



El Delito de Pornografía Infantil: Un Análisis de cómo se Informa sobre Él en los Medios Digitales de Ecuador

The Crime of Child Pornography: An Analysis of how it is Reported in Ecuador's Digital Media

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RESUMEN

Este estudio examina la cobertura mediática de la pornografía infantil en los medios digitales ecuatorianos desde una perspectiva comunicacional, ética y discursiva. Mediante un enfoque predominantemente cualitativo de métodos mixtos, se analizó un corpus de 106 artículos de noticias digitales. Los hallazgos indican un predominio de narrativas oficiales, una contextualización limitada del daño y una escasa inclusión de información preventiva y educativa, lo que restringe una comprensión integral del fenómeno y del papel social del periodismo en la cobertura de delitos altamente sensibles.

Palabras clave: material de abuso sexual infantil, medios digitales, encuadre mediático, ética periodística, derechos de la infancia

ABSTRACT

This study examines media coverage of child pornography in Ecuadorian digital media from a communicational, ethical, and discursive perspective. Using a predominantly qualitative mixed-methods approach, a corpus of 106 digital news articles was analyzed. The findings indicate a predominance of official narratives, limited contextualization of harm, and scarce inclusion of preventive and educational information, which constrains a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and the social role of journalism in reporting highly sensitive crimes.

Keywords: child sexual abuse material, digital media; media framing, journalistic ethics, children's rights



INTRODUCTION

Media coverage of crimes involving children and adolescents represents one of the most significant ethical and communicative challenges faced by contemporary journalism. The way in which these events are narrated not only informs audiences but also shapes social perceptions, influences reporting and complaint processes, and may generate both protective and harmful effects for victims and society.

In recent years, the international debate surrounding sexual crimes against minors has been accompanied by highly visible judicial cases, such as that of Jeffrey Epstein, as well as audiovisual productions like *Sound of Freedom*, which have addressed the issue from different perspectives. These developments have intensified public discussion across diverse contexts regarding child protection and broader questions of social and institutional responsibility.

Among these offenses, child pornography—legally defined in Ecuador as pornography involving the use of children or adolescents under Article 103 of the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code (2014)—as well as any form of sexual exploitation of minors, constitutes a serious violation of human rights (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, 2022). Despite its social relevance and increasing visibility across media environments, this phenomenon has received limited scholarly attention within the field of communication studies, particularly in the Ecuadorian context. Although national legislation provides legal protections for children and adolescents, there remains a lack of widely disseminated and specific guidelines to orient media coverage of highly sensitive crimes.

A communicative gap in the reporting of such offenses may generate adverse consequences for audiences, including the normalization of harm, the stigmatization of individuals or communities, and the no visibilization of victims' needs for protection and support. Conversely, responsible coverage can contribute to social awareness, prevention efforts, and the strengthening of reporting mechanisms. In this regard, it becomes essential to examine not only what the media report, but also how these issues are framed, which voices are prioritized, and which perspectives remain absent from the narrative.

Within this context, the present study seeks to contribute, from a scientific and academic perspective, to a critical reflection on how Ecuadorian digital media frame and address these issues in their news coverage. The general objective of this research is analyzing the media coverage of child pornography crimes in Ecuadorian digital news outlets, identifying the discursive, ethical, and communicative patterns present in online news reporting. Based on this objective, the following research questions are defined: What types of narratives predominate in coverage? How are victims and criminals represented? Which informational sources are prioritized? And to what extent do news reports comply with ethical and communicational quality standards?

To address these questions, a mixed methodological approach was adopted, with a predominantly qualitative orientation, combining discourse analysis with descriptive quantitative tools. Two analytical matrices were applied to a corpus of 106 digital news articles: one focused on discourse analysis and another designed to evaluate the communicational quality of the coverage.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Pornography and Child Pornography

Across contemporary media environments and communication platforms, audiences have access to a wide diversity of content. However, certain types of content continue to generate significant social controversy, as is the case with pornography. The Spanish Royal Academy (Real Academia Española, n.d.) defines pornography as the “explicit representation of sexual acts intended to produce sexual arousal” (definition 1). Nevertheless, both the use of the term and its meaning have evolved over time, shaped by the cultural norms, values, and social contexts of each historical period.

According to Peña (2012), pornography became widely popularized at the end of the nineteenth century with the emergence of technological advances such as photographic cameras, which enabled its large-scale production. Since then, it has expanded into a vast range of commercial formats that persist to the present day (p. 48). This development has increased both the availability of such material and the ease of access to these products. For Triviño and Salvador (2019), this accessibility represents a significant concern, as

adolescents between the ages of 12 and 14 constitute one of the groups with the highest levels of pornography consumption (p. 246). Given the nature of this content, exposure may contribute to compulsive use or addictive behaviors. However, consumption is not the only challenge faced by children and adolescents (hereafter referred to as C&A) in relation to this issue; their exploitation in the production of such content represents an even more serious concern.

According to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2000), child pornography is defined as “any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities, or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes” (Article 2). The document further urges all State Parties to combat and criminalize this and all related practices associated with such forms of exploitation. Similarly, the organization Stop Child Abuse (2024) notes that child pornography is also referred to as Child Sexual Exploitation and emphasizes that it is often difficult to detect, both for caregivers and for the victims themselves.

Children’s Rights Worldwide and in Ecuador

Seda (2010) explains that social perceptions, rights, and obligations concerning children and adolescents have evolved significantly over time. Historically, minors were not regarded as citizens and were therefore understood almost as extensions of the State or of parental authority. Later, they came to be perceived primarily through a deficit-based lens, defined by what they were not or by what they were presumed incapable of doing. It was only toward the end of the twentieth century that children and adolescents began to be recognized as citizens in their own right—valued for who they are and for their developing capacities to engage with the world, which progressively expand as they grow (pp. 109–132). This perspective also acknowledges that minors hold responsibilities appropriate to their stage of development, level of discernment, and conditions of vulnerability.

This shift in understanding was consolidated with the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989. The Convention and subsequent international frameworks recognize that children and adolescents possess the same fundamental rights as any other citizen, while also establishing

specific protections tailored to their age-related needs and conditions of vulnerability. These rights include, among others, the right to life, identity, and privacy; the right to express their views on matters affecting them and to have those views taken seriously; the right to protection from all forms of violence; and the right not to be subjected to sexual or economic exploitation (UNICEF, 2006).

According to Cezarita (2022), “the government of Ecuador has demonstrated a strong commitment to the protection of children’s rights through the ratification of international treaties and the implementation of domestic policies” (para. 1). In addition, “social research indicates that children’s early experiences significantly influence their future development. The course of that development determines their contribution—or cost—to society throughout their lives” (UNICEF, n.d., para. 13). Consequently, safeguarding children’s rights constitutes a shared responsibility that extends to all social actors, including the media. The representation of children and adolescents, as well as the dissemination of information concerning them, must therefore be handled responsibly in ways that reinforce rather than undermine their fundamental rights. This perspective recognizes that childhood must be protected not only from physical harm but also from symbolic or communicational harm.

The State has the primary responsibility for guaranteeing the fundamental rights of children and adolescents. When any of these rights is violated, the act represents not only an ethical failure or a social injustice but may also constitute a criminal offense. As Seda (2010) explains, “when an offender threatens or violates legally protected interests such as life, liberty, dignity, honor, property, or others of similar importance, the offender is understood to have committed a crime.” In cases involving child pornography, the sexual exploitation of minors and all related conduct violate their sexual integrity, dignity, and their right to protection from any form of exploitation or violence, thereby constituting a serious human rights violation.

In Ecuador, offenses against the sexual integrity of children and adolescents are addressed within the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008), which establishes that measures must be adopted to protect minors from such forms of violence. The Constitution further provides that penalties for crimes related to the sexual and reproductive integrity of minors are

not subject to statutes of limitation (Article 46). This provision implies that perpetrators may be prosecuted and convicted regardless of the amount of time that has elapsed between the commission of the crime and the filing of a complaint.

Media and representation of the child pornography crime

The media function as intermediaries between audiences and events. This implies that what appears—or does not appear—in news coverage, how events are narrated, the terminology employed, and the actors granted a voice can either reinforce the understanding of a crime as a serious social issue or contribute to its trivialization. Various communication theories explain this phenomenon, demonstrating how media outlets can construct, shape, legitimize perceptions and, in some cases, contribute to the social construction of reality itself.

From the perspective of framing theory, media organizations select specific elements of an event that they consider relevant and, by emphasizing them, establish dominant narratives (Entman, 1993), thereby shaping audience perceptions. As Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) notes, “news is therefore a textual and visual construction developed around a central axis of thought, a particular perspective, created by an information professional” (p. 424).

Depending on the aspects highlighted during the writing process, the same event may be framed as a sensationalist scandal, a criminal act with legal consequences, or a case of revictimization, among other possibilities. A clear example can be observed in media coverage of gender-based violence. Numerous studies agree that the framing applied to news stories influences how the public interprets and responds to this problem. In many cases, coverage focuses on the victim—revealing personal details such as name or family relationships—and may even attribute partial responsibility to the victim for the violence suffered. This approach can diminish public scrutiny of the perpetrator and shift responsibility away from them (Gorosarri, 2021, p. 77). Beyond physical or psychological harm, this type of coverage may generate symbolic damage by reproducing stereotypes, exposing victims unnecessarily, or reducing complex crimes to isolated incidents or scandals, thereby affecting both dignity and social understanding of the issue.

From another perspective, Van Dijk’s (2009) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a framework for understanding how discourse—including media discourse—can reproduce power relations, reinforce stereotypes about victims and perpetrators, obscure broader patterns of abuse, or, alternatively, challenge such stereotypes (p. 149). When news reporting omits contextual information, portrays children and adolescents as consenting participants, or employs particular forms of language, it may minimize public perception of the ethical and legal harm associated with child pornography offenses. In *News as Discourse*, Van Dijk (1990) further emphasizes that journalistic texts are not simple reflections of reality; rather, they are shaped by discursive constructions, ideological positions, and the interests of both producers and audiences.

From the combined perspectives of framing theory and critical discourse analysis, it can therefore be argued that the effects of media coverage depend not solely on the visibility granted to an issue, but also on how events are narrated, contextualized, and discursively legitimized. News reporting may reinforce or reproduce ideologies, hierarchize social actors, and contribute to the establishment or maintenance of power structures.

Considering these factors, it becomes pertinent to analyze how child pornography—or child sexual abuse material—is reported in Ecuadorian media outlets and to examine the discursive, ethical, and social implications of such coverage. This analysis seeks to identify areas for improvement that may contribute to the development of a more accurate and socially responsible understanding of the crime.

The Crime of Child Pornography in the Ecuadorian Media

In Ecuador, the media coverage of sexual crimes against children and adolescents has historically exerted a direct influence on social perception and on institutional and legal decision-making regarding these offenses. The 2005 criminalization of these crimes in the COIP (Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code) was a response to the Burdett-Cedeño case, which took place in the Galápagos Islands between 2003 and 2005. The extensive media reporting generated social and political pressure that contributed to the approval of the Reformatory Law of the Penal Code in 2005 (Vintimilla, 2016).

In the thesis Ser niña(o) ecuatoriana(o) y crecer en Galápagos: trata, pornografía infantil, el caso Burdett-Cedeño. Análisis crítico de discurso del tratamiento periodístico sobre la pornografía infantil en las noticias de prensa escrita diaria de alcance nacional (El Universo): el caso Burdett-Cedeño y la reforma al código penal en 2005 para tipificar los delitos sexuales en Ecuador, Vintimilla (2016) identifies both strengths and deficiencies in the media coverage of these crimes, particularly by the newspaper El Universo. The author notes that the news reports often adopted a sensationalist style and lacked in-depth investigative journalism, frequently limiting themselves to official statements. Furthermore, the coverage occasionally criminalized the victims, included explicit descriptions of child pornography videos, and overlooked the potential existence of a local or national market for such material. Nevertheless, Vintimilla also recognizes positive contributions, such as increasing the case's visibility, highlighting new social actors and international pressures, exposing judicial shortcomings, and connecting the case to broader societal issues.

This background helps illustrate how media discourse can exert direct or indirect effects on the political agenda and social perception. Consequently, it is problematic that, despite the gravity of the offense, Ecuador lacks official guidelines—or sufficiently disseminated ones—on how the media should report on these crimes in a careful and responsible manner. The absence of such standards or their lack of reach may increase the risk of sensationalism, the trivialization of the issue, indirect forms of revictimization, or even the concealment or glorification of perpetrators.

Manuals and Other Self-Regulatory Norms for the Communication of Crimes Against the Sexual Integrity of Children and Adolescents (NNA)

Given the impact of the media on the social construction of crime and the perception of children and adolescents (NNA) as subjects of rights, various international organizations, foundations, and journalistic networks have developed manuals and guides for the responsible coverage of these issues. While these documents lack the force of law and neither countries nor media outlets are obligated to subscribe to them, they serve as ethical, technical, and pedagogical tools to guide journalism toward a more careful practice when reporting on situations that place NNA in a state of vulnerability.

According to the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) et al. (2005)¹, “mass media, due to its reach, coverage, and influence on the population, is fundamental for generating a culture of rejection and zero tolerance toward this phenomenon” (p. 3). This underscores the role of the media as decisive actors in combating this type of offense, as well as any other that affects children or any human being.

The Global News Agency and UNICEF Paraguay (2023), in its Manual on Childhood and Journalism, states that including the voices of NNA in the media is advisable, as their perspectives can enrich the understanding of the issues that affect them. However, it clarifies that when dealing with NNA in vulnerable situations, they should not be interviewed, as this constitutes a form of revictimization by forcing them to relive a traumatic situation through their narrative (p. 12-13).

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach with a qualitative predominance. However, quantitative descriptive analysis tools were incorporated to support data interpretation and the classification of narrative and ethical patterns in media coverage. The primary objective was to understand how digital media in Ecuador report on the crime of child pornography, considering both the form and substance of the media treatment. This includes reviewing news content, central themes, imagery, source selection, narrative patterns, and information gaps, among other factors. Subsequently, the study reflected on the potential effects of this coverage on the public perception of the crime, the victims, and the perpetrators.

This approach enabled the reconstruction of media discourse not as a mere reflection of reality, but as a form of active representation that shapes meaning, reproduces ideologies, and prioritizes certain voices over others. To achieve this, the study drew upon the theoretical foundations of Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 2009) and Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), as well as child rights-based approach principles contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and manuals of journalistic best practices.

Construction of the Research Corpus

The analysis corpus consisted of a set of news articles published by Ecuadorian digital media regarding cases related to the crime of child pornography. Data collection was carried out through purposive sampling by keywords, utilizing the Google search engine and its result filtering function to isolate news published within a specific period. In this case, news articles from 2019 to 2024 were filtered to analyze a recent and sufficiently broad temporal range to identify recurring coverage patterns, thereby avoiding the likelihood of the corpus reflecting only a specific circumstantial moment.

The search was performed using the exact term: “delito de pornografía infantil Ecuador” (child pornography crime Ecuador), prioritizing Spanish-language results published on websites belonging to Ecuadorian media outlets.

Analysis Techniques

The resulting corpus was processed in three stages. The first stage involved discourse and content analysis supported by an ad hoc instrument, designed to identify qualitative characteristics of the media treatment of the crime, such as the narrative approach, the treatment of victims and perpetrators, the types of sources utilized, and information gaps. In the second stage, a communication quality evaluation instrument was applied, constructed based on principles extracted from manuals

of journalistic best practices. This instrument allowed for the assessment of ethical dimensions, the protection of rights, and the educational value of the news reports. Finally, the results obtained were organized to identify recurring patterns in the analyzed media coverage.

The instrument for discourse and content analysis included the following sections:

- Link to the original text
- Year of publication
- Media outlet
- Headline
- Content type (Defined as a news story, feature, or narrative feature)
- Location of events
- Treatment of victims (Depersonalization, unnecessary exposure, revictimization, empathetic approach)
- Treatment of perpetrators (Justification, shift of responsibility, neutral/judicial language, harsh/punitive language)
- Sources (Only authorities or public institutions, victims or relatives, experts or NGOs, mixed)

Table 1
Corpus distribution by year and content type

| Year | News | Report (long story) | Opinion | Chronicle | Total per year |
|--------------|-----------|---------------------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| 2019 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 2021 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 2022 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 11 |
| 2023 | 26 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 33 |
| 2024 | 48 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 59 |
| Total | 82 | 21 | 2 | 1 | 106 |

Research Limitations

Digital media outlets are not strictly regulated within the Ecuadorian legal framework. There is no clear definition of what constitutes a digital medium. According to the Organic Law of Communication of Ecuador (2013), hereinafter referred to as the LOC, media outlets are defined as: Public, private, and community-based companies or organizations, as well as concessionaires of radio and television frequencies, which provide a public service of mass communication using print media or radio, television, and subscription audio and video services, whose content may be generated or replicated by the media outlet via the internet. (Article 5)1.

Given this context, the decision was made to include both digital-native media and the digital portals of traditional media outlets. Notwithstanding, it cannot be guaranteed that the selected media will align with any subsequent definition of digital media developed in Ecuador. Another limitation in the analysis of digital content is the possibility that media outlets may edit or update news stories after their initial publication. During the compilation and review of the corpus, it was observed that some reports had been updated, while others were no longer available online, yielding error messages (404) when attempting to re-access the original links. To address this situation, which is inherent to the digital environment, the study utilized backups of the publications, preserving the full texts and screenshots, and maintaining a record of the basic data for each news item. This approach ensured the stability of the analyzed corpus.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the reliance on Google search results may involve algorithmic and indexing bias. However, its use is justified by its function as the primary search engine for the public, a fact evidenced in Ecuador.

RESULTS

The following section presents the principal findings obtained from the study of the corpus through the application of two matrices: the first focused on discourse analysis and the second on the evaluation of the communication quality of the news reports. The results are organized according to the analyzed dimensions: content type, treatment of victims and perpetrators, use of sources, visual resources, and narrative approaches. The second part considers ethical and journalistic criteria, the protection of the rights of children and adolescents (NNA), and the educational and social value of the content. The presentation of results utilizes percentages to illustrate the identified narrative and quality patterns.

Based on the application of the discourse analysis instrument to a corpus of 106 news items, the following are the key findings regarding how Ecuadorian digital media report on child pornography—also referred to in some cases as Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). In this instrument, the categories are not mutually exclusive; that is, a news item may correspond to more than one category, and therefore, the totals do not necessarily sum to 100%.

Regarding the type of content, a clear predominance of brief news stories was observed—those with limited contextual development and generally based on a single source—representing 77.4% of the corpus (82 news). In a smaller proportion, features (Report long story) were identified, accounting for 19.8% (21 news), characterized by a deeper exploration of information and the presentation of context and data. In contrast, formats with greater interpretative depth were marginal: only 2 editorials (1.9%) and 1 narrative feature (chronicle) (0.9%) were recorded. This finding suggests a coverage primarily centered on news immediacy and the reproduction of specific events, rather than on the contextual or interpretative analysis of the phenomenon.

1 The Organic Law of Communication was published in the Official Registry Supplement No. 22 on June 25, 2013. However, it has been reformed on several occasions. For this research, the modified text as of February 20, 2019, was consulted. Additionally, the General Regulation to the Organic Law of Communication, published in the Official Registry Second Supplement No. 383 on August 28, 2023, was consulted concurrently.

Table 2
Percentage distribution by content type

| Content Type | Frecuence | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| News | 82 | 77,4% |
| Report - long story | 21 | 19,8% |
| Opinion | 2 | 1,9% |
| Chronicle | 1 | 0,9% |
| Total | 106 | 100% |

Representation of Victims and Perpetrators

Regarding the treatment of victims, the predominant category was depersonalization, present in 98.1% of the news stories (104 cases). This implies that victims are not characterized beyond their generic status as a minor, child or adolescent (NNA), or victim. Nevertheless, in 27.4% of the news items (29 cases), elements of unnecessary exposure were identified, primarily through specific references to the location of the events, family or trust-based relationships, and other contextual data that could facilitate the indirect identification of the victims. No cases of explicit revictimization were recorded, and only one news story (0.9%) incorporated an empathetic or protective approach toward the victims, recognizing that the testimony of a child or adolescent is trustworthy and must be considered.

In relation to the treatment of perpetrators, most of the news stories utilized neutral or judicial language (92.5%, 98 news), aligned with the official narrative—that is, the information provided by public institutions. However, in 11.3% of the cases (12 news), the use of harsh or punitive language was detected, which included terms such as “predators,” “pedophiles,” or “individuals with mental disorders.” Likewise, in a high percentage of news stories (73.6%, 78 cases), personal data of the alleged perpetrators was included, such as name, age, nationality, profession, or place of residence.

Information Sources

The analysis of information sources evidenced a strong reliance on institutional or official sources. In 97.2% of the news (103 cases), the cited sources corresponded to authorities and members of the National Police, the State Attorney General’s Office (Fiscalía General del Estado),

or Ministries. The inclusion of other perspectives was limited: only 10.4% of the news (11 cases) incorporated the voices of experts such as psychologists, activists, lawyers, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs); 3.8% (4 news) included victims or their relatives; and 2.8% (3 news) mentioned individuals linked to the alleged perpetrators or gave voice to the perpetrator. In two cases (1.9%), no explicit source was identified, as these corresponded to editorials (opinion).

Table 3
Information Sources distribution by type

| Source type | Number of news | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Institutional or official sources | 103 | 97,2% |
| Experts / NGOs / civil society | 11 | 10,4% |
| Victims or related individuals | 4 | 3,8% |
| Individuals linked to the perpetrator / perpetrator | 5 | 4,7% |

Use of images and visual resources

Regarding the use of images, 63.2% of the news articles (67 cases) used images of real people, either with visible or pixelated faces. Meanwhile, 29.2% (31 articles) used images of the crime scene or seized objects, and 22.6% (24 articles) relied on generic or symbolic images. No articles were found without visual support. In most cases, the images of real people, crime scenes, or seized objects corresponded to posts on social media by the National Police or the State Prosecutor’s Office or were explicitly attributed to these institutions. On the other hand, narrative approach, the police perspective—focused on reporting operations and arrests—was overwhelmingly predominant, appearing in 79.2% of the articles (84 cases), followed by the judicial approach at 29.2% (31 articles), characterized by a focus on the legal process of the perpetrators. In contrast, social (18.9%, 20 articles) and educational or preventive approaches (8.5%, 9 articles) were less common. A sensationalist approach was identified in 9.4% of the corpus (10 articles), indicating that, although not dominant, it remains present in some coverage.

Table 4
Dominant narrative approach in coverage

| Narrative approach | Number of contents | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Police (operations and arrests) | 84 | 79,2% |
| Judicial (legal process) | 31 | 29,2% |
| Social | 20 | 18,9% |
| Educational / preventive | 9 | 8,5% |
| Sensationalist | 10 | 9,4% |

Finally, regarding the inclusion of legal, emotional, or preventive context, only 15.1% of the news articles (16 cases) presented a comprehensive approach combining these elements. In 30.2% (32 articles), the crime was explained in general terms, and in 25.5% (27 articles) an explicit reference to legal frameworks such as the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code (COIP) was also included. However, in 29.2% of the corpus (31 articles), no type of contextualization was identified, with coverage in these cases limited to describing the operation or judicial process.

Regarding respect for victims' privacy, 70.8% of the analyzed news (75 cases) fully protected the identity of children and adolescents, avoiding the disclosure of names, faces, data, or contexts that could enable identification. However, 18.9% of the publications (20 articles) showed partial protection of privacy, while 10.4% (11 articles) violated this principle by including elements that could facilitate indirect identification of the victims. Although 70.8% of the corpus avoided direct exposure, approximately 3 out of every 10 articles presented some level of vulnerability. Concerning non-sensationalist treatment, 59.4% of the news (63 cases) maintained a respectful approach in both headlines and body text. A total of 30.2% (32 articles) adopted a neutral tone, while 10.4% (11 articles) used sensationalist resources, such as alarmist headlines and wording or emphasis on morbid aspects of the crime or its potential impact on the community.

Considering accuracy and source verification, a strong dependence on single or institution-related sources was observed. In 85.8% of the news (91 cases), only one source was used, generally of an official or institutional nature, such as the National Police, the Office of the Attorney General, or other public officials. Only 12.3% of the publications (13 articles) incorporated multiple sources, while 1.9% (2 articles) did not mention any explicit source; these correspond to editorials, a genre characterized by expressing the outlet's position and not necessarily relying on direct or indirect citation of sources. This pattern reveals limited diversity of voices in the coverage, with scarce presence of specialized sources, civil society organizations, or actors linked to prevention and rights protection.

The correct use of terminology, 67% of the news (71 cases) used partially correct language, employing legal terms imprecisely or without sufficient contextualization. A total of 32.1% (34 articles) used terminology correctly and in context, while only 0.9% (1 article) showed incorrect or vague usage. In terms of recognizing the crime as a serious violation of rights, 65.1% of the news (69 cases) explicitly presented it as a serious crime. Meanwhile, 30.2% (32 articles) adopted a neutral approach without emphasizing its severity, and 4.7% (5 articles) tended to trivialize the event, treating it as an isolated occurrence or merely a police operation. One of the weakest aspects identified was the inclusion of help or reporting mechanisms. In 90.6% of the news (96 cases), no support channels, reporting lines, or protection institutions were mentioned. Only 3.8% (4 articles) included this information partially, and just 5.7% (6 articles) offered clear and useful guidance for the audience.

Results shows that the contextualization of the crime was limited. A total of 41.5% of the news (44 cases) provided no explanatory context, 36.8% (39 articles) offered partial contextualization, and only 21.7% (23 articles) explained more comprehensively what the crime entails, how it occurs, and who the most frequent victims are.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings from the discourse analysis and the evaluation of the communicational quality of media coverage on child pornography. Consistent with the theoretical framework, the discussion focuses on dominant narrative frames, representations of victims and perpetrators, and the ethical and social implications of journalistic practices. The results show that Ecuadorian digital media construct meaning around the crime largely through specific narrative decisions that shape how responsibility, impact, and social responses are understood, ultimately defining the role of the media in addressing a serious violation of children's rights.

A key finding is the strong dominance of an official or institutional narrative. Most coverage is centered on police operations and arrests and relies heavily on official sources such as the National Police and the Prosecutor's Office. This framing presents the crime primarily as a matter of law enforcement, emphasizing state response while downplaying broader issues such as causes, prevention, and long-term consequences. As framing theory suggests, this selective emphasis may create a perception of effective control while obscuring the structural and social complexity of the problem.

Another important result is the near-total depersonalization of victims, which, although intended to protect their identity, also risks making the harm invisible. The absence of victims' voices reduces the emotional and social dimension of the crime, shifting attention toward institutional action and judicial punishment. At the same time, perpetrators are often described using neutral legal language, but sometimes through stigmatizing or punitive terms that individualize and pathologize the crime, reinforcing stereotypes rather than addressing it as a broader social issue. The inclusion of unnecessary personal details about perpetrators can also lead to indirect identification of victims or stigmatization of communities.

Finally, while the coverage shows some ethical progress—such as avoiding explicit sensationalism and generally protecting victims' privacy—it presents important limitations. There is little contextualization, minimal inclusion of preventive or educational information, and very limited guidance for reporting or seeking help. The heavy reliance on official sources reduces diversity of perspectives and weakens the informative and social

value of the news. Overall, the coverage reflects a tension between basic ethical compliance and narrative patterns that restrict a deeper understanding of the crime and its structural implications.

CONCLUSIONES

- Ecuadorian digital media predominantly frame child pornography cases through official and law-enforcement narratives, emphasizing police operations and judicial actions while providing limited social, educational, or preventive context.
- Although most news coverage protects victims' identities and avoids explicit sensationalism, the frequent depersonalization of victims and the limited inclusion of diverse sources reduce the public's understanding of the human and social impact of the crime.
- The lack of contextual information, prevention-oriented content, and reporting or support mechanisms weakens the educational and social value of media coverage, highlighting the need for more rights-based and socially responsible journalism.
- Ecuadorian digital media predominantly frame child pornography cases through official and law-enforcement narratives, emphasizing police operations and judicial actions while providing limited social, educational, or preventive context.
- Although most news coverage protects victims' identities and avoids explicit sensationalism, the frequent depersonalization of victims and the limited inclusion of diverse sources reduce the public's understanding of the human and social impact of the crime.
- The lack of contextual information, prevention-oriented content, and reporting or support mechanisms weakens the educational and social value of media coverage, highlighting the need for more rights-based and socially responsible journalism.

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