presidential transition in the United States, which increased content production on both accounts, albeit more intensely on @rtvenoticias. This pattern reflects the extent to which institutional changes in the United States function as major news triggers, particularly for general-interest media outlets, while also anticipating a broader tendency to prioritise the visibility of certain international actors over others.

A similar dynamic can be observed on 6 February in relation to the European Union's support for Zelensky, and again on 12 and 13 February, when coverage focused on political decisions linked to the global economy (aluminium tariffs) and institutional developments within the United States (the arrival of Elon Musk to reduce the size of the federal administration). In these cases, the thematic convergence and simultaneous increase in publication volume suggest that both media outlets responded to a shared and highly reactive news cycle centred on international events with potential implications for global politics and the economy. At the same time, this convergence also reveals that events involving the United States generated substantially higher levels of media attention than those associated with other actors, thereby reinforcing asymmetries in media exposure.

The events of 12 March constitute another point of interest, as the announcement of a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia, together with the boycott of Tesla, triggered similar responses across both profiles, although with a slightly more balanced distribution of posts. By contrast, the coverage of the leak concerning United States military plans against Yemen on 25 and 26 March did not produce a significant increase in the total volume of publications. This suggests that not all events with geopolitical relevance generate the same degree of media activation, particularly when they involve countries or conflicts positioned at the margins of the Western agenda.

Finally, the activity recorded on 2, 3, and 4 April surrounding the tariffs imposed by Trump on 185 countries once again reveals a pattern of simultaneous attention, albeit with notable differences in publication intensity: @rtvenoticias significantly increased its output, whereas @a3noticias maintained a more moderate pace. Overall, @rtvenoticias published an average of more than five posts per day, compared with just over three on @a3noticias, suggesting a more proactive or intensive editorial strategy regarding international political coverage on the part of the public broadcaster.

During these same days, however, both outlets failed to cover events occurring in other regions, such as Brazil's inauguration of a motorway through a protected area of the Amazon in preparation for the guests attending the Belém climate summit — a story covered by *El País*; the United Nations warning regarding the detection of a new mpox variant in South Africa, reported by *El Confidencial*; and the arrival of the Holi festival in India, one of the world's largest and most significant celebrations within the Hindu calendar, which did receive coverage in newspapers such as *20 Minutos*.

3.2 Formal Strategies and Content Performance

With regard to formats, there is a clear predominance of audiovisual content, particularly on @a3noticias, where only one of the 281 posts adopted the format of a still image. On @rtvenoticias, the range of formats was somewhat more diverse, although video content still clearly dominated. This recurrent use of audiovisual formats responds both to Instagram's platform logics — which reward retention, movement, and interaction — and to an editorial strategy aimed at producing brief, direct, and emotionally engaging messages.

However, this type of format also carries important informational implications. By prioritising fast-paced and easily consumable visual narratives, audiovisual content tends to favour simplified representations of international politics and to concentrate attention on actors, events, or conflicts with strong dramatic potential. Consequently, less prominent geopolitical actors or more complex structural processes — such as multilateral dynamics or institutional debates — are afforded less space and become marginalised within the media agenda.

From this perspective, the predominance of audiovisual content not only reflects a formal adaptation to the digital ecosystem, but also contributes to reinforcing inequalities of visibility between highly newsworthy actors — due to their capacity to generate conflict or emotional impact — and those whose relevance requires greater contextualisation, explanation, or narrative depth. This helps explain why certain powers dominate the information space while others, despite their geopolitical importance, appear only rarely or remain confined to marginal positions.

Finally, the analysis of engagement shows that the five most interactive posts on each profile did not correspond to political content, revealing a disconnect between informational intensity and the capacity of these topics to attract public attention. This finding suggests that, on Instagram, virality is determined less by the political relevance of content than by factors such as emotional tone, curiosity, or spectacle. This mechanism not only weakens the ability of the media to foreground complex issues, but also contributes to sustaining a visibility gap in which actors or conflicts that do not align with these logics remain systematically underrepresented, regardless of their geopolitical significance.

The two political posts that generated the highest levels of user interaction were the one published by @rtvenoticias on 23 March, which received a total of 29,563 reactions and reported that the United States would revoke residence and work permits for more than 500,000 migrants; and, secondly, the post published by @a3noticias, which received 20,356 reactions and reported Trump's demand that Spain increase its defence spending.

3.3 Analysis of Contextualisation and Evaluative Orientation in News Coverage

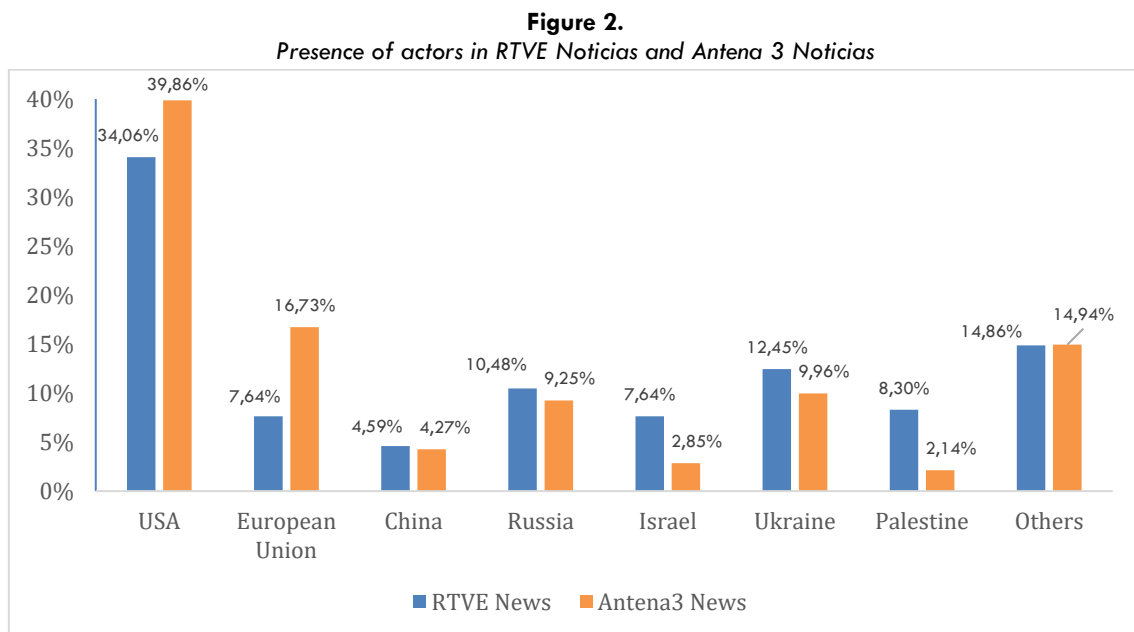
With regard to the contextualisation of news coverage, understood as the capacity of media outlets to provide background information that enables audiences to understand the origin and development of events, uneven patterns can be observed across the two profiles. The account @rtvenoticias contextualised information in 362 posts (79%), whereas @a3noticias did so in 200 posts (71.2%). This difference suggests that the public broadcaster tends to provide more background information, while the private outlet adopts a more concise approach oriented towards immediate updates.

Differences also emerge in relation to the informational tone, understood as the predominant evaluative orientation assigned to events (negative, positive, or neutral). Of the 458 news items analysed on @rtvenoticias, 308 (67%) presented a negative tone — frequently associated with conflict, risk, or adverse consequences — while 87 (19%) adopted a positive tone linked to achievements, agreements, or progress, and 63 (14%) maintained a neutral tone focused on the narrative presentation of facts without explicit evaluation.

On @a3noticias, the predominance of negative framing was even more pronounced: 209 of the 281 posts analysed (74.4%) fell into this category, while positive framing appeared in 34 cases (12.1%) and neutral framing in 38 (13.5%). Overall, the findings reveal a structural predominance of conflict as a narrative resource, consistent with broader dynamics of spectacularisation and the prioritisation of high-impact events, particularly on visual platforms such as Instagram. This tendency is closely related to the roles played by actors such as the United States, Israel, and the European Union in armed conflicts including the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

3.4 Representation of International Actors and Role Attribution in Media Coverage

Figure 2 presents, in percentage terms, the presence of the different international actors across both profiles. This makes it possible to compare the number of times each of these actors was mentioned in some form by the two media outlets throughout the period under study.



Source: Author's own elaboration.

To facilitate interpretation, the category “others” groups together minor mentions — mainly Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, and Hungary — each of which appeared 11 times or fewer, thereby justifying their consolidation under a single label. Since the analysis includes a total of eight actors, the reference value for equal representation would be 12.5%. This percentage would correspond to 57.3 mentions on @rtvenoticias and 35.1 mentions on @a3noticias. Comparing the

actual figures with these reference values makes it possible to identify the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of particular actors, thereby providing empirical evidence for discussing asymmetries in international visibility and potential differences in editorial strategy.

On the @rtvenoticias account, the United States is the most visible actor, accumulating 156 appearances, 92 of which position it as the protagonist. In these cases, it is predominantly framed as a threatening actor or as the actor responsible for causing the problem (66 cases), while positive or mitigating roles appear far less frequently: four appearances as affected, four as saviour, three as beneficiary, and twelve as informant. When appearing as a secondary actor (68 appearances), the tendency to frame the United States as responsible for the problem remains evident (26 cases), although it is also occasionally portrayed as affected (17 cases), beneficiary, third party, saviour, informant, or irrelevant. This characterisation is largely personalised through figures such as Trump and Musk, who function as symbolic representations of the American threat. Actors such as JD Vance and Marco Rubio further reinforce this narrative of conflict-oriented leadership.

Russia appears 48 times, 19 of which position it as the protagonist. In eleven of these cases, it is presented as responsible for the problem, while positive or instrumental roles (beneficiary, saviour, or informant) remain marginal. As a secondary actor (29 appearances), Russia follows a similar pattern, with threatening representations again predominating (21 cases), alongside only limited appearances as affected, beneficiary, or third party. This framing confirms its status as a central disruptive actor, particularly associated with armed conflict.

The European Union appears 35 times, although only 12 of these position it as the protagonist. Notably, it is never represented as the actor responsible for causing the problem, in contrast to other actors. When acting as protagonist, the EU is mainly assigned the roles of affected actor or informant, and only exceptionally that of saviour. As a secondary actor (23 appearances), it is likewise never portrayed as a threat; instead, roles such as affected actor, third party, beneficiary, or saviour predominate. This construction reflects a narrative of the EU as a cooperative and reactive actor rather than a strategic or conflict-driven power, and reveals an editorial tendency to avoid presenting it as an aggressive force.

Israel appears 35 times, 11 of which position it as the protagonist. Representations alternate between portrayals of Israel as responsible for the problem and as beneficiary, although it also appears as affected actor or informant. As a secondary actor (24 appearances), conflict-oriented representations become more prominent (14 cases), followed by more fragmented roles. This treatment reveals a narrative ambivalence in which Israel oscillates between aggressor and victim, but is rarely presented as a neutral actor.

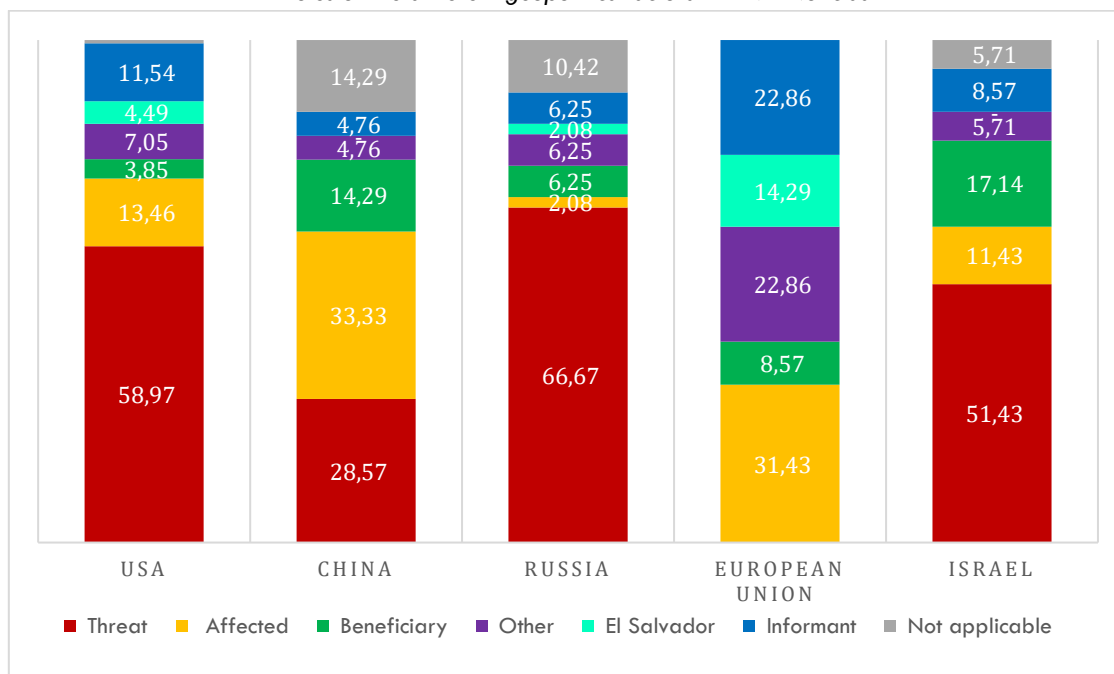
In the cases of Ukraine (57 mentions) and Palestine (38 mentions), their presence is significant, although they are almost exclusively associated with the role of victims, reinforcing their position within narratives of vulnerability. By contrast, other BRICS members such as Brazil and South Africa do not appear at all, while India is mentioned only once in a residual manner. The only publication directly addressing the BRICS is a humorous piece concerning Trump's confusion over the bloc, highlighting the limited attention paid to alternative geopolitical projects.

Finally, China appears in 21 posts on @rtvenoticias, eight of which position it as the protagonist. In this role, negative framing predominates: five appearances portray China as a source of geopolitical risk, one as affected actor, and two as a marginally mentioned actor without narrative relevance. As a secondary actor (13 appearances), China is represented primarily as the victim of external actions (six cases) or as beneficiary (three cases), reinforcing a narrative of reactive competition vis-à-vis the United States.

Figure 3 synthesises these findings and presents, in percentage terms, the distribution of roles assigned to the principal international actors on @rtvenoticias, combining both their appearances as protagonists and as secondary actors. Figure 4 presents the equivalent results for the same actors based on posts published by @a3noticias. Following Entman's (1993) framework, the

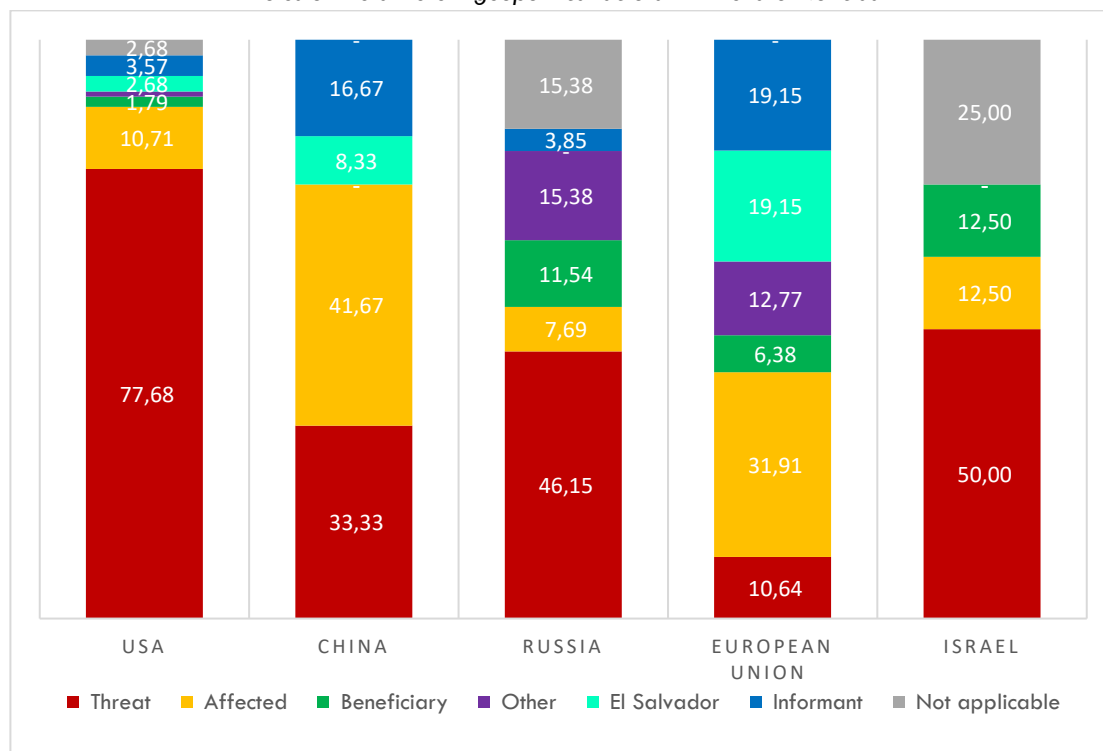
figures below present the percentages corresponding to whether these countries are represented as threats, affected actors, beneficiaries, third parties, saviours, informants, or merely residual and irrelevant mentions.

Figure 3.
Roles of the different geopolitical actors in RTVE Noticias



Source: Author's own elaboration

Figure 4.
Roles of the different geopolitical actors in Antena 3 Noticias



Source: Author's own elaboration

A similar pattern of concentrated visibility around the United States can be observed on @a3noticias, although with even greater intensity: 112 appearances, 91 of which position it as the protagonist. Threat-oriented framing once again predominates (74 cases), followed by occasional representations as affected actor, saviour, or informant. As a secondary actor (21 appearances), the United States continues to occupy roles associated with causality or victimhood.

Russia appears 26 times, predominantly in roles associated with threat or responsibility, both as protagonist and as secondary actor.

The European Union, by contrast, receives greater visibility than on @rtvenoticias (47 appearances), and in some cases is represented as responsible for causing the problem — something absent from the other profile — suggesting significant editorial differences between the two outlets.

China appears 12 times, mainly framed either as affected actor or as threat, although isolated cases portray it as saviour or informant.

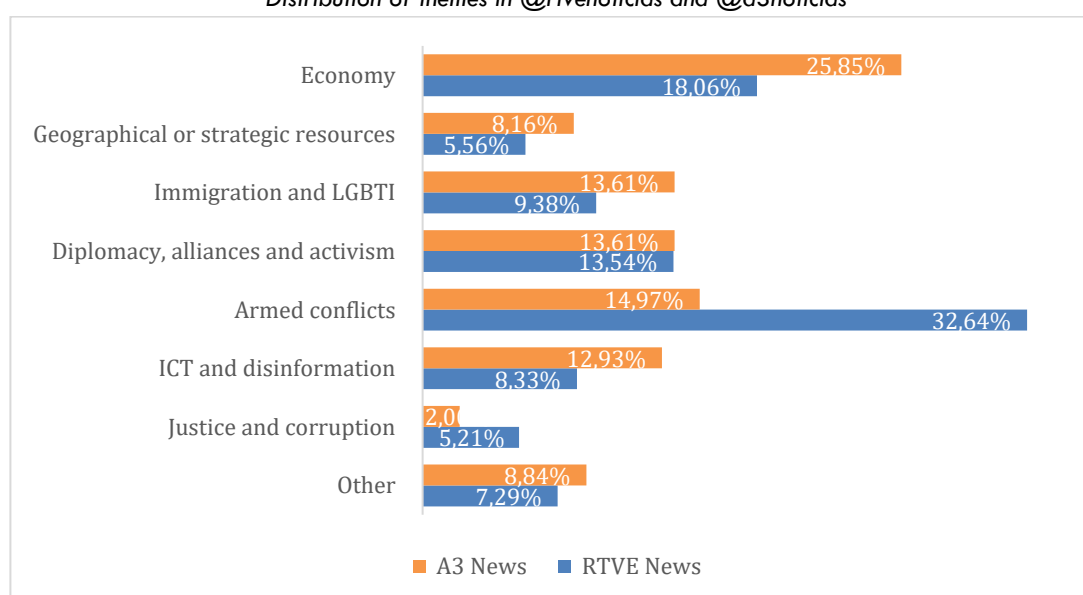
Israel appears only eight times, with a fragmented distribution of roles, although representations remain largely oriented towards conflict.

In both @rtvenoticias and @a3noticias, Ukraine and Palestine are primarily represented as victims, while the BRICS countries — despite their geopolitical relevance — are almost entirely absent. This reinforces a structural visibility gap that marginalises emerging powers in favour of traditional powers and highly mediated conflicts.

3.5 Thematic Distribution and Editorial Priorities

Figure 5 presents the distribution of the themes shaping the international political agenda in the posts published by @rtvenoticias and @a3noticias. The thematic classification made it possible to categorise all posts referring to issues related to: the economy; geographical or strategic resources (including rare earths, natural resources, and territories); immigration and LGBTQ+ policies; diplomacy, activism, and alliances; armed conflicts; Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and disinformation; justice and corruption; and, finally, other topics not included in the previous categories.

Figure 5.
Distribution of themes in @rtvenoticias and @a3noticias



Source: Author's own elaboration

Armed conflicts constitute the central focus of coverage, although with different levels of intensity: they account for 32.64% of the posts published by @rtvenoticias, compared with 14.97% on @a3noticias. In both cases, attention is concentrated on the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and between Israel and Palestine, confirming the centrality of war-related narratives as a driving force of news coverage on Instagram.

Economic issues also occupy a prominent position on both profiles, although with differing levels of importance: they represent the most frequent topic on @a3noticias and the second most frequent on @rtvenoticias. Coverage largely revolves around the protectionist policies of the United States, particularly the tariffs promoted by Donald Trump, with emphasis on their effects on China and the European Union. Likewise, the institutional restructuring led by Elon Musk through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) repeatedly appears linked to cuts affecting organisations such as USAID, thereby reinforcing the connection between political power and economic reconfiguration.

Issues related to immigration and LGBTQ+ rights receive greater attention on @a3noticias, although both profiles reflect the restrictive policies associated with Trumpism and their consequences for populations in Central and South America, as well as the impact of nationalist or ultra-conservative governments such as those led by Milei and Orbán.

Posts concerning strategic resources and territorial disputes account for a smaller percentage of coverage (5.56% on @rtvenoticias and 8.16% on @a3noticias), yet they constitute an important indicator of geopolitical tensions. These include cases related to the possible annexation of Greenland, control over the Panama Canal, suggestions of transforming Gaza into a tourist area administered by the United States, and disputes over Ukraine's rare earth resources. Such topics point towards a geopolitics of resources in which conflict is not only military, but also economic and territorial.

The category “diplomacy, alliances, and activism” presents similar figures across both accounts and includes content ranging from the signing of decrees to institutional statements, particularly those issued by the European Union. One notable exception was the considerable impact generated by the European Emergency Preparedness Guide, which advised citizens to keep survival kits and prompted reactions associated with fear and uncertainty.

The topic of ICTs and disinformation receives greater prominence on @a3noticias, although it is also present on @rtvenoticias. Here, coverage highlights debates surrounding hybrid warfare on the digital front (Barón, 2024), technological competition between China and the United States, and disputes over platform control, such as attempts to acquire TikTok. By contrast, content related to justice and corruption, although more limited, remains present (5.21% on @rtvenoticias and 2.04% on @a3noticias).

During February and March, both profiles published content related to the fifth anniversary of COVID-19, focusing on revisiting the origins of the pandemic and on current healthcare response capacities, particularly in relation to China.

Finally, a significant proportion of the content was found to include direct implications for citizens — that is, actions presented by these media outlets as actively affecting people's daily lives — accounting for 64% of the posts on @rtvenoticias compared with 42% on @a3noticias. This finding suggests that the public broadcaster places greater emphasis on narratives with tangible social consequences, whereas the private outlet prioritises more reactive or spectacular content with a less explicit connection to audiences.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study compares the treatment of international politics provided by RTVE and Antena 3 through their Instagram profiles, with the aim of identifying the degree of visibility and the narrative roles

assigned to the principal geopolitical actors within a context marked by multipolarity and digital news consumption.

The findings reveal a systematic overrepresentation of the United States across both profiles, with an excess visibility rate of 21.6% on @rtvenoticias (99 additional posts compared with the expected average) and 27.4% on @a3noticias (77 additional posts). Although this centrality may be justified by the country's geopolitical weight, as well as by the historical significance of the institutional transition in the United States during the period analysed, the scale of its presence displaces and overshadows other key geopolitical players, thereby producing an unbalanced news agenda. Moreover, the United States functions as the central narrative axis of external conflicts, reducing the visibility of the countries directly involved.

The underrepresentation of China, close to 8% on both profiles, confirms a tendency identified by Paterson and Nothias (2016): emerging powers receive less visibility than traditional powers despite their growing relevance in the reconfiguration of the global order. Furthermore, coverage is largely restricted to economic and bilateral narratives — mainly portraying China either as a competitor to the United States or as a threat — while obscuring key dimensions such as its alliances with Russia, technological leadership, and influence within the Global South. These dimensions are essential for understanding the systemic transition towards a multipolar order (Acharya, 2017; Ikenberry, 2018).

By contrast, Russia and Israel appear as high-profile actors because of their involvement in armed conflicts, although framed predominantly through narratives of culpability and threat, consistent with conflict-oriented framing logics (Entman, 2019). However, the constant mediation of the United States within these conflicts tends to displace local actors, contributing to a symbolic hierarchy that reproduces a Western and vertically structured geopolitical perspective.

The European Union presents a pattern of uneven exposure. @a3noticias grants it greater prominence than @rtvenoticias, although its representation is broadly similar across both profiles: the EU appears as a reactive and vulnerable power, frequently affected by external decisions and constrained by internal divisions that undermine its capacity for action. This narrative projects Europe as a weakened power, lacking the capacity to compete with hegemonic actors and dependent on external alliances to sustain its influence.

It is particularly important to interpret these findings in light of the European information deficit documented in the literature. De Vreese (2001, 2007) argues that media coverage of the European Union is limited, fragmented, and framed primarily through national perspectives, thereby generating a communication deficit and a corresponding knowledge gap among citizens. The findings obtained here are consistent with this diagnosis: the EU is represented as reactive, fragmented, and subordinated to the agendas of other actors, particularly the United States, even when events take place within its immediate geographical environment. This representation reinforces perceptions of structural weakness and contributes to limiting public understanding of Europe's role within the global system.

Nevertheless, this lack of prominence cannot be interpreted solely as the result of editorial decisions. Several authors have argued that the EU faces structural limitations that hinder both the projection of leadership and the construction of a coherent geopolitical narrative, including institutional fragmentation, the absence of a unified foreign policy, military weakness, and dependence on external security structures, particularly NATO (Ikenberry, 2018; Stuenkel, 2022). From this perspective, the media may be reflecting, rather than producing, a genuine position of subordination.

This dual possibility — namely, whether the observed patterns reflect the media reproduction of geopolitical biases or broader structural weaknesses — constitutes one of the study's main limitations. The analysis does not allow us to determine the extent to which the coverage observed results from editorial strategies, from the EU's own difficulties in acting as a visible and

recognisable geopolitical actor, or from the algorithmic dynamics of the platform itself. Recommendation algorithms prioritise short, emotionally intense, and easily digestible content, favouring simplified representations of international politics while reducing the media prominence of actors characterised by complex governance structures, such as the European Union. Future research could address this issue by comparing media representations across different national contexts and platforms, or by examining how citizens perceive European leadership within an increasingly digital and visual information environment.

Meanwhile, the BRICS countries and the broader Global South are almost entirely absent, despite their prominence within the literature on emerging multipolarity (Stuenkel, 2021). This absence reinforces a global visibility gap (Hamelink, 2015) in which actors actively reshaping the world order struggle to gain access to the information space, thereby limiting the public's capacity to understand broader structural geopolitical processes.

From the perspective of audience reception, the findings show that international political content does not generate particularly high levels of engagement, creating tensions around the role of the media as agenda setters within environments governed by algorithms, where visibility is assigned according to interaction metrics rather than criteria of public relevance. This algorithmic logic — centred on personalisation, emotionality, and entertainment (Highfield & Leaver, 2016) — may encourage the simplification of complex narratives and favour the circulation of reactive, fragmented, and affect-driven content, thereby creating fertile ground for polarisation and the rise of populism.

Instagram has become a central space for the production and circulation of political narratives, particularly among younger audiences, highlighting the need to improve the plurality, contextualisation, and depth of the information provided. In this regard, media organisations must reconsider not only their editorial decisions, but also their strategies for adapting to algorithmic logics if they wish to preserve their role as trusted institutions of public information (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018).

The implications of these findings are clear: if a well-informed public sphere is to be maintained within a context characterised by multipolarity, polarisation, and disinformation, media organisations must broaden their coverage of emerging powers, correct the overrepresentation of the United States, and strengthen both contextualisation and thematic diversity, particularly in relation to the European Union, whose information deficit is known to affect public understanding and democratic participation.

Public institutions themselves should also encourage and promote Media and Information Literacy (MIL) initiatives that enable users to become aware of the real role played by the actors currently shaping the emerging global order. As guarantors of democracy, these same institutions would be among the first to benefit from a genuinely informed and digitally literate society.

Finally, this study presents several limitations that open new avenues for future research. Analysing a larger number of media outlets, incorporating international profiles, and employing mixed methodologies would allow for a deeper understanding of the cognitive, affective, and democratic impacts of these narratives. Future studies could also explore how such representations influence political attitudes, perceptions of legitimacy, and geopolitical preferences, particularly among highly digitalised audiences.

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