

## **Comparative study of the frequency of use of natural therapies among the Spanish population and their public image on digital media**

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### *Introduction*

The Observatory of Natural Therapies, based in Catalonia, published in 2008 the results of a quantitative study, the only one so far in Spain, indicating the frequency of use of some alternative therapies. For this, 2,000 individuals were interviewed, aged between 16 and 65, with a sampling error of +/- 2.25%, and a confidence level of 95%. The frequency of use of the techniques were: yoga, 32.5%; acupuncture / TCM, 31.5%; massage, 28.4%; Homeopathy, 23.0%; Reflexology, 16.1%; Tai-chi, 13.3%; Flower therapy, 12.0%; Lymphatic drainage, 9.1%; Naturopathy, 8.8%; Reiki, 8.4%; Osteopathy, 8.2%; Shiatsu, 3.9%; and Kinesiology, 2.1%.

Based on the thirteenth techniques most often reported on the survey to improve some ailment, we did a boolean search in online newspapers to know how representative these techniques are in newspapers and what bias is transmitted (positive or negative). We have selected the period from January 1, 2015 until July 31, 2015, to conduct searches and analyze the texts of the following newspapers: *ABC*, *El Pais*, *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*.

This period of study coincides with a major social controversy, widely discussed in the media and on social networks. A popular talk show host of TVE, the Spanish public television, was speaking in her program on health effects of aromatherapy, when she said: "the smell of lemon can prevent cancer". Many experts criticized public television for promoting alternative techniques on their health programs. In the wake of this event different techniques of natural medicine (in favor and against) began to appear in the media, and in the Spanish Congress, the Socialist Party submitted a legislative proposal to improve health information on the public television. In this study, we assess the scope of this event in the transmission of social imaginary and compare if the frequency of use of these therapies is linked with the frequency of media presence with a positive image.

### *Method*

As an indicator to know what therapies we wanted to analyze, we have selected the data from the only one survey published on the use and consumption of complementary therapies in Spain

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(2008). There're other studies about the use of homeopathy (2013 and 2016), but homeopathy is just one technique of 139 that has listed the Ministry of Health in Spain.

Therapies	Percentage
Yoga	32.5%
Acupuncture	31.5%
Chiropractor	28.4%
Homeopathy	23.0%
Reflexology	16.1%
Tai-chi	13.3%
Flower therapy	12.0%
Lymphatic drainage,	9.1%
Naturopathy	8.8%
Reiki	8.4%
Osteopathy	8.2%
Shiatsu	3.9%
Kinesiology	2.1%

**Tab. 1: Frecuency of use from Spanish Population.**

In this table, you can share the frequency of use of the techniques: yoga, 32.5%; acupuncture, 31.5%; massage, 28.4%; Homeopathy, 23.0%; Reflexology, 16.1%; Tai-chi, 13.3%; Flower therapy, 12.0%; Lymphatic drainage, 9.1%; Naturopathy, 8.8%; Reiki, 8.4%; Osteopathy, 8.2%; Shiatsu, 3.9%; and Kinesiology, 2.1%. As is shown in Table 1, Yoga was the most used technique; followed by acupuncture, chiropractic and fourthly, Homeopathy.

For check if there is a relationship between the use of these complementary therapies among the Spanish population and the frequency of publication on media, we have analyzed digital media to know what bias is reporting (positive or negative) by social media. First, we selected the period from 1 January 2015 until 31 July 2015 (six months), to search each of the therapies listed in the above table in the stories written on the following digital diaries: *ABC*, *El País*, *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*. These are the four digital general information newspapers with highest audience share in Spain

We found total of 759 documents contained in the headline or the text cited one of the 13 natural therapies, according to the 2008 survey, more used by the Spanish citizens. Once the noise or the junk information was eliminated in the selection process. We did the searching of documents in the data base myNews.

## *Results*

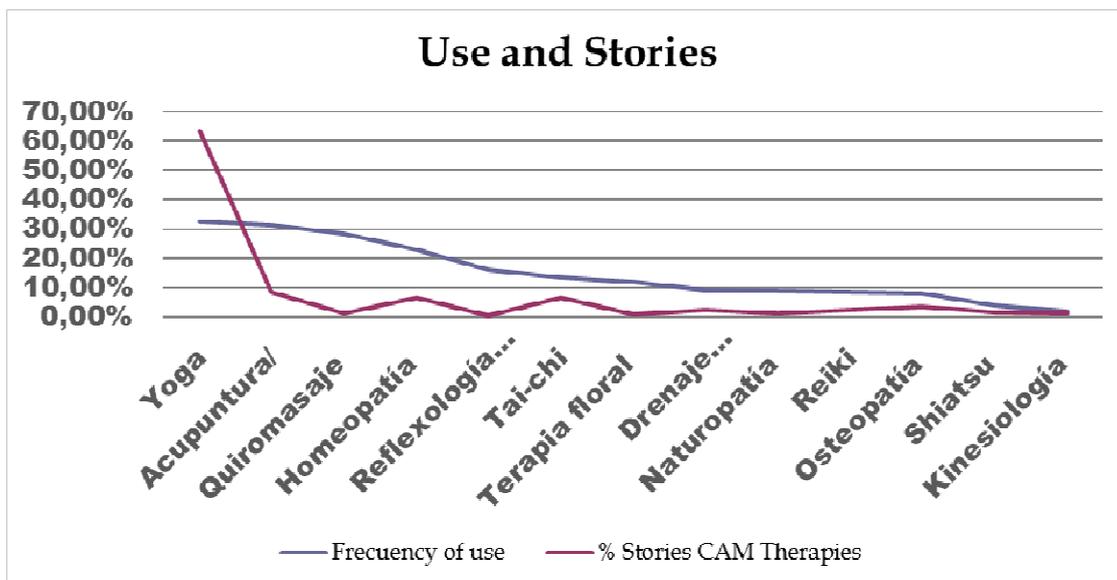
Yoga is reported in 483 texts published in six months in the four newspapers. Therefore, it's the heath technique most frequently covered by digital media. Yoga is widely covered by digital newspapers.

In table 2, you can see Yoga was the therapy reported a greatest number of stories and the less number of stories was the Reflexotherapy.

Therapies	ABC	El País	El Mundo	La Vanguardia	Stories	Percentage
Yoga	97	117	113	156	483	63,63%
Acupuncture	16	11	10	26	63	8,30%
Chiropractor	1	2	1	6	10	1,31%
Homeopathy	10	16	10	13	49	6,45%
Reflexology	0	1	1	2	4	0,52%
Tai-chi	12	6	9	22	49	6,45%
Flower therapy	3	0	2	2	7	0,92%
Lymphatic drainage,	5	5	2	7	19	2,50%
Naturopathy	1	1	0	7	9	1,18%
Reiki	7	2	3	7	19	2,50%
Osteopathy	8	2	5	12	27	3,55%
Shiatsu	2	3	1	5	11	1,40%
Kinesiology	1	1	2	5	9	1,18%
Total	163	167	159	270	759	99,89%

Tab. 2: Frequency of stories on digital diaries.

Except yoga, other therapies are represented below 10%. Yoga is overrepresented detriment of the other therapies. The use and consumption of complementary therapies among the population is better balanced. At least, there are four therapies that could be highlighted: yoga, acupuncture, chiropractic and homeopathy.



Graphic 1: Percentage Use CAM Therapies versus S Percentage Stories on Digital Diaries

In this graphic, we can check that the use of alternative therapies is greater than the number of piece of news reported on digital media, with the exception of yoga, which is already a Western icon.

### *Conclusions*

There is no relationship between frequency of publication stories about CAM therapies on digital diaries and frequency of use by Spanish citizen. We could say the use of complementary therapies is spreading by word of mouth. This is the main conclusion we have obtained from this research. This fact has made us think about other ways in which citizens are informed about those particular therapies.

We have found that 4 out of 5 pieces of news, not about a complementary therapy, in particular, but one or several therapies are reported in the body of the text, in stories about another main topic. For example, sports news or lifestyle.

Representativeness and visibility of complementary therapies is very low on media. About 75% of the stories are neutral. However, negative news would be published in a future as a response of some social groups that are opposed to the presence of these therapies in official spaces (universities, public media or other institutions), due to the lack of scientific evidence

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