

Disinformation in Media Coverage of the 2014 and 2022 Oil Spills in the Cuninico Community

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Abstract

This study analyzes the thematic content of the national coverage of three traditional digital media outlets and three alternative ones regarding the oil spills that occurred in the locality of Cuninico, territory of the Amazonian indigenous people, Kukama Kukamiria. It focuses on digital news material from 2014 to 2024. The analysis was conducted using a content observation sheet with eight categories. The objective of the analysis is to identify opposing narratives that may show perceptual disparity regarding the event, whether in favor of the indigenous peoples, the oil company, or even neutral. In this way, it is observed how such narratives or the omission of information play a role in climate disinformation concerning the Amazon.

It was evident that traditional media focus on reproducing official discourses, while alternative media provide greater coverage both in quantity and in depth regarding the event. The main discourse found was that of guilt imposed by Petroperú and state officials on the indigenous communities regarding responsibility for the 2022 spill. In this way, two types of disinformation were validated: omission of information and distraction; both of which largely contribute to the deterioration of perception towards the indigenous communities and the Amazon.

Introduction

Climate disinformation and the fight against climate change

Before discussing climate disinformation, it's necessary to define what we mean by it. According to the Climate Action Against Disinformation Coalition (CAAD) climate disinformation refers to "false or misleading content that undermines the existence or impacts of climate change, the undeniable human influence on it, and the urgent need for action in line with the IPCC scientific consensus and the goals of the Paris Agreement." A key point to highlight is that much of this content is produced intentionally and for profit. It also includes distorting scientific data to generate distrust in climate science and related fields. Additionally, it covers deceptive actions that claim to support climate goals but ultimately have the opposite effect by contributing to global warming.

This type of content represents a major threat to climate action, as it delays the development of policies aligned with the Paris Agreement. Social media has amplified climate denial on a massive scale, since information can be shared quickly without verifying its accuracy. Financial incentives also exist for spreading this misleading content online. Proposed solutions include promoting transparency, fostering global cooperation to address the issue, and supporting political initiatives designed to combat climate disinformation (CAAD, n.d.).

Case study

This study seeks to examine how Peruvian traditional and alternative media covered the 2014 and 2022 oil spills in the Cuninico ravine, affecting the Kukama Kukamiria people, and how such coverage reflects patterns of climate disinformation or omission of information. In this context, the section will address the intersectionality between climate disinformation and Indigenous peoples to highlight the relevance of this topic. Subsequently, the possible implications for the Kukama Kukamiria community will be discussed, considering the role of disinformation in shaping public perception and policy responses in the present case study.

The media coverage in Indigenous populations

It is important to mention that the media respond to a media agenda, which means they select the information they will present to the public according to their topics of interest. In this way, the media preemptively choose the topics that are relevant to the public and

that align with their stance. It can therefore be stated that the media shape their readers' perception of the world through their news (Valverde, 2024). The danger lies in the fact that the information provided by the media is considered absolute truth, which, in this case, affects the urban population's perception of the Amazonian Indigenous population. One example that highlights the misrepresentation of Indigenous communities in media coverage is the Baguazo socio-environmental conflict in 2009, in which the dominant state discourse portrayed Indigenous peoples as "against the country's development" (based on a primary-export model), thereby positioning them in apparent conflict with the interests of the majority population. This occurred without a thorough analysis of the state's unmet obligations, which prioritized foreign investment to carry out extractive activities on Indigenous territory (Valverde, 2024).

This form of media representation not only distorts socio-environmental conflicts but also relies on stereotypes that affect the general perception of Indigenous populations. News coverage involving these groups has long been shaped by prejudice, portraying them as "savages" or as "something from the past" (Barreiro et al., 2019). Thus, the media play a crucial role in either reinforcing these stereotypes or, alternatively, contributing to their deconstruction.

Such patterns are also observed in other contexts. Ivars (2021) conducted research analyzing the stance of the Argentine newspaper *Río Negro* on unconventional hydrocarbon extraction and the social conflicts arising from the events in Allen in 2015. The study concluded that the newspaper's position helped maintain established social structures regarding economic and political realities. Similarly, from a perspective closer to the present case, Orellana (2022) examines the media coverage by Peruvian newspapers of the Repsol oil spill in Ventanilla in 2022. The study found that traditional newspapers such as *El Comercio*, *La República*, *RPP*, and *Trome* adopted a sensationalist approach, exaggerating the events and emphasizing the irreversible catastrophe involved.

The present research draws on the conclusions of Orellana's (2022) analysis and incorporates the additional variable that this is not only an environmental disaster, but one that has affected the community of Cuninico, which is composed of the Indigenous Kukama Kukamiria population. In this context, there is a greater likelihood of climate disinformation, which could reinforce a negative image of Amazonian Indigenous peoples and hinder their struggle to defend their right to life within an oppressive system.

On this point, AsiaNews explains the consequences of climate disinformation for Indigenous communities in Thailand, stating that "public acceptance of these narratives allows authorities to adopt increasingly severe measures, including criminalization

through restrictive laws, intimidation, and even physical violence against these groups” (n.d.). In other words, climate disinformation fosters an environment in which the state can implement repressive measures against Indigenous peoples. Given that similar patterns have occurred historically for Indigenous communities worldwide, it is reasonable to infer that these dynamics are also present in Latin America. Unfortunately, the perspective of the predominantly urban population tends to be considered “correct,” both because they hold the majority of positions of power and because Indigenous peoples are a minority, often physically and socially distant from urban centers.

Contextual framework

This section will address the social, historical, and geographical context of the disasters. It is important to note that the information collected comes from official sources rather than media reports. Additionally, it draws on previous fieldwork conducted in the locality, verifying the situation following the spill.

Oil extraction in the Peruvian Amazon

Oil extraction in Peru emerged as a central component of the country’s strategy for economic growth and development, reflecting the strategic importance attributed to hydrocarbons. The industry experienced its major expansion in the 1970s following the discovery of oil wells in the Amazon, particularly in the Corrientes River basin, by the state-owned company Petroperú (Chirif, 2010). This development was further accelerated by the construction of the Norperuvian Pipeline (ONP), initiated in 1974 and completed in 1978. The ONP stretches across much of the Peruvian Amazon from east to west, crosses the Andes Mountains, and terminates on the northern Peruvian coast in the Piura department.

After 14 mostly American oil companies began exploratory activities in the region, only Petroperú and the private company Occidental Petroleum Co. (OXY) remained operating in the territory. These companies initiated exploration in Block 1AB, later renamed Block 192, and Block 8 (see Map 1) (Okamoto, 2011). Both are historically significant oil fields, being among the most productive in the country. At its peak, Block 192 alone accounted for 50% of oil extraction in Loreto. Currently, Petroperú is promoting its reactivation despite Indigenous resistance, given the government’s failure to honor agreements (Infobae, 2024).

Compared to sectors such as agriculture, livestock, and forestry, which contributed 6.3% to GDP, and the mining sector, with 9.1% between 2007 and 2021, oil production in the country

can be considered relatively low, accounting for only 1.6% of GDP. However, its importance for fiscal revenues is greater, representing 6% in 2020. Regarding the significance of the Amazon as a hydrocarbon extraction zone, its production has historically been comparable to that of the northern coast, corresponding to the departments of Tumbes and Piura, along with the blocks in the continental shelf. Between 2011 and 2022, the Amazon accounted for 35.5% of total oil production, the northern coast for 44.16%, and the continental shelf for 20.35%. These figures indicate that the Amazon contributes a substantial share of total crude production, in addition to being the only region where heavy crude is found, whereas in other regions the crude is considered light (Viale, 2024).

Figure 1



Hydrocarbon blocks in Peru, indicated in green, and the route of the Norperuvian Pipeline (ONP) marked in yellow.

Source: Perupetro.

Oil spills in the Amazon

Despite the significant economic benefits for the country, such as attracting foreign investment, the long-term negative consequences are borne by Amazonian Indigenous peoples, whose territories are partly occupied by hydrocarbon blocks (Sullares, 2011). They are the ones who face the effects of numerous spills that damage their lands and undermine their quality of life. In this regard, what is promoted as a tool for the country's economic development is, in reality, for the directly affected communities a mechanism of impoverishment and rights violations, as their main sources of income, fishing and agriculture, are severely impacted. Additionally, adverse consequences include threats to their health and lower academic performance among children (León et al., 2024; Espinosa, 2016).

Since the Supervisory Agency for Investment in Energy and Mining (OSINERGMIN) began recording oil spill emergencies in 1997, according to the report *La sombra de los hidrocarburos* prepared by the Hydrocarbons Impacts Working Group of the National Coordinator of Human Rights (CNDDHH), a total of 1,462 oil spills had occurred by May 2023. It is important to note that the majority of these incidents took place in the Peruvian Amazon (831) and, secondly, along the coast (609), which also has a high presence of oil operations. Of these, 707 spills occurred in the Loreto department and 566 in Piura. This distribution reflects the number of hydrocarbon blocks in each department, indicating a concentration of this resource in these regions. Another notable figure is the annual frequency of spills, which has increased since 2006–2007. Evidence of this upward trend can be seen in 2020, 2021, and 2022, when 133, 136, and 181 spills were recorded, respectively. Currently, it is likely that the number has exceeded 200 spills per year. A more specific figure relevant to the case addressed in this study is the total number of spills that have occurred along the ONP route. According to the primary source, Petroperú, there have been 94 incidents between 2014 and May 2025, “of which 79 were caused by third parties, 12 by natural forces, 2 by equipment failure, and 1 by material failure” (n.d.). The relevance of the cause “caused by third parties” will be discussed further below.

The Kukama Kukamiria Indigenous People of the Lower Marañón

The Kukama Kukamiria Indigenous community is one of the 60 ethnic groups in the Peruvian Amazon, and their language belongs to the Tupi-Guarani linguistic family (Barrantes & Glave, 2014). Over 800 years ago, they were located between the Paraguay and Paraná rivers and the Atlantic coast. From there, they began migrating to areas of the Upper Amazon, the Lower Huallaga, Pastaza, and Marañón, which constitutes their main territory. Although in smaller numbers, Kukama communities are also found along the Tigre, Urituyacu, and Huallaga rivers. According to the 2017 national census, 10,762 people

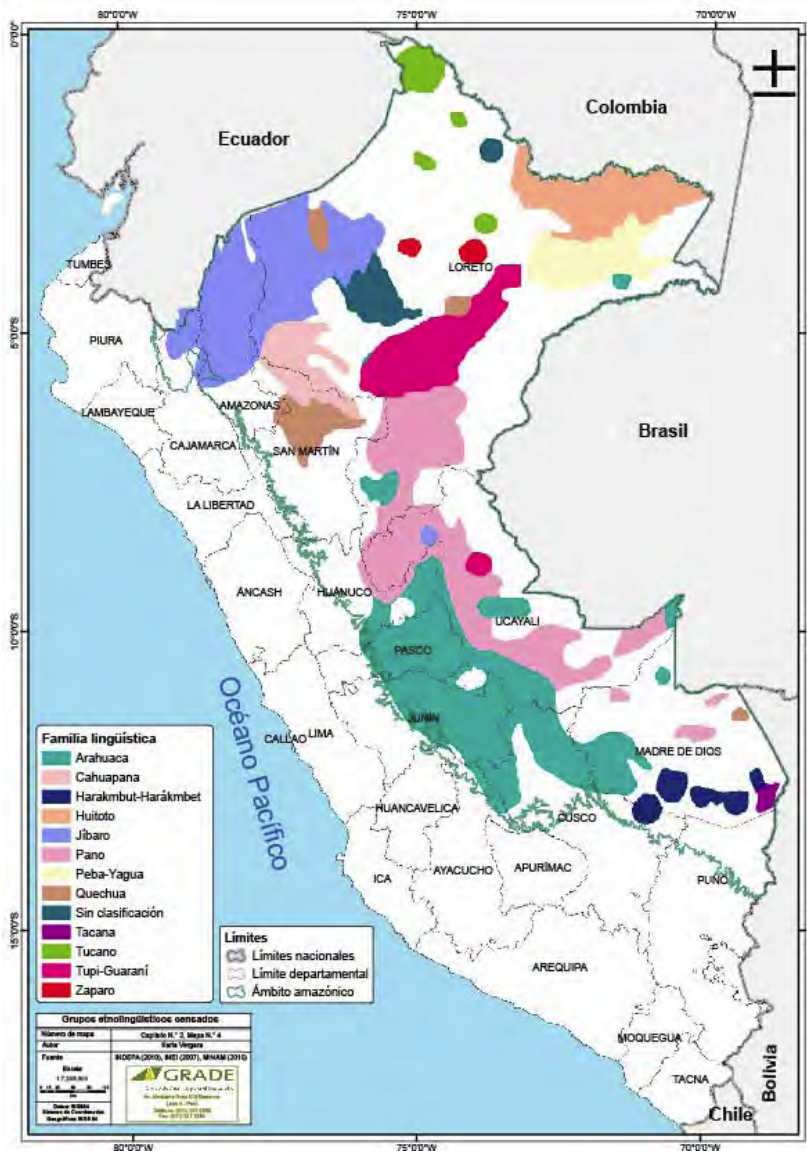
self-identified as part of the Kukama Kukamiria people. However, the actual number, according to the Ministry of Culture, is estimated at around 37,053 people.

Like many Amazonian Indigenous peoples, they were also subjected to various authorities, serving as domestic workers or laborers on estates in exchange for education, protection, and evangelization. Additionally, their involvement during the rubber boom between 1880 and 1914 is notable. In the 1970s, at the beginning of oil exploitation in the country, they were employed as laborers in urban areas.

It is important to note that their primary economic activity is fishing, not only because it is their main source of income due to its commercialization thanks to their location near the rivers, but also because of its ancestral connection to their beliefs. Fishing appears in their origin myths, through the hero Ini Yara, or the “great fisherman” in the Kukama language, as well as in the collective memory of the community across generations (Mincul, n.d.). In this way, the water resource is a crucial part of their worldview, as their cosmos is divided into three realms: the earth, the sky, and “the world of water.” The latter is paramount, inhabited by mythological aquatic beings such as yacurunas, bufeos, mermaids, and the water people (Grados & Pacheco, 2016). The water people are considered guardians for those living on land. Due to oil spills, these beings have been dying in the river, which directly affects the memory and spiritual life of the Kukama Kukamiria people.

Regarding the Kukama Kukamiria community in the locality of Cuninico, in the Parinari district, it is located eight hours by canoe from the nearest city, Nauta, which in turn is two hours away from the capital of Loreto and the largest city in the Peruvian Amazon, Iquitos. The community is composed of 130 families, totaling approximately 300 people. Following the spill, 66% of the community’s food basket derived from natural resources has been put at risk. Consequently, they are now more vulnerable to food insecurity, which in turn reduces their quality of life (Alfaro, 2022). This issue is increasingly affecting various populations across Peru, many of them due to events linked to climate change and other environmental factors.

Figure 2



Geographic area of residence of language families in 2007. Source: INEI, Second Census of Indigenous Communities of the Peruvian Amazon, 2007

The 2014 Oil Spill in Cuninico

This was the first spill experienced by the native community of Cuninico, located in the Cuninico River basin, one of the tributaries of the Marañón River, which in turn feeds the great Amazon River. The communities of San Francisco, Nueva Santa Rosa, and Nueva Esperanza were also affected. On June 22, 2014, 2,358 barrels (99,036 gallons) of oil were spilled. As a result, it has been described as one of the largest spills in the Amazon

(Ancieta & Morvelli, 2024). The incident reportedly began at kilometer 41+833 of Section I of the ONP.

Subsequently, the community members became aware of the spill due to its effects on the taste of their fish, the presence of oil stains in the water, and dead fish. It is important to note that the community immediately alerted Petroperú; however, a temporary clamp was not installed at the pipeline rupture until July 2 (Alfaro, 2022). As a result of this lack of action, a complaint was filed with the Environmental Assessment and Oversight Agency (OEFA) for noncompliance with environmental management, damage to flora and fauna, and potential harm to human life and health.

In this way, Petroperú was sanctioned under the PAMA for failing to carry out maintenance actions and for noncompliance with its Contingency Plan, which establishes the series of measures to be taken in the event of disasters both at company facilities and in the specifically affected area (Ancieta & Morvelli, 2024). According to Petroperú (n.d.), its current Contingency Plan consists of the following stages: initial environmental remediation, main environmental remediation, final environmental remediation, and environmental and social assessment. At that time, the following actions were implemented: containment and recovery of the spilled oil, as well as cleaning and remediation of the affected areas. This plan was in effect from July 2014 to March 2015. Between July and September of that period, the communities also received food supplies from Petroperú.

At the end of the period for implementing the Contingency Plan, the proposed items were not fully completed. For instance, the transportation of contaminated material reached 93% completion, while the restoration of the affected area had not even begun (0%). In this regard, OEFA declared Petroperú administratively responsible for the spill and again granted a six-month period to rectify its actions (Ancieta & Morvelli, 2024).

The 2022 Oil Spill in Cuninico

On September 16, 2022, eight years after the first disaster and without having fully recovered from it, a new spill struck the same locality, this time at kilometer 42+350 of the ONP. Crude oil flowed into the Cuninico ravine for nine hours before being stopped. In this way, it reached the Marañón River, where more than 100 Indigenous communities were affected. Immediately, in addition to Cuninico, the localities of Urarinas, San Pedro, Nueva Esperanza, Maypuco, and Santa Rosa in the Urarinas district were also impacted. It is important to note that in September 2022, this was the third spill registered and associated with the ONP (DAR, 2022).

The National Institute of Civil Defense (INDECI) reported that the response and rehabilitation actions included sampling by the National Water Authority (ANA) as part of emergency environmental monitoring on September 21. Subsequently, the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MINEM) reported that on September 20, Petroperú had provided humanitarian assistance to the native community of Cuninico in the form of 100 boxes of 20 liters of water. The following day, an additional 272 boxes of water, along with the same number of food packages, were delivered. Furthermore, 34 barriers were installed to stop the flow of crude oil, and cleanup operations began.

Regarding the testimonies provided, the community leader Mariluz Canaquiri, the current recipient of the 2025 Goldman Environmental Prize, stated that she had not received any prior notice of the spill from Petroperú that would have allowed her to collect as much water as possible before the crude reached their communities. Subsequently, OEFA reported that Petroperú concluded the incident had affected 5 hectares and involved 2,500 barrels. Finally, it is also important to note that the Loreto department was declared in a state of emergency on September 25 by the Ministry of Environment (MINAM) (Mongabay, 2022).

Objectives

The objectives of this research are to analyze the discourses found in digital news articles from both traditional and alternative media covering the two oil spills in the Cuninico ravine (2014 and 2022).

By examining the discourses in both types of media, it is expected to identify contrasting narratives that may reflect perceptions of the events, whether in favor of Indigenous peoples, the oil company, or even taking an impartial stance. Subsequently, the study will explore how these narratives, or the omission of information, play a role in climate disinformation regarding the Amazon.

According to Stecher (2009), who presents the methodological-theoretical framework of discourse analysis, power discourses are those that show indications of the social reality of the population, thereby exerting considerable influence over people's thinking. They are referred to as "indications" because discourse reflects only one dimension of social life, not its entirety. Furthermore, discourse analysis examines the relationships between language and power, revealing the mechanisms of domination in contemporary capitalist societies. In addition, it also uncovers discourses of resistance against hegemonic standards.

The perception of the Amazon in Peru is still stigmatized. As Espinoza (2016) notes, it is believed “that it is an uninhabited region with fertile lands that should be better utilized” (p. 153). Therefore, I consider that the coverage of such disasters is where polarized discourses can be found, creating divisions within the population.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, using the content analysis method. Texts will be interpreted based on decomposition and classification (Orellana, 2022). The study starts from the premise that language is not only a means of expressing ideas but also an active factor in social reality. In this way, language is not static; it is capable of performing actions (Santander, 2011). This language becomes information that humans use to make decisions, highlighting the importance of the language employed in countering disinformation.

The sample consists of a total of 165 digital news articles from three alternative media outlets and three traditional media outlets (see Table 1 for distribution). The traditional media considered were *El Comercio*, *La República*, and RPP, while the alternative media included Servindi, Actualidad Ambiental (SPDA), and Wayka. From the total of 165 articles, a sample of 80 articles was drawn proportionally according to the number of articles found from each digital outlet. This selection was made randomly.

Furthermore, the criterion for selecting traditional media was based on data collected regarding the weekly reach of digital platforms, according to the 2024 Reuters Institute Digital News Report (see Table 2). The highest weekly usage rates were prioritized: RPP with 24%, *El Comercio* with 23%, and *La República* with 22%. The portal Peru.com was not considered because it is managed by the El Comercio Group, which already includes its main portal (Cueva, 2024).

This approach avoids potential redundancy or overlap in editorial positions across the news articles.

Table 1

Digital news outlets selected for the sample according to exclusion criteria and total number of articles considered

Type of digital media	Digital outlet	Website	Total
Tradicional	El Comercio	www.elcomercio.pe	14
Tradicional	La República	www.larepublica.pe	24
Tradicional	RPP	www.rpp.pe	31
Alternative	Servindi	www.servindi.org	69
Alternative	Actualidad Ambiental (SPDA)	www.actualidadambiental.pe	18
Alternative	Wayka	www.wayka.pe	9
Total			165

Note. The table shows the six selected digital news outlets, classified as traditional and alternative.

To select the sample units, articles were considered from the day each spill began (June 22, 2014, and September 16, 2022) and any subsequent events that occurred over the following two years. To streamline the process, the following Google search shortcut was used as a model: **"site:larepublica.pe 'cuninico'"**. This limits search results to articles from a specific website that contain the selected keyword. Considering that Cuninico is a little-known locality with limited media coverage, almost all of the articles found were directly related to the spills.

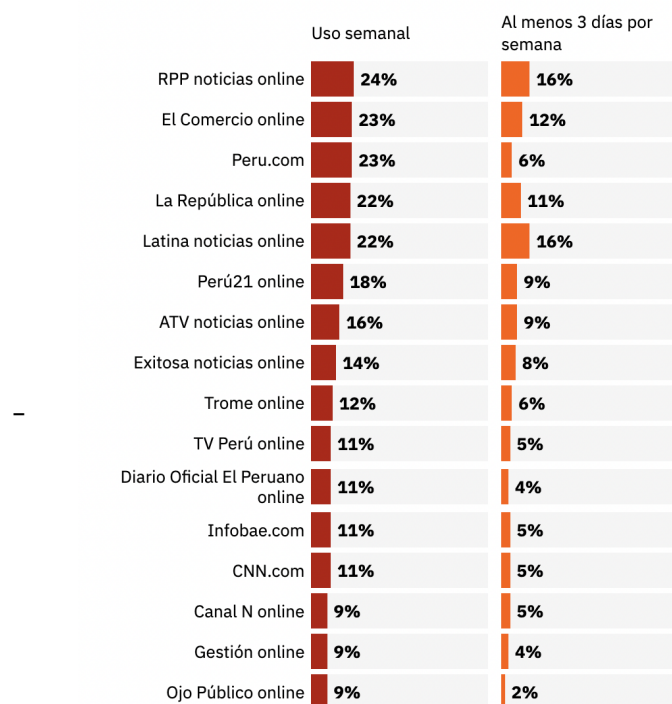
Table 2

Weekly reach of traditional digital newspapers in Peru

Alcance semanal - online

ONLINE

Perú



[Descargar los datos](#) • [Insertar](#) • Creado con [Datawrapper](#)



Fuente: Cueva (2024). Peru's Digital News Report.

To conduct the content analysis, focused on the ideas established around the oil spills in the locality of Cuninico, a quantitative organization of the information based on categories was used. This organization includes themes and subthemes addressed in the articles.

Results

Table 3

Categories	Subcategorías	Traditional media			Alternative media		
		El Comercio	La República	RPP	Servindi	Actualidad Ambiental	Wayka
Identification of responsible parties	Petroperú	1	0	0	4	1	0
	Third parties	3	7	0	3	0	0
Technical Information	Procedure	3	1	2	1	1	0
	Contingency plan	4	4	3	0	0	0
Government Statements	Structural	0	1	1	0	2	1
	Circumstantial	0	5	5	1	3	0
Spill Impact	Environmental impact	4	0	2	0	2	0
	Economic impact	2	0	0	1	0	0
	Health impact	2	0	0	2	1	2
Legal Procedures between Petroperú and the Government	Parlamento Nacional, OEFA, Juzgados, Tribunal Constitucional	3	1	0	13	1	2
Petroperú's response	Magnitude of impact	6	2	0	2	0	0
	Official reports	8	4	5	1	0	1
Direct criticism	Petroperú	1	1	1	22	4	4
	Community	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Government	5	0	1	7	1	5

Mention of the Kukama Kukamiria people	Contact with Petroperú	3	1	2	0	0	0
	Procedure	1	7	0	0	0	0
	Participation in the debate	2	15	6	10	2	1
	Resistance	3	0	6	4	0	0
	Testimonies	0	0	0	2	1	2
	Impact	1	4	6	3	4	2

Note. Table showing results regarding the number of mentions for each category.

The results show that traditional media adopt a more technical approach than alternative media, as evidenced by the higher number of mentions in this category. This information refers to the actions implemented by Petroperú upon becoming aware of the spill, both in terms of simple procedures and those aligned with its Contingency Plan.

Furthermore, there is a disparity in the identification of responsible parties: alternative media largely hold Petroperú accountable, while traditional media place responsibility on third parties. Government statements are more present in traditional media, contrasting with the coverage of Petroperú's legal procedures with the government in alternative outlets. Traditional media also highlight Petroperú's official communications regarding the physical extent of the spills. Perhaps the most notable aspect is the direct and explicit criticism of Petroperú by alternative media, particularly the digital outlet Servindi.

Additionally, there is greater criticism of the government, although *El Comercio* also presents some cases.

Regarding the involvement of the Kukama Kukamiria people in the published information, both types of media present circumstances in which the community could participate in procedures and provide their opinions on legal measures. However, there is a greater focus on "life after the spill" for the affected communities when real testimonies are conveyed through alternative media. Finally, both types of media also mention the impact of the spill on the community, albeit with differences in the level of detail provided. This will be illustrated with examples.

Overall, traditional media can be seen as adopting a neutral or merely informative stance, reporting Petroperú's statements and official reports without offering an opinion. In contrast, alternative media take a clear stance in favor of the affected Kukama Kukamiria communities by including testimonies and challenging the arguments presented in

Petroperú's official statements, particularly regarding the attribution of responsibility for the spill.

That said, the following sections will detail the categories in which the greatest disparities are observed: **"Identification of responsible parties," "Technical information," "Legal procedures between Petroperú and the Government," "Direct criticism,"** and **"Mention of the Kukama Kukamiria people."** A brief description of the most notable and striking excerpts in terms of language and content for each category is provided below.

Identification of responsible parties

Responsibility for the June 2014 spill is unanimously attributed to Petroperú. However, it is possible to observe, based on the publication dates of the articles, that the resolution with the findings was issued four months after the event. This delay may reflect the slow response of state agencies in addressing environmental disasters. Furthermore, in the Servindi report, the phrase "as it has not been proven that the responsible parties were native" suggests that, during the initial four-month waiting period, it was assumed that the native communities were responsible for the spill.

In the case of the 2022 spill, the disparity is more complex. On one hand, two days after the event, Petroperú stated that it was an "intentional cut" but did not specify the actors involved. Subsequently, Galo Vásquez Silva, the *apu* of Cuninico, and the lawyer from the Legal Defense Institute (IDL) confirmed that it was caused by a third party, after a representative was accused of the incident. On the other hand, one month later, the then-Prime Minister, Aníbal Torres, directly accused the native communities of cutting the ONP for monetary gain (repairs and compensation).

"The Environmental Evaluation and Oversight Agency (OEFA) issued a directoral resolution concluding **that Petroperú bears administrative responsibility**" (*El Comercio*, 23/10/2014).

"As it has not been proven that the responsible parties were native, **the only plausible explanation lies in the age of the pipelines**, which has been tirelessly reported by the federations, as well as the excessive pressure they endure" (Servindi, 26/11/2014).

"According to the Environmental Evaluation and Oversight Agency (OEFA), Petroperú failed to comply with pipeline maintenance measures and is **therefore directly responsible for the consequences of the spill**" (Actualidad Ambiental, 14/06/2016).

"According to Petroperú, the oil spill that occurred on Friday at kilometer 42 of the Norperuano Pipeline (ONP) in the district of Urarinas (Loreto), affecting the Cuninico River and reaching the Marañón River, **was the result of an intentional cut**. This was reported by the Peruvian company on Saturday through an official statement" (La República, 18/09/2022).

"[Galo Vásquez Silva and lawyer] indicate that the intellectual authors are 'those bad companies that incite the population to attack the pipeline in order to later benefit from remediation contracts'" (Servindi, 06/10/2022).

"That the government has not assisted the population, that the government has not attended to the people detained by the natives. Absolutely false, because if that outlet were decent it would tell the truth: **that some members of those native communities are the ones cutting the pipeline in order to later claim repairs and compensation,**" (La República, 04/11/2022).

Technical Information

Regarding the first spill, technical information is presented similarly across both types of media and even uses the same language. It is evident that both paraphrase the same official statement from Petroperú. In the case of the second spill, more instances of technical information were found. Notably, the coverage highlights the steps Petroperú took following its Contingency Plan, specifically the delivery of supplies to the affected Indigenous communities.

"Petroperú's actions include **the placement of two containment plugs to prevent the spilled hydrocarbon from flowing into the Cuninico River** (a tributary of the Marañón), the recovery of crude oil, the provision of water and food to the native community of Cuninico, as well as the deployment of personnel to provide medical care" (El Comercio, 09/07/2014).

"In response to the event, OEFA highlighted that Petroperú had initiated the following actions: **the placement of two containment plugs to prevent the spilled hydrocarbon from flowing into the Cuninico River** (a tributary of the Marañón), crude oil recovery actions, the provision of water and food to the native community of Cuninico, and the deployment of personnel to provide medical care" (Actualidad Ambiental, 09/07/2014).

The Ombudsman's Office urged Petroperú to take immediate measures in response to the new oil spill reported today at kilometer 55 of the Norperuano Pipeline, which is already

affecting the Marañón River. **The autonomous agency stated in a communiqué that it is necessary to “identify the spill site, contain the oil, remediate the area, and assist the affected native communities”** (Servindi, 16/09/2022).

Company personnel arrived at the site and installed a metal clamp to contain the hydrocarbon. **The company will temporarily provide food and water to the affected communities** (El Comercio, 17/09/2022).

Petroperú announced that it will temporarily provide food and water, coordinating with local authorities. **This aims to assist the populations of neighboring communities in a supportive and preventive manner in response to the environmental contingency.** Additionally, the company emphasized that, in line with its social management policy, it **prioritizes dialogue with communities to carry out the tasks** it is responsible for promptly during such contingencies (RPP, 17/09/2022).

"As reported, after containing the crude oil leak with the installation of a metal clamp, containment barriers were placed at the mouth of the Cuninico River, at the confluence with the Marañón River, with 19 barriers installed so far. Their main function is to prevent the displacement of hydrocarbons. **These actions are carried out in accordance with Petroperú's Contingency Plan**" (La República, 18/09/2022).

The oil company has also delivered water and food supplies to eleven communities considered affected by the crude oil spill, including the native community of Cuninico. However, due to this blockade of river traffic on the Marañón River, **it will not be possible to continue with the scheduled deliveries, which affects the residents of the native communities** (RPP, 20/11/2022).

Legal Procedures of Petroperú with the State

In both spills, there is a clear reproduction of the official discourse provided by the resolutions of OEFA as well as the Constitutional Court. However, what stands out is the level of detail regarding the measures taken, which is more often reported by alternative media such as Servindi, along with opinions on these actions, mostly expressing disagreement.

"According to OEFA, Petroperú committed various violations: *failing to comply with the Environmental Management and Adaptation Program (PAMA)* by not performing maintenance actions at kilometer 41+833 of the Norperuano Pipeline; failing to comply with the Contingency Plan by not detecting or controlling in time the spill that occurred at

kilometer 41+833 of Section I of the Pipeline, thereby releasing oil into the environment and causing actual damage to flora and fauna and potential harm to human life or health" (El Comercio, 30/09/2015).

"The Environmental Evaluation and Oversight Agency (OEFA) sanctioned Petroperú with a fine of 2,578.30 UIT (S/. 10,184,285 soles) for failing to remediate the areas impacted by the spill [...]" (Actualidad Ambiental, 27/06/2016).

"The OEFA resolution of February 15, 2016, following the corresponding proceedings, **ordered Petroperú to immediately carry out maintenance on sections of the Norperuano Pipeline that had not yet been affected**, to replace damaged pipeline segments, and to prepare a report to the Ministry of Energy and Mines detailing the environmental impacts identified after the spills. All of this was mandated as a preventive measure" (Wayka, 21/07/2017).

1. Environmental remediation.

OEFA established the administrative responsibility of Petroperú for failing to provide maintenance to the Norperuano Pipeline, for causing actual damage to flora and fauna, and for posing a potential risk to human health. OEFA therefore ordered Petroperú to remediate the affected area.

2. Health and compensation for the spill.

The claim requesting healthcare assistance for those affected by the spill was upheld in two judicial instances and is currently in the enforcement stage of the ruling.

3. Maintenance of the Norperuano Pipeline.

A writ of amparo was filed by FEDEPCUM and Indigenous communities against Petroperú's **refusal to conduct maintenance on the Norperuano Pipeline**. This claim was rejected by the Mixed Court of Nauta and by the Civil Chamber of Loreto, and is currently pending a final decision before the Constitutional Court. (Servindi, 01/03/2019)

"The Constitutional Court ordered Petroperu to compensate the Indigenous communities of Cuninico, San Francisco, Nueva Esperanza, and Santa Rosa, affected by the oil spill that occurred in their territories in 2014. [...] **To date, Petroperu has refused to compensate** the communities affected by the Cuninico spill. Finally, it should be noted that this ruling is historic, **as through it the Constitutional Court reaffirms its precedent on the possibility of protecting rights through the constitutional compliance process**, in

this case, the conventional right to receive compensation for damages caused as a result of extractive activities.” (Servindi, 01/05/2021)

Direct criticism

In both oil spills, it can be said that alternative media outlets frequently present direct and explicit criticism toward Petroperú, various state entities, or government authorities. This criticism is expressed through the journalist, but more often through the voices of Indigenous representatives themselves. At first glance, traditional media appear to adopt a neutral stance; however, the language used deserves closer examination.

Overall, the criticism focuses on the slow response by Petroperú and institutions such as the Ministry of Health, which reflects a lack of concern from the State regarding the situation. Additionally, alternative media highlight false accusations against Indigenous representatives, as well as a lack of clarity about the amount of oil spilled in the area.

Experts estimate that at least 10,000 barrels of oil escaped from the old and poorly maintained pipeline. This is the largest **spill ever recorded in our country, but for Petro-Perú it is as if nothing had happened.** (El Comercio, 07/22/2014).

Given everything mentioned above, several questions arise, one of them related to what was said by the Minister of Energy and Mines, Eleodoro Mayorga. **According to the official, it will take ten days to clean up the spilled crude. He made this announcement on July 21. Is it really possible to fulfill this promise when there is no consensus on the magnitude of the damage?** Are they not playing with the expectations of the communities by making this type of statement? Has the company already identified the cause of the spill? (Servindi, 07/26/2014).

The Apu of the Cuninico community, Watson Trujillo, reported that Petroperú offered to pay community members to clean the area affected by the spills ahead of next week’s visit by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). **The spills occurred more than two and a half years ago.** Now that they know the IACHR will be in Cuninico, and with only a week left before they arrive, **only now do they want to clean the area,** Trujillo said (Servindi, 02/15/2017).

The people of Cuninico also **claim that the Ministry of Health’s response has not gone beyond toxicological tests.** Seven years have passed since the spill, and they have not received specialized medical care for heavy metals exposure. (Wayka, 07/21/2019)

Impunity regarding actions that contaminate or degrade territories is a form of violence and contempt for the life that these impacted territories sustain. Without environmental compensation (physical, biological, and social), reparation, investigation, and sanctions for the individuals or institutions responsible (in compliance with regulations), **this institutionalized disregard by the State becomes immunity in favor of those who pollute;** those who show contempt toward territories, bodies, ecosystems, and, ultimately, toward life itself, a life they ignorantly fail to value and consciously reject. (Wayka, 09/21/2022)

Another demand is humanitarian aid. Petroperú delivered 272 food packages to Cuninico. The other communities have not yet received any, said Chiroque, **who also highlights inconsistencies in the weight of the food supplies provided.** (La República, 09/30/2022)

Although it may be difficult to admit, **attempts to evade responsibility for the maintenance of the North Peruvian Pipeline (ONP) and to incriminate Indigenous leaders know no bounds.** This is evident in the accusations against Galo Vásquez Silva, president of the Federation of Cocama Peoples of the Marañón (Fedepcum), **who has allegedly attacked the ONP** in order to benefit from remediation work. (Servindi, 10/06/2022)

However, the high-level commission made up of officials from various State institutions **was unable to reach the area** due to the temporary shutdown of operations at Jorge Chávez International Airport, caused by an accident that left two people dead. Although a new date was proposed to resume dialogue, the leaders refused. They also stated that they would continue their protest by blocking navigation on the Marañón River. **As a result, Petroperú called for reflection, urging that the blockade be avoided so that cleanup and remediation efforts in the Cuninico River can resume.** (RPP, 11/20/2022)

Despite a meeting being scheduled for Saturday, November 19 in Nauta, the representative from the PCM, Gustavo Bustamante, informed of a new date because, due to the accident at the Jorge Chávez airport, the High-Level Commission would not be able to arrive. **The Indigenous communities state that the government delegation could have arrived on a military plane** or on the helicopter that takes President Pedro Castillo to his home in Cajamarca. (Servindi, 20/11/2022)

The highest court adopted this decision **after identifying an “omissive conduct” by Petroperú regarding the maintenance it is responsible for providing to the ONP,** thus causing damage to the environment and to the health of communities. Although

Petroperú committed to following a schedule of actions to maintain the ONP, **it has been determined that there are mandates partially fulfilled, pending, and even some unfulfilled, they indicate.** (Servindi, 01/08/2024)

Mención del pueblo Kukama Kukamiria

Ambos tipos de medio incluyen al pueblo Kukama Kukamiria en sus noticias, ya sea informando que se trata de la población afectada o incorporando sus declaraciones respecto al accionar de Petroperú y del Estado. En esta categoría destacan **La República y Servindi**. La diferencia radica en la profundidad del tratamiento: mientras los medios tradicionales suelen limitarse a algunas líneas que describen el impacto o recogen breves opiniones, los medios alternativos dedican artículos completos a la voz de los representantes indígenas e incluso a testimonios de madres afectadas, poniendo en primer plano la experiencia humana y cotidiana de las comunidades tras el derrame.

Alfonso López, president of the Association of Kukama Indigenous Peoples (Acodecospat), explained that one ton of rice was delivered to the community of Cuninico for 500 people, **with the notice that this amount was meant to last only one week.** (Servindi, 07/26/2014)

Indigenous leader Wrays Pérez, who met with the IACHR delegation, **questioned Minister Tamayo's denial of any impact on human health in Loreto as a result of the oil spills.** He told *El Comercio* that the affected Indigenous people brought samples of contaminated water and soil to officials of both the IACHR and the Peruvian government. (*El Comercio*, 07/10/2017)

In her memory, Liceña Oblitas also holds the story of two pregnancies that barely reached three months before ending in heavy bleeding, with the fetus falling to the ground like a ripe fruit from between her legs. Her first seven children, born before the year of the oil spill in Cuninico, completed nine months of pregnancy without complications and through natural deliveries. After 2014, any attempt at life died inside her. (*Wayka*, 02/13/2018)

"They have requested to participate in the development of the plan. We have a meeting scheduled tomorrow with their representatives, and on Wednesday we will carry out work to review and plan one of the proposed actions," stated Percy Minaya, director of DIRESA, yesterday to the Loreto newspaper *La Región*. (*Wayka*, 08/28/2019)

The Legal Defense **Institute highlighted the involvement of male and female leaders**, as well as Indigenous mothers from these communities, including Flor de María Paraná, Loydi

Macedo Mozombite, Monica Kikube Canaquiri, and Maria Pacaya Sifuentes. (*La República*, 01/06/2021)

“We have nothing to do with whether there was a cut or not — that is outside the territory of Cuninico. It is 2 km from where we are living. (...) Before this pipeline, we didn’t need to constantly ask the authorities to provide us with food to eat; we didn’t have to bother them about water or food. But now, with this spill that is happening, we are in this situation,” he said. (*RPP*, 02/19/2022)

Despite Petroperú’s conclusion, prior to the public prosecutor’s investigation, the truth is that according to the legal adviser and Indigenous leader of the Federation of Peoples Affected by Oil Activity, José Fachín, Petroperú’s **statement stigmatizes Indigenous peoples by claiming that the pipeline cuts are intentional, and seeks to discredit their platform’s struggle agenda.** (*La República*, 09/18/2022)

At least 15 communities in the districts of Urarinas and Parinari, in the Loreto region, do not have access to water for food preparation and hygiene after the oil spill at kilometer 42 of the Norperuvian Pipeline —operated by the state-owned company Petroperú S.A.— reached their main source: the Marañón River. (*La República*, 09/22/2022)

According to the affected party, their vessel was seized by local residents while navigating the Marañón River near the town of Cuninico. **It was there that several protestors boarded the boat with spears, arrows, among other weapons, and forced the crew to stop.** As a result, the victims cannot leave the vessel. (*La República*, 09/26/2022)

This mijano season (1), a central period for artisanal fishing, which is a crucial means of subsistence for the communities, as well as one of their few sources of income— **has been severely affected.** This spill is not an isolated event. The communities of the Parinari district have suffered the negative impacts of oil activity for five decades. However, they have not received a single benefit. (*Servindi*, 10/01/2022)

Indigenous community representatives stated that they began this indefinite strike, in coordination with the four federations of the Corrientes, Tigre, Marañón, and Pastaza river basins, **because the State has not addressed the needs of their Indigenous communities.** They emphasized that they will remain mobilized until a high-level commission visits their territories, and that the protest will not be lifted. (*Servindi*, 10/10/2022)

When asked about the time it would take to remediate the affected areas, the **leader questioned that workers of the state-owned company claim that this will only take a few months**. In Cuninico they said the cleanup would take 10 days. A year and a half has passed and traces of oil are still being reported. When asked about the time it would take to remediate the affected areas, **the leader questioned that workers of the state-owned company claim that in only a few months the contaminated areas will return to what they were before**. “It is impossible that the entire area will be remediated in three months (...), the community is upset because Petroperú keeps lying,” he asserted. (Servindi, 20/10/2022)

“That’s why we have mobilized again. **The only form of protest we have is to block traffic on the Marañón River**. Maybe that way they will listen to us, because it is a fair claim,” he noted. According to what he said, the protest action, which began at zero hours this Thursday, is indefinite. (La República, 11/04/2022)

Discussion

In this section, the analysis of the media discourses identified will be addressed based on the characteristics of disinformation explained in the introduction.

Returning to Table 1, it is stated that alternative media present greater coverage of the event, with 96 articles compared to 69 from traditional media. We can compare this figure with the sample of the study by Orellana (2022), where the object of study was the oil spill at the La Pampilla refinery in the Ventanilla sea, near Lima. The sample consisted of 162 news articles, only from traditional media such as *El Comercio*, *La República*, *RPP* and *Trome*. This data reflects the coverage focus that traditional media give to events that occur in the capital or near it, even when dealing with the same type of event and in the same year.

Likewise, it is possible to affirm the priority focus that alternative media take regarding the event in the Amazon. Particularly, the digital media outlet Servindi (69 articles), which specializes in “promoting intercultural dialogue on topics of Indigenous and environmental interest” (Servindi, n.d.).

In connection with the identification of those responsible for the spill, it is observed that there is a narrative of blame towards the Kukama Kukamiria people, specifically in the 2022 spill, where it was officially declared that the event was caused by an intentional cut to the ONP carried out by third parties (*El Comercio*, *La República*, *RPP*, 09/17/2022).

The central problem in the communication of traditional media in this case is that they provide a superficial coverage of a central axis of the event, which is its cause. This point is

validated because it is by knowing those responsible that actions can be taken, whether to contain the spill or to provide the corresponding assistance to the affected communities. The more time passes without taking action, the more the crude oil spreads. This happened in this case, since there was no response from Petroperú for one day even after having received the alert.

A superficial coverage means that they repeat Petroperú's "official discourse" without questioning the measures, which turns them into sympathizers of what was said. In this way, their news is presented as a simple informative note.

Including subtitles such as "Complaint against those responsible" and "Delivery of food and water" highly mitigates Petroperú's responsibility regarding the spill (*RPP, El Comercio*, 09/17/2022). In the eyes of inhabitants of urban areas, delivering food and water in this situation is seen as a positive and supportive act. However, it is an obligation of the State, since the Indigenous communities of the area rely on the river as their main source of drinking water, and access to it is a constitutional right. Likewise, the quantity of products is not indicated, since alternative media later reported that they were only sufficient for one of the six affected communities. In addition, the amount offered was not enough for the number of people for the time period estimated by the company (*Servindi*, 07/26/2014). Thus, the public perception of the depth of the impact on the communities is reduced.

In relation to the parameters of disinformation, this would be a case of omission of information, since traditional media choose to follow a generalized narrative and overlook the reality of those affected. In this sense, disinformation or, in this case, misleading information, does not only occur when false information is transmitted, but also when information is left aside.

Returning to the main narrative of the identification of those responsible, once again including the phrase "caused by third parties" mitigates Petroperú's responsibility. The problematic aspect is that it is not specified who the "third parties" are, which makes the communication ambiguous. Later in the timeline, the "third parties" are identified as members of Indigenous communities, since they are the other actors involved.

As indicated in the results, the then Prime Minister reinforced this accusation with his statements in *La República*, saying that Indigenous representatives are guilty of the cut for money. Given the context of the statement, it can be affirmed that he makes this accusation with the aim of denying the fact that the government did not assist the people affected by the stoppage of boats by the communities. Since it came from a national authority, stating it as a truth was dangerous, because in Western society the word of an authority "carries more weight" than that of an Indigenous person.

These are statements that people in urban areas are not going to question by themselves, because they are not familiar with the living reality of Indigenous peoples. How would an Indigenous person make a cut in the pipeline that would contaminate their only source of drinking water? Would they be capable of harming their entire community, knowing that they are a collective culture, for an amount of money? These are questions that allude to individual morality; however, the first answer would be negative. Currently, they themselves are experiencing the consequences of every spill that has taken place. They know that crude oil does not easily disappear from their territories, and that is why there are so many groups fighting for an Amazon without fossil fuels. Money, on the other hand, is temporary.

Concretely, in the articles of alternative media, Indigenous representatives deny these accusations at least three times.

The first statement is made by the president of the Federation of the Kukama Peoples United of the Marañón (FEDEPCUM), Julio Arirua Nashnate, who comments, "We have nothing to do with whether there was a cut or not; that is outside the territory of Cuninico. It is 2 km from the territory where we are living." (Servindi, 09/19/2022). By using "we" he considers all Indigenous people of the affected communities free from involvement.

The second statement is made by Galo Vásquez, the apu of Cuninico, who argues the rejection of the prime minister's statements "because we only have machetes, axes and arrows to survive. We don't have anything to cut a pipe of that magnitude." (RPP, 11/04/2022). It is a valid argument, since he refers to the means to carry out the act. In addition, he points to the prime minister's lack of knowledge about the communities' way of life. It should be emphasized that this rejection was reported by a traditional media outlet, which is surprising, although throughout the record RPP has shown itself sympathetic to Indigenous communities. However, it still aligns with the reproduction of official discourses. As Ivars (2021) argues in his study, it may be a medium that adopts a "multiform" stance. That is, it adjusts the information it transmits to its own convenience. To confirm this, a deeper analysis focused on this medium alone would be necessary.

The third statement rejecting the prime minister's accusations is also made by Galo Vásquez, based on a study he conducted with the Legal Defense Institute (IDL): "those bad companies that instigate the population to attack the Pipeline in order to later benefit from remediation contracts" (Servindi, 10/06/2022). In this case, he continues to deny the accusations against the communities, but he adds an interesting piece of information: the existence of third-party companies that carry out bad practices through the population. In this sense, he is revealing a kind of mafia behind the oil spills. In the same way, the most

affected always end up being Indigenous peoples, and for the same reason: receiving money in exchange.

In addition, in the same article the apu of Cuninico puts forward a more forceful cause than the prime minister's baseless accusations: the lack of maintenance of the pipeline, whose responsibility lies entirely with Petroperú. He supports this position by stating that half of the spills occur for this reason. In fact, this was the official cause declared for the first spill in 2014, which resulted in a fine of 10 million soles for Petroperú (Servindi, 10/06/2022).

This narrative aligns with the "Distract" tactic of disinformation, since those who are initially accused later accuse the accuser. In this case, Petroperú and State authorities accuse the Indigenous communities when they are the first to raise the alert and demand justice for the event that occurred. The roles are subtly reversed and end up delaying the implementation of measures that would benefit the affected communities.

The reasoning makes sense when one knows the large amount assumed due to the responsibility for the first spill compared to the lower cost invested in the repair of damages from a spill. The spills caused by the ONP could be avoided if maintenance were carried out, but it is cheaper to place barriers in the rivers and provide "solidarity" aid to the Indigenous communities.

Conclusion

- Traditional media (*El Comercio*, *La República* and *RPP*) reproduce the official discourse of Petroperú and national authorities without questioning them when addressing the central axis of the event: its cause. In this way, they present their news as a mere informative note, since it is a superficial coverage.
- Alternative media present greater coverage of the event than traditional media, which reflects the priorities in their media agenda. In addition, there is a greater priority given to events that occur near the capital than in remote areas of the Amazon.
- The emphasis of traditional media on the delivery of food to the affected communities by Petroperú conceals the complex consequences of the spill, since it has been reported that even 10 years after the spill the communities still do not have full access to drinking water in their rivers. The delivery of food for a few weeks or months does not solve the problem, but rather reduces the public perception of the severity of the social impact.

- The discourse transmitted by traditional media that accuses Indigenous communities of being responsible for the pipeline cut in the 2022 spill is discouraged by the lifestyle of the communities. It is unlikely that of their own will they would harm the wellbeing of their entire community in exchange for money. This type of discourse continues to deteriorate the perception that city dwellers have of Indigenous populations.
- The coverage recorded reflected two types of disinformation. The first was the omission of information, which makes the impacts of the spill on Indigenous communities invisible. The second was the “Distract” tactic, which places the accusatory gaze on Indigenous communities and not on the State-owned company.
- Since only two events were analyzed and with a small sample of articles, it is not possible to generalize Petroperú’s attitude regarding oil spills; however, it shows an initial forcefulness that may give rise to future research. It is recommended to carry out investigations focused specifically on language, as well as headline analysis, which could provide more perspectives on the issue.

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