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Social media, trust and news consumption: comparative analysis of France, United Kingdom and Spain

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Introduction

- **Disinformation** is one of the most urgent threats facing contemporary societies around the world (Tandoc, Wei Lim & Ling, 2017). Since the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States and the approval of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, research on this topic has flourished. Disinformation has also played an important role during the Covid-19 pandemic and, more recently, in the war in Ukraine.
- Disinformation is related to other phenomena such as **media and political polarization**:
 - ❑ The Digital News Report of the Reuters Institute (2022) highlights the existence of distinct national realities regarding **media polarization as perceived by the audience**: from 31% in France to 49% in Spain, with United Kingdom occupies an intermediate position (37%).
 - ❑ **Political polarization** is increasing in the public sphere due to social media, who reinforces **the spread of emotional messages** instead of rational ones, exacerbating differences among groups.
- **Disinformation spreads quickly** among social media and has affected the work of journalists and the perception of public opinion about them. But... is this happening in the same way in different European contexts?
- We follow the well-known **classification of media systems** proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and select countries with different media systems to test the relationship between trust in news, use of social media for informative purposes and finding fake news.

Research questions and methodology

➤ Research questions:

1. Do the audiences of the three countries differ in their **interest and trust** in news?
2. Do the audiences of the three countries differ in their **concern about fake news** and the frequency they found them?
3. Do the audiences of the three countries differ in their **use of social media for informational purposes**?
4. What is **the association between interest in news, concern about fake news and use of social media** for informational purposes?
5. **Do these associations differ in the three countries?**

➤ Methodology:

- ✓ Data from **National representative samples** (people aged 18 and more) obtained from the **2022 Digital News Report** (Reuters Institute). The size of the National representative samples are: 2410 (UK), 2059 (France) and 2028 (Spain).

➤ Analytical strategy:

- ✓ We carried out a **descriptive analysis** as a first step of our research: frequencies, contingency tables and associations.
- ✓ The second step will be to carry out an **explanatory analysis**, where we can compare the association between disinformation and socioeconomic variables in the three countries.

Methodology

We study **9 variables**, divided in two groups:

❖ **First group: variables included in the questionnaire** (categorical, measured with a 5 points Likert scale)

1. Degree of agreement: “I think you can trust most news most of the time”
2. Degree of agreement: “I think you can trust most of the news I consume most of the time”
3. Degree of agreement: “Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet”
4. Degree of interest in news

❖ **Second group: variables calculated by the authors** (numerical). Two of them are related to **finding fake news in 5 sections** (International news, political news, News about coronavirus, Local news (about my region, city or town), Environment and climate change news) and the other three measures the **number of social media used in last week from a list of 7 social media** (Twitter, You Tube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Tik Tok).

1. Internet users who have found fake news in 3 or more sections in last week.
2. Internet users who have not found fake news in all 5 sections in last week.
3. Internet users who do not use social media in the last week for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news
4. Internet users who use 3 or more social media in the last week for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news
5. Internet users who use only one social media in the last week for finding, reading, watching sharing or discussing news.

Results

- ✓ **Only one in three Internet users believe that most news can be trusted most of the time**, with higher trust in news consumed by the interviewee.
- ✓ **Only a minority** (between 15 and 10%) say they are **not interested** in the news.
- ✓ Very few Internet users **have not found fake news** in the five sections analyzed.
- ✓ **Differences between countries reflects different media systems:** (1) Spaniards trust less the news but are more interested in them, they use more social media for informative purposes, and they find more fake news in 5 sections. (2) People from UK trust more in news and use fewer social media for informative purposes. (3) French people is less interested in news and less concerned about fake news.
- ✓ **The association between the variables analysed are quite similar** in all three countries, although **United Kingdom separates from Spain and France** because the association between interest in news and concern about fake news is lower there and there is no significant association between a huge use of social media and finding fake news in the 5 sections analysed. The last pattern found could be due to the lower percentage of citizens in this country using social media for informational purposes.

Conclusions

Do the audiences of the three countries differ in their interest and trust in news?

- ❖ The figures of people who trust news (in general or those who consume) are quite similar in all three countries: around one third for news in general and four in ten regarding news that the interviewee consume.
- ❖ Regarding interest in news, most citizens are interested at least in some extent in them, with figures between 80% (France) and 90% (Spain).

Do the audiences of the three countries differ in their concern about fake news and the frequency they found them?

- ❖ We can observe that French people are less concerned if compared with Spain and UK (50% vs. 60%). Indeed, in UK the audience found more frequently fake news in 3 or more sections than in the other countries and, on the contrary, is less frequent not to find fake news.

Do the audiences of the three countries differ in their use of social media for informational purposes?

- ❖ We can find relevant differences. The percentage of citizens who do not use social media (at least, the seven analyzed here) is around 60% in UK, 40% in France and 30% in Spain.

What is the association between interest in news, concern about fake news and use of social media for informational purposes?

- ❖ Those who are interested in the news are more concerned about its veracity, while it is more likely that those who are not interested in them do not use social media for informational purposes and have not found false news.

Do these associations differ in the three countries?

- ❖ The results are quite similar in all three countries, although we can find some differences that could be related to the media system. Spain and UK are at the opposite extremes, while France occupies an intermediate position.