

The health crisis in infotainment shows. Analysis of Pablo Motos' monologues in *El Hormiguero 3.0: Quédate en casa*

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Abstract

This research is based on the analysis of Pablo Motos' monologues on the television show El Hormiguero 3.0: Quédate en casa, aired during the months of lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions (03/23/2020 – 06/22/2020). Through the use of content analysis and by evaluating their informative and social relevance, 11 of the presenter's opening monologues were assessed to observe how an infotainment show tackles the coverage of health information within the context of a global pandemic. All the monologues analysed are centred around the development and consequences of the pandemic. The results of the research reinforce the perceived status of Pablo Motos as an opinion leader and television coach, who assumes the role of expert on social and welfare issues, with his discourse focussed on mental health, yet without relying on authoritative scientific sources.

Keywords

El Hormiguero, COVID-19, infotainment, mental health, late-night, monologue.

Resum

La investigació es basa en l'anàlisi dels monòlegs de Pablo Motos a El Hormiguero 3.0: Quédate en casa, durant els mesos de confinament i les restriccions per la COVID-19 (23/03/2020 - 22/06/2020). A través de l'anàlisi de contingut i valorant-ne la rellevància informativa i social, s'han estudiat 11 discursos inicials del presentador amb l'objectiu d'observar com un espai d'infoentreteniment aborda la presentació de la informació en salut en un context de pandèmia mundial. Totes les peces prenen com a punt de partida el desenvolupament i les conseqüències de la pandèmia. Els resultats reforcen la idea de Pablo Motos com a líder d'opinió i coach televisiu que assumeix un paper d'expert en matèria sociosanitària. En la mateixa línia, centra el discurs en la salut mental, sense basar-se en fonts científiques d'autoritat.

Paraules clau

El Hormiguero, COVID-19, infoentreteniment, salut mental, late night, monòleg.

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1. Introduction

This research is based on the analysis of how health and welfare information is covered by the television show *El Hormiguero*, by focussing on the opening monologues of its host. Based on the programme *No somos nadie* by M-80 Radio, *El Hormiguero* first premiered on the Cuatro channel in 2006, and today continues to be aired on Antena 3. As noted by Gascón and Marta-Lazo (2015), it is the first Spanish programme to have won a Rose d'Or award on several occasions, as well as the Premio Nacional de Televisión [National Television Award] from the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport for "its innovative nature as a family entertainment programme", and "its contribution to the Spanish audiovisual industry and international reach" (La Vanguardia, 4 April 2016). This success is also reflected in the programme's ratings, which have seen it ranked among the most-watched shows on Spanish television for many years. This fact also applies to the year 2020, when it achieved a 14.9% audience share (Espinell, Producción Audiovisual, 3 January 2021).

Since it first premiered, *El Hormiguero* ["The Anthill"] has been regarded in all studies on neo-television, infotainment and genre hybridisation as one of the prime examples of the blend between entertainment and information, "understanding the latter in the broadest sense of media current affairs" (Gordillo et al., 2011, p. 101), and a programme in which "sensationalism far exceeds the information". "The common thread of *El Hormiguero* is the childlike amusement on which information on current affairs hangs, be it to a greater or lesser extent serious, formal, grave or cautious" (Gordillo et al., 2011, p. 102). In research, various classifications have been proposed to describe hybrid formats that combine information and entertainment. The taxonomy proposed by Gordillo et al. (2011) distinguishes between three models found in the sub-genre of entertainment: satirical news, metatelevision and the variety show. *El Hormiguero* falls under the latter category, as it is based on the magazine show model while incorporating aspects of current affairs treated superficially and with humour. The show revolves mainly around its star presenter, Pablo Motos, and features fixed segments and collaborators, each with a specific, rotating role (Gascón-Vera and Marta-Lazo, 2019). In their study of politainment television, Martín, Vázquez and Cebrián (2017) build upon these aforementioned classifications by considering the relative weight given to information and entertainment. They distinguish between two types of formats: one that is more focused on politics, and the other where political content takes a backseat to entertainment. *El Hormiguero* forms part of this second group, in being a programme whose primary focus is entertainment. It "features on-set interviews with political leaders and regularly includes political content, albeit presented in a decontextualised manner, interspersed with light-hearted topics and characters" (Martín et al., 2017, p. 67).

Due to the socio-health crisis caused by the COVID pandemic, the programme's access prime-time broadcasting

slot was suspended following the state of emergency declared on 14 March 2020. The slot was replaced by a special news programme hosted by Vicente Vallés, which discussed the ongoing developments of COVID-19 with input from experts. *El Hormiguero* resumed broadcasting on 23 March under the name *El Hormiguero 3.0: Quédate en casa* ["Stay at home"], adapting its format to comply with health restrictions. This included respecting social distancing regulations and reducing the number of on-set crew members (camera operators, producers, floor managers, etc.). The number of collaborators was also cut down, leading to the creation of a new segment called "La tertulia". This section, which has remained a part of the show, featured the presenter along with three rotating co-hosts who discussed current affairs, politics and humorous themes during the pandemic. During the health crisis, guest interviews were conducted by video link with the presenter and the show's regular ant puppets. There was no live audience, a measure that was also adopted by other competing formats.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Infotainment

The term infotainment is a portmanteau of the words *information* and *entertainment*, used to describe a format that blurs the distinction between two traditional media functions — informing and entertaining — in a concept that initially emerged in television (Postman, 2005). Infotainment was integrated into the medium in three main ways: by incorporating soft news into traditional news programmes, addressing serious news topics in entertainment shows, and airing parody programmes that focus on current affairs (Berrocal, Redondo, Martín and Campos, 2014). In the 1990s, academics also coined the term *political infotainment* or *politainment*, to describe the fusion of political news and entertainment. According to Berrocal (2017), this phenomenon involves presenting political information in a superficial, sensationalised, parodic or humorous manner, in an approach which, although particularly prevalent in television, can be found across all media.

The stylistic elements of infotainment can be classified into four key components: thematic preferences, selection and handling of information sources, technical characteristics and narrative style. Therefore, "when discussing infotainment, it is essential to consider both the content of the message and the way in which it is presented" (Aguilera, 2019, p. 32). This is evident in the case of *El Hormiguero*, which incorporates many of these stylistic features, such as the inclusion of post-production effects, editing to accentuate sensational elements, and the use of music — a feature that "plays a very important role from the beginning of the programme with the team's dance" (Gascón-Vera and Marta-Lazo, 2019, p. 10). Additionally, the use of lower thirds and the development of informal interviews which blend questions with humour and games are also prominent.

The presenter becomes “co-protagonist in each of the sections of the programme. His narrative style is characterised by spontaneity, sarcasm, sentimentality and, above all, humour” (Berrocal et al., 2014, p. 99).

2.2 The presentation of health issues on television

Television has become a key platform for transmitting scientific knowledge to the public and for shaping scientific culture in society, acting as an intermediary between the scientific community and the general audience. As one of the most socially influential media, television also becomes a double-edged sword when tackling health issues: this subject, which demands a documented and rigorous approach, stands in contrast with the reality that television often gives voice to “opinion leaders who lack the preparation or sufficient information to discuss topics that could potentially jeopardise quality of life or promote unhealthy habits” (Domínguez Lázaro, 2010, p. 123). This approach is incompatible with the social responsibility inherent in the medium, which should apply to all types of television formats, whether informative or not.

Although health and illness are popular topics on television, health is rarely given its own specific space or independent coverage (Revuelta, 2006). In Spain, in fact, there is no tradition of television programmes specifically dedicated to health (European Commission, 2002). The only exception lies in certain morning shows where issues related to well-being, including medical and health matters, are loosely addressed and —until its cessation in 2014— a single popular science programme, *Redes*, which aired during off-peak hours on La 2 (Grosso Messa, 2014).

Health communication messages exist within a broader context than just the media itself: they transcend the media to become part of our social representations (Nahón, 1994), shaping the way the public perceives and understands health and medical science. As a result, the health of the general population is closely related to their access to and use of health information transmitted through this medium; information that “often relies on sources with little expertise and heavily influenced by political demands” (Revuelta, 2006, p. 208).

2.3 How *El Hormiguero* tackles issues of health and science

Health issues rarely receive a specific space or independent coverage in the media. When it does appear, the information is often presented by professionals with little expertise (Revuelta, 2006). Moreover, although the general public acknowledges that this type of content is a priority for them, they also admit to feeling inadequately or poorly informed on the subject (FECYT, 2020). Additionally, the dissemination of health information often tends to be highly influenced by political demands (Revuelta, 2006). Therefore, the inherent nature of *El Hormiguero* as an infotainment show, which also falls under the broader spectrum of politicised magazines, makes its approach to the health crisis particularly noteworthy.

Television in Spain serves as one of the main channels for accessing information on science and technology (FECYT, 2020), and as San Sebastián Ikutza (2015, p. 11) states, “a television programme can explain concepts that initially seem unappealing in an engaging way”. During the pandemic, television sought to address science and health issues with the aim of offering rigorous, useful information (Pueyo, 2022), in a context where the information provided by public institutions could have been more substantial (Cascón et al., 2021). This is also true of infotainment spaces.

Since *El Hormiguero* first aired, science and technology have occupied an important space in the programme, initially through what was known as the “Espacio de Flipy” (“Flipy’s Space”) —which originally referred to the nickname of the segment’s presenter, but which has subsequently been hosted by various collaborators such as the Hombre de Negro (Man in Black) (Gascón Vera, 2016). This segment has covered topics ranging from chemistry to medicine, as well as showcasing all sorts of scientific and technological advances and curiosities, always with a distinctly entertaining tone and related to current affairs. Its influence has been so significant that previous research has used this segment as a model to explore whether there is a correlation between television programmes with scientific content and attitudes towards subjects like Physics (Moya Guirao and García Molina, 2013). With the arrival of *El Hormiguero 3.0: Quédate en casa*, however, health took centre-stage within this focus on scientific dissemination, through the opening monologues of Pablo Motos.

In the context of a pandemic where medical information and its political connotations were at their utmost relevance, it is crucial to examine the extent to which television shows such as *El Hormiguero* provide accurate coverage of health topics, as even in medical matters “the media agenda influences the issues considered important by the receiving society” (Revuelta, 2006, p. 203). The programme’s capacity for influence became evident from the very first day of its return to the airwaves (23 March), when *El Hormiguero 3.0* became the leader of its time slot and the most-watched episode of the year (eldiario.es, 24 March 2020), with 3.6 million viewers and an 18.1% audience share.

2.4 The television monologue as a prime-time tool for humour

Since the inception of *El Hormiguero*, the monologue has been a segment in which, as the creators themselves describe it, Pablo Motos offers “a unique perspective of the news”. This monologue can be considered a hybrid between two distinct formats: stand-up comedy—a variation of the comic monologue imported from the United States—and the opening monologue of late-night shows (Gordillo et al., 2011, p. 101).

The first type, stand-up comedy, is a form of entertainment that transitioned from the stages of small clubs to the television screen. Its greatest exponent in Spain was *El Club de la Comedia* [“The Comedy Club”], which began on Canal+ (1999–2000) and went on to be aired on various different channels

such as *La 1* (2003), *Telecinco* (2001) and *Antena 3* (2004-2005) (Ríos Carratalá, 2009). The second type, the opening monologue from late-night shows, is, along with interviews, one of the key components of the "late show" format. This format was also solidified in the United States in the mid-20th century with NBC's *The Tonight Show*, and later made its way to Spain in 1994 with the programme *Estamos todos locos* by Pepe Navarro on Antena 3 (Nogués and Rodríguez, 2021).

As Gómez Martínez (2005) highlights in his analysis of the monologues from *El Club de la Comedia*, these monologues follow a common structure based on the principles of classical rhetorical discourse: they begin with an introduction to a theme or subject (exordium), followed by the argument or narration, which includes digressions such as examples, models and commonplaces, and ultimately lead to a conclusion. Meanwhile, in the case of stand-up comedy, American comedian Jerry Seinfeld defines it as "a humorous reflection of reality, viewed from a distance, that creates a sense of identification and with it the laughter of the audience" (Castellón Alcalá, 2008, p. 487). Reflecting these thoughts, Castellón Alcalá (2008, p. 487) also emphasises that between the audience and monologist "a harmony of understanding and camaraderie must be established, creating an informal atmosphere of companionship".

The monologist uses a series of different mechanisms to achieve this connection: continuous engagement with the audience, breaking the fourth wall, and the use of so-called rhetorical *figures of communion*, through which the speaker aims to create or reinforce a bond with the audience. Ultimately, the monologue is a genre of person-to-audience communication with a prewritten script, but performed in a seemingly improvised manner, maintaining an informal tone and addressing topics that are relatable to everyone (Ruiz Gurillo, 2019).

3. Aims

This research aims to analyse how the coverage of COVID-19 was tackled through this politicised magazine show, taking into account the specific features of the programme.

Just as the media can influence the perpetuation of pseudo-treatments linked to COVID-19 or fuel the political conflicts surrounding health measures, the scientific and apolitical coverage of the issue by platforms with extensive reach, such as *El Hormiguero*, could also play a crucial role in shaping the dissemination of ideas about the pandemic on various levels.

This research was guided by the following aims:

- To assess the monologues for characteristics related to infotainment.
- To observe how health policy is presented.
- To identify the types of arguments most commonly used.
- To examine the appeals made during the monologues.
- To analyse references to COVID-19, both direct and indirect.
- To observe the inclusion of health advice.
- To observe the use or absence of expert scientific sources.

The study of Pablo Motos' monologues between March and June 2020 aims to address the following research questions:

- What kind of arguments are most commonly used?
- How does a television programme connect with the audience in the context of lockdown?
- Does the coverage of the pandemic retain the political component typical of a politicised news magazine?
- How is COVID-19 referenced in a comedy/entertainment monologue?
- How important are reflections on health policy in the context of the programme?
- Does the presenter offer medical advice for coping with the situation of lockdown?
- Is this advice based on scientific sources?

Finally, this study proposes two hypotheses: Firstly, that *El Hormiguero*, and more specifically the opening monologues of its host, Pablo Motos, favoured political confrontation related to health measures during the pandemic, at a time of high television consumption and on a prime-time programme with maximum audience reach (H^1). The second hypothesis (H^2) proposes that Pablo Motos' monologues revealed unscientific attitudes and references to pseudo-treatments, including those related to mental health.

4. Methodology

The monologues were assessed using content analysis, considered the method par excellence for evaluating messages (Igartua and Humanes, 2004). Content analysis can be understood as an interpretative procedure applied to a communicative product—in this case, texts—that enables the extraction of both quantitative and statistical data as well as qualitative insights by assessing a combination of categories (Piñuel, 2002). To achieve this, the research draws on works with a similar approach, such as the analysis of Eva Hache's monologues conducted by Ruiz Gurillo (2015).

The categories selected for analysis and quantification can range from more external and formal aspects (both quantitative and qualitative, which are always measurable), to more conceptual elements such as the speakers, the concepts expressed, etc. (Yelo Díaz, 2002). To this effect, an analysis sheet was created featuring variables that provide data on formal aspects, such as the broadcast date and duration of the monologue, as well as the set design and format in which the opening monologue of the programme takes place. Other variables are also included that refer to more conceptually driven aspects, such as:

- The topic of the monologue.
- The type of arguments used (authoritative, factual, statistical or data-related, personal experience, health, emotional/affective, ethical, existential, generalisation or historical facts).

- Direct appeals (to viewers, politicians, emotions or common sense).
- References to COVID-19 (both direct and indirect).
- The inclusion of psychological advice.
- The use of expert scientific sources.

By combining the collected quantitative and qualitative data for subsequent analysis and interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research objective, the content analysis applied in this study could be considered a hybrid research methodology (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Molina-Azorín, 2012). For this study, a two-stage explanatory design method was selected (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Firstly, content analysis was employed to collect quantitative data through the use of the analysis sheet. The second stage focused on qualitative analysis, with the goal of describing and exploring the defined categories to gain a deeper understanding of the object of study (Guerrero Bejarano, 2016). To this end, an intentional, nonprobability sampling method was chosen, as it allows Pablo Motos' discourse on the programme to be correlated with current affairs during the selected period, thereby facilitating qualitative analysis and the formulation of inferences in the second phase.

The sample selected for the analysis of COVID-19 coverage in *El Hormiguero* consists of Pablo Motos' monologues from 11 of the 53 programmes broadcast during the season, each of which is linked to a significant milestone in the pandemic, as outlined in figure 1.

5. Results and discussion

Pablo Motos' monologues in *El Hormiguero* serve as the opening of the programme and follow a consistent formal structure across the analysed speeches. They usually begin with a greeting followed by a 20-30 second advertisement, and the monologue

lasts an average of 6 minutes. One of the distinguishing features of Pablo Motos' opening speech, compared to other monologues in similar programmes like Buenafuente's *Late Motiv*, is the presenter's interaction with the three collaborators present on set and the ant puppets. Generally, comedy monologues on television rely on the reactions of the live audience, with whom the monologist interacts, thereby shaping the discourse (Gómez Martínez, 2005). In this case, as there is no live audience due to COVID restrictions, it is the collaborators who provide feedback to the presenter and highlight the funny or curious aspects of the speech.

With regard to another of the formal elements analysed, the set design, the most common structure features Pablo Motos standing in front of the desk dressed in formal attire (i.e., a suit jacket), accompanied by the ants and three collaborators. Once the monologue ends, these collaborators are the ones with whom the chat show takes place. This presentation structure occurs in 54% of the monologues analysed. In contrast, in only three of the monologues does the presenter appear in casual attire (i.e., just wearing a shirt). One of these instances is on 22 June, considered the date of return to the "new normal", when the audience returns to the set, thus conveying an image of liberation and comfort.

All the monologues analysed share a common topic: the discussion of the mental health or emotional well-being of the audience during the lockdown period caused by the pandemic. In these speeches, Pablo Motos adopts the attitude of a coach, and assumes the role of an expert on the subject, offering advice intended to alleviate the potential effects of the pandemic on his audience's mental health.

73% of the monologues mention COVID-19 or related topics (pandemic, confinement, virus, etc.). However, these mentions are usually made indirectly, avoiding direct references to the virus itself. In some cases, the pandemic situation is even overlooked, and the monologue shifts focus to a general call for well-being or hope. This approach moves away from the health

Figure 1. Monologues selected for the research sample

DATE	COVID NEWS
Monday 03/23/2020	First programme after the state of emergency is declared.
Thursday 04/09/2020	Second extension of the state of emergency.
Wednesday 04/22/2020	Third extension of the state of emergency.
Tuesday 04/28/2020	Approval of the lockdown de-escalation strategy.
Wednesday 05/06/2020	Fourth extension of the state of emergency.
Thursday 05/14/2020	In Barcelona, Madrid and urban areas of Castile and León, restrictions are eased for phase 0. 14 autonomous communities are in phase 1 and 4 islands in phase 2.
Wednesday 05/20/2020	Fifth extension of the state of emergency.
Monday 06/01/2020	Spanish government hands over the management of phase 3 to the autonomous communities.
Wednesday 06/03/2020	Sixth and final extension of the state of emergency
Monday 06/08/2020	52% of Spaniards enter phase 3.
Monday 06/22/2020	Beginning of the "new normal".

Source: Own work.

and social-political context, using euphemisms or particularly sensitive anecdotes to soften the reality, for example: “We came back because we felt it was important for people not to lose hope” (06/22/2020); “I want to tell you about two life lessons that I know to be true and that I learned on the same day” (06/05/2020); “Our mental hygiene is very bad (...) just as you take a shower on the outside, you can also wash on the inside” (06/08/2020).

With regard to the political management of the pandemic—one of the topics we might expect to be addressed in an infotainment programme—this matter is hardly given any direct mentions. Only on 22 April 2020 does the presenter refer to the incompetence of politicians, in a speech where he points out that the pandemic exposes “all that is false”, using as an example “politicians who pretend to be competent, but are not”. Mentions of health policy are also rare; the only reference of this kind occurs in the monologue on the return to normality (06/22/20), when he refers to the “indecent protective equipment” with which healthcare workers had to contend with COVID-19. On the other hand, there is a constant stream of health advice that may impact on public health and which is not supported by authoritative scientific sources: “No doctor can offer a pill as good as sport” (04/09/2020); “You listen, you breathe and the anguish goes away” (06/08/2020).

In these speeches focused on the emotional well-being of the audience, Pablo Motos assumes the role of coach to such an extent that, in one of the monologues (04/09/2020), he conducts meditation exercises. During this moment, his interaction with the viewing public reaches its peak as he seeks to break the fourth wall. These meditation exercises led by the presenter are conducted without the involvement of any professional in the field or any reference to the sources from which the exercises are derived.

In Motos' words, “the basis of all these techniques is just listening (...) the trick is to breathe” (04/09/2020). These assertions are supported through his own personal reflections and anecdotes, such as: “A friend told me...” (06/01/2020); and

“You will feel better, your clothes will fit better” (04/09/2020). In this same vein, the most frequently used arguments are those of a personal nature, occurring in 91% of the cases. For example, in the monologue of 23 March 2020, the first of the initial lockdown, Motos states: “I have started to write a personal diary (...) you might also be interested in doing so”. It can be observed, therefore, that psychological advice is common, and, in fact, is the focus of 100% of the monologues analysed. Some of this advice is more in-depth and practical in nature, such as offering steps for meditation or explaining certain physical exercises supposedly linked to mental health (e.g., 06/08/2020). Others are more focussed on emotional well-being, such as when, based on his own anecdotes, he advises the audience to avoid nasty arguments or to stay active in order to seize opportunities (e.g., 05/06/2020). However, contrary to what would be expected when addressing a particularly relevant and stigma-prone health issue, this advice is only supported by expert scientific sources in three of the eleven monologues analysed. In the rest of them, Motos serves as the only source, relying exclusively on his personal experience to offer advice such as “right now it is important to create physical fatigue so that there is moral fatigue” (04/09/2020).

Affective arguments, which appeal to the emotions of the audience, also feature in 91% of the monologues. Pablo Motos constantly uses verbs and adjectives related to grief, terror and struggle, introducing lapidary phrases such as “hope is destructive”. After these two types of arguments, the third most frequent, appearing in 72% of the monologues, are those based on generalisations, such as “we have all been very afraid” (06/22/2020).

In contrast, arguments supported by authoritative sources are found in only 27% of the monologues, such as when citing the work of Michael Gazzaniga (06/01/2020). These expert sources often come from self-help books and are frequently misquoted or mispronounced, as seen when referring to psychologist Guy Winch. On other occasions, credentials are overlooked, as in the case of Caroline Adams Miller, who is cited as an expert source



(04/09/2020)

without having any formal scientific training or specific training in psychology.

Regarding appeals to the audience, in all the monologues the host directly addresses the audience at home, while the on-set audience only interacts with him in one of the episodes analysed: the one featuring an entire audience comprised of healthcare workers, which marked the transition to the new normal (06/22/2020). On the other hand, direct appeals to emotions can be observed in 81% of the cases, with phrases such as “you feel like an old rag” or “above all you are going to be sad” (04/09/2020), with fear and hope being the most common emotions alluded to, for example: “Life can change you in a moment, even for the better” (05/06/2020); “At the beginning we were all scared to death, just like you” (06/22/2020); and “Don’t read the news, because now the news are scary” (04/09/2020). These appeals fall in line with the arguments used, and are particularly striking when compared to the percentage of monologues that, in contrast, appeal to common sense, which make up only 18% of the speeches.

6. Conclusions

The first hypothesis proposed in this study (H^1) is disproved: although previous research has observed that coverage of health issues in the media is often influenced by political demands (Revuelta, 2006), this is not the case in the monologues of *El Hormiguero*. In these, health policy takes a secondary role, never encouraging debate or confrontation —a fact that sets the programme apart from the characteristics of a politicised magazine show. The host never uses general politics or the appropriateness of health measures as a narrative, and no political discourse is observed in these monologues aside from the occasional doubts about leaders’ capacity, which were expressed in the monologue of 22 April. Nor are there any direct references to decisions that could spark social controversy, or attempts to sensationalise health policy. In contrast, and in accordance with the second hypothesis (H^2), the focus of entertainment is on mental health, and the emotional and pseudo-scientific approach to it.

In these monologues, the presenter takes on the role of a television coach, using current affairs in a superficial manner to offer psychological advice primarily based on emotional/affective arguments and the narrator’s personal experience, and as seen, this advice is not backed up by authoritative sources. This lack of scientific sources supports the second hypothesis regarding the harmful dissemination of non-scientific treatments related to mental health. Indeed, previous research has already observed that mental health is frequently mentioned in the media without being supported by additional information on symptoms, causes, rehabilitation processes or treatments, and is rarely backed by expert scientific sources (Angermeyer and Schulze, 2001; Gamo, 1992; Nairn et al., 2001). In this context, Pablo Motos’ assumed role serves as confirmation of

this harmful media approach, which also applies to Spanish prime-time infotainment.

The affective arguments and constant appeals to emotions observed also support the findings of other research, which highlight sentimentality as one of the key features of the narrative style of *El Hormiguero* (Berrocal et al., 2014, p. 99). In this regard, Motos serves as the sole source of information, taking on the role of a television coach and employing some of the typical techniques of the monologue (Castellón Alcalá, 2008) to emphasise his message, thereby reinforcing the psychological advice he provides. In addition, hybridisation can also be observed in these monologues, which is one of the defining features of neo-television. A blend can be observed between the features of a stand-up comedy monologue and those of a late-night show. To this effect, as shown in the results, the appeals to the audience that define this format (Gascón-Vera, 2022) are constant and present in all the monologues, breaking the fourth wall and strengthening the connection with a public that, during these pandemic episodes, reached its peak with a 22.7% audience share (eldiario.es, 24 March 2020).

Although *El Hormiguero* is not a news or informative programme but rather an infotainment show, its reach and Motos’ own influence should prompt a reconsideration of how mental health issues are addressed in prime-time programmes. As Manuel Muñoz et al. (2011, p. 172) point out, “an appropriate and rigorous approach to the subject by these same media could play a fundamental role in the fight against stigma”. While the attempt to avoid direct mentions of the virus and present the programme as a place for hope carries seemingly positive connotations that apparently attempt to deliberately position it against the confrontation inherent in politics (H^1), the advice offered and the approach to mental health taken fall short of being desirable. They favour stereotypical attitudes and treatments detached from modern psychology, which are clearly unscientific (H^2), and show a predilection towards pseudo-scientific proposals, such as the idea that hope can overcome illness.

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