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Audiences in Spain and Portugal:
common patterns and diverging paths in a post- truth era

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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.

➢ The Digital News Report of the Reuters Institute (2022) highlights the existence of distinct national realities regarding **media polarization** as perceived by the audience. In <u>Spain</u>, the level of polarization is particularly high, with 49% of the audience reporting a significant divide.

➢ **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) to test the relationship between trust in news, use of social media for informative purposes and finding fake news in two countries classified by the authors as the Mediterranean polarized pluralist model, Spain and Portugal.

Research questions and methodology

TABLE 1. Media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004)

Dimension	Mediterranean polarized pluralist	Northern European Democratic Corporatist	North Atlantic Liberal
Press market	Low	High	High
Political parallelism	High	High	Low
Journalistic professionalism	Low	High	High
Role of the state	High	High	Low

➢ **Press market:** The commercial press did no develop as strongly as in the other two systems, newspaper circulation remained relatively low and directed to an educated elite.

➢ **Political parallelism:** The media are relatively strongly politicized and political parallelism is relatively high. The style of journalism gives emphasis to commentary. Newspapers (and their readerships) tend to represent distinct political tendencies. Public broadcasting tends to be party-politicized.

➢ **Journalistic professionalism:** Journalism originated as an extension of the worlds of literature and politics. The level of professionalization was lower because the media market was smaller and the state intervention higher. The formal education in Journalism developed relatively late and the development of professional self-regulation is limited.

➢ **Role of the state:** The state had during a long a period the role of censor. Indeed, he played an important role as owner of media enterprises, not only broadcasting but newspapers and news agencies. Since the 80s, these countries experienced a "savage deregulation".

Research questions and methodology

Spain and Portugal are grouped by Hallin and Mancini in the same model, but…

1. Do the audiences of these countries differ in their **interest and trust** in news?

2. Do the audiences of these countries differ in their **concern about fake news** and the frequency they found them?

3. Do the audiences of these 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 these 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: 2011 in Portugal and 2028 in 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 both countries.

Methodology

➢ **Variables:**

We study 9 variables, divided in two groups:

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

1. Degree of agreement: "I think you can <u>trust most news</u> most of the time"

2. Degree of agreement: "I think you can <u>trust most of the news I consume</u> most of the time"

3. Degree of agreement: "Thinking about online news, <u>I am concerned</u> about what is real and what is fake on the internet"

4. Degree of <u>interest in news</u>

❖ **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 <u>have found fake news in 3 or more sections</u> in last week.

2. Internet users who <u>have not found fake news in all 5 sections</u> in last week.

3. Internet users <u>who do not use social media</u> in the last week for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news

4. Internet users <u>who use 3 or more social media</u> in the last week for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news

5. Internet users <u>who use only one social media</u> in the last week for finding, reading, watching sharing or discussing news.

Results

Similarity: less than 5 percentage points (pp.). Small difference: between 5 and 10 pp. Big difference: more than 10 pp.

❖ Big **differences:** Portuguese citizens have more trust in the news in general and the news they consume than Spanish citizens.

❖ Small differences: Portuguese are slightly more concerned about fake news and has found them more frequently than Spaniards.

❖ **Similarities:** the figures of people interested in news and those the use of social media for informational purposes are similar.

Finally, we have transformed categorical variables into numerical ones in order to test the correlation between variables.

In both countries, those who are interested in news are more concerned about their veracity.

Only in Spain it is more probable that **those not interested in news** do not use social media for informational purposes.

In both countries, those who use more social media for informational purposes tend to find more frequently fake news.

Nevertheless, **associations are low** in all the cases. **Spain stands out in the three cases as the country where there is a stronger positive correlation**.

Conclusions

➢ Results reveal that, although Portugal and Spain are grouped in the Mediterranean polarized pluralist model, they have some **common patterns** as well as **diverging paths**.

❑ Among the **similarities**, the figures of people interested in news and those who use social media for informational purposes are similar, those who are interested in the news are more concerned about its veracity, and those who are not interested in them are less likely to use social networks for informational purposes and have not come across false news.

❑ Regarding **differences** between the two countries, Portuguese citizens generally have more trust in the news in general and the news they consume than Spanish citizens, while Spain stands out for its stronger positive correlation between the use of social networks and the probability of encountering false news and between interest in the news and the use of social networks.

❑ **Future steps**: we want to carry out an **explanatory analysis**, where we can compare the association between disinformation and socioeconomic variables in both countries, and explore what causes similarities and differences between them.