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## When the Grid Went Silent: Radio Journalism, Crisis Framing and Public Responsibility in Spain's 28A Blackout

*Cuando la red quedó en silencio: Periodismo radiofónico, encuadres de crisis y responsabilidad pública durante el apagón del 28A en España*

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### Abstract

This article examines radio journalism as a public resource when a technical breakdown becomes a societal emergency. It analyses the Iberian blackout of 28 April 2025, which disrupted electricity, transport, telecommunications and everyday access to information. Drawing on a mixed-methods content analysis of 346 items published or archived online by RNE, RNE Audio, Cadena SER, COPE and Onda Cero between 28 April and 5 May 2025, the study compares public-service and commercial radio coverage. The findings show that radio helped organise uncertainty through immediate updates, practical guidance and narratives of causality. Yet mediation was uneven. Public-service radio relied more strongly on expert and institutional voices and maintained a cautious explanatory register for longer, whereas commercial networks moved earlier towards political evaluation, responsibility claims and the lived experience of disruption. The article argues that radio remains a significant infrastructure of public mediation in moments of systemic vulnerability.

*Keywords:* Radio Journalism, Blackout, Crisis Communication, Media Framing, Public Responsibility.

### Resumen

Este artículo examina el periodismo radiofónico como recurso público cuando un fallo técnico se convierte en emergencia social. Analiza el apagón ibérico del 28 de abril de 2025, que afectó a la electricidad, el transporte, las telecomunicaciones y el acceso cotidiano a la información. A partir de un análisis de contenido mixto de 346 piezas publicadas o archivadas en línea por RNE, RNE Audio, Cadena SER, COPE y Onda Cero entre el 28 de abril y el 5 de mayo de 2025, el estudio compara radio pública y comercial. Los resultados muestran que la radio organizó la incertidumbre mediante actualización inmediata, orientación práctica y narrativas causales. La radio pública recurrió más a voces expertas e institucionales y mantuvo una explicación cautelosa;

las cadenas comerciales avanzaron antes hacia la evaluación política, la atribución de responsabilidades y la experiencia social de la interrupción.

*Palabras clave:* Periodismo radiofónico, apagón, comunicación de crisis, encuadres mediáticos, responsabilidad pública.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND STATE OF THE ART

On 28 April 2025, a major power failure across the Iberian Peninsula very quickly became more than an electrical incident. Transport systems stopped, digital communications became unreliable, economic activity was interrupted and everyday access to information was destabilised. The blackout therefore offers a useful case through which to examine how journalism gives public form to an event whose causes are initially uncertain and whose consequences are immediately social.

Radio is a particularly revealing medium in that situation. Its crisis value is partly material: broadcast audio may remain accessible when other channels are weakened. Yet its significance is also editorial and cultural. During the blackout, radio did not simply relay updates. It sorted information, established priorities, connected dispersed experiences and helped listeners interpret a rapidly changing event. The case therefore speaks to radio's continuing role as a medium of public orientation.

The article treats the blackout as a problem of public sense-making. In the early hours of a crisis, newsrooms must work with partial evidence and competing pressures: to inform quickly, to avoid speculation, to identify reliable voices and to explain what remains unclear. These pressures are especially acute in infrastructural crises, where technical causality and public accountability soon become intertwined.

The analysis brings together agenda-setting, media framing and public-service communication. Agenda-setting helps identify which aspects of the blackout acquired salience in radio coverage. Framing shows how broadcasters defined the problem, attributed causes and assessed responsibility. The public-service perspective makes it possible to examine whether coverage prioritised usefulness, continuity and caution, or whether it moved more quickly towards interpretive competition.

In this design, the three perspectives are not applied as separate layers. Agenda-setting identifies the attributes that become salient; framing examines the interpretive operation that links those attributes to causality, consequences and responsibility; and the public-service perspective functions as an operational criterion for observing orientation towards public usefulness, continuity, source plurality and caution in contrast to more competitive logics of editorial interpretation.

This approach builds on scholarship that treats blackouts as sociotechnical events rather than isolated technical faults. Power failures involve interdependent systems and can reveal unequal capacities to respond (Cox, 2023; Dugan et al., 2023; Rudolph-Cleff et al., 2022). They are also politically legible events: once disruption becomes public, questions of causality quickly become questions of responsibility (Kasperson et al., 2022; Mason, 2019).

The study asks how Spanish general-interest radio constructed the 28A blackout as a public crisis. Four research questions guide the analysis: RQ1) Which aspects of the blackout became most salient in the radio agenda during the critical phase and the immediate aftermath? RQ2) Which frames dominated the coverage, and how did they differ across public-service and commercial radio? RQ3) Which actors and sources acquired news authority? RQ4) To what extent did ownership correspond to different logics of service, interpretation and responsibility attribution?

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Blackouts are often described as technical breakdowns, but their social effects extend well beyond the loss of electricity. Large outages disturb the arrangements that connect energy, mobility, communication, security and public coordination. Ptak et al. (2025) place outage research at the intersection of critical infrastructure, climate change and social impact; Rudolph-Cleff et al. (2022) show that communication in blackout scenarios depends on socio-spatial vulnerability and reliable public guidance.

A first implication is that causality is rarely simple. Salman et al. (2023) review multiple causes of outages, including extreme weather, line damage, generation failures, human error, overloads and cascading events. Comité de Análisis 28-A (2025) similarly describes the Spanish case as a sequence of events and imbalances that led to a voltage crisis and system disconnection. Batlle et al. (2025) and ENTSO-E (2026) both stress complexity, interdependence and shared responsibility across operators, generators, large consumers, distributors and regulators.

A second implication concerns social vulnerability. Energy disruption is experienced through transport delays, failed communication, impaired care and difficulty accessing trustworthy information. For journalism, this means that blackout coverage cannot remain at the level of technical failure. It must also account for the social, emotional and communicative consequences of disruption.

A third implication concerns responsibility. As soon as an outage becomes public, the interpretive field widens from technical causality to institutional accountability and political evaluation. The social amplification of risk framework explains how media and institutions select signals, amplify some dimensions and stabilise or polarise the interpretation of an event (Kasperson et al., 2022). Gonzalez and Knox (2023) also warn that grid failures can encourage scapegoating, especially when complex systems are compressed into politically convenient explanations.

Radio enters this discussion with a distinctive communicative profile. The European Broadcasting Union (2024) highlights radio's portability, reach and resilience in emergencies, while Rodero Antón and Blanco Hernández (2020) stress its capacity to accompany listeners and provide continuity in the Spanish context. Trust is also relevant: Zhang and Zhang (2024) show that media do not organise crisis information in the same way, and that such differences affect credibility.

In radio-specific terms, crisis communication rests on three dimensions: the immediacy of live speech, the capacity to accompany audiences in conditions of mobility or isolation, and the ability to sustain news routines when digital channels become unstable. The analysis therefore does not only assess whether radio reported the blackout, but how it modulated uncertainty through authorised voices, practical instructions, narrative rhythm and causal caution (European Broadcasting Union, 2024; Rodero Antón & Blanco Hernández, 2020).

Agenda-setting provides one way to study that organization. Rather than treating the blackout as a single news object, it allows us to examine which attributes became prominent: the technical cause, damage to services, political management, mobility, economic effects or citizen resilience (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In this article, the radio agenda refers to the distribution of attention across these dimensions, actors and phases of coverage.

Framing adds a second level of analysis. Frames organise meaning by defining a problem, suggesting causal links, evaluating actors and pointing towards possible responses (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993). In crisis contexts, frames are especially consequential because they help transform uncertainty into public interpretation. Work by Capurro et al. (2021), Hayek (2024) and Kasperson et al. (2022) shows that communication under uncertainty is never neutral: it can encourage caution, amplify risk, or accelerate responsibility claims.

Although the radio-specific literature on energy crises remains limited, studies of other media provide

useful parallels. Matthews (2025) finds that British television coverage of the energy crisis combined elite criticism, everyday harm and limited practical guidance. Ninni Ramos et al. (2026) show how Brazilian television repeatedly framed shortages, rationing and blackouts as crises. Mercado-Sáez and Monedero-Morales (2017) identifies conflict, economic and responsibility frames in Spanish television coverage of energy issues, and Laakso et al. (2024) show that the press can present households as victims, agents of change or responsible subjects. These studies suggest that energy disruption is commonly narrated through a combination of technical explanation, social impact, political conflict and blame. In operational terms, public-service journalism is not defined only by institutional ownership, but by a specific editorial orientation: prioritization of general-interest information, source plurality, independence from political and commercial pressures, universal access and contribution to democratic deliberation. Recent public service media scholarship has emphasized precisely this tension between public mission, social legitimacy and competition in digitalized media markets (Donders, 2021). From a comparative perspective, Cushion (2022) shows that public service media tend to differ from more market-oriented media by devoting greater attention to politics, public affairs and civic information. This distinction is especially relevant in crisis contexts, where expectations of accuracy, public usefulness and informational caution may come into tension with commercial logics of immediacy, editorial differentiation and interpretive competition. The concept of public service is used here as an analytical lens. It refers to journalistic practices that prioritise public usefulness, source plurality, caution in uncertainty and informational continuity. Agenda-setting identifies what became prominent; framing shows how meaning was organised; and the public-service perspective assesses whether radio acted primarily as a guide, an interpreter, or a site of political contestation.

Operationally, an item is considered closer to a public-service logic when it prioritises actionable information for citizens, continuity of updates, verification through institutional and expert sources, explicit acknowledgement of what remains unconfirmed and restraint in causal attribution. Conversely, it is considered closer to a commercial-interpretive logic when it privileges editorial evaluation, presenter authority, political contestation, personalisation of conflict or the acceleration of explanatory hypotheses. This distinction does not presume normative superiority or automatic equivalence with ownership; it allows different editorial thresholds under uncertainty to be observed empirically.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study uses a mixed-methods content analysis. The quantitative component maps topics, frames, protagonists and sources; the qualitative component interprets the editorial and narrative logics behind those patterns. Content analysis is appropriate because it enables systematic description and comparison of media messages (Krippendorff, 2019; Piñeiro Naval, 2020).

The sample was built from the retrievable online output of five Spanish general-interest radio services: RNE, RNE Audio, Cadena SER, COPE and Onda Cero. RNE and RNE Audio were coded as public-service output; Cadena SER, COPE and Onda Cero were coded as commercial networks. The final corpus contains 346 items published or archived online between 28 April and 5 May 2025. It is therefore a digital-retrievable corpus, not a full recording of the linear broadcast flow.

Retrieval was carried out through systematic searches in each broadcaster's internal archives and search tools, complemented by web searches combining station names and dates. Search terms in Spanish included «apagón», «apagón 28A», «apagón 28 de abril», «fallo eléctrico», «corte eléctrico», «crisis eléctrica», «red eléctrica» and «suministro eléctrico», together with the name of each radio service. Items were included when the 28A blackout or its immediate consequences constituted the central topic and when they were published or archived between 28 April and 5 May 2025. Duplicates, items

without substantive content on the blackout, merely tangential references, materials inaccessible at the time of coding and exclusively television or written items with no explicit link to radio coverage were excluded. When the same content appeared both as audio and as web text, only one unit was retained unless the materials represented distinct segments.

This procedure was intended to maximise comparable retrieval across services, but it cannot guarantee capture of the entire live broadcast flow. The sample should therefore be understood as the universe of digitally retrievable radio-related items under these criteria, not as an exhaustive inventory of linear broadcasting. The unit of analysis was the individual radio-related item: audio clip, podcast segment, bulletin, interview, feature, editorial or web item linked to radio coverage of the blackout. This broad definition reflects the way contemporary radio journalism circulates across broadcast and digital platforms, while preserving a consistent unit for coding (Neuendorf, 2017).

For items derived from local transcripts or full hours of programming, the unit of analysis was not the entire broadcast hour, but the segment, intervention or thematic unit specifically devoted to the blackout. This clarification is particularly relevant for news bulletins and magazine programs, where the same broadcast hour could include content unrelated to the object of study. Each record was therefore coded according to the content linked to the electricity crisis, rather than to the full radio container. The codebook covered three analytical dimensions. The first captured the agenda through dates, temporal phases and genres. The second identified the dominant frame of each item. The third examined informational authority through protagonists and source types. This structure made it possible to compare not only volume of coverage, but also the interpretive and source hierarchies through which the crisis was narrated.

**Table 1:** Variables and Categories.

| Variable                  | Operational definition                                               | Values/categories                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Coding criterion                                                                                    |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Station                   | Radio network or platform where the item was located                 | COPE, Cadena SER, Onda Cero, RNE, RNE Audio                                                                                                                                                                          | Coded according to the source recorded in the database.                                             |
| Ownership                 | Type of media ownership                                              | Public / private                                                                                                                                                                                                     | RNE and RNE Audio = public; SER, COPE, and Onda Cero = private.                                     |
| Date                      | Publication or archive date of the item                              | Exact date                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Taken from the database; if missing, the case is excluded from temporal analysis.                   |
| Temporal phase            | Chronological location of the content within the news cycle          | Crisis (04/28–04/30/2025) / immediate post-crisis (05/01–05/05/2025)                                                                                                                                                 | Derived directly from the date.                                                                     |
| Program/section           | Radio program or editorial container                                 | Open denomination                                                                                                                                                                                                    | The original label used by each network is respected.                                               |
| Journalistic genre        | Main form of journalistic presentation                               | News/information; opinion/commentary; report; interview; talk/debate; other                                                                                                                                          | Assigned according to the formal dominant feature of the item.                                      |
| Dominant frame            | Main interpretive frame of the item                                  | Causes and attribution; impact on critical services and mobility; political conflict and accountability; service and response; economic impact; radio resilience; social impact; community resilience; indeterminate | Coded according to the predominant thematic and narrative axis in headline, paratexts, and content. |
| Protagonist               | Actor or instance occupying narrative centrality                     | Newsroom/opinion; institutional/political; expert(s) or system operator; citizens; emergency/critical services; business/sectoral; other                                                                             | Assigned according to the figure organizing the account or concentrating the main voice.            |
| Types of sources present  | Presence of voices or sources cited in the item                      | Institutional/political; expert/technical; operational/emergency; citizens/testimonial; business/sectoral; newsroom/opinion                                                                                          | Multiple-response variable: presence/absence of each type is marked.                                |
| Mention of sustainability | Presence of references to broader energy or environmental frameworks | No mention / climate change / energy transition / 2030 Agenda-SDGs / combination                                                                                                                                     | Coded when the item explicitly mentions any of these frameworks.                                    |
| Observations              | Coding incidents                                                     | Open field                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Used to record ambiguities or data-cleaning decisions.                                              |

Source: own elaboration.

Table 1 presents the variables and categories used in the analysis. In addition to station, ownership and date, the study coded temporal phase, journalistic genre, dominant frame, protagonist, source type and references to climate, energy transition or the 2030 Agenda. Categories were defined to be explicit, empirically grounded and mutually exclusive where required (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017).

The qualitative reading focused on theoretically selected items that were representative of the main frames, broadcasters and phases identified in the quantitative phase. Its purpose was not to add a second statistical coding layer, but to interpret the narrative logics suggested by the quantitative patterns: urgent updating, causal explanation, public guidance, social experience, political conflict and responsibility attribution.

Qualitative extracts were chosen to maximise variation by ownership, broadcaster, temporal phase, dominant frame and source or protagonist type. Each quotation is used as an analytical example of a pattern previously identified in the quantitative phase and is contextualised by programme, network and date so that it does not operate as isolated evidence.

The quantitative analysis combined three operations: descriptive distributions, comparison by station and ownership, and cross-tabulations between selected variables. This strategy allowed the study to move from mapping salience to interpreting differences in editorial logic.

$\chi^2$  tests were applied only to valid cases and comparable categories. The reported *n* values vary because cases with missing data, non-codable genres and indeterminate or residual frames were excluded when their inclusion could distort the comparison. Expected cell frequencies were reviewed before interpreting each test: when sparse cells appeared, the result was read as exploratory and priority was given to percentage-based description. Cramer's *V* was used as an indicator of effect size and interpreted substantively as weak association around .10, moderate association around .30 and strong association at higher values.

The coding was conducted by a single researcher, so a formal intercoder reliability test could not be included. To strengthen consistency, an intracoder stability check was carried out on a subsample of 29 items. Observed agreement and Cohen's kappa were calculated for journalistic genre and dominant frame. Stability was very high for genre (observed agreement = 100.0%; kappa = 1.000) and substantial for dominant frame (observed agreement = 72.4%; kappa = 0.629).

This check does not replace independent double coding, but it provides evidence of internal consistency. The findings should therefore be read as a systematic comparative case study, with the usual caution required when inferential claims rest on a single-coder design.

In line with recommendations on reliability in content analysis, this test is reported as a stability control and not as equivalent to intercoder reliability (Lombard et al., 2002). The absence of independent double coding is therefore incorporated as an explicit limitation and as a priority for improvement in future research.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Quantitative Results

The quantitative results are presented in five areas: temporal concentration of coverage, journalistic genres, dominant frames, protagonists and source types, and references to sustainability, the energy transition or the 2030 Agenda. These dimensions show both the common agenda produced by the blackout and the differences between public-service and commercial radio.

The 346 items were strongly concentrated in the first three days. Between 28 and 30 April, 221 items

were published (63.9% of the corpus). The peak came on 29 April, with 94 items, followed by 30 April (72) and 28 April (55). Commercial networks accounted for 258 items (74.6%), compared with 88 items (25.4%) from public-service output.

Coverage rhythms differed by service. Cadena SER produced 92 items and peaked on 29 April; COPE produced 94 and peaked on 30 April. Onda Cero published 72 items. RNE registered 46 items, with no records after 2 May, whereas RNE Audio contributed 42 items and maintained a more stable pattern across the period.

Direct comparisons with RNE confirm this imbalance. RNE was close to Cadena SER only on 28 April and exceeded Onda Cero only that same day. It remained below COPE throughout the shared period and disappeared from the digital corpus after 2 May. This does not necessarily mean absence from linear broadcasting, but it does indicate less retrievable online output.

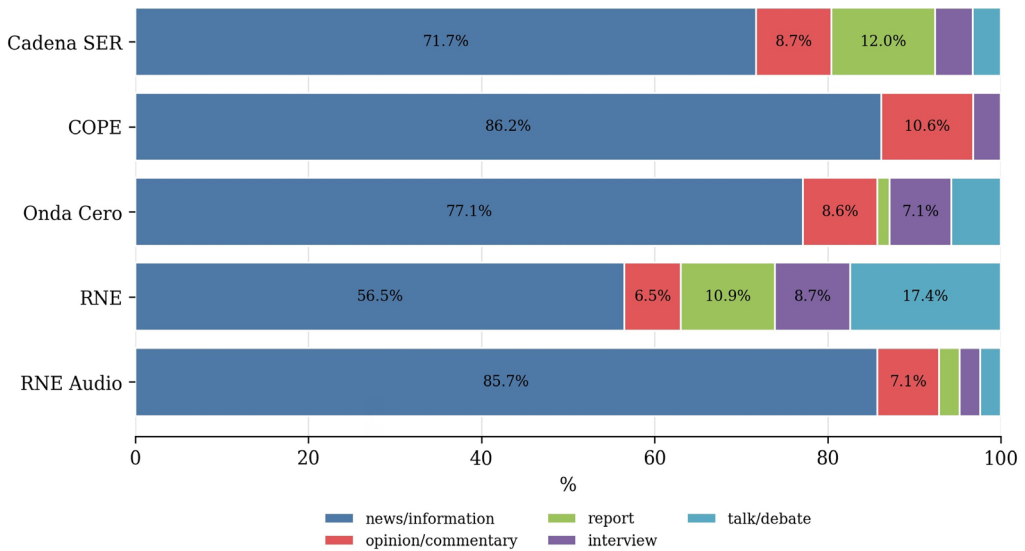


**Figure 1:** Percentage Distribution of Journalistic Genres by Station and Ownership.

Source: own elaboration based on research data.

Among the 344 cases with a coded genre, news formats predominated: 263 items (76.5%). They were followed by opinion/commentary (8.7%), feature reports (5.2%), interviews (4.9%) and talk/debate (4.7%).

COPE had the highest share of news items (86.2%), followed by RNE Audio (85.7%), Onda Cero (77.1%), Cadena SER (71.7%) and RNE (56.5%). Cadena SER stood out in feature reports (12.0%), while RNE had the largest share of talk/debate (17.4%). The association between ownership and genre was significant but modest,  $\chi^2(4, N=344) = 9.65$ ,  $p = .047$ , Cramer's  $V = .168$ .

For this test, five consolidated genre categories were used and two non-codable items were excluded. Assumption checks showed three expected frequencies slightly below 5 out of ten cells (min. = 4.09), so the result is interpreted as a weak association and with exploratory caution.

Frame analysis shows that the blackout was primarily narrated through causality and responsibility. The dominant frame was «causes and attribution» (127 items; 45.0%). It was followed by «impact on critical services and mobility» (42; 14.9%) and «political conflict and accountability» (34; 12.1%).

Service and response, economic impact, radio resilience, social impact and community resilience appeared with lower frequency.

Public-service and commercial broadcasters differed sharply in this respect. Cadena SER combined causality with radio resilience and service; COPE and Onda Cero gave more space to political conflict and accountability. In RNE and RNE Audio, «causes and attribution» reached 62.2% and 64.3% respectively. By ownership, this frame represented 63.0% of valid public-service cases and 38.8% of commercial cases. The association between ownership and frame was significant,  $\chi^2(7, N=282) = 28.33$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .317$ .

This test was calculated on 282 valid cases and eight frame categories, excluding items with no codable frame or non-comparable residual coding. Four of sixteen expected frequencies were below 5 (min. = 0.52), so statistical significance is interpreted alongside the percentage distribution and Cramer's  $V$ , which indicates a moderate association.

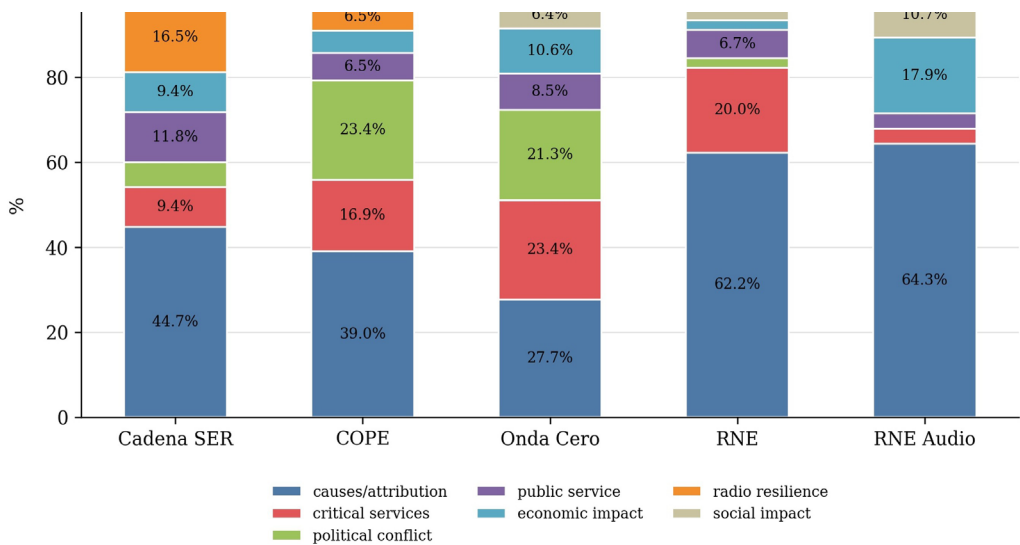


**Figure 2:** Percentage Distribution of Dominant frames by Station and Ownership.  
Source: own elaboration based on research data.

The distribution of protagonists confirms different logics of authority. Cadena SER and RNE gave strong prominence to experts and system operators, whereas COPE and Onda Cero relied more heavily on newsroom/opinion and institutional/political protagonists. By ownership, expert or operator voices represented 51.1% of public-service cases and 29.2% of commercial cases.

Source types show a similar pattern. In RNE, political/institutional sources reached 60.9%, whereas other/newsroom sources predominated in RNE Audio and the commercial networks. By ownership, institutional sources appeared in 34.1% of public-service items and 20.2% of commercial items. This difference was significant in a presence/absence test,  $\chi^2(1, N=346) = 7.05$ ,  $p = .008$ , Cramer's  $V = .143$ .

For this dichotomous test, Pearson's  $\chi^2$  without continuity correction is reported. All expected frequencies exceeded the threshold of 5 (min. = 20.86), and Cramer's  $V$  indicates a small effect size.

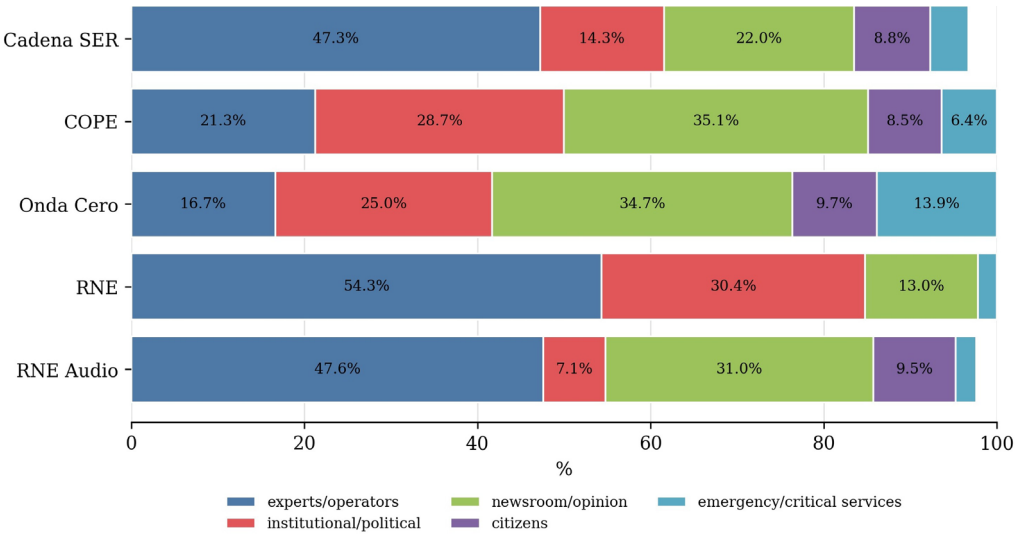


**Figure 3:** Percentage Distribution of Dominant Protagonists by Station and Ownership.  
Source: own elaboration based on research data.

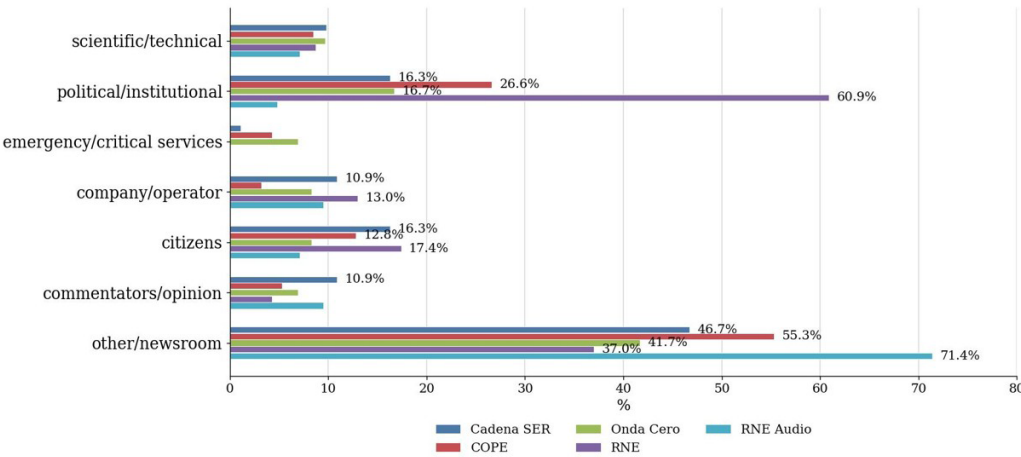


**Figure 4:** Percentage Presence of Source Types by Station and Ownership.  
Source: own elaboration based on research data.

Mentions of climate, the energy transition, or the 2030 Agenda are very scarce: they appear in only 12 items (3.5% of the corpus). By station, Cadena SER registers 1 item (1.1%), COPE 4 (4.3%), Onda Cero 4 (5.6%), RNE 2 (4.3%), and RNE Audio 1 (2.4%). By ownership, private radio accounts for 9 of these items (3.5%) and public radio for 3 (3.4%).

#### 4.2. Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis shows how the blackout moved through three narrative moments: collective shock, explanation in progress and struggle over responsibility. The contrast between services lies less

in whether they informed than in how quickly they moved from practical orientation to interpretation. On 28 April, radio adopted a style of continuous updating and listener guidance. RNE's *La mañana de RNE – Especial informativo* framed the event as exceptional: «It is the blackout of the century. Peninsular Spain is in the dark» (*La mañana de RNE – Especial informativo*, RNE, 28 April 2025). It also issued a practical instruction: «112 is operating only for emergencies. Please keep 112 free» (*La mañana de RNE – Especial informativo*, RNE, 28 April 2025).

Later that night, RNE added a map of damage and restoration. In *Especial apagón*, Lourdes Maldonado focused on stranded travellers: «We are looking for the latest updates... on where and how the thousands of stranded travellers are going to spend the night» (*Especial apagón*, RNE, 28 April 2025, night). Figures, percentages, substations and references to the Ministry for the Ecological Transition anchored the narrative in institutional information.

Cadena SER highlighted another dimension: disconnection as an emotional experience. In a piece on communication failures, Íñigo Tobes and his interlocutor described «a certain feeling of unease... of abandonment, of feeling alone in the void» (Loss of communications, Cadena SER, 28 April 2025). The collapse of telephony and internet was therefore narrated not only as technical failure, but as social isolation.

COPE used a different texture of immediacy. In *La Linterna*, the host opened from the street and turned the programme itself into evidence of radio's resilience: «We are lighting up *La Linterna* almost miraculously from the street... with no electricity» (*La Linterna*, COPE, 28 April 2025, 7:00 p.m.). The programme listed affected services and emphasized the extraordinary conditions of the broadcast. As the hours passed, the question of why became central. RNE treated causality as provisional. Reports from 29 April described queues, disrupted mobility and uncertainty, but quickly returned to restoration and system evolution. Testimony, such as that of a traveller trapped in a tunnel in Sant Andreu, introduced proximity while remaining within a broader narrative of order (*Informativo RNE*, RNE, 29 April 2025).

This restraint became explicit in interviews. In *La mañana de RNE*, Cristina Narbona argued that «citizens deserve the debate to be rigorous» and added that «it is far too early» (*La mañana de RNE*, RNE, 30 April 2025). In discursive terms, uncertainty was not erased; it was managed through appeals to caution, verification and waiting for evidence.

Commercial networks moved more quickly towards contestation. In *La Linterna*, COPE dramatised rumours circulating around the blackout: «The million-dollar question is, what happened?... Is it true that it was a cyberattack?... Is it true... that the Ministry of Defence is on fire?» (*La Linterna*, COPE, 28 April 2025, 8:00 p.m.). In *Herrera en COPE*, the blackout became an explicitly political dispute: «We still do not know... the causes of this total blackout», followed by the suggestion that Moncloa was «going crazy» for the cause to be a cyberattack (*Herrera en COPE*, COPE, 1 May 2025).

Onda Cero also framed the event as a matter for evaluation. In *Más de uno / Monólogo de Alsina*, titles such as «Lessons from the blackout» and «Who is performing the autopsy on the blackout?» presented the crisis as an object of post-event judgement (*Más de uno / Monólogo de Alsina*, Onda Cero, 29 April and 2 May 2025). Cadena SER developed a similar move in opinion pieces such as «The political blackout» (*Cadena SER*, 3 May 2025).

Onda Cero's treatment was especially consistent around causality and accountability. Interviews with Jorge Sanz and Antonio Turiel were introduced as explanations of warning signs and system management, while talk segments and monologues foregrounded government responsibility. Phrases such as «Sánchez has no explanation, but he does have someone to blame» or «The government wants a culprit...» condensed that move towards political accountability (*La brújula*, Onda Cero, 29 and 30 April 2025).

Overall, the qualitative material reveals two narrative pedagogies. Public-service radio sustained an institutional mode based on continuity, verification and cautious explanation. Commercial networks moved earlier into an interpretive mode in which rumours, political conflict, responsibility frames and presenter-led evaluation became more prominent.

The concept of narrative pedagogies is used here as an interpretive category to describe how radio publicly teaches a crisis while it is still unfolding. One pedagogy orders uncertainty through updates, caution and authorized sources; the other accelerates interpretation through causal questions, responsibility markers and editorial voice. Both produce orientation, but they differ in the pace at which they turn the absence of explanation into a public narrative, in dialogue with studies on crisis framing and the interpretive mediation of journalism (Entman, 1993; Hayek, 2024; Kaspersen et al., 2022).

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings show that radio coverage of 28A helped stabilise a moment of uncertainty. From an agenda-setting perspective, radio quickly organised attention around supply interruption, critical services, mobility and causality. This was not merely a matter of distributing information. Radio offered listeners a sequence of priorities at a time when ordinary channels of orientation were weakened. The case is important because this stabilising function took different editorial forms. All services covered the outage, but they did not give it the same meaning or move at the same pace. Framing analysis shows how a shared event was translated into different patterns of causality, service, conflict and responsibility.

The public-service/commercial contrast is central. RNE and RNE Audio sustained a more cautious and service-oriented mode, while commercial networks moved earlier towards political evaluation and responsibility claims. This is not a simple opposition between information and opinion. It is a difference in editorial threshold: the point at which factual coverage gives way to the struggle over interpretation.

These differences should not be seen as a mechanical effect of ownership. Commercial radio operates in attention markets where presenter familiarity, recognizable opinion and interpretive speed form part of the listening pact. Public-service radio, by contrast, is linked to expectations of continuity, verification, plurality and general usefulness, features associated with its democratic mandate and its distinctive value in relation to more market-oriented media (Cushion, 2022; Donders, 2021; Urbániková & Smejkal, 2025).

This pattern resonates with crisis-communication research. Hayek (2024) shows that institutional communication affects the salience and tone of coverage, while Zhang and Zhang (2024) link media trust to the organisation of information. The 28A case suggests that public-service radio and commercial radio differed in how they managed uncertainty, not only in how much they reported.

Causality is the hinge of the case. The most frequent frame was «causes and attribution», which is unsurprising in a crisis that moved quickly from shock to explanation. Yet a large blackout is difficult to narrate because technical opacity, multicausality and public pressure for answers collide. Journalism must make complexity intelligible without collapsing it into premature blame.

The findings also connect with work on communication under uncertainty. Capurro et al. (2021) show that journalism must decide how to present what is not yet confirmed, which voices to legitimize and how much caution to maintain. RNE's coverage largely treated explanation as an open process. Private broadcasters, by contrast, made causality a more visible arena of symbolic dispute.

Responsibility attribution then becomes the decisive step. In infrastructural crises, the public question shifts from «what happened?» to «who should have prevented it?» and «whose account is credible?».

The blackout demonstrates how quickly radio coverage can move from emergency information to the politics of explanation.

Comparisons with other media support this interpretation. Television and press studies of energy crises show recurrent combinations of technical explanation, everyday disruption, politicization and blame (Laakso et al., 2024; Matthews, 2025; Mercado-Sáez & Monedero-Morales, 2017; Ninni Ramos et al., 2026). The Spanish radio case follows this broader pattern, but adds a medium-specific feature: the speed with which live speech and presenter authority can connect guidance, interpretation and responsibility.

The risk of simplification is therefore central. Gonzalez and Knox (2023) warn that public debate after grid failures can slide towards scapegoating, especially when complex system failures become politically useful narratives. The 28A corpus does not show a single linear drift, but it does show how responsibility frames gained strength as the crisis moved beyond the first hours.

The near absence of sustainability, energy-transition and 2030 Agenda frames is also revealing. Radio focused on immediate and operational questions: what happened, who was affected, who responded and who failed. Structural debates about energy transition did not enter the acute radio agenda in any significant way. This suggests that long-term context requires deliberate editorial construction; it does not automatically emerge from crisis coverage.

The limited presence of these frames does not mean that they are irrelevant for understanding the blackout; rather, they were displaced by informational urgency and by the immediate search for causes and responsibilities. The finding points to an editorial opportunity: to connect acute crises with debates on energy resilience, infrastructure governance and ecological transition without turning the emergency into a monocausal explanation or a politically instrumentalised narrative.

From a normative standpoint, the study reinforces the democratic relevance of radio in crisis. Radio kept information circulating, but it also offered continuity, accompaniment and a shared narrative framework at a moment of social dislocation. Its value lay in technical resilience and in the capacity to organise public meaning.

Several methodological cautions remain. The study uses a retrievable online corpus, not the full linear broadcast flow. It covers the critical phase and immediate aftermath, not the longer process through which interpretations settle. It also relies on a single coder, although the intracoder test supports internal consistency. These limits restrict generalisation, but they do not undermine the case-based comparison. For these reasons, the article should be read as a systematic case study rather than as a general model of radio crisis coverage. Future research could extend the time window, compare media platforms and countries, and use independent coders to strengthen reliability.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined the 28A blackout as a test of radio journalism's capacity to mediate infrastructural disruption. The analysis shows that radio did more than remain technically available. It helped audiences locate themselves in a rapidly changing situation, identify relevant actors and understand competing accounts of responsibility.

The study's main contribution is to show that this mediation was not uniform. Public-service radio sustained a grammar of continuity, verification and cautious explanation. Commercial networks moved sooner towards conflict, interpretation and political accountability. The distinction lies in rhythm and narrative threshold rather than in a crude divide between information and opinion.

The research questions can therefore be answered as follows. The radio agenda prioritised critical services, mobility and causality (RQ1). Causal and attributional frames dominated, but public-service

and commercial broadcasters developed them differently (RQ2). Experts, institutional actors and newsroom voices carried most authority, although their weight varied by service (RQ3). Ownership corresponded to different logics of service, interpretation and responsibility attribution (RQ4). The results also show that the blackout was rarely connected to broader debates about sustainability or energy transition. In the acute phase, radio concentrated on operational questions and immediate responsibility. This finding suggests that structural interpretation is not an automatic consequence of crisis coverage; it requires editorial decisions that connect the event to longer-term processes. The 28A case also confirms that major blackouts are better understood as sociotechnical crises than as isolated technical failures. For journalism, this creates a demanding task: translating complex system processes into public language without collapsing them into premature blame. The tension between cautious explanation and interpretive closure is one of the clearest findings of the study. More broadly, the article argues that radio remains a relevant infrastructure of public mediation. Its crisis value lies not only in technical resilience, but also in narrative continuity, source ordering and social accompaniment. Radio can still help societies interpret disruption as it unfolds. Beyond the Spanish case, the implications extend to crisis journalism in contexts of infrastructural dependence. Newsrooms need protocols that combine speed, verification, explanation of uncertainty and practical guidance. They also need narrative repertoires capable of linking emergencies to structural processes when sufficient evidence exists, without rushing causal or political attributions. The study has three main limitations: the short time window, the use of retrievable online material rather than the complete linear broadcast, and the absence of independent intercoder reliability. These limits require caution, but they also point to clear routes for future research. Future research should extend the corpus, compare radio with television, digital press and social media, and examine similar infrastructural crises in other countries. Such work would help determine whether the narrative pedagogies identified here are specific to Spain or part of broader patterns in crisis communication. In sum, the blackout shows that radio is not merely a residual or emergency medium. It remains a site where uncertainty is organised, responsibility is narrated and public meaning is negotiated. That capacity makes radio journalism a valuable object for communication research in an age of infrastructural vulnerability.

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