

“The truth is lightweight and does not break, and it always rides over falsehood, as oil does over water”. Don Quixote

Introduction: Spain's current situation among the tech giants

Spain has never walked among greater giants, and perhaps there has never been a more appropriate time to bring up this analogy taken from Cervantes' imagination. For several reasons, first because it is true, as Spain finds itself among those tech giants that often present us with discourses and ideologies that are alien to us, and I emphasise alien because neither their origin nor their message come from Spain or its geopolitical interests. Secondly, because Spain is more than ever reflected in a gaunt knight who can do little or nothing but throw himself with his steed and his lance against these giants who, more terrifying than those in the book, not only subdue the brave Quijano, but also the nations of the world.

Let us now give shape and substance to these giants, the big tech companies from both sides of the globe that dominate and control access to information and communication for nations and their citizens. First, we have social media and instant messaging platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram, Discord, WhatsApp and TikTok, among others, followed by Telegram, with its much more lax moderation, which has attracted the interest of Russia and Ukraine¹, France², Hezbollah³ and Hamas⁴, all seeking to dominate the discourse through it. Secondly, we have SVODs, with platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, HBO Max and YouTube, which, together with others such as Shahid in the Arab world, Tencent Video in China and Globoplay in Brazil, monopolise entertainment viewing hours through their series and films.

Cases of foreign interference, mass manipulation and the promotion of riots and unrest through social media are well known, which we will not discuss here but mention to illustrate what we are talking about. All this without even dwelling on the capacity for

¹ - WEILER, Julia, “First Propaganda Detection Mechanism for Telegram”, Max Planck Institute, August 2005, available at <https://www.mpi-sp.org/87779/First-Propaganda-Detection-Mechanism-for-Telegram>

² - France 24, “Telegram messaging app CEO Pavel Durov arrested at French airport”, August 2024, available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240825-telegram-chief-pavel-durov-arrested-at-french-airport>

³ - HABERFELD, Daniel and AZANI, Eitan. “Hezbollah on Telegram: Post-Ceasefire Media Campaigns and Narrative Shifts”, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), June 2025, available at: <https://ict.org.il/hezbollah-on-telegram/>

⁴ - Counter Extremism Project, “Terrorists on Telegram”, February 2024, available at: <https://www.counterextremism.com/terrorists-on-telegram>

espionage and data and intelligence gathering by these technology companies and the danger that this could pose.

With our scene in mind, that of this Quixote, we will see below how our knight, together with those representing the members of the EU, gallops off to combat disinformation and cyber manipulation with his broken lance in one hand and European regulatory legislation in the other. The problem with such an approach is that the entities that create these platforms and the algorithms that govern them are unlikely to comply with the bureaucratic regulatory legislation that is intended to be applied and, even if they did comply, the nature of regulation is, due to its slowness, radically opposed to the nature and speed of technological advancement, and will therefore be severely out of step. Not only that, but social media and SVOD also play on a board where there are not only written rules that are visible to everyone, but also unwritten rules.

Consider that, in modern warfare, and in peacetime, the rule that anything goes is more applicable than ever, especially in a digital world where nothing is what it seems and what is indeed what it seems may not be, as in the case of images and videos generated by artificial intelligence (AI). In this state of affairs, even the proverbial maxim "*don't believe anything you hear and believe half of what you see*" is no longer applicable here. Now you can't even believe what you see, not even half of it. In any case, with or without AI, lying is as old as humanity itself and only the means have changed.

The propaganda promoted by such technologies is generated from all over the globe and converges on our territory, now cybernetic, with our knight on the back of a gaunt steed trying to face an enemy he does not understand with his lance. I hope you will allow me and understand this repeated analogy because this is the situation in Spain, in our view, in the cyber battle, and we will explain the reasons below.

The use of social media and technological platforms by nations

Beyond any literary analogy, the domination and control exercised by entities such as TikTok and Meta for the respective interests of countries other than Spain is out of control. We have seen what happened in Romania⁵ and there is no need here to go into detail

⁵ - ZOB, Luiza Elena, "How Romania's Presidential Election Became the Plot of a Cyber-Thriller", European Youth Portal, June 2025, available at: https://youth.europa.eu/news/how-romantias-presidential-election-became-plot-of-cyber-thriller_en

about many other covert influence operations perpetrated by different states throughout history and around the world, systematically and calculatedly projected from their centres of origin. These operations have always existed and are now adapted to the cyber realm.

Such exercises sometimes take place in a subtle manner, in a kind of soft power that goes unnoticed by the masses. An example of this is the penetration of culture, political values and, in general, the *modus vivendi* of one country that is culturally different from another through television series, literature or songs. A paradigmatic example is Netflix, which is present in more than 190 countries and is only unavailable in China, Crimea, North Korea, Russia and Syria⁶. At other times, such influence takes on a more aggressive tone, such as operations directly orchestrated from foreign national entities through Facebook profiles⁷, among many others, or by terrorist groups, as in the case of Telegram⁸, or similar cases.

Such operations, we repeat, are carried out either by and from those nations that own the major social networks or by those who use them for their own purposes from other locations. This includes not only the social media, SVOD or IM platforms already analysed, but also any other type of computer software or programme belonging to external entities, such as Pegasus⁹, which do not fall under the regulatory legislation described here and which we only mention without going into detail for reasons of length.

To the above, we must add the added complexity that many of the covert operations perpetrated by national entities or other types of groups, whether terrorists or cybercriminals, are carried out in a coordinated manner from one or more centres and extend to several social media platforms where they operate simultaneously. Regarding this phenomenon, known as *Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour* (CIB), Meta itself states: "*The vast majority of CIB networks we have dismantled globally attempted to spread across many online apps, including ours, YouTube, TikTok, X, Telegram, Reddit,*

⁶ - Netflix Help Centre, "How many countries is Netflix available in?", available at: <https://help.netflix.com/en/node/14164>. (accessed 19 October 2025).

⁷ - ZUIDIJK, Daniel, "Covert Facebook Network Found Targeting Romanian Voters", Bloomberg, December 2024, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-12-09/covert-facebook-network-found-to-be-targeting-romanian-voters>

⁸ - Europol, "Europol and Telegram take on terrorist propaganda online", available at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/europol-and-telegram-take-terrorist-propaganda-online> (accessed 18 October 2025).

⁹ - Reuters, "Spanish prime minister's mobile phone infected by Pegasus spyware, government says", May 2022, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spanish-prime-ministers-telephone-infected-by-pegasus-spyware-2022-05-02/>

Medium, Pinterest, and more"¹⁰. From this perspective, the ability of external entities to influence a national territory through large social media platforms can also extend to smaller ones thanks to their capacity to viralise and transfer propaganda, photos, or texts to reach the population.

On the other hand, in the case of Spain, SVOD consumption by Spaniards in mid-2024 indicates that 61.9% of households with Internet access used this type of platform, with Netflix being the favourite, followed by Amazon Prime and Movistar Plus+¹¹. It should be noted that free YouTube viewing, for example, is not included here as SVOD, nor is all the content of series and films that are consumed illegally on the internet, which further increases the influence of these SVODs through networks.

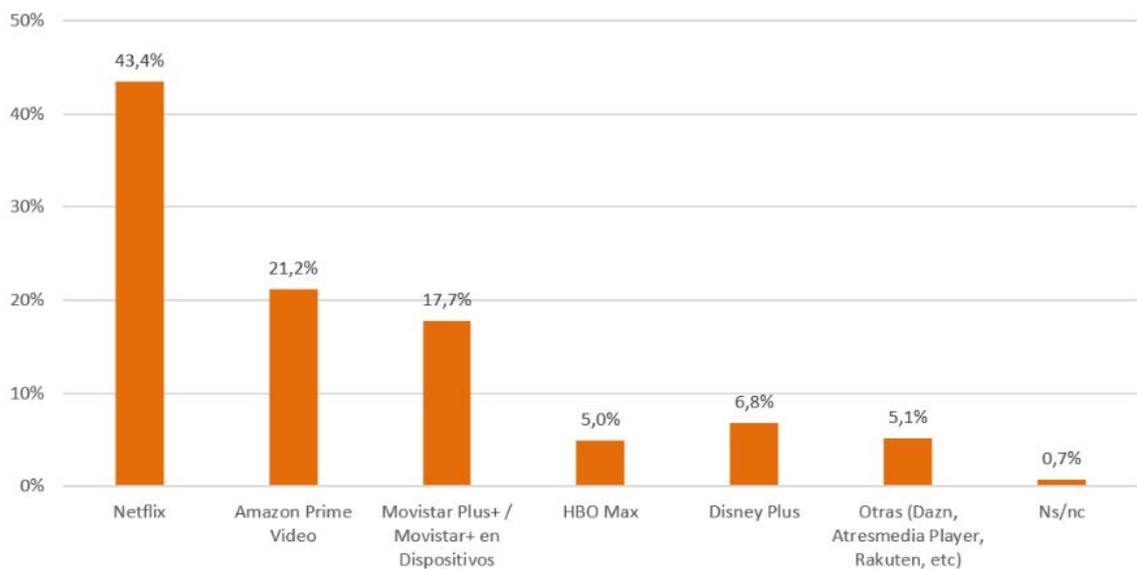


Figure 1. Preferred platforms in Spanish households (percentage of households in Q2 2024) Source: CNMCData.

With regard to social media, the most popular platforms were Facebook, Instagram and TikTok¹². Meta therefore clearly dominates this sector, and TikTok is also clearly established as an alternative.

¹⁰ - CLEGG, Nick, "What We Saw on Our Platforms During 2024's Global Elections", Meta, December 2024, available at: <https://about.fb.com/news/2024/12/2024-global-elections-meta-platforms/> (translated by Ignacio Minuesa).

¹¹ - CNMC, "Six out of ten households with Internet used payment platforms to view online content", October 2024, available at: <https://www.cnmc.es/panel-hogares-consumo-audiovisual-20241031>

¹² - *Ibid.*

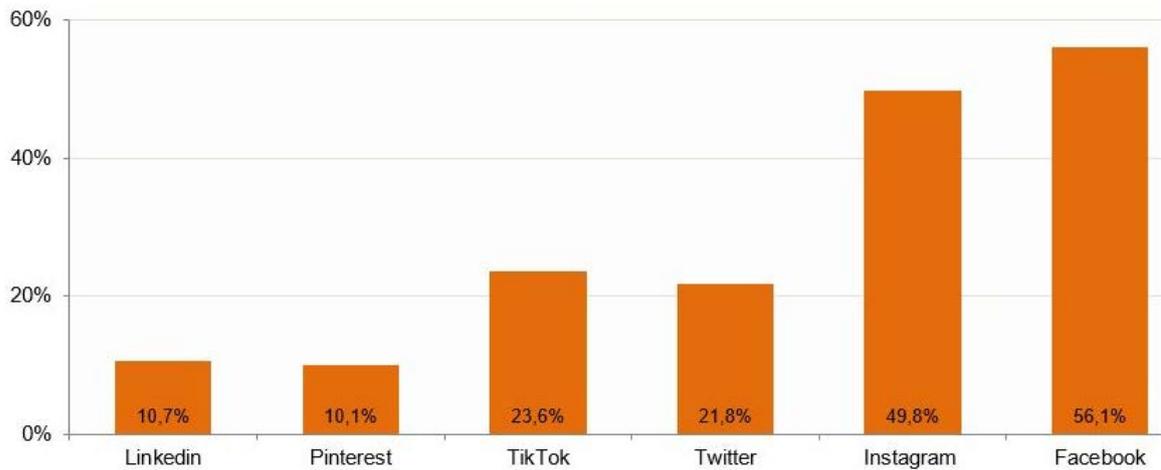


Figure 2. Social networks commonly used (IV-2023, percentage of individuals). Source: CNMCDData.

All of the above cases involving different social media platforms, SVOD, IM and the operations carried out through them by governments and other entities are part of the so-called "sixth power"¹³, which is changing the way we see and understand the world.

It is surprising to see that none of the social media platforms shown in the graphs were created in Spain. Similarly, in relation to the SVOD world, the two main media (Netflix and Amazon Prime Video) almost triple the third (Movistar+). The question that needs to be asked here is whether we are clearly losing ground in this area of *the sixth power*, with the consequent cultural, social, political and ideological implications for Spain and its sovereignty in cyberspace, which, let us not forget, has a direct impact on the sovereign capabilities of nations, as we have seen above.

¹³ - LÓPEZ GARAY, Miguel. Social media as weapons of mass influence and the need for an information doctrine. IEEE Opinion Paper 68/2025. [IEEE web link](#) and/or [bie3 link](#) (accessed 15 October 2025).

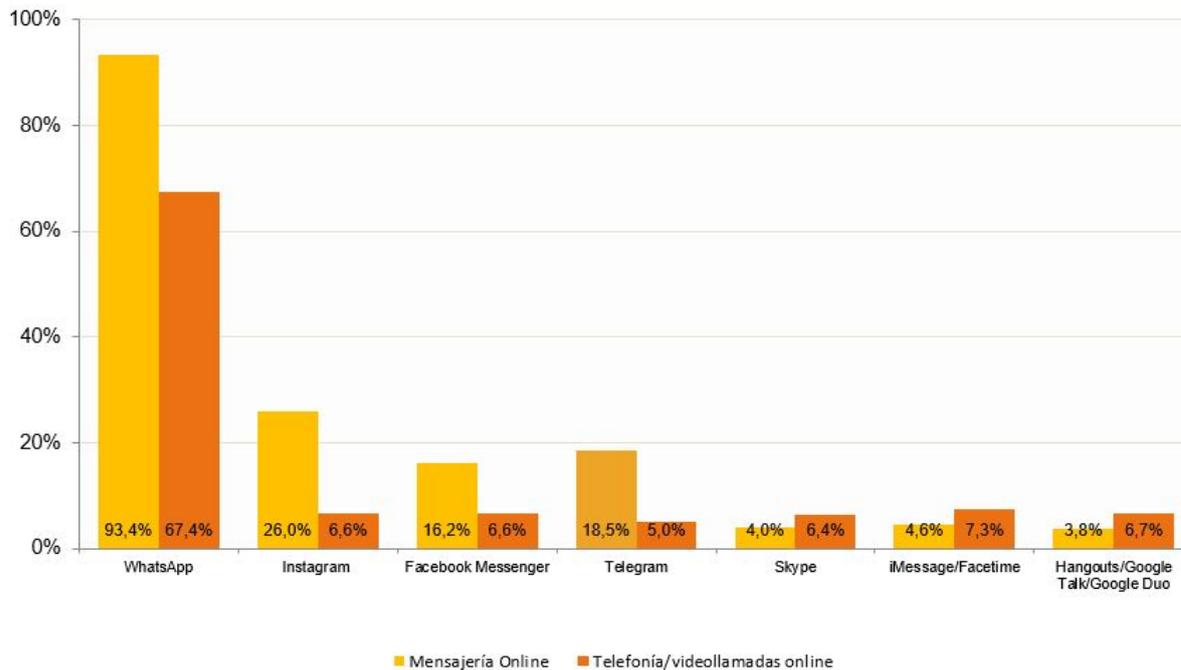


Figure 3. Online messaging/telephony services commonly used (IV-2023, percentage of individuals). Source: CNMCData.

Finally, we observe how IM is also dominated by products derived from the Meta matrix, with WhatsApp accounting for 93.4% of online messaging and 67% of telephony/video calls, followed by Instagram in second place and Facebook (also from Meta). Telegram ranks fourth.

On the other hand, outside Spain and Europe, there is a lack of cultural offerings from our country on the globe that other nations such as Turkey are taking advantage of, as we see in the analysis of the transnationalisation of serial fiction produced in that country¹⁴, or Saudi Arabia, with its MBC group that owns the Shahid platform, the largest viewing platform in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which has recently signed a partnership with the giant Netflix¹⁵, the leading platform in Europe, Latin America and part of Oceania¹⁶. The question to ask here is how Spain, with a Spanish-speaking

¹⁴ - BADILLO MATOS, Ángel. Turkish (television) delights: the globalisation of dizi. IEEE Analysis. [IEEE web link](#) and/or [bie3 link](#) (accessed 15 October 2025).

¹⁵ - Alarabiya English, "MBC Group and Netflix launch first-ever Shahid streaming bundle in MENA", July 2025, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/life-style/entertainment/2025/07/28/mbc-group-and-netflix-launch-first-ever-streaming-bundle-in-mena>

¹⁶ - MENA ROA, Mónica, "The streaming platform with the most subscribers in each country in the world," March 2023, available at: <https://es.statista.com/grafico/29600/servicio-de-streaming-con-el-mayor-numero-de-suscriptores-por-pais/>

market of 500 million native speakers and up to 600 million non-native speakers¹⁷, has only a superficial influence in a field where it should naturally be a leader. We say superficial because, although Spanish series launched worldwide have had and continue to have considerable success, these series are presented through foreign SVOD platforms rather than their own.

European regulatory laws as defence mechanisms

In this field under analysis, there are several fundamental pillars in European regulation that influence, to a greater or lesser extent, the matters we are dealing with here, which are:

- Digital Services Act (DSA).
- The Regulation of Online Terrorist Content (TCOR).
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act.
- Digital Markets Act (DMA).
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

We will leave aside the Cyber Resilience Act (CRA), which covers everything related to the protection of users with regard to products containing software or digital content¹⁸.

At the national level, each country can develop more specific domestic regulatory codes. In Spain, the National Commission for Markets and Competition (CNMC) is responsible for this function. However, the scope of action of the CNMC and its counterparts in each European country is limited, as they are all subject to European law, which seeks to unify the approach to the various dilemmas in the field of technology regulation in order to avoid fragmentation by country and promote the existence of a single, unified regulation. All of this is coordinated by the European Commission.

The CNMC is, therefore, a tool with limited scope for action, firstly because it is subject to the EU framework and the European Commission's regulatory guidelines, which may or may not be detrimental to the country, and secondly because regulation is a passive

¹⁷ - Instituto Cervantes, "Spanish surpasses 600 million speakers for the first time and consolidates its influence in film, music and video games," October 2024, available at: <https://cervantes.org/es/sobre-nosotros/sala-prensa/notas-prensa/espanol-supera-primera-vez-600-millones-hablantes-consolida> (accessed 16 October 2025).

¹⁸ - European Commission, "Cyber Resilience Act," March 2025, available at: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/es/politicas/cyber-resilience-act>

tool that is always used after the fact. We say after the fact because regulation is always adapting to the new realities of the field it regulates, with the field of technology being the fastest changing and therefore the most difficult to combat through regulation.

The emergence of regulations such as TCOR, which provide a solid and uniform framework for terrorism across Europe, is important. However, it is also complex to implement the articles that make up this framework when the technological platforms to be regulated are very different in terms of their economic, human and technological capacity to implement such legislation. Furthermore, it is also complex to balance under TCOR the very different approaches to what constitutes terrorism, which groups are designated as such, which are designated at EU level, which at domestic level and, of course, which at global level or by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) and other entities, especially in present or recent armed conflicts, civil wars or territorial conflicts.

There is also the complex issue of how to regulate new fields such as AI, especially those applications in the military sphere, an area *"where the lack of regulation of AI in defence and security represents a risk for both the military and civilian spheres due to the misuse that can be made of the tool"*¹⁹. On the other hand, there is another complexity, which is the overlap in AI and its capacity to generate legal conflicts regulated under the GDPR framework.

Finally, there is the biggest problem facing regulation, which is that, given the dangers mentioned above regarding the malicious use of social media and SVOD by other entities, governmental or otherwise, we have seen how these types of operations are carried out completely outside the scope of regulation, as they are unregulatable, either because they are carried out as covert operations or because they are simply a form of soft power that cannot be legislated or censored, as freedom of expression and information is a right that should always be inviolable in our society.

Spain's options in the face of technological problems

¹⁹ - TALAVERA RODRÍGUEZ, Emma. Impact of regulation on the application of Artificial Intelligence in Defence and Security. IEEE Opinion Paper 70/2025. [IEEE web link](#) and/or [bie3 link](#) (accessed 19 October 2025).

Considering the situation described above, we must find a solution for our long-suffering knight, who not only finds himself surrounded by technological giants such as TikTok and Meta, among many others, but is also constrained by regulations such as those in Europe, which are moderate but slow to take effect and be enforced, adding little sense of security to the barber's basin that our Quixote wears as a helmet.

For all the reasons outlined above, considerations about what our Alonso Quijano can do in the face of such windmills seem complicated to us. Once again, leaving aside all literary references, Spain has no choice but to try to deal with such giants. It is somewhat unacceptable that we are losing, as we saw above, on the national stage to foreign RRSS, SVOD and IM offerings. It is almost equally difficult to explain how, given our linguistic, cultural, historical and religious advantage, we do not have a greater presence in the statistics concerning the Spanish-speaking world.

Regulation alone cannot defeat what foreign agents have devised to wage cognitive warfare, in NATO terms²⁰, where anything goes. There is no regulation that covers and contains what is invisible, or almost invisible, such as algorithms and influence operations, bot farms or artificial intelligence that distorts the very natural truth of what the eye sees. The options involve being aware of how we are being defeated in this area of technology in our own national territory, not to mention internationally, and, knowing this, acting accordingly.

That is why Spain's options involve, first, raising awareness of the current situation, a situation in which the overwhelming presence of foreign technology companies is almost monopolising not only the means by which citizens obtain information and communicate, but also the content, with the impact and dangers already analysed in this paper, and, second, being able to develop solid skills in the areas of social media, SVOD and IM within the country and in those countries where historical ties, language, culture and religion are the basis for its organic and natural development, and where there is no need to resort to disinformation or lies, but only to the truths that unite us.

Conclusion

²⁰ - NATO, "Cognitive Warfare", Available at: <https://www.act.nato.int/activities/cognitive-warfare/> (accessed 20 October 2025).

The use of these giants by other nations, the intelligence operations carried out within countries through them and the soft power exercised as described above cannot be combated solely with European regulatory laws, not only because of their slowness but also because such operations are carried out outside the law and covertly. To this we must add other non-national actors, such as terrorist groups, radicals, and cybercriminals, who also operate within them. National sovereignty as the container of territorial, legal, political, economic, and cultural power now has a new terrain, which is technology, a terrain in which, as we have seen, we have more than questionable sovereignty. The danger is that this field has an influence on the others mentioned that we do not yet fully understand and that it may directly jeopardise the very concept of sovereignty itself.

Spain must wake up from its dream and try to stop being that Alonso Quijano who did not dare to be Don Quixote, once again abusing the analogy, but this time with permission and in the words of Borges²¹. We must not be so dependent on social media, SVOD or IM, because this jeopardises, as we have seen in so many countries and examples, not only civil stability, but also the sovereignty described above. Such a situation puts us at the mercy of those who possess such technology or those who make use of it, who in the best of cases exercise soft power over us and in the worst have an unparalleled capacity for destabilisation.

Not only is it necessary to regulate *a posteriori*, but also to combat and identify such influence operations in advance, through police, military and intelligence operations, and, above all, it is necessary to propose. Spain needs to reaffirm its presence within itself, strange as it may sound, because in the field of cognitive warfare and technological sovereignty, we have seen how the weight of the big tech companies is practically monopolised by others.

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²¹ - BORGES, Jorge Luis, "Complete Poetry", Penguin Random House, Barcelona, 2018.