

News consumption profiles facing disinformation: exposure and responses to suspect information

Perfiles de consumo informativo ante la desinformación: exposición y reacciones ante una información sospechosa



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Received: 23/12/2025 - Accepted: 15/04/2026 - Early access: 22/06/2026 - Published: 01/07/2026

Recibido: 23/12/2025 - Aceptado: 15/04/2026 - En edición: 22/06/2026 - Publicado: 01/07/2026

Abstract:

This article analyzes patterns of news consumption and their relationship with the perception of having been exposed to false information, as well as with the responses triggered by such perceptions. Based on a representative survey of the Andalusian population

Resumen:

El presente artículo analiza los perfiles de consumo informativo y su relación con la sospecha de haber recibido información falsa y con las reacciones generadas por dicha sospecha. A partir de una encuesta representativa de la población andaluza (n=1.550), se identifican

How to cite this article:

Pastora Estebanez, P. and García-Faroldi, L. (2026). News consumption profiles facing disinformation: exposure and responses to suspect information. *Doxa Comunicación*, 43, pp. 351-375.

<https://doi.org/10.31921/doxacom.3519>



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(n=1,550), three consumption profiles are identified through cluster analysis. Subsequently, logistic regression models are estimated to examine (1) the likelihood of suspecting exposure to disinformation, (2) the likelihood of reacting by consulting news media, (3) engaging in verification practices, or (4) taking no action. The results show that profiles with higher levels of digital consumption are more likely to report suspicion of disinformation, but not necessarily more likely to respond to it. Political interest emerges as the main predictor of active responses, whereas passivity is particularly concentrated among digitally oriented profiles with low informational interest. These findings suggest that the management of disinformation is disproportionately borne by the most politically engaged segments of the population, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities within the digital public sphere.

Keywords:

Incidental news consumption; news avoidance; generative artificial intelligence; social media; fact-checking.

tres perfiles de consumo mediante análisis de conglomerados. Posteriormente, se estiman modelos de regresión logística para analizar la probabilidad (1) de sospechar haber recibido desinformación, (2) de reaccionar a través de la consulta de medios de comunicación o (3) de verificación, o (4) la probabilidad de no hacer nada. Los resultados muestran que los perfiles con mayor consumo digital presentan una mayor probabilidad de sospecha, pero no necesariamente una mayor reacción. El interés político emerge como el principal predictor de las respuestas activas, mientras que la pasividad se concentra especialmente en perfiles digitales de bajo interés informativo. Estos hallazgos sugieren que la gestión de la desinformación recae sobre los sectores más politizados de la ciudadanía, lo que refuerza las dinámicas de desigualdad en la esfera pública digital.

Palabras clave:

Noticias incidentales; desconexión informativa; IAG; redes sociales; agencias de verificación.

1. Introduction

The increasingly widespread use of digital devices, especially smartphones with continuous internet connectivity, has brought about profound changes in recent years in how information is accessed, interpreted, and valued in contemporary society. News consumption is now fragmented, information disengagement is growing, along with distrust of both traditional media, social media, and online platforms. This paper addresses the different profiles of news consumption that exist today and how they relate to the phenomenon of disinformation.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The transformation of how we consume news

News consumption has undergone profound changes in recent years. Since the internet burst onto the scene in daily life, causing the digitization of traditional media, the expansion of social media to ever wider parts of the population has brought about further transformations in the news landscape. They can be summarized in three points: (i) the decentralization and personalization of consumption; (ii) the erosion of media professionals' roles; and (iii) the growth of news avoidance and incidental news consumption.

Regarding the decentralization and personalization of news consumption, the latest Spanish edition of the *Digital News Report* (2025, hereinafter DNR) confirms that all news sources have lost ground, even social media, and that online consumption is now predominant (seven out of ten Spaniards have used an online channel). Television remains the leading source of news

(54%), followed by social media (46%), the digital versions (websites and apps) of traditional newspapers (25%), and lastly, print newspapers (19%) and radio (18%).

The generational gap is evident in news consumption patterns, linked to the younger generations' massive and constant use of social media. According to the CIS *Study on Social Media Audiences (II)* (2025, study 3,511), 56.2% of those aged 18 to 24 usually get their news from television, compared to 70.4% of the population as a whole. In contrast, television is mentioned by more than 80% of Spaniards aged 55 and over. At the other end of the spectrum, among those aged 18 to 24, the use of social media as a news source is overwhelming (87.3%). Conversely, its use is much lower –though far from negligible– among those aged 65 to 74 (38.7%) and, especially, among those 75 and over (14.5%).

The prominence of social media as an information source can be explained by several of its defining characteristics. According to uses and gratifications theory, audiences are motivated to choose a medium that satisfies their needs and provides gratifications such as surveillance, information seeking, and maintaining contact with others (Katz *et al.*, 1973, Katz *et al.*, 1974, McQuail *et al.*, 1972). Thus, news fulfils several needs: cognitive, affective, personal integration, and escapism or catharsis (Katz *et al.*, 1973). In a recent qualitative study, Anderson (2025) found that social and emotional gratifications are more frequent among young people and women. These types of gratifications, moreover, are easier to obtain through social media than through traditional media. This author finds that, while established news values such as relevance, timeliness, and magnitude are important, younger people value live content and the ability to share news through social media.

News consumption has changed not only because of diversification of the channels through which citizens access information, but also because of the nature of consumption itself, which is more personalized and potentially allows for greater public participation (although this does not necessarily mean that such participation will come about). According to the DNR (2025), algorithmic access is the predominant mode today (59%), while 37% of direct access to news is through searches of journalistic brands, social media, search engines, aggregators, and notifications.

A second consequence of the changes in news consumption habits relates to the waning of the role of news professionals, whose role as gatekeepers (filtering and selecting what is news and what is published) has diminished. This phenomenon is closely related to the rise of novel news channels and, in particular, to the emergence of so-called Social Media Influencers. (SMI, Hudders *et al.*, 2020). These are figures who can be considered opinion leaders, and who extrapolate classic communication theories such as those of Lazarsfeld *et al.* (1944) and Katz (1957) to the digital context. Peter and Muth's qualitative study (2023) analyses the impact of influencers on the forming of political opinions. Young people use influencers as a complement to traditional media, especially to understand complex issues (Stehr *et al.*, 2015). The interviews show that traditional media are considered more credible sources of political information than these leaders, who influence more by reinforcing prior opinions than by altering them.

The latest significant change in the communications sphere concerns the growth of news avoidance and incidental news consumption. The latest DNR report (2025) states that 37% of Spaniards say they often or sometimes avoid the news, especially the young and those who express disinterest in politics or hold extreme views. The perceived information level (measured by the degree to which individuals consider themselves informed about what is happening in the country) is 68.5% in Spain, according to data from CIS study 3.511 (2025) mentioned above. That shows a decrease of 4.5 percentage points from two

years earlier (Feriouni & Ahmed-Mohamed, 2024). In both cases, young people consider themselves less informed than the population as a whole, although their average rose in 2025 from 59% to 60.7%. The group that considers itself the best informed has indeed changed. In 2023, it was the 55-64 age group (79% self-identified as such), while in 2025 it is the 45-54 year-olds (73.4%). Feriouni and Ahmed-Mohamed (2024) point to three reasons why young people have this lower self-perception: 1) their interests are not aligned with current events, which are heavily focused on politics and economics, as they prefer news related to entertainment and sports (a trend corroborated in the study by Catalina-García *et al.*, 2021); 2) their swift, fragmented consumption of news through social media; and 3) their mostly incidental (unintentional) exposure, which leads them to perceive their knowledge as more superficial. However, the young population is hardly uniform, and differences can be found in how news is consumed according to age and educational level (Catalina-García *et al.*, 2021).

As Boczkowski *et al.* (2017) point out, incidental news consumed through social media represents a break from the structured way traditional media was consumed, with its structured consumption times. Incidental consumption blurs the line between news and other content arriving via social media; news access is constant, but clicks on news are sporadic, and little time is spent reading it.

Alongside the rise in news avoidance and the consumption of incidental news, a reduction in news diet has been observed in recent years. According to data from the DNR (2025), 9% do not consult any news brands in Spain, 21% use one or two news outlets per week, and 49% consult five or more outlets. As the report points out, the data has both positive and negative implications: on the positive side, it implies brand loyalty among some consumers, but on the other hand, the risk of cognitive biases and information isolation has risen, reinforced by the growing personalization of content.

2.2. The spread of disinformation in digital environments and its consequences

Disinformation, defined by the European Commission as “verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm” (2018, p. 5), has become widespread as one of the defining phenomena of contemporary society, with its increasingly evident interference in politics both nationally and internationally. So much so that the World Economic Forum, in its Global Risks Report 2025, identified false information –whether intentional (disinformation) or unintentional (misinformation)– as the primary risk for the next two years. These phenomena are linked to others, such as conspiracy theories and hate speech, and have consequences both in the communication sphere and in the social and political spheres. The spread of false narratives influences social dynamics such as the discrediting of the media, social polarization, the weakening of institutional trust, and the erosion of scientific knowledge.

Shu *et al.* (2020) categorize the challenges posed by disinformation into two types: content-related and user-related. The former type is often sensationalist and emotional, affecting the news consumer more and prompting greater interaction (Shu *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, posts containing false content often go viral and trend on social media (Vosoughi *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the low cost of creating sources of disinformation and the ease of using software-controlled social media bots to help spread it contribute to the problem (Shao *et al.*, 2017).

Regarding user-related challenges, those who get their information through social media are more vulnerable to disinformation. A recent study (Montiel Torres *et al.*, 2025) observed that young people (15-24 years old) report greater difficulty in identifying false content, while, at the other extreme, the over-75s (the main consumers of news through traditional media) show greater confidence in their ability to do so. Pariser (2011) warns that an important aspect of social media platforms to consider is the existence of “bubbles” or “echo chambers” created as a result of the platforms’ recommender systems. Users are thus exposed to content that aligns with their own beliefs, reinforcing them in the process, while keeping users unaware of opposing narratives and beliefs. Such “echo chambers” or “bubbles” make the task of detecting and mitigating disinformation especially difficult because, as Shu *et al.* note (2020), repeated exposure to the same viewpoint only reinforces pre-existing beliefs and increases resistance to changing one’s opinion, even if the information is proven false. In turn, such news “bubbles” produce an increasing distance between groups of citizens with differing opinions, hindering consensus and fostering polarization. Recent academic debate focuses on digital platforms’ role in this process. While some studies argue that “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles” (Terren & Borge, 2021) isolate individuals in homogeneous news environments, other research nuances that view, noting that incidental exposure to differing perspectives still exists (Dubois & Blank, 2018). Such intentional, selective exposure explains why, beyond the control of algorithms, users tend to seek out and reinforce content that confirms their previous beliefs, while actively rejecting opposing views (Tucker *et al.*, 2018).

However, disinformation does not circulate solely through social media. Given the low cost of creating and publishing online content and the enormous reach of social media platforms, several alternative media sources (so-called *pseudo-media*) have recently emerged that often disseminate false and/or highly biased claims. When mainstream media outlets report on such claims to debunk them, they actually increase their reach—initially limited—and can consequently lead to increased distrust of legitimate media sources among audiences (Haller & Holt, 2019).

The combination of a diet of news consumed through social media and the spread of disinformation in those settings has negative consequences for trust in the media. Three studies analysing the Spanish situation are highlighted here. Hameleers *et al.* (2022) conducted a survey in ten European countries and concluded that the perception that disinformation and misinformation exist reduces trust in the news and is associated with greater consumption of news from non-journalistic sources. The association between lower trust in the news and the use of social media and other non-journalistic channels had been confirmed in the analysis by Fletcher and Park (2017) in 11 countries, using data from the DNR (2015); Park and colleagues (2020) reached the same conclusion using DNR data from 2016 and 2019 for 26 countries.

The latest Digital News Report (2025) identifies four population profiles in Spain based on their interest in news and the credibility they accord it. The category that has grown most in the last five years is the so-called “news neets”, meaning those who both declare little interest in the news and bestow it little credibility. While they represented a quarter of the population in 2021, by 2025 they accounted for 38%. This highlights the increasingly widespread information disengagement among citizens. At the other end of the spectrum, those who show great interest in the news and considerable trust in it are decreasing in number, falling from 29% in 2021 to 20% in 2025, almost half of the first group.

However, trust in the news is not a uniform phenomenon, and significant differences exist depending on the news source. Studies show greater trust when people are asked about news they consult personally than when they are asked about trust

in general (40% in the first case and 31% in the second, according to DNR data for Spain, 2025). Various surveys have also revealed that people trust news from news brands more than that coming from social media. Data from CIS study 3,511 (2025) shows that over half of the population trusts radio and print media news, one in four television news, and one in six for social media news. Interestingly, young people's trust in all these news sources is higher than that of the general population, except for radio. The difference is particularly pronounced with regard to social media –firstly– and the press –secondly. 29.7% of young people trust news posted on social media, compared to 63.1% for that published in the press. This greater trust in the press reinforces the trend found in the previous edition of the survey (Feridouni & Ahmed-Mohamed, 2024). Similarly, Catalina-García *et al.* (2021) surveyed young people aged 17-24 in Madrid and found that they accord greater credibility to traditional than to social media, even though the latter is their primary channel.

Finally, this section on the rise of disinformation in the hybrid media system cannot conclude without mentioning the recent emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) and its role in this context. There is a general consensus among the public that it helps to produce (fake images, deepfakes) and distribute disinformation (through bots and recommendation algorithms), although a majority also believe that it can help fight hoaxes through tools that facilitate their detection (García-Faroldi *et al.*, 2025).

2.3. Research questions and hypotheses

After a review of the literature, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the news consumption profiles that characterize the population? What sociodemographic, political, and informational characteristics are they related to?
2. Are there differences in the probability of suspecting having encountered false information and reactions to that suspicion depending on news consumption profiles?
3. What sociodemographic, political, and informational variables are related to the probability of suspecting having encountered false information and to the reactions to that suspicion?

With regard to the first research question, it is expected that news consumption profiles will be mainly related to greater or lesser access to news through social media (H1).

Regarding the second research question, significant differences are expected in the probability of having encountered false news, this being more likely among those who inform themselves more through social media (H2a). Significant differences are also expected based on news consumption profiles in the reactions to such suspicion (H2b).

Finally, it is expected that informational and political variables will be of greater importance than sociodemographic variables in estimating the probability of suspecting having received false news and of the reactions to that suspicion (H3).

3. Methodology

Data from a representative survey of the Andalusian population aged 15 and over was used to answer the research questions and verify the hypotheses proposed. This survey was conducted within the framework of the Excellence Project “Impact of

disinformation in Andalusia: a cross-sectional analysis of audiences and journalistic routines and agendas (DesinfoAND)", part of the Andalusian Plan for Research, Development and Innovation (PAIDI 2020, ProyExcel_00143). The survey was carried out in December 2023 by a polling firm contracted specifically for the purpose. The sample comprised 1,550 people: 1,250 from online surveys drawn from a panel of over 9,000 people, and 300 telephone interviews conducted with the population aged 60 and over¹. This mixed method ensured that the older population were adequately represented in the overall sample, as online surveys tend to under-represent that age group. The sample was stratified by size of residence using data from the 2021 Census, and quotas were established for sex and age using data from the Municipal Register (*Padrón Continuo*) (2021). The margin of error for a 95.5% confidence level was $\pm 2.55\%$ for the overall sample, assuming simple random sampling².

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data anonymity was ensured. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Málaga (protocol 160-2024-H).

Five questions were chosen to create the dependent variables.

Firstly, the item concerning the suspicion of having received false information is as follows:

Thinking about the last 7 days, have you received any information or news through any channel (through the mass media, social media, instant messaging, video platforms, etc.) that makes you suspect it may be false? Yes / No / I don't know, I'm not sure.

For the purposes of the analysis, only the first two responses were taken into account to perform the logistic regressions, and those who indicated that they were not sure were considered missing values (496 cases).

Secondly, the respondent's reaction on receiving information of this type is included in a multiple-choice question:

If you had any doubts about whether information from social media (Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) or messaging apps (WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.) was true or false, how would you react?

Select all that apply.

- *I would find out where the message came from.*
- *I would cross-check the information with traditional media (press, radio, television).*
- *I would consult specialized fact-checking sources.*
- *I would ask people around me who are informed about current affairs.*
- *I wouldn't do anything.*
- *I would stop following the individual or digital media outlet that had disseminated it.*

1 The individuals participating in the online panel were recruited by the polling firm via the internet, with financial incentives for their participation. The telephone survey of people aged 60 and over was conducted using randomly selected phone numbers.

2 It is standard practice in public opinion studies to calculate the margin of error for simple random sampling. While the introduction of quotas for sex and age means that the sampling does not meet the randomness requirement, thus increasing the margin of error, stratification decreases the variance and, therefore, the error. The final sample matches the designed sample in terms of age, sex, and habitat size.

- *I would report it as false news.*
- *Not applicable. I never use the internet, or I don't use any social media or instant messaging.*
- *I don't know.*

Due to space limitations, only the second (check with media outlets), the third (consult fact-checking sources), and the fifth (do nothing) responses were chosen for analysis in this study. These elicit dichotomous responses (Yes/No), if the respondent selected the option.

Regarding the independent variables, the following question was used to create the news consumption profiles: *How often do you use the following sources for news? Television/ Print newspapers/ Digital newspapers/ Radio/ Social media and video platforms.*

The respondent could answer on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 for each source, the data was then recoded so that the highest values corresponded to the greatest frequency of use: Every day (5), Once or more times a week (4), A few times a month (3), Hardly ever (2), Never (1), Don't know.

The remaining independent variables were divided into two groups: those of a sociodemographic nature and those of a sociopolitical nature.

a) Sociodemographic and political variables:

Included here are sex (categories male/female); age (divided into 15 to 24 years/ 25 to 44 / 45 to 59 / 60 and over); educational level (three categories: up to compulsory secondary studies/ non-compulsory secondary studies/ university); subjective social class (the five original responses have been recoded into three: high (sum of high and upper-middle classes)/ middle/ working class (sum of lower-middle and working class)); political ideology (the original scale of 0 to 10 was recoded into five groups: extreme left (values 0-2), left (3-4), centre (5), right (6-7) and extreme right (8-10)); and the respondent's declared interest in politics (the original variable with four responses was recoded into two groups, those who show interest -having responded a lot or quite a lot- and those who do not -having indicated little or no interest-).

b) Informational variables:

This group includes questions related to trust in different sources and interest in the news.

Questions related to trust stem from the question:

- *To what extent do you trust the news and information you access or receive through...? A lot/ Quite a bit/ Little/ Not at all/ I don't use it to access news/ Don't know*
- *Television*
- *Print newspapers*
- *Digital newspapers (online)*
- *Radio*
- *Social media*

- *Instant messaging applications (WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook Messenger, etc.)*
- *Friends, family, and coworkers*

Traditional media outlets, including digital newspapers, have been recoded as a single variable that captures the average trust of all of them. If a respondent indicated that they did not use a certain channel, that channel was not included in the calculation of the average. Only 7 people said that they did not use any of the proposed channels for news.

To simplify the analysis, the categories of variables that measure trust (in the media, social media, messaging apps, and people close to them) were recoded into two: trustful (for those who chose the options “a lot” or “quite a bit”) or distrustful (for those who chose “little” or “not at all”). This dichotomization, and subsequent ones, is based on criteria of analytical parsimony and ease of interpretation, since the intermediate categories on the scales show limited substantive differences between them, and therefore, dichotomization allows for more stable estimates in logistic regression models.

Finally, interest in the news is reflected in the question:

To what extent would you say you are interested in the news?

- *I'm very interested in it.*
- *I'm quite interested in it.*
- *I'm not very interested in it.*
- *I'm not interested in it at all.*
- *I don't know.*

Similarly to how interest in politics was handled, the original variable was recoded to dichotomize it: those who show interest –having responded a lot or quite a bit– and those who do not –responses of little or not at all.

The analytical strategy followed in this study consists of three parts:

1. Cluster analysis to establish news consumption profiles.
2. Descriptive analysis to examine how profiles are distributed in the different social categories studied.
3. Logistic regression analysis with dichotomous dependent variables to estimate the probabilities related to each independent variable of having received news suspected to be false and of reacting by consulting traditional media, specialized fact-checkers, or by deciding to do nothing.

1. Analysis of clusters of news consumption profiles:

The process to create the news consumption profiles was as follows. A cluster analysis was performed based on the frequency of use of different news sources. This procedure allowed individuals to be classified into internally homogeneous groups that differed from each other, based on their media consumption patterns. The analysis was based on five variables that capture the frequency of use of the main news sources, as explained above.

The study was conducted in three complementary phases, following standard methodological approaches for multivariate exploratory techniques. A hierarchical cluster analysis was applied in the first phase using Ward's method, employing the

squared Euclidean distance as a measure of dissimilarity to minimize within-group variance (Ward, 1963). Secondly, by visualizing a dendrogram and using the Calinski-Harabasz test (1974), the three-group cluster was identified as the most robust, maximizing the ratio of between-group to within-group variance (Milligan & Cooper, 1985). Finally, a non-hierarchical cluster analysis (k-means clustering) was performed to optimize the partitioning based on the centroids obtained in the previous hierarchical solution (Punj & Stewart, 1983). This combined strategy improved the stability of the classification and validated the robustness of the three news consumption profiles identified.

Having obtained the final three-cluster solution, statistical validation and characterization of the profiles was carried out using analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA). The results of the analysis confirmed the existence of statistically significant differences between the three clusters in all the consumption dimensions analysed ($p < .001$ in all cases).

2. Descriptive analysis:

Once the three clusters were identified, they were descriptively characterized. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated for the frequency of use of each news channel within each group. Based on the results, the clusters were substantively interpreted and labelled as per their dominant patterns of news consumption.

Furthermore, in order to externally validate the clusters, their association with several sociodemographic and political variables was analysed. These variables were examined using contingency tables and chi-square tests. The analysis confirmed that news consumption profiles are related differently to relevant sociodemographic, trust-related, and political characteristics, thereby reinforcing the substantive validity of the typology found.

3. Logistic regressions:

Binary logistic regression analyses were performed in the third phase with the aim of estimating the probability that individuals suspect they have received false information and react differently to said suspicion, based on their consumption profile, and the other characteristics mentioned, be they sociodemographic, political, informative or related to trust.

The model's results are presented using odds ratios, a common measure in analysis of this type due to its ease of substantive interpretation. Odds ratios indicate how much the probability of the analysed event increases or decreases when an independent variable increases by one unit or when a category is compared to the category of reference, all other independent variables in the model remaining constant. Values greater than 1 indicate an increase in the probability of the event, while values less than 1 indicate a decrease. To obtain more robust estimates against potential problems of heteroscedasticity or deviations from the model's classical assumptions, robust standard errors were employed.

Finally, to aid interpretation of the results, adjusted probabilities (margins) were calculated for the different profiles. The estimates allow for an intuitive visualization of the differences between groups, translating the model coefficients into predicted probabilities.

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of news consumption profiles

Table 1 presents the average frequency of use (scale 1-5, where 5 = “every day” and 1 = “never”) for each news channel by cluster. First, we find the traditional profile (n = 601), characterized by very intensive use of traditional media, especially television (M = 4.49) and radio (M = 4.02), with the majority of respondents reporting daily use in both cases. In contrast, social media use is minimal (M = 1.56), concentrated in the categories “never” and “hardly ever”. Newspaper consumption, both print and digital formats, is moderate to low, falling in the middle of the scale.

The second cluster represents a moderate digital profile (n = 406) defined by a generally low pattern of news consumption, with the exception of social media, which constitutes their main route for accessing news (M = 4.03). Television use (M = 3.52) is at intermediate levels, while radio (M = 1.76) and newspapers (especially print) show lower values. This profile, therefore, combines a strong centrality of social media with a low overall news intensity, which differentiates it from both the traditional and omnichannel profiles.

Finally, the third cluster presents the intensive omnichannel profile (n = 515), characterized by high and widespread consumption across all news channels. This is primarily marked by intensive use of social media (M = 4.63) and television (M = 4.60), followed by radio (M = 4.21) and digital newspapers (M = 3.77). This profile shows a high frequency of daily or weekly consumption across virtually all media analysed, constituting a pattern of varied and sustained exposure to news.

Table 1. Media consumption frequencies by consumption profiles

Consumption profile	n	Television (mean)	Print media (mean)	Digital media (mean)	Radio (mean)	Social media (mean)
Traditional	601	4.49	2.50	2.54	4.02	1.56
Moderate digital	406	3.52	1.45	2.22	1.76	4.03
Intensive omnichannel	515	4.60	2.05	3.77	4.21	4.63
Total	1.522	4.27	2.06	2.87	3.48	3.26

Source: Own elaboration

Note: All differences between profiles are statistically significant (one-way ANOVA, p < .001)

As shown in Figure 1, the profiles exhibit different sociodemographic and political characteristics, as well as distinct levels of trust in information channels, when consuming news, with statistically significant differences across all the variables analysed. The traditional profile is primarily composed of older individuals and has a lower proportion of the young. It is the only profile where men outnumber women and has the lowest education level, whilst being in the middle in both ideology and social class. They show less trust in social media and digital platforms but relatively high levels of trust in traditional media and in people close to them. The profile also exhibits intermediate levels of interest in politics and the news.

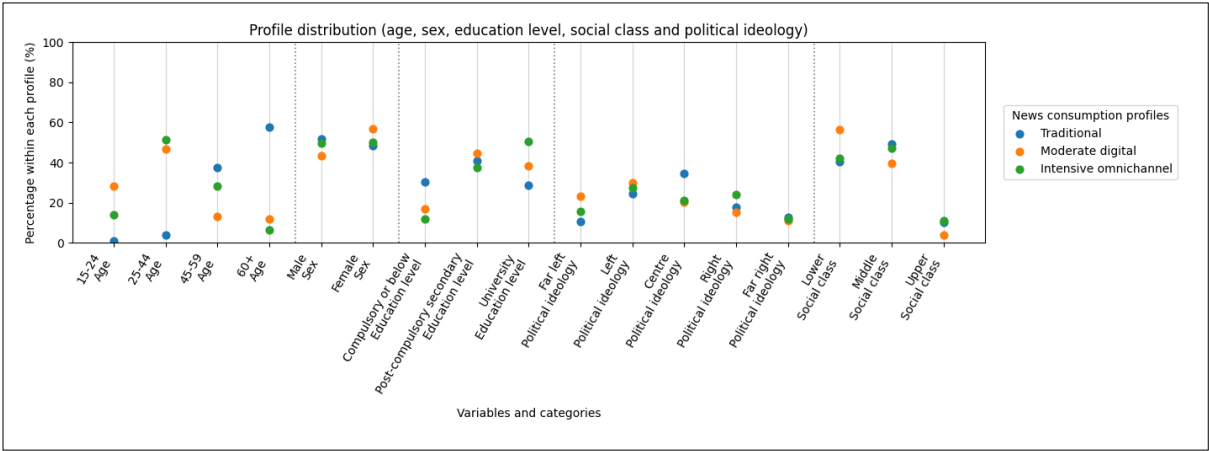
The second profile, termed moderate digital, is the youngest, with an over-representation of people between 15 and 24 years old. It is the profile that most commonly has secondary education levels and lower socioeconomic status. They are characterized by lower trust in traditional media, apps, and people close to them, and by intermediate levels of trust in social media and platforms. This profile shows the lowest levels of interest in politics and news, reinforcing their character as sporadic and detached consumers of news.

Finally, the intensive omnichannel user profile is middle-aged, with a higher proportion of people between 25 and 44 years old, and an over-representation of university graduates and those from middle and upper social classes. This profile shows the highest levels of trust across all channels, including social media, digital platforms, and people close to them, and is the most interested in both politics and news.

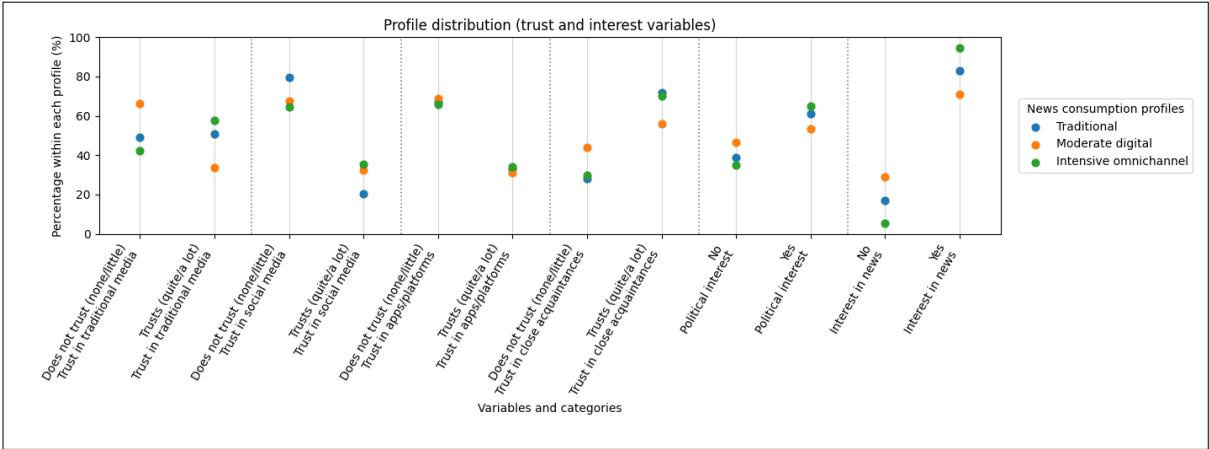
These descriptive results point to the existence of structural inequalities in access, intensity, and orientation of news consumption, which not only refer to generational differences, but also to levels of interest, trust, and education.

Figure 1. Frequency of independent variables in news consumption profiles

a)



b)



Source: Own elaboration in Python

4.2. Analysis of the suspicion of receiving false information and reactions to it

Table 2 presents the results of the estimated logistic regression model used to analyse the factors associated with the suspicion of having received false news, measured dichotomously. The model is statistically significant (Wald $\chi^2 = 80.84$; $p < 0.001$) and explains a moderate proportion of variance (Pseudo $R^2 = 0.104$).

Table 2. Logistic regression on the suspicion of disinformation
(Odds Ratios, Robust Standard Errors)

Dependent variable: Suspicion of having received false news (1 = yes)
Reference categories: Traditional profile · Age 15–24 · Male · Compulsory education or less · Distrustful · Ideologically centrist · Lower social class · No interest in politics · No interest in news

Variable	Odds Ratio	p
Consumption profile (Traditional)		
Digital	1.85 **	0.043
Omnichannel	1.82 **	0.028
Trust in traditional media (Does not trust)		
Trusts	0.54 ***	0.001
Trust in social media (Does not trust)		
Trusts	0.82	0.426
Trust in apps/platforms (Does not trust)		
Trusts	1.56 *	0.070
Trust in close acquaintances (Does not trust)		
Trusts	0.64 **	0.026
Interest in news (No)		
Yes	1.61	0.197
Age (15–24)		
25–44	0.97	0.924

45-59	1.07	0.822
60+	1.72	0.144
Sex (Male)		
Female	1.00	0.986
Education level (Compulsory or below)		
Post-compulsory secondary	0.79	0.433
University	1.01	0.973
Political ideology (Centre)		
Far left	0.54 **	0.043
Left	0.89	0.660
Right	0.72	0.232
Far right	0.75	0.363
Social class (Lower)		
Middle	0.86	0.451
Upper	0.41 **	0.008
Political interest (No)		
Yes	3.45 ***	0.000
n=621		
Pseudo R²=0,104		
Wald $\chi^2=80,84$ ***		

Source: Own elaboration

Notes: * p < 0.10 . ** p < 0.05 . *** p < 0.01

Firstly, news consumption profiles are one of the main explanatory factors. Compared to the traditional profile, both the digital and omnichannel profiles show a greater likelihood of suspecting they have received false news, with odds ratios significantly greater than one. This result is consistent with the fact that, compared to the traditional news consumer, these profiles use more digital and social media and are more exposed to the disinformation circulating on those platforms. Conversely, classic sociodemographic variables (age, sex, and education level) do not show statistically significant associations with the suspicion of disinformation once the other factors are allowed for.

Regarding political ideology, only the far-left category shows a significant association, exhibiting a lower probability of suspicion compared to centrist positions. Socioeconomic status also shows major differences. Belonging to the upper social strata is associated with a lower probability of suspicion compared to the working classes. Variables related to trust in news sources reveal differentiated effects depending on the channel. Trust in traditional media is associated with a lower probability of suspicion, as is trust in people close to the individual. In contrast, trust in social media does not show a significant relationship with suspicion, while trust in messaging applications shows a moderately significant positive effect. Finally, interest in politics is one of the model's most robust predictors. Those who are interested in politics are significantly more likely to suspect they have received false information. This effect is not replicated for general interest in news.

Overall, the results indicate that suspicion of disinformation is more closely linked to news consumption patterns, trust in certain sources, and the degree of political involvement than to traditional sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 3 presents the results of three logistic regression models that analyse the factors associated with different reactions when suspecting disinformation: consulting media outlets, consulting fact-checkers, and doing nothing. All models include the same set of independent variables and share the same reference categories.

Table 3. Factors associated with different reactions when suspecting disinformation
(Odds Ratios, Robust Standard Errors)

Reference categories: Traditional profile · Age 15–24 · Male · Compulsory education or less · Distrusts · Ideological centre · Lower social class · No political interest · No interest in news

Variable	Consulting media outlets	Consulting fact-checkers	Doing nothing
Digital Profile	—	—	2.28 **
Omnichannel Profile	—	—	—
Trust in media (Trusts)	2.97 ***	—	—
Trust in apps (Trusts)	0.48 ***	—	—
Interest in news (Yes)	2.46 **	—	—
Age 45–59	—	—	3.49 **

Age 60+	0.59 *	—	4.18 **
Female	0.76 *	—	—
Post-compulsory secondary	—	—	3.64 **
University	—	0.63 *	3.30 **
Right	—	0.55 **	—
Far right	—	0.31 ***	3.69 ***
Upper social class	—	1.88 **	—
Political interest (Yes)	0.59 ***	1.46 **	0.56 *
n	887	887	887
Pseudo R ²	0.096	0.060	0.117
Wald χ^2	100.57	63.57	52.80

Source: Own elaboration

Notes: = not significant ($p \geq 0.10$); * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. In all three models $p < 0.001$.

Firstly, the model explaining the likelihood of checking in traditional media shows no significant differences between news consumption profiles. However, relevant sociodemographic and trust effects do emerge. People aged 60 and over are less likely to consult the media compared to the 15-24 age group, as are women, whose behaviour shows a lower propensity to turn to the media when they have suspicions. In contrast, trust in traditional media significantly increases the likelihood of consulting such sources. Conversely, trust in apps or digital platforms is associated with a lower likelihood of consulting the media, suggesting a shift in news sources. Similarly, interest in politics reduces the likelihood of consulting the media, while interest in news significantly increases it.

Regarding the model for consulting specialized fact-checkers, a discernible pattern emerges. News consumption profiles do not show significant associations, but ideological, educational, and social class variables do. Individuals who identify as right-wing or far-right are less likely to consult fact-checking sources compared to those with centrist positions. Conversely, belonging to a higher social class and demonstrating an interest in politics significantly increases the likelihood. As for educational level, university graduates show a lower propensity to consult fact-checking sources.

In cases of inaction, clear differences emerge related to news consumption patterns. Those with a moderate digital profile are characterized by a greater likelihood of not reacting, compared to those of a traditional profile. Age is also a relevant factor:

both the 45–59 age group and, especially, the 60-plus group show a higher probability of taking no action when suspicious. Similarly, individuals with post-compulsory secondary education and university degrees exhibit a greater propensity for passivity. From an ideological perspective, the far right stands out for its higher probability of inaction, while political interest is associated with less passivity, significantly reducing the likelihood of not reacting.

Overall, the results show that reactions to disinformation do not follow a uniform pattern, but rather depend on the type of response considered. While passivity is particularly associated with age, the low-consumption digital profile, and certain ideological positions, active responses such as checking in media outlets and using fact-checking agencies appear to be more closely linked to political interest, ideological stance, and, in the case of fact-checking, social class.

The adjusted probability analysis (Table 4) allows for the interpretation of logistic regressions in terms of probabilities and facilitates a substantive comparison between news consumption profiles. First, the results show clear differences in the probability of suspecting having received disinformation. While the estimated probability among individuals with a traditional profile is around 48%, this increases to approximately 61% among moderate digital profiles and 60% among intensive omnichannel profiles. These results indicate that, when allowing for all variables, profiles with greater exposure to digital environments are more likely to suspect they have received potentially false content.

Table 4. Adjusted probabilities (margins) by news consumption profile

Dependent variable	Traditional	Moderate digital	Intensive omnichannel	n	Pseudo R ²
Suspecting disinformation	48%	61%	60%	621	0.104
Consulting media outlets	57%	53%	60%	887	0.096
Consulting fact-checkers	36%	31%	35%	887	0.060
Doing nothing	6%	12%	7%	887	0.117

Source: Own elaboration

**Note: Probabilities estimated from logistic regressions. All other variables in the model remain constant
Reference category in the profiles: Traditional**

Regarding reactions, it was found that the likelihood of consulting traditional media is slightly higher among omnichannel profiles (60%), followed by traditional profiles (57%), while it is somewhat lower among moderate digital profiles (53%). As for consulting fact-checking agencies, the likelihood is generally lower, although there are still differences between profiles. Traditional and omnichannel profiles show similar probabilities (35–36%), while moderate digital profiles show a lower likelihood of checking information through this channel (31%). The pattern points to less institutionalization of fact-checking among those who primarily consume news on social media. Finally, passivity in the face of disinformation (measured as the likelihood of taking no action against it) is significantly higher among moderate digital profiles. The estimated probability of

this last group taking no action reaches 12%, which is double that observed among traditional profiles (6%) and also higher than that of omnichannel profiles (7%).

5. Conclusions and discussion

The results shown in the previous section provide answers to the research questions posed in this study and allow testing of the hypotheses proposed.

First, cluster analysis reveals that there are three distinct news consumption profiles: one dominated by traditional media, another characterized by moderate consumption primarily through digital and social media, and an omnichannel profile with high levels of consumption across all media. This finding corroborates the first hypothesis, which assumed that news consumption profiles are distinguished mainly by the degree of access to news through social media (H1). While the second and third profiles do consume news via the internet, the intensity with which the third does so is very different from the second, as is its consumption of traditional media. In addition to diversity of sources, differences were found in all the variables analysed, allowing each profile to be characterized. Profile one is older, with primary education, little trust in digital media, and much more trust in traditional sources; profile two is younger and from a lower social class, completed compulsory education, and shows little trust or interest; while number three is middle-aged, has higher education, is upper-middle class, and shows the greatest trust and interest.

The results are consistent with previous research in showing that digital profiles are more common among young people. Six out of ten respondents aged 15 to 24 belong to the group that primarily gets its news from social media. Therefore, incidental news consumption is more common in this age group, a finding also observed by Ceballos-del-Cid *et al.* (2025). However, cluster analysis also reveals that 37.5% of young people belong to the group that is most actively engaged with news.

Regarding the second question, it has been observed that the probability of suspecting the presence of false content is higher among those who use the internet more frequently for news, a not unexpected result given that social media is the primary platform for disseminating that type of content, thus corroborating hypothesis H2a. However, hypothesis H2b is only partially confirmed, since news consumption profiles are only significant in terms of inaction when encountering suspicious news items –with the probability of passivity doubling in the moderate digital user group compared to traditional and intensive omnichannel users– but not in terms of confirming via other media or consulting fact-checking agencies. Such passivity could be explained by the low level of interest in news and politics that characterizes this moderate digital user profile. Indeed, interest in news and politics are two of the strongest predictors of active reactions, suggesting that inaction is primarily a consequence of disengagement from the news and not a deliberate strategy for managing the digital environment.

Finally, regression analyses have shown that sociodemographic variables are worse predictors of suspicion of having received false news and of reactions to such suspicion than informational and political variables, thus confirming hypothesis H3. This finding suggests that the sociodemographic differences observed in previous studies may be mediated by variables more directly related to the news ecosystem, factors that have been taken into consideration in this work, such as consumption patterns, trust in different sources, and interest in politics.

The key sociodemographic variables, although none are relevant in all three reactions studied, are age (greater passivity among those over 45 and less checking in traditional media among the over-60s) and educational levels. The results reveal that graduates show a lower propensity to consult fact-checkers and a greater likelihood of doing nothing. The first finding observed in those with university degrees suggests greater confidence in their own judgment of the trustworthiness of news. The second may be related to this group feeling less social pressure against choosing this response (only 133 people in the sample do so), which is likely socially disapproved. Sex, for its part, is only relevant in the case of checking news in the media, such behaviour being less frequent among women than men. Other studies agree that sex differences in the perception of and reaction to disinformation are subtle and non-linear (Montiel *et al.*, 2025; Turel, 2024).

Political interest is the most influential factor determining reactions when suspecting disinformation. It is a significant variable in all three cases: those who express an interest in politics are more likely to verify news in specialized media and are less likely to do nothing or to check in traditional media. Conversely, an interest in news leads to greater consultation of media outlets for confirmation. The crucial role of the media in fact-checking is evident in that it is the most frequently cited response by the population surveyed (52.5%) when faced with suspected disinformation, a result that coincides with the DNR report (2025).

These findings suggest that managing disinformation in the digital public sphere falls primarily to the most politically engaged and socially mobilized sectors, while a significant portion of the population chooses inaction in the face of suspicion. These results match those obtained by the DNR (2025), which indicate that participation in public debate is linked to interest in current affairs and to those who get news through social media. Future studies may wish to look more closely at the factors examined here and the dynamics that currently characterize public discourse, employing qualitative techniques combined with research based on the extraction of large amounts of data from social media.

The increase in news consumption through incidental news –reflected in the moderate digital profile, which represents a quarter of the population surveyed– challenges journalists' traditional role as the arbiters of whether news is important or not (Boczkowski *et al.*, 2017). This erosion of journalism is related not only to the expansion of social media use but to the loss of trust in traditional media, which is even called out as a generator of disinformation (Montiel Torres *et al.*, 2025). That perception leads to less news consumption through traditional media, but also decreased consumption through social media and even through Artificial Intelligence (Rasul *et al.*, 2025). Thus, a phenomenon of news avoidance emerges, whereby over a third of the Spanish population voluntarily limits their exposure to news (DNR, 2025).

It is increasingly common to learn about the latest political news not through journalistic sources but through non-specialized websites, as highlighted by the international study conducted by Wojcieszak *et al.* (2024), who conclude that of all visits to political content, only one third come from news sites. News consumption is an essential component in the formation of citizenship, but not enough attention has been paid to the fact that social media can potentially play a significant role in young people's political socialization, something which has consequences in the public sphere (Bode, 2016). One consequence is the polarization of political debate, particularly clear at election time (Teruel *et al.*, 2026). It is accentuated by algorithmic dynamics, which prioritize emotional content that is swiftly shared and leads to the creation of echo chambers in which people of differing opinions are increasingly less likely to interact with each other or to consume news from opposing viewpoints.

Finally, it goes without saying that the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) in recent years has been another disruptive factor in how news is produced and consumed, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood (Sedano *et al.*, 2025). New GAI tools have led the European Union to regulate their use in this and other social spheres (Fernández-Torres & Cea, 2025). According to a recent survey (Pastora-Estebanez & García-Faroldi, 2025), one in five Andalusians uses it to search for information and news. Furthermore, their assessment of the information provided is very positive: four out of ten consider it highly trustworthy. However, more than half have a negative view of the use of GAI by media professionals to write news articles (*ibid.*). Media literacy is increasingly needed to combat disinformation; GAI itself is proving to be a powerful tool for achieving this goal (Zafra *et al.* 2025).

These results allow the identification of some specific practical implications. Firstly, the media literacy actions mentioned should be targeted primarily at the moderate digital profile, characterized by little interest in news and politics and greater passivity in the face of disinformation. Given that political interest emerges as the strongest predictor of active reactions, those actions would be more effective if integrated with civic education, fostering not only media literacy but also engagement with the public sphere. Secondly, the results point to the desirability of promoting a diversified news diet, since omnichannel profiles show a greater propensity to fact-check. Finally, the low rate of consultation of fact-checking sources, even among those who actively react to suspected disinformation, suggests the need to increase the visibility and public accessibility of specialized fact-checking agencies.

6. Funding

This work has been funded by the Excellence Project “Impact of disinformation in Andalusia: cross-sectional analysis of audiences and journalistic routines and agendas (DesinfoAND)”, of the Andalusian Plan for Research, Development and Innovation (Junta de Andalucía, PAIDI 2020, ProyExcel_00143); and by the national research project PID 2023-147486OB-I00 (State Research Agency, Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, “Journalistic applications of AI to reduce disinformation: trends, uses and perceptions of professionals and audiences” (DESINFOPERIA)).

This article has been translated into English by Brian O’Halloran, to whom we are grateful for his work.

7. Specific contributions of each author

	Name
Conception and design of the work	Pablo Pastora Estebanez and Livia García-Faroldi
Methodology	Pablo Pastora Estebanez and Livia García-Faroldi
Data collection and analysis	Pablo Pastora Estebanez
Discussion and conclusions	Pablo Pastora Estebanez and Livia García-Faroldi
Writing, formatting, revision and approval of versions	Pablo Pastora Estebanez and Livia García-Faroldi

8. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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