

What message do we want to convey? An analysis of the media treatment of largest fires in Spain

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Abstract

Leading think tanks in Integrated Fire Management seem to agree on the need to modify communication on wildfires to promote social prevention. The goals seem clear: improving social understanding by informing about the causes and overcoming the simplistic interpretation of the fatalism of ignitions and meteorological conditions, as well as relativising the technological myth; contributing to the understanding of the fragility and vulnerability of the environment; avoiding sensationalist treatments; favouring the recognition of the positive role of agricultural activities regarding the prevention of forest fires; avoiding the media and political manipulation of fires; or assuming the management of fire risk as an opportunity for the development of rural areas.

Building on this theoretical framework, we will undertake a systematic literature review to identify approaches and themes, as well as analyse a sample of the 10 largest fires in Spain over the last 10 years (2013-2022) based on their treatment in both the national and regional newspapers, using the Atlas.ti tool. The analysis of written media focused on a selection of five national newspapers (El País, El Mundo, ABC, La Vanguardia and 20minutos) and 10 local newspapers for the 3 largest forest fires recorded in each year of the 2013-2022 period (30 fires in total). Editorials and opinion pieces for the same period in the 5 selected national newspapers are also analysed.

Our purpose is to identify and analyse the discourses, today questioned, of fire exclusion in the media treatment of wildfires, to understand the construction of the misleading social perception that all studies attribute to public opinion and to try to develop keys for the implementation of alternative communication actions based on the fire ecology paradigm, the promotion of resilient rural landscapes and the construction of fire-adapted communities.

Keywords: Wildfire communication, Risk communication Management, Framing.

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