YOUNG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND THEIR PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AND DISSEMINATION OF NEWS ACCORDING TO IDEOLOGICAL TRENDS

Los jóvenes universitarios y sus pautas de consumo y difusión de noticias según la tendencia ideológica

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze to what extent and the ways in which the political positions of Spanish young people have an influence on their consumption and access to news, with special interest in the digital environment. This perspective is established in relation to aspects such as the media consulted, credibility and the forms in which information is shared. In order to achieve this, a self-administered survey was conducted among 297 Communication students for one month. It has been possible to observe a correlation between ideology and greater use of online media, in addition to the relevance of the conventional television in combination with the access to digital news. In this context, social media become the most common space to access digital news instead of digital newspapers. This paper also confirms the idea of credibility associated to both traditional press and radio.

Key words: young people, consumption, news, internet, social networks, credibility, ideology

RESUMEN

Este texto analiza los resultados de una encuesta exploratoria entre estudiantes de la Universidad Rey Juan Carlos con el objeto de analizar en qué medida y de qué forma el posicionamiento político influye en el consumo y acceso a las noticias, con especial interés en el plano digital. Esta perspectiva se establece en relación a aspectos como los medios consultados, la credibilidad otorgada o el modo en que se comparte la información de actualidad. A tal efecto, se ha trabajado sobre la base de una encuesta autoadministrada durante un mes a 297 alumnos de Comunicación. Se ha podido observar una correlación entre la ideología y la mayor atención en Internet, junto a la relevancia de la televisión convencional en combinación con el acceso a las noticias digitales. En este contexto, son los medios sociales, antes que la prensa, el espacio más habitual de acceso a la información de actualidad. También se confirma la idea de credibilidad asociada a la prensa y radio tradicionales.

Palabras clave: jóvenes, consumo de noticias, internet, redes sociales, credibilidad, ideología

1. INTRODUCTION

The ways in which the young population consumes the latest news, together with their increasingly significant role as prosumers shape an ever-changing reality with an undeniable social interest that can be studied from different approaches.

This text establishes its focus on the ideological tendency of Spanish university students in order to determine the extent to which it conditions their patterns of consumption and dissemination of news. It studies whether their ideological perspective, from the point of view of their political beliefs, is associated with the plurality of the media they access, the credibility they ascribe to those media, the type of information that interests them or the way in which they share or disseminate the latest news: to whom, through what channels or what sources they use, among other considerations.

2. STATE OF THE QUESTION

The interest of young people in information about current events, whose access has moved from paper media to the new digital formats and media and to social networks such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* (Catalina-García, García & Montes, 2015), is on the same wavelength as an elevated civic concern found in this community (Casero-Ripollés, 2012). Due to their increasingly relevant role as prosumers, we want to know the influence that some factors, like ideology, have on the consumption and dissemination of information. The analysis of cases like the use of *Twitter* during the elections that were held in May 2015 in Spain (Said-Hung, Prati & Cancino-Borbón, 2017) lets us understand the use that is made of social networks. In this case, *Twitter* was mostly used to share news about the events, although in the cases in which the messages showed a clear ideological orientation, there was a predominance of messages with a progressive or leftist bias.

Other studies have linked the ideology of young university students with patterns of social organization, and have associated values related to the well-being of others to young people with a left-wing ideological orientation and with an educational background in degrees of Humanities, whereas right-wing young people ascribed to tendencies of social dominance and chose traditional and technical studies that put an emphasis on objectives such as the securing of power (Zubieta et al., 2008). These conclusions are in line with the categories presented by Espinoza & Calderón (2006), in which a left-wing ideology is associated to values of change, whereas a right-wing ideology is associated to tradition and conformism.

We may highlight the growing importance of the role of the social network *Twitter*, not only as a direct vehicle to access the latest information, but also as an indirect channel to access that information given its potential to distribute the latest events (Kim et al., 2014). In parallel to this, Bernal (2015) has observed that the generation of social networks has allowed their users to switch from a single agenda provided by the conventional media to their audience to a multiple, active, open and collaborative agenda. This finding is in line with the conclusions obtained by Qayyum et al. (2010), although these researchers consider that the consumption of information on the Internet is not a basic activity, but a secondary consequence of the browsing activity. Young people have other priority objectives in their online activities, such as social interaction (Carlsson, 2011), and receiving information on current news is a chance consequence (Patterson, 2007). In any case, users assess favorably the fact that digital media promote, through connections with other online resources, the possibility to con-

trast information or to expand on it, as well as the inclusion of spaces that favor interactivity (Gutiér-rez-Coba et al., 2012).

When the interest of citizens for politics —and other current news topics— decreases, the way in which the media try to reverse the situation depends on the historical and social context of each nation, although there is a global trend towards a model of infotainment in informative products. Within this category, we can find different variants: political topics are shown from a sensationalistic approach (Hanusch, 2013) and special focus is placed on the private lives of the main characters (Stanyer, 2012) as a consequence of the so-called digital era (Casero-Ripollés, Ortells-Badenes & Rosique-Cedillo, 2014). There is, therefore, a trend to prioritize the more entertaining aspects of information, regardless of the target audience of the media, be it popular or elitist (Mellado-Ruiz, López-Rabadán & Elortegui, 2016).

Regardless of the contents, there is a clear trend among young people towards sharing what they deem interesting (Jiménez & Gaitán Caballero, 2013), and *Facebook* and *Twitter* are their favorite networks to do so. With regard to this last tool, López-Meri (2016) has observed that with two of the *hashtags* that became viral on *Twitter* (#*Arde-Valencia* and #*25N*, related to the forest fires in Valencia in 2012 and the elections in Catalonia on that same year), citizens tended to spread and promote their contents. In this study, we analyze whether ideology also determines the channels and the way in which information is shared, as well as the contents that are disseminated. Thus, the conclusions in this analysis will complement those from the research by Gómez Rubio and López Vidales (2016), which show how when television channels use social media like *Twitter*, they promote the publication of certain news depending on their own ideology more clearly than in their conventional broadcast.

Finally, this research is derived from different theoretical and practical grounds. On the one hand, it draws on studies like the one by Rayén Bachmann and Mujica (2014), which focuses on the consumption of news by groups of teenagers and young people in Chile; and on the other hand, it is based on works that attempt to know more about the way in which the internet and social networks are used in different spheres (Pérez Tornero et al., 2015). Other interesting studies deal with relevant questions regarding the consumption of news, and more specifically with credibility (García Avilés et al., 2014), as well as research focused on the digital behavior of young people within the framework of social activism (Valenzuela et al., 2012) or on the way in which exposure to social networks polarizes the population (Tewksbury & Riles, 2015).

3. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to detect the trends followed by Spanish university students, in their capacity as citizens, to become informed of current events. It aims to find out whether the habit they develop regarding the way in which they access news varies according to their ideological self-categorization, whose basis is structured around the traditional Left-Right axis which is inscribed and self-inscribed by different political groups in a major part of the democratic states worldwide. This dual vision, present since the French Revolution, is meant, according to Bobbio (1995:94), to "give a single name to the persistent —because it is essential— dichotomist composition of the political universe".

In order to have a deeper and more detailed knowledge about the ideological leanings of the subjects in our study, a Likert scale with scores from 1 to 7 was used. It makes it possible to perform an operational analysis of the results classified into the following items: Extreme Left, Left, Center-Left, Center, Center-Right, Right and Extreme Right.

Based on this premise, the following particular objectives are presented:

O1. Establishing the frequency, motives and media used by the different groups to access and contrast information on current events that they receive from different media.

O2. Verifying whether the young people who completed our survey become sources of information by spreading the news they receive from different media and in different formats to their environment. Analyzing whether the frequency of those interactions and the type of means used to carry them out are related to their political convictions.

O3. Getting to know the perception of these university students about the different means they choose to access information and observing whether there are differences about the degree of trust (credibility) they ascribe to these resources and the level of impartiality they assign to them depending on their ideological categorization.

4. METHODS

This research is based on an exploratory survey distributed to 297 students of different degrees in the Faculty of Communication Sciences of the Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid, Spain), a public higher education center. The answers were included in a database which was then analyzed with the statistical software package SPSS 18.0 to establish contingency relationships based on the ideological tendencies expressed by the respondents to the survey.

The ages of the subjects range from 18 to 30 years, with an average of 20.94 years and a mode of 21 years. The students completed the survey in the classrooms by themselves. Out of all the students who answered the survey, there were 5.1% of lost results, corresponding to subjects who did not manifest their ideology. Within the remaining group, in which they express their positioning (282), there is a clear predominance of different degrees of a left-wing alignment, and more specifically of the Center-Left (36.2%). One third of the respondents show a Center position; and with regard to the extremes of the axis, there was only one respondent who declared that he had Extreme-Left tendencies, and none of them stated that they had Extreme-Right tendencies (Table I).

Table I. Political position of the respondents to the survey

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid	Extreme Left	1	.3	.4	.4
	Left	39	13.1	13.8	14.2
	Center-Left	102	34.3	36.2	50.4
	Center	95	32.0	33.7	84.0
	Center-Right	35	11.8	12.4	96.5
	Right	10	3.4	3.5	100.0
	Extreme-Right	0	.0	.0	100.0
	Total	282	94.9	100.0	
Lost	System	15	5.1		
	Total	297	100.0		

Source: Compiled by author

The survey includes 20 questions, 7 of which were multiple-answer questions and 2 which were used as a filter. Those related to the perception of impartiality on the media and the credibility they deserve have been created with a Likert scale with values from 1 to 5 in which the minimum value represented media which were not at all credible/partial; and the maximum represented completely credible/impartial media.

The time to complete the survey ranged from 5 to 10 minutes. Apart from the first questions that referred to the profile of the respondents, their ideological tendencies and their social participation, the rest of the survey was divided into the following thematic axes:

- Access to information: The survey asked about the daily frequency (from zero to three or more times per day); the reasons that lead the respondents to be informed; the contents that most interest them and the most common ways to access that information. In this last regard, they are both asked about the media which are mainly devoted to the dissemination of news (television, radio and press in their different traditional and online versions), and about other digital means which also provide information about current events, although they may have different objectives. This last case includes social networks, blogs, messaging services, search engines and other undetermined means. The responses that corresponded to the different groups of items were added and provided a reliability index which was acceptable according to the values of Cronbach's alpha: .81 for frequency, motives and routes of access; and .82 for contents.

- Dissemination of news. In order to record whether young people become, for their part, sources of the information they receive, they are asked about the frequency with which they do so (Cronbach's alpha: .79) and the means and forms they use to do so (Cronbach's alpha: .73).

- Contrast of information: We tried to find out whether young people accept the first information they receive or, conversely, whether they use alternative means and forms to contrast it. In this regard, they are asked when and why they do it (Cronbach's alpha: .84) and their preferred means to do it (Cronbach's alpha: .76).

- Perception about the degree of impartiality and credibility. The first concept is interpreted as a synonym of neutrality, the lack of tendencies for or against specific ideological tendencies in different fields within the information. Credibility is associated to a subjective quality regarding how much they trust the different media and forms of conveying news according to their veracity or other parameters (their authorship, for example) that they observe in their contents. For each of the fields the items were added and revealed an adequate level of reliability: .81 for impartiality and .80 for credibility.

5. RESULTS

5.1. FREQUENCY OF AND REASONS FOR ACCESSING INFORMATION

Out of the small number of university students who claim that they never read or watch news (1.8% of the total), the highest percentage (60%) corresponds to the political Center, and the rest is equally distributed between the two more moderate positions: Center-Left and Center-Right. Out of the 98.2% of respondents who are informed about news, the highest percentage corresponds to a frequency of once a day (38.1%), followed by those who do not access that information every day (24.2%) and those who do it twice a day (21.7%) (Table II).

Table II. Contingency table: Ideological position/Daily frequency of access to news

		Frequency of access					Total
		Never	Less than once a day	Once a day	Twice a day	Three or more times a day	
Extreme Left	% Ideology	.0%	.0%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	% F. access	.0%	.0%	.9%	.0%	.0%	.4%
	% of the total	.0%	.0%	.4%	.0%	.0%	.4%
Left	% Ideology	.0%	23.1%	28.2%	25.6%	23.1%	100.0%
	% F. access	.0%	13.2%	10.3%	16.4%	22.5%	13.9%
	% of the total	.0%	3.2%	3.9%	3.6%	3.2%	13.9%
Center-Left	% Ideology	1.0%	26.5%	38.2%	18.6%	15.7%	100.0%
	% F. access	20.0%	39.7%	36.4%	31.1%	40.0%	36.3%
	% of the total	.4%	9.6%	13.9%	6.8%	5.7%	36.3%
Center	% Ideology	3.2%	26.6%	37.2%	24.5%	8.5%	100.0%
	% F. access	60.0%	36.8%	32.7%	37.7%	20.0%	33.5%
	% of the total	1.1%	8.9%	12.5%	8.2%	2.8%	33.5%
Center-Right	% Ideology	2.9%	17.1%	42.9%	20.0%	17.1%	100.0%
	% F. access	20.0%	8.8%	14.0%	11.5%	15.0%	12.5%
	% of the total	.4%	2.1%	5.3%	2.5%	2.1%	12.5%
Right	% Ideology	.0%	10.0%	60.0%	20.0%	10.0%	100.0%
	% F. access	.0%	1.5%	5.6%	3.3%	2.5%	3.6%
	% of the total	.0%	.4%	2.1%	.7%	.4%	3.6%
Total	% Ideology	1.8%	24.2%	38.1%	21.7%	14.2%	100.0%
	% F. access	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of the total	1.8%	24.2%	38.1%	21.7%	14.2%	100.0%

Source: Compiled by author

In general terms, the university students who pay attention to information are mostly aligned in the Center and the Left. In this regard, we may highlight that 40% of the respondents who claim to have Center-Left tendencies access that information three or more times a day, and that 37.7% of those who are in the Center do so two or more times a day. Within the conservative tendencies, the most common group is the moderate sector, with 15% of respondents who access news tree or more times a day.

The main arguments provided by the respondents to justify why they look for information are, in this order, the need to know about current events for their professional career and a desire to be up to date on current events. As a third cause, only respondents who claim to be on the Left of the political spectrum claim that this habit is essential to take political decisions or decisions in any other area; while those who are in the Right part of the spectrum associate this activity with gaining knowledge on a specific field, and the rest of the respondents gives priority to this last motive over the decision-making process (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Reasons to look for news according to the ideological tendency.
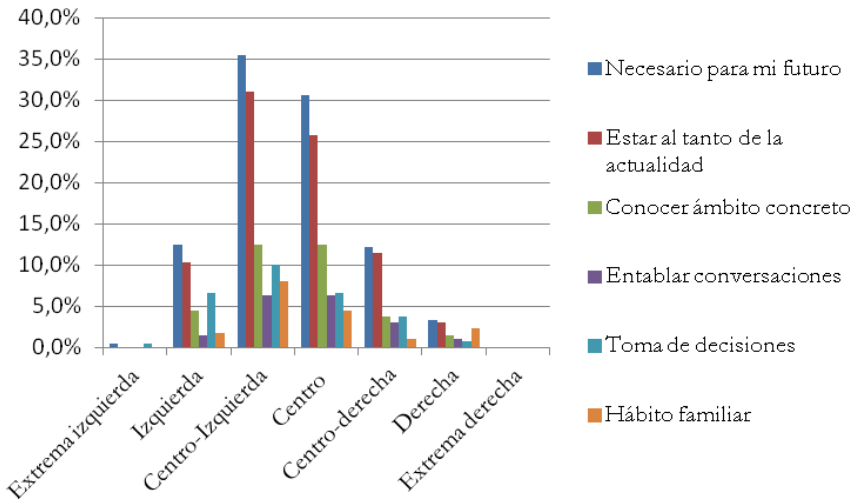
Source: Compiled by author

5.2. PREFERRED CONTENTS

The fields related to Society (25.8%), followed by those related to Politics (18.5%) are the most common for all ideological sectors. The highest values can be found in young people who are in the Center-Left or the Center of the political spectrum and who opt for social information with 8.3% and 9.7%, respectively.

On the opposite end, and if we do not take into account information of an unspecific nature (Other), celebrity gossip occupies the last position of the preferences of most ideological groups. Only the respondents in the Center-Right group rank them above news about the Environment, and those in the Right group prefer them to information about Science-Technology and the Environment. Apart from these first options, there is a higher balance with regard to the preferences of young people who claim to occupy a position of the spectrum far away from the Center. In this regard, university students who categorize themselves into the Left are equally distributed (11.8%) among the sections of Economy, Sports, Science-Technology and Environment, and respondents who prefer Right-wing parties show the same percentage (7.1%) regarding Economy, Science-Technology and Environment. The only factor which separates both groups is that conservatives are significantly more interested in Sports (10.8%).

Young people in the Center and those closer to this position reveal higher diversity regarding the news they consume: there are no cases in which the same percentage is seen for two different topics. None of the cases reveals a preference for a topic which may be related to the ideological position.

5.3. ACCESSED MEDIA

Conventional television is growing as a medium to access news, which is very significant, and particularly among the Center-Left (82.6%) and Center (90.2%) groups. In the group of traditional media, it is followed at a distance by the written press, although in this case it is more common among those in the Center-Right (16.1%) and the Right (11.1%). The presence of the radio is almost negligible, and it shows even lower values among those who do not use conventional media. The lack of interest in radio information is reinforced in the groups of the Center-Right and the Right.

With the exception of a single university student in the Center group, all other respondents use some online resource to be informed of current events, mainly through social networks (35.3%) and online press (29.9%). This order of preference can be seen across all ideological tendencies, except for the group in the Left of the spectrum, who prefers online press with a noticeably higher percentage: 38.8%, compared to 36.3% for social networks. The only registered case of a respondent in the Extreme Left also follows this trend and only finds out about news through digital media (press and messaging apps like WhatsApp) (Table III).

It is paradoxical that, except for the percentages found with regard to the online press, digital media devoted to the diffusion of news reach lower values than other online media with a more varied scope. In this regard, online radio, like its traditional counterpart, is again the least consulted medium. For its part, the acceptance of online TV is opposite that of the conventional version: 4.1% of the respondents use it, the same percentage as blogs.

Media which are not only meant to provide information about current events show significantly higher percentages: apart from the social networks mentioned above, instant messaging apps appear in 12.9% of the answers, and search engines in 10.9% of the cases. This preference appears in all ideological groups, with particular significance in the Center and its closest positions (Center-Left, Center-Right).

Table III. Contingency table ideological position/digital media

						Digital media				
		None	Online radio	Online TV	Online press	Blogs	Social net-works	Messaging services	Search engines	Other	Total
Extreme Left	% Ideology	.0%	.0%	.0%	50.0%	.0%	50.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	% Dig. media	.0%	.0%	.0%	.5%	.0%	.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.3%
	% of the total	.0%	.0%	.0%	.1%	.0%	.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.2%
Left	% Ideology	.0%	2.5%	3.7%	38.8%	5.0%	36.3%	8.7%	5.0%	.0%	100.0%
	% Dig. media	.0%	20.0%	11.5%	16.4%	15.4%	12.9%	8.5%	5.8%	.0%	12.6%
	% of the total	.0%	.3%	.5%	4.9%	.6%	4.6%	1.1%	.6%	.0%	12.6%
Center-Left	% Ideology	.0%	2.8%	3.2%	27.2%	3.7%	35.9%	12.4%	13.9%	.9%	100.0%
	% Dig. media	.0%	60.0%	26.9%	31.2%	30.8%	34.7%	32.9%	43.5%	40.0%	34.3%
	% of the total	.0%	.9%	1.1%	9.3%	1.3%	12.4%	4.3%	4.7%	.3%	34.3%
Center	% Ideology	.5%	.9%	5.1%	28.7%	5.6%	35.2%	13.4%	9.7%	.9%	100.0%
	% Dig. media	100%	20.0%	42.3%	32.8%	46.2%	33.8%	35.4%	30.4%	40.0%	34.1%
	% of the total	.2%	.3%	1.7%	9.8%	1.9%	12.0%	4.6%	3.3%	.3%	34.1%
Center-Right	% Ideology	.0%	.0%	4.2%	30.5%	2.1%	32.6%	16.8%	12.6%	1.1%	100.0%
	% Dig. media	.0%	.0%	15.4%	15.4%	7.6%	13.8%	19.5%	17.4%	20.0%	15%
	% of the total	.0%	.0%	.6%	4.6%	.3%	4.9%	2.5%	1.9%	2%	15%
Right	% Ideology	.0%	.0%	4.3%	30.4%	.0%	43.5%	13.0%	8.7%	.0%	100.0%
	% Dig. media	.0%	.0%	3.9%	3.7%	.0%	4.4%	3.7%	2.9%	.0%	3.6%
	% of the total	.0%	.0%	.2%	1.1%	.0%	1.6%	.5%	.3%	.0%	3.6%
Total	% Ideology	.2%	1.6%	4.1%	29.9%	4.1%	35.3%	12.9%	10.9%	.8%	100.0%
	% Dig. media	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of the total	.2%	1.6%	4.1%	29.9%	4.1%	35.3%	12.9%	10.9%	.8%	100.0%

Source: Compiled by author

5.4. FREQUENCY AND WAYS TO SHARE NEWS

With the exception of young people who classify themselves into the political Right, and who only share news occasionally, most respondents claim that they almost always forward the news they receive to their environment. Only one respondent in the Center-Left admits that he never does it, and 5 more respondents in that same group (62.5% in that frequency) aver that they almost never become sources of information for their environment; the rest of respondents in this frequency range are distributed into the Center-Left (25%) and the Center (12.5%).

With regard to the ways in which they disseminate news to their environment (not including the respondent in the Extreme Left who only uses social networks), virtually all the groups prefer face-to-face communication to carry out this task, with a range between 35.6% for those in the Center and 40.2% for those in the Left (Figure 2). The only group that does not follow this trend is the Right, who prefer social networks with 47.3% of the answers, whereas direct physical face-to-face communication is used by 26.3% of young conservatives.

Messaging services like *WhatsApp* are used as a second option by university students in the Center (30.2%) and the Center-Right (28.9%), while those in the Left (23.2%), Center-Left (26.6%) and Right (21.1%) rank this option in the third place, after social networks. Telephone communication and blogs are barely used by any of the groups. In this regard, the two groups in the Left part of the spectrum show a significant preference for the use of telephones, although with values that do not reach 10% in any of the cases: 8.9% for those in the Center-Left and 7.3% for those in the Left. In the rest of the groups, it barely reaches 5%.

Blogs are also not a recurrent option for university students. In fact, none of the respondents in the Right uses them, and in the rest of the tendencies, it ranges from 0.5% for students in the Center-Left to 1.3% for those in the Center-Right.

Figure 2. Ways to disseminate news according to ideological tendency*
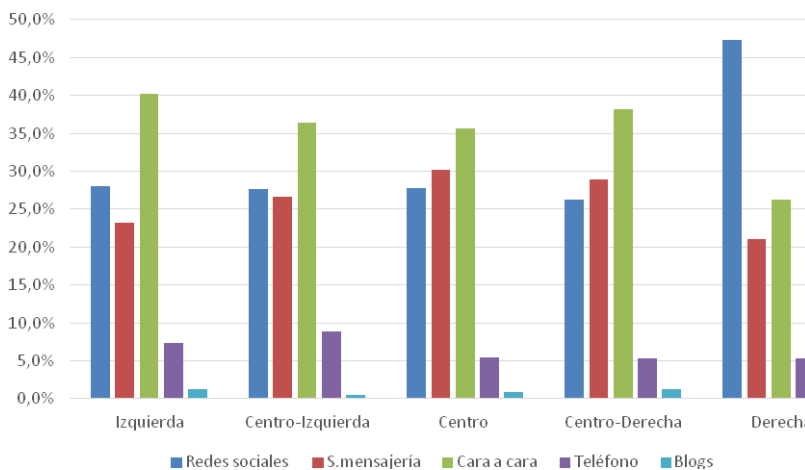
Source: Compiled by author. *In the creation of this figure, the Extreme Left has been omitted because the variable for this single respondent shows a frequency of 100% for social networks and this percentage distorts an adequate visualization of the rest of items.

5.5. CONTRAST OF NEWS. MOTIVES AND MECHANISMS

In general terms, respondents to the survey claim that they contrast the news they receive; 47% of them do this always and 42.6% do it occasionally. The remaining 10.4% who do not contrast information are mainly part of the three groups closer to the Center, and their reasons not to do it are their trust in the medium that provides the information and the lack of time to access other sources, in that order.

The causes that move 47% of young people to always contrast news vary according to their ideological tendencies. No fixed behavior pattern has been observed: Those in the Center (18.8%) and the political Right (2.4%) state that the main reason for consulting other sources is to complement the information with further data. For their part, the rest of the groups, particularly on the Left, want to confirm the versions offered by the first news provider: 19.5% for the Center-Left and 8.6% for those in the Left.

Within the 42.6% of university students who contrast information occasionally, there is an association between their motives and their tendencies: those in the Center (17.8%) and those in the categories on the Right of the spectrum (6.9% for the Center Right and 3.5% for the Right) have a stronger motivation to contrast news when the information involves a topic of personal interest, whereas in the two groups on the Left, they access different versions of the information if its contents are controversial. This difference between ideologies is reinforced if we take into account the fact that none of the university students on the political Right contrasts any information involving some degree of controversy.

Online press, in the first place, and conventional television are the two most widely used media among young people in all the groups to the political Left. These preferences are also observed in students in the Center and the Right. Those in the Center-Right choose both media to contrast news, but they prefer traditional television (4.1% of the total). This percentage is significantly higher than in the digital press (3.3%). This way to contrast news is the one with the highest percentage of all media (27.3%), with special significance among respondents in the Center-Left, who reach the highest position with 9.7% of the total.

The radio, both conventional and online, is virtually not used by any of the groups to contrast information. This lack of interest is particularly significant in its digital format among the young people in the Extreme Left and the Center-Right: none of them uses this medium, and only 4 respondents in the rest of the groups ever consult it. Online TV is also not very relevant, contrary to what happens with its traditional version. Only 0.8% of all respondents use this digital medium, and they are equally distributed among all the groups, with the exception of those on the Right and the Extreme Left, in which the values were 0%.

Similarly, blogs are not followed by any of those groups as a priority. It is significant that instant messaging applications, whose main target is to establish communications with the environment of the user, rather than a dissemination of current news, are in the fourth position among the preferences of those in the Center-Right, and in the fifth position for the rest of the groups. Social networks are also significant, and they occupy the third position in all the ideological groups in our study, with the exception of the respondent in the Extreme Left, who only uses online press to contrast information.

5.6. PERCEPTIONS ABOUT IMPARTIALITY AND CREDIBILITY

With the exception of the university student in the Extreme Left, who did not answer the question about the perception of traditional media, and whose maximum rating is "Quite impartial" for online press (in a Likert scale in which 1 is considered "Not impartial at all" and 5 means "Completely impartial), out of all the media and resources used by university students to retrieve information about current events, there were only two in which there was a correlation between the perception of impartiality and the ideological tendencies. Both cases refer to traditional media: press and especially television, which are considered more impartial as the ideological position shifts to the Right, so that television is assessed within a range that starts from an average of 2.1 among young people in the Left and a 3 among those in the Right. The range for the neutrality of the printed press varies from 2 among those in the political Left and 2.5 among those in the Center-Right and the Right. In contrast, the conventional version of the radio shows different assessments that are not related to the political self-classification of the respondents (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Perception of impartiality of conventional media
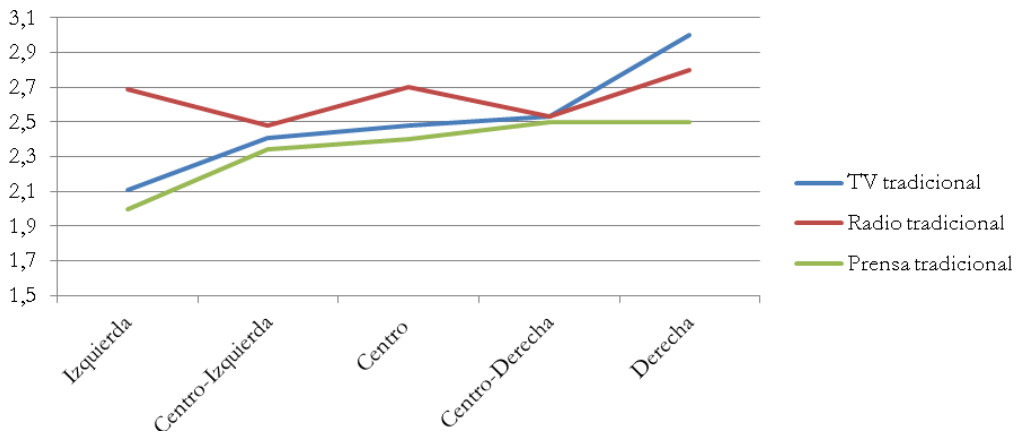
Source: Compiled by author

With regard to the different online resources used by young people to access information, no correlation with ideology was found: while those in the Left and the Center believe that online press is the most impartial way to receive information, the two more moderate groups in both sides of the spectrum and respondents in the Right believe that the highest degree of neutrality can be found on social networks (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Perception of impartiality on online media and other online sources of information
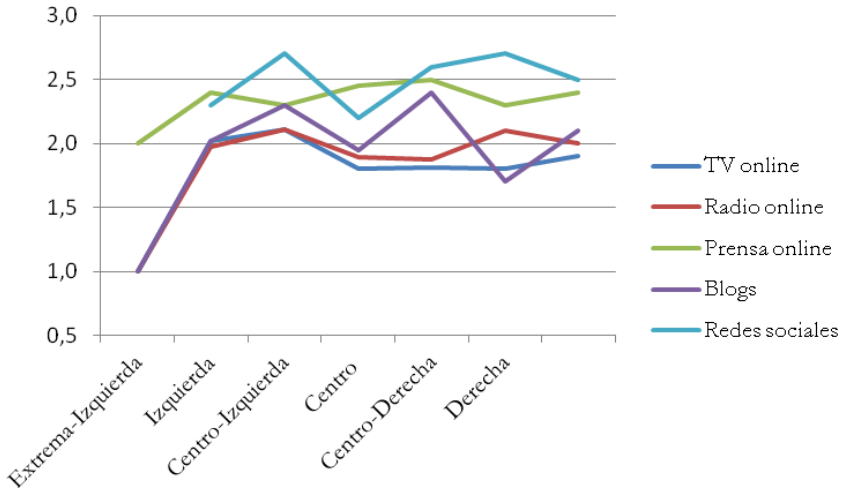
Source: Compiled by author

In any of the cases, both in offline and in online versions, values are moderate, and with a tendency to low scores. The lowest score (1.7) was found among young people in the Right when referring to blogs, whereas the highest score, with an average of 3, was also found in this group with regard to conventional television.

Credibility was assessed with the same values as impartiality (1: not credible at all; 7: completely credible). Young people generally rated this item higher than neutrality when referring to the way in which they access news. In fact, in some cases, and for some ideological tendencies, their trust is over 3 points as an average, mainly in two traditional media: offline radio and written press. Both of them are regarded with confidence by all ideological groups except for the Left. In contrast, this last group is the only one in which social networks receive an average score over 3. Online press also receives rather high marks among most university students, with the exception of those in the Center-Right, among which the average credibility for this medium was 2.8.

The media with the lowest score were online radio and television, and especially blogs. This last case registers the only value below 2 for all the ideological groups in the study: young people in the Right only rated it with 1.7 points. On the contrary, the highest score for credibility (3.6) was given to traditional press by respondents in the Center-Right, followed closely (3.5) by conventional television, which also receives a high degree of trust among university students in that same ideological group.

Finally, we have found only one case of association between the ideological tendency and the degree of credibility of one of these media: online radio. The average value ranges from 2.1 in the case of respondents in the Left to 2.6 for the most conservative respondents. For the rest of sources, university students hold positions that are more diverse.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The general objective of this work is to focus on the interactions and relationships established between the political position of the Spanish youth and their behavior regarding digital media.

The first question approached in this research is related to the frequency, the motives and the means and ways that young people have to access and contrast information on current events. In this regard, there is a correlation between their political or ideological tendencies, in this case among the group who classify themselves as Center-Left, and a greater attention to news on the internet. However, no direct association has been found between the political position of the subjects in our study and the reasons they had to access news.

With regard to the contents they accessed, and although some differences in behavior were observed, no conclusions can be obtained regarding the existence of separate behavior patterns based on their political opinions. In general terms, news about Society (25.8%) and Politics (18.5%) have the greatest impact on the respondents of our survey. At the same time, conventional television is the medium they most often use to receive information, particularly among the respondents on the Center-Left or the Center. This is followed by the written press.

In general terms, access to online news is obtained through social networks (35.3%) or through the digital press (29.9%). However, this order is inverted if we refer to the respondents on the Left, because they show a higher preference for the digital press (38.8%, compared to 36.3% for social networks).

Secondly, this work has focused on the way in which young people disseminate the news they receive and how this is related to their political leanings. We have observed that a high percentage of the respondents help to disseminate the news they find interesting, a pattern that is in line with the conclusions of Jiménez and Gaitán Caballero (2013). With regard to the media they use or the procedures they follow, a clear difference appears: most of the respondents prefer face-to-face communication. The only difference can be found among those who refer more conservative tendencies, and who mention social networks as their first option (47.3%), rather than face-to-face communication, with 26.3%. In general terms, social networks or applications like WhatsApp appear as the second or the third option, depending on the ideological tendencies of the group.

On the other hand, the third objective was to know the perception that young people have of the different channels to access information about current events, both in terms of impartiality and of the degree of trust they have on them (credibility). With regard to impartiality, no direct association was found with political self-categorization, although some differences were observed. Respondents in the Left and the Center of the spectrum believe that the digital press is the most impartial, whereas more conservative respondents claim that social networks are more neutral. When analyzing credibility, traditional radio and written press have the highest scores, except among those in the Left, who prefer social networks. We may conclude that credibility is not associated to the communicative channel and, therefore, that other variables such as the ones described by García Avilés et al. (2015), which include the prestige of the medium or the author of the information, may still be relevant in this area.

In spite of the non-representative nature of our sample, this work shows relevant data which complement other pieces of research (Qayyum et al., 2010; Casero-Ripollés, 2012; or Rayén Condeza et al., 2014; among others) about media consumption among the young population, in this case in Spain. This article must be interpreted within the framework of a focus on young university students, which may produce a bias on the results and the conclusions, since the entire community has not been analyzed. Together with this aspect, there is another one on which we may focus for our next research and consideration: the clear dissociation found between the use of the media and the criteria of credi-

bility applied in the study. On the other hand, further research is needed on the political categories used as well as on the incidence of specific controversial topics which are representative of the ideology of the subjects in the study.

Although we have observed that there are a high percentage of young people who contrast the first source of information they access, it would also be interesting to know the extent to which they verify that the contents are legitimate and are an accurate reflection of the facts. This question is relevant because over one third of the young people in our survey go to social networks to receive first-hand information. This finding suggests that they are not overly concerned about authorship and, therefore, about the issues of authenticity of contents derived from the overabundance of sources (not all of which are reliable) which can be found on the internet. In this context, we may argue whether young people have an adequate "media literacy" to carry out a task such as the search of news.

Also, we must take into account that, although the percentage of people who never contrast information about current events is not very high —10.4%—, it is significant that they do not show any interest to know whether that information accurately reflects reality. In parallel to this, and as a new aspect for debate, it would be relevant to observe whether they go into those contents in any depth or they just read the headlines. This last element might also be associated with their perception of the knowledge they have about current events.

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