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Taking on Social Media as New Gatekeepers among Young People: A Call upon Digital Literacy

Ana Pérez-Escoda ^{1,*} , Andrés Barrios-Rubio ^{1,2} , Luis Miguel Pedrero-Esteban ¹  and Carolina Ávalos ³

¹ Department of Communication, Faculty of Communication and Arts, University Antonio de Nebrija, 28015 Madrid, Spain; barriosr_andres@javeriana.edu.co (A.B.-R.); lpedrero@nebrija.es (L.M.P.-E.)

² Department of Communication, Faculty of Communication and Language, Pontifical Javeriana University, Bogotá 110121, Colombia

³ Department of Curriculum and Didactics, Distance State University, San José 4742050, Costa Rica; cavalos@uned.ac.cr

* Correspondence: aperezes@nebrija.es

Abstract: Today's public sphere is increasingly shaped by a dynamic, global, cross-cutting digital landscape, mostly ruled by social media and algorithms. Individuals are the raw material, the product, in this digital scenario, insofar as they generate and create information that coexists and is consumed alongside the information generated by the media outlets. In this context, this study focusses on an international sample from three countries (Spain, Colombia, and Costa Rica) to study the youngest information consumption, the trust they relay in media used to get informed, and their perceptions. The research was articulated from a quantitative methodological approach, focusing on a descriptive and correlational perspective. The results show interesting and innovative outcomes that point out that country origin does not constitute a significative factor when describing consumption patterns related to social media. It was confirmed in the study that these scenarios seem to become the new gatekeepers for young people, who barely consume traditional media such as press or radio broadcast. The lack of trust in the media that they consume to get informed is a matter of awareness, and digital literacy is described to be the most appropriated solution in a transformative normality in which young people do not consume information from traditional media.



Citation: Pérez-Escoda, A.; Barrios-Rubio, A.; Pedrero-Esteban, L.M.; Ávalos, C. Taking on Social Media as New Gatekeepers among Young People: A Call upon Digital Literacy. *Information* **2024**, *15*, 180. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info15040180>

Academic Editor: Vincenzo Moscato

Received: 4 March 2024

Revised: 22 March 2024

Accepted: 24 March 2024

Published: 27 March 2024



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Keywords: social media; students; information; disintermediation; media; communication; digital literacy

1. Introduction

Technology has radically changed the way information is produced and distributed, and the era of instantaneity poses multiple challenges to the media ecosystem, related to the credibility and impact of traditional media, i.e., press, radio, and television, whose consumption seems to be decreasing more and more among the younger strata of the population [1,2]. The media industry continues to make efforts to respond to its responsibility to keep the population informed, but digital environments and, in particular, social networks are firmly establishing themselves as the main sources of the population's media diet. The incorporation of new platforms for the distribution of communicative products [3] establishes a bubble of hyper-information in which messages, both serious and fake news, converge, with which the citizen faces the challenge of being informed.

The digital transformation of the media is still a pending task for the media industry, which needs to strengthen productive routines that address the transmedia narrative [4,5] linked to current affairs and include journalistic elements with the capacity to attract young people [6]. The failure to analyze user behavior, from a quantitative and qualitative point of view [7], leads to a decrease in the penetration and consumption of traditional mass media, and even in their reliability. The inability to capture the attention of a community of young audiences opens space for other scenarios, altering the traditional news cycle, leading to

a new role for the audience [8] and a turning shift in the traditional role of media outlets as gatekeepers.

Social networks constitute the stage and fundamental piece of communication, the public sphere [9] in which, from different geographical contexts, politicians and social actors decide to explain their decisions, justify their positions or changes in opinion, and validate their actions firstly in social media [10]. The digital environment becomes relevant and gives the user power over the control of consumption, blurring the linear essence of the broadcast model to give way to a scheme in which content and thought processes oversee capturing the deception of those who perfectly handle subliminal messages and smokescreens. The normalization of a new paradigm based on connectivity, ubiquity, timelessness, and interactivity [11] equals the potential reach of all media proposals replaced by the screen of a smartphone, centralizing all human actions and interactions, including informative ones.

Communication research, specifically the study of mass media under digital impact, focuses its attention on media convergence and the dangerous effect of disintermediation, a process understood as one in which the traditional media cease to act as gatekeepers with their agenda setting between news and audiences [12,13]. This phenomenon means that the logics of information dissemination are being reshaped, forcing us to rethink journalism [14] and requiring special attention to be paid to how the new generations consume news and what perception they have of their information consumption habits. Only by understanding the audience's new behaviors can a clear response be given to the necessary transformation. This is the context in which our study focused its attention, the observation of the process from the perspective of reception since the audience plays an essential role in this chain of transition and, moreover, young audiences. In addition, this study pretends to go further within an international focus, striving to observe and offering empirical evidence in a transnational study, focusing on young people as a social construct, not a different reality depending on each country.

The countries included in this study were Spain, Colombia, and Costa Rica. According to latest data gathered by the international report presented yearly by We are Social in February 2024, all three countries have had similar numbers when referring to the number of social media users and percentage of young people: Spain was home to 39.70 million social media users in January 2024, equating to 83.6 percent of the total population, and 28.2% of the population is aged between 18 and 34 [15]; Colombia was home to 36.70 million social media users in January 2024, equating to 70.3 percent of the total population, and 28.1% of the population is aged between 18 and 34 [16]; and Costa Rica was home to 3.86 million social media users in January 2024, equating to 73.8 percent of the total population, and 26.1% of the population is aged between 18 and 34 [17]. These data mean similar conditions regarding the contextual framework, so it makes sense trying to compare perceptions among young people in these countries. Moreover, to guarantee the equivalence of samples, only university students participate in this study, which is per se a previous bias for results, but researchers assume this condition pretending not to be representative but descriptive in the intended results.

This state of affairs described provides a pathway to the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the sample analyzed inform themselves, and what is the most consumed media in their media diet?

RQ2: Is the country of origin a determining factor in defining the media through which young people inform themselves?

RQ3: How much do students trust the media they use to get information?

RQ4: Is the country of origin a determining factor in this reliability?

RQ5: Do students believe themselves to be well informed in terms of knowledge, and does the country constitute differences?

RQ6: Do students feel that their media diet is enough to be informed?

2. Materials and Methods

This research was articulated from a quantitative methodological approach to achieve the proposed objectives. In order to offer a meaningful and in-depth perspective of the results [18], a descriptive and correlational focus was applied. The sampling approach used for the purpose of the research was non-probabilistic and convenience sampling, which means that the sample is accessible at the time and during the duration of the research, as stated by Vilches [19]. According to Hernández-Sampieri [20], in non-probabilistic sampling, the selection of individuals does not depend on probability or representativeness, but on the characteristics of the research. In this case, the researchers decided to include only university students as the most accurate for the research objectives. The sample was not representative. The sample description was as follows in each country: Spain, N = 203 (Male = 85 and Female = 118); Colombia, N = 192 (Male = 37 and Female = 155); Costa Rica, N = 185 (Male = 76 and Female = 116). All students in the samples were undergraduate university students. The description of the sample according to the students' current studies is shown in Figure 1.

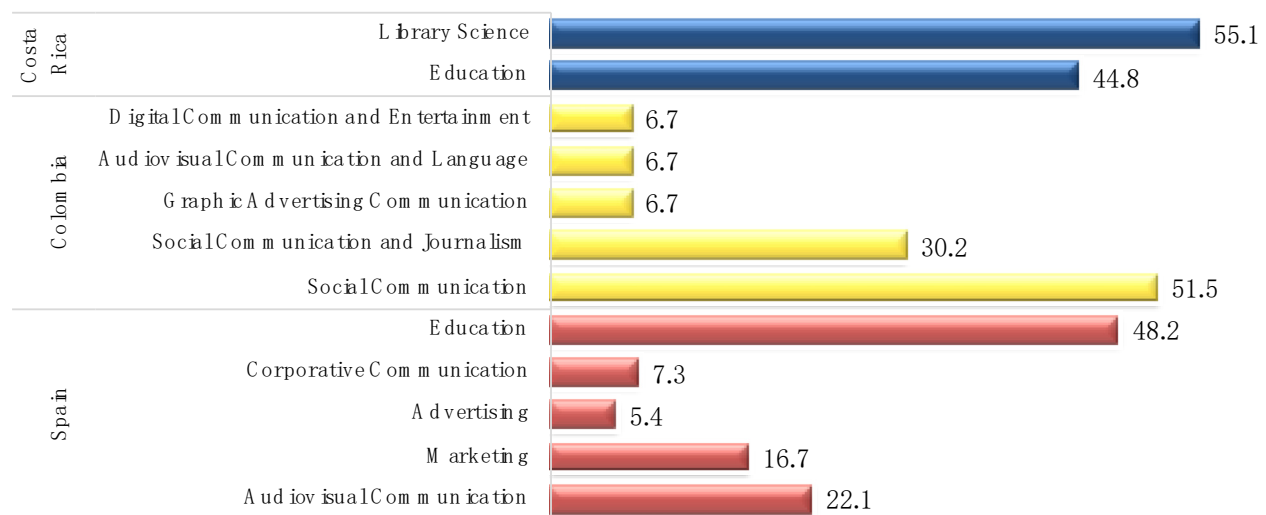


Figure 1. Sample distribution according to the studies. Own elaboration.

Questionnaire was the method of data gathering considered to be the most appropriate. The design of the tool was based on previous existing models, Media Use in the European Union [21] and Digital News Report.es 2020 [22], being adapted for the purpose of our study. The final structure was as follows: (1) sociodemographic variables; (2) media, information, and social media consumption; and (3) consumption, reception, and perception of fake news. The total number of variables was 30, with a total number of 105 items. In this study, only five variables and 19 items were used, as shown in Table 1.

It is important to mention, to give a better understanding of the validity process, that the reliability and consistency of the instrument were studied. Cronbach's alpha was applied for the three different samples from each country, and the obtained results ranged as follows: 0.77 (Spanish sample), 0.80 (Colombian sample), and 0.86 (Costa Rican sample) for the mean of the variables of the construct studied, (2) media, information, and social media consumption. As stated by Creswell [18], values obtained (≥ 0.7) were acceptable to consider a proper consistency of the instrument.

Data were gathered online in compliance with the University Institute's ethics research guidelines, which were created in accordance with the American Psychological Association's ethical standards. In this specific case, as all individuals in the sample were of legal age, express consent was collected from each participant before answering the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using SPSS v.25.

Table 1. Variables, items, number of items, and type of responses analyzed.

Variable	Item	Number of Items	Likert Scales and Responses
C1_ You usually get informed by...	Radio	8	1 = never 2 = rarely 3 = sometimes 4 = often 5 = always
	Online radio		
	Press		
	Online press		
	TV		
	Online TV		
	Websites		
	Social media		
C2_ Reliability given to the media you use to get informed	Radio	8	1 = none 2 = rarely 3 = sometimes 4 = often 5 = always
	Online radio		
	Press		
	Online press		
	TV		
	Online TV		
	Websites		
	Social media		
C3_ Media you use the most to get informed		1	1 = radio; 2 = online radio; 3 = press; 4 = online press; 5 = TV; 6 = online TV; 7 = websites; 8 = social media
C4_ Perception of knowledge		1	1 = I do not know nothing; 2 = I do know something; 3 = I know enough; 4 = I know quite enough; 5 = I know quite a lot
C5_ Perception of confidence in the information consumed		1	1 = unconcerned; 2 = misled; 3 = poorly informed; 4 = misinformed; 5 = well informed

Own elaboration from data.

3. Results

Bivariate descriptive and correlational statistics were used to analyze the data with a dual purpose: on the one hand, to describe the results analyzed and, on the other, to determine whether statistically significant differences were observed between the different variables in the sample based on the independent variable (IV) “country of origin”, in which there were three different groups (Spain, Colombia, and Costa Rica), $N = 508$ ($N_{\text{Spain}} = 203$; $N_{\text{Colombia}} = 192$; and $N_{\text{Costa Rica}} = 185$). For the analysis of the correlation between variables, the one-factor ANOVA test was chosen as the most appropriate for the study of differences between the means of dependent variables among the three groups that make up the sample. Despite not complying with a normal distribution ($p < 0.005$), this statistic is accepted in Social Sciences, as argued by Hernández-Sampieri et al. [20].

3.1. Young People’s Resources to Get Informed and Country Origin as Conditioning Factors or Not

This first section of the results answers question one (RQ1): how do the people in the sample analyzed inform themselves, and what is the most consumed media in their media diet? In order to analyze which media are present in the information diet of the young people in the sample in the three countries analyzed, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) were first used to obtain the context of media consumption through which young people usually get information, analyzed in eight items for the variable “media through which you usually get information”, as can be seen in Table 1: radio receiver, online radio, press, digital press, TV, online TV, websites, and social networks. Table 2 shows the frequencies by country and in the sample totals, with all the data collected in the Likert-type response, where 1 = never; 2 = little; 3 = occasionally; 4 = frequently; and 5 = always.

Table 2. Basic statistics for the total sample and for groups according to the country of origin.

You Usually Get Informed by:	Country	Mean	SD	Percentages of Consumption Frequencies					N
				Never	Almost	Occasionally	Frequently	Always	
Radio	Spain	1.73	0.916	48.3	38.4	6.9	4.4	2	203
	Colombia	2.11	1.020	33.9	31.8	26.6	5.2	2.6	192
	Costa Rica	1.73	1.039	58.4	20.5	13	5.9	2.2	185
	Total sample	1.86	1.005	46.7	30.5	15.3	5.2	2.2	508
Online radio	Spain	1.61	0.851	58.6	26.1	10.8	4.4	0	203
	Colombia	2.14	1.156	37.5	29.7	18.2	10.4	4.2	192
	Costa Rica	1.56	0.913	67.0	14.6	14.6	2.7	1.1	185
	Total sample	1.77	1.013	54.3	23.6	14.5	5.9	1.7	508
Press	Spain	1.72	0.920	53.7	26.6	14.3	4.9	0.5	203
	Colombia	2.18	0.976	27.1	39.6	23.4	8.3	1.6	192
	Costa Rica	1.89	0.920	39.5	38.9	16.2	3.8	1.6	185
	Total sample	1.93	0.957	40.3	34.8	17.9	5.7	1.2	508
Digital press	Spain	3.27	1.130	7.9	14.3	36.5	25.6	15.8	203
	Colombia	3.72	1.090	3.6	8.3	30.2	28.1	29.7	192
	Costa Rica	2.76	1.247	20	22.2	30.3	17.3	10.3	185
	Total sample	3.26	1.217	10.3	14.8	32.4	23.8	18.6	508
TV	Spain	3.43	1.206	7.9	15.3	23.6	32.0	21.2	203
	Colombia	3.18	1.167	7.8	20.8	33.3	21.9	16.1	192
	Costa Rica	3.26	1.238	9.2	18.4	29.7	22.2	20.5	185
	Total sample	3.29	1.206	8.3	18.1	28.8	25.5	19.3	508
Online TV	Spain	2.18	1.210	38.9	25.1	21.2	8.9	5.9	203
	Colombia	2.46	1.193	25	31.8	20.3	17.7	5.2	192
	Costa Rica	1.91	1.102	50.3	21.6	17.3	8.6	2.2	185
	Total sample	2.19	1.190	37.9	26.2	19.7	11.7	4.5	508
Websites	Spain	3.48	1.087	5.4	11.8	30	34.5	18.2	203
	Colombia	3.88	1.024	2.6	5.7	26	32.3	33.3	192
	Costa Rica	3.78	1.058	2.2	10.3	25.4	31.9	30.3	185
	Total sample	3.71	1.069	3.4	9.3	27.2	32.9	27.1	508
Social media	Spain	4.16	1.022	2	5.9	15.8	27.1	49.3	203
	Colombia	4.35	0.970	1.6	2.6	18.2	14.6	63	192
	Costa Rica	4.09	1.117	2.7	8.1	17.3	21.1	50.8	185
	Total sample	4.20	1.040	2.1	5.5	17.1	21.0	54.3	508

Own elaboration from data obtained in the study.

For a more specific analysis, Figure 2 shows only the sum of the frequencies for the response values “frequently” and “always”, which highlight the tendency of the sample studied to use the online sphere for getting informed: six out of ten participants in the study sample use a website for getting information, and seven and a half out of ten use social networks. The lack of use of radio (both on-air and online) and the press is very striking: not even one in ten uses these media to get information, meaning that the young audience prefers the digital sphere to get informed. It is also striking that, of the traditional

media, television is resisting the digital trend, with 45% of the sample saying that they also get their information from this medium.

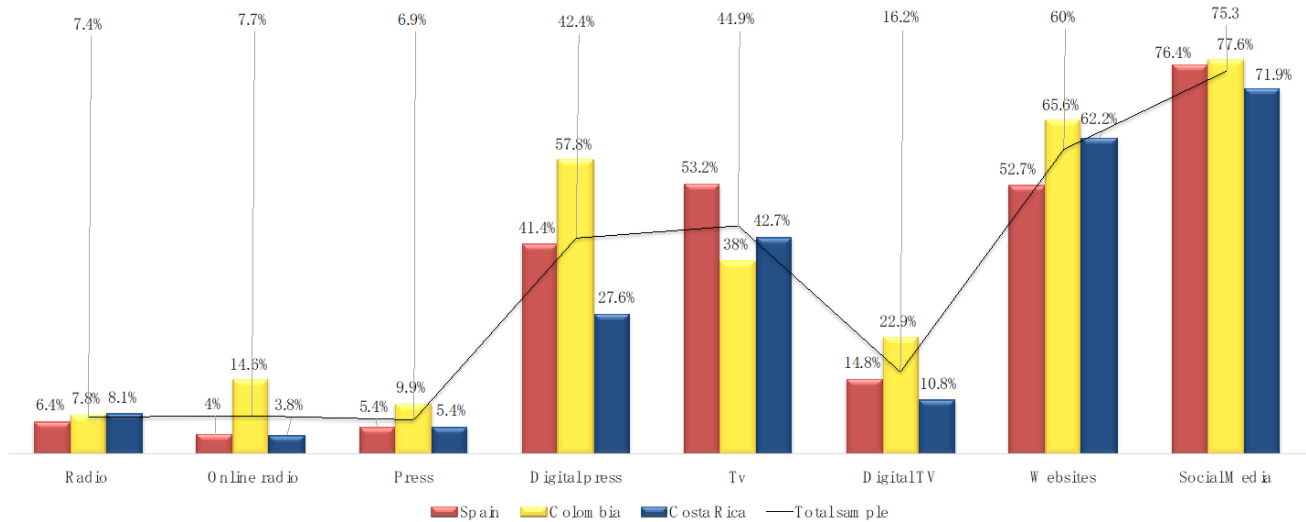


Figure 2. Media consumption by country and media (%) and total sample results by media. Own elaboration from data obtained.

We now answer research question 2 (RQ2): is the country of origin a determining factor in defining the media through which young people get their information? The correlation between the independent variable (VI) “country of origin” and the dependent variable “media through which you usually get information” was analyzed using the one-factor ANOVA statistics (F). The results can be seen in Table 3 (descriptive statistics) and Table 3 (ANOVA statistics).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the total sample and for groups according to the country of origin.

You Usually Get Informed by:		N	Mean	Standard Dev.	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval for the Mean		Min	Max
						Inf. Lim.	Sup. Lim.		
Radio	Spain	203	1.73	0.916	0.064	1.61	1.86	1	5
	Colombia	192	2.11	1.020	0.074	1.96	2.25	1	5
	Costa Rica	185	1.73	1.039	0.076	1.58	1.88	1	5
Online radio	Spain	203	1.61	0.851	0.060	1.49	1.73	1	4
	Colombia	192	2.14	1.156	0.083	1.98	2.31	1	5
	Costa Rica	185	1.56	0.913	0.067	1.43	1.69	1	5
Press	Spain	203	1.72	0.920	0.065	1.59	1.85	1	5
	Colombia	192	2.18	0.976	0.070	2.04	2.32	1	5
	Costa Rica	185	1.89	0.920	0.068	1.76	2.03	1	5
Digital press	Spain	203	3.27	1.130	0.079	3.11	3.43	1	5
	Colombia	192	3.72	1.090	0.079	3.56	3.87	1	5
	Costa Rica	185	2.76	1.247	0.092	2.58	2.94	1	5

Table 3. Cont.

You Usually Get Informed by:		N	Mean	Standard Dev.	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval for the Mean		Min	Max
						Inf. Lim.	Sup. Lim.		
TV	Spain	203	3.43	1.206	0.085	3.27	3.60	1	5
	Colombia	192	3.18	1.167	0.084	3.01	3.34	1	5
	Costa Rica	185	3.26	1.238	0.091	3.09	3.44	1	5
Online TV	Spain	203	2.18	1.210	0.085	2.01	2.34	1	5
	Colombia	192	2.46	1.193	0.086	2.29	2.63	1	5
	Costa Rica	185	1.91	1.102	0.081	1.75	2.07	1	5
Websites	Spain	203	3.48	1.087	0.076	3.33	3.63	1	5
	Colombia	192	3.88	1.024	0.074	3.73	4.03	1	5
	Costa Rica	185	3.78	1.058	0.078	3.62	3.93	1	5
Social media	Spain	203	4.16	1.022	0.072	4.02	4.30	1	5
	Colombia	192	4.35	0.970	0.070	4.21	4.49	1	5
	Costa Rica	185	4.09	1.117	0.082	3.93	4.25	1	5

Own elaboration from data obtained in the study.

As can be seen from results, the country of origin seems to be a determining factor in defining the media through which young people get their information and get informed. The ANOVA analysis (see Table 4) allows us to confirm that there are statistically significant differences ($p < 0.005$) in the way young people access information in the three countries studied regarding the following resources: radio, $F = 9.313$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); online radio $F = 20.537$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); press, $F = 11.907$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); digital press, $F = 32.657$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); online TV, $F = 10.613$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); and websites, $F = 7.565$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$). However, the most significant results for our purpose are the data observed in the case of social media: $F = 3.158$, and Sig. 0.043 ($p > 0.005$). The results show no existing statistically significant differences among the three countries. Social media are massively used by young people to get informed in the three countries studied.

In order to analyze these results more in-depth, we consider the variable “C3_Media you use the most to get information”, as shown in Figure 3. It can be observed that the data from Table 4 get reinforced with data from this variable; the samples studied from all countries declare that the media most used for getting informed are social media (Spain, 72.4%; Colombia, 71.5%; and Costa Rica, 68.4%).

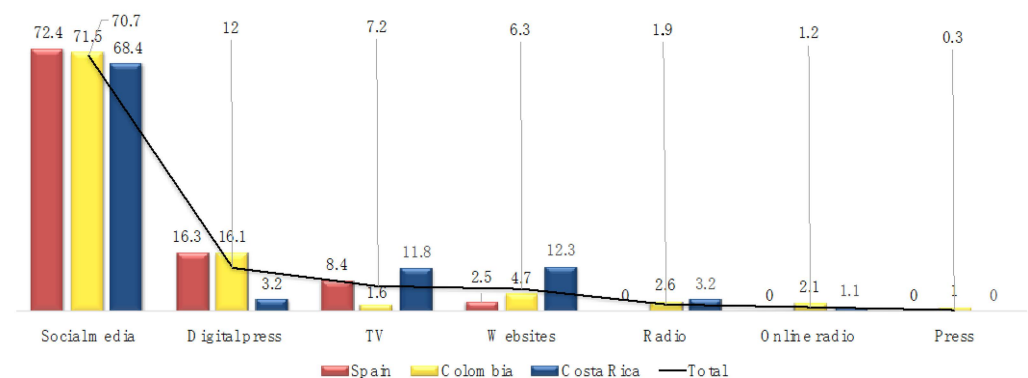


Figure 3. Percentage per country of media most used to get informed.

Table 4. ANOVA statistics used to analyze differences among the variance between groups, within groups and total.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Radio	Between groups	18.297	2	9.149	9.313	0.000
	Within groups	566.825	577	0.982		
	Total	585.122	579			
Online radio	Between groups	39.507	2	19.754	20.537	0.000
	Within groups	554.994	577	0.962		
	Total	594.502	579			
Press	Between groups	21.000	2	10.500	11.907	0.000
	Within groups	508.812	577	0.882		
	Total	529.812	579			
Digital press	Between groups	87.269	2	43.635	32.657	0.000
	Within groups	770.965	577	1.336		
	Total	858.234	579			
TV	Between groups	6.731	2	3.366	2.323	0.099
	Within groups	835.853	577	1.449		
	Total	842.584	579			
Online TV	Between groups	29.091	2	14.546	10.613	0.000
	Within groups	790.798	577	1.371		
	Total	819.890	579			
Websites	Between groups	16.909	2	8.454	7.565	0.001
	Within groups	644.848	577	1.118		
	Total	661.757	579			
Social media	Between groups	6.787	2	3.393	3.158	0.043
	Within groups	620.013	577	1.075		
	Total	626.800	579			

Own elaboration from data obtained in the study.

3.2. Students' Perceptions Related to the Reliability Given

In this second step of the analysis results we give an answer to RQ3: how much do students trust the media they use to get information? We also give an answer to RQ4: is the country of origin a determining factor in this reliability? Descriptive data based on frequencies give the first results about the trust placed in the different media that the sample uses to get informed: radio ($M = 2.61$; $SD = 1.132$); online radio ($M = 2.42$; $SD = 1.011$); digital press ($M = 2.75$; $SD = 1.104$); press ($M = 2.77$; $SD = 0.997$); TV ($M = 3.05$; $SD = 0.993$); online TV ($M = 2.60$; $SD = 0.932$); websites ($M = 3.01$; $SD = 0.940$); and social media ($M = 2.74$; $SD = 0.991$). This means that the total sample declares a low level of trust in the media that they use to get informed (no results over 3 when 1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; and 5 = always).

As seen in Table 5, the study of basic statistics gives an overview of the level of trust, in addition to the differences among countries. However, to go in-depth in the analysis, ANOVA statistics was applied to identify if the variable “country” is a factor determining the reliability of the media used for getting informed.

As can be observed from the results, the country of origin seems to be a determining factor in establishing the reliability of the media used for getting informed. The ANOVA analysis (see Table 6) allows us to confirm that there are statistically significant differences ($p < 0.005$) in the way that young people trust in the media that they use to get informed: radio, $F = 33.460$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); online radio, $F = 45.072$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); press, $F = 17.861$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); digital press, $F = 29.310$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); online TV, $F = 11.729$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); websites, $F = 19.542$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$); TV, $F = 5.339$, Sig. 0.005 ($p > 0.005$); and social media, $F = 15.354$, Sig. 0.000 ($p < 0.005$).

Table 5. Basic statistics per country origin for the variable “trust in media you use to get informed”.

You Usually Get Informed by:	Country	Mean	SD	Percentages of Consumption Frequencies					N
				Never	Almost	Occasionally	Frequently	Always	
Radio	Spain	3.41	0.830	2	11.3	35	46.8	4.9	203
	Colombia	3.02	0.946	5.2	23.4	40.6	26	4.7	192
	Costa Rica	2.61	1.132	18.5	28.6	33.3	12.7	6.9	185
Online radio	Spain	3.23	0.788	2	15.3	41.9	39.9	1	203
	Colombia	3.06	0.848	2.6	20.8	48.4	24	4.2	192
	Costa Rica	2.42	1.011	20.1	34.4	31.2	12.2	2.1	185
Press	Spain	3.51	0.858	1.5	10.8	32	46.8	8.9	203
	Colombia	3.18	0.965	3.1	22.4	35.4	31.8	7.3	192
	Costa Rica	2.75	1.104	13.2	29.6	32.8	17.5	6.9	185
Digital press	Spain	3.26	0.852	1	18.2	40.4	35.0	5.4	203
	Colombia	3.27	0.931	2.1	18.2	39.6	31.3	8.9	192
	Costa Rica	2.77	0.997	9.2	31.9	36.2	18.4	4.3	185
TV	Spain	3.24	0.966	3.4	21.2	29.6	39.9	5.9	203
	Colombia	2.91	1.017	6.3	30.2	37	19.3	7.3	192
	Costa Rica	3.05	0.993	5.3	21.7	44.4	19.6	9	185
Online TV	Spain	3.06	0.947	4.4	24.1	36.9	30	4.4	203
	Colombia	2.73	1.043	9.4	35.4	35.9	11.5	7.8	192
	Costa Rica	2.60	0.932	15.3	24.9	45	14.3	0.5	185
Websites	Spain	2.65	0.863	5.4	43.3	34	15.8	1.5	203
	Colombia	3.21	0.950	2.1	21.4	38.5	29.2	8.9	192
	Costa Rica	3.01	0.940	2.6	28.0	42.3	19.6	7.4	185
Social media	Spain	2.39	0.839	12.8	45.8	31	10.3	0	203
	Colombia	2.90	0.984	3.6	33.9	40.1	13.5	8.9	192
	Costa Rica	2.74	0.991	8.5	33.3	41.3	10.1	6.9	185

Own elaboration from data obtained in the study.

Table 6. ANOVA statistics to analyze differences among the variance between groups and within groups, and total correlating variables “country” and “level of trust”.

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Radio	Between groups	63.490	2	31.745	33.460	0.000
	Within groups	551.221	581	0.949		
	Total	614.711	583			
Online radio	Between groups	70.565	2	35.282	45.072	0.000
	Within groups	454.805	581	0.783		
	Total	525.370	583			
Press	Between groups	30.655	2	15.327	17.861	0.000
	Within groups	495.138	577	0.858		
	Total	525.793	579			
Digital press	Between groups	56.100	2.000	28.050	29.310	0.000
	Within groups	556.030	581	0.957		
	Total	612.130	583			

Table 6. Cont.

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TV	Between groups	10.506	2	5.253	5.339	0.005
	Within groups	571.616	581	0.984		
	Total	582.122	583			
Online TV	Between groups	22.312	2	11.156	11.729	0.000
	Within groups	552.646	581	0.951		
	Total	574.959	583			
Websites	Between groups	32.873	2	16.437	19.542	0.000
	Within groups	488.687	581	0.841		
	Total	521.560	583			
Social media	Between groups	27.069	2	13.535	15.354	0.000
	Within groups	512.148	581	0.881		
	Total	539.217	583			

Own elaboration from data obtained in the study.

In Figure 4, the data for the variable “C1_You usually get informed by...” are correlated with the data for variable “C2_ Reliability given to the media you use to get informed”. The most curious thing about this correlation all over the three countries studied, as can be observed, is that the more the sample uses a medium to get information, the less they trust it; and, on the contrary, the less the sample uses the medium to get information, the most it trusts it. These results imply a paradox.

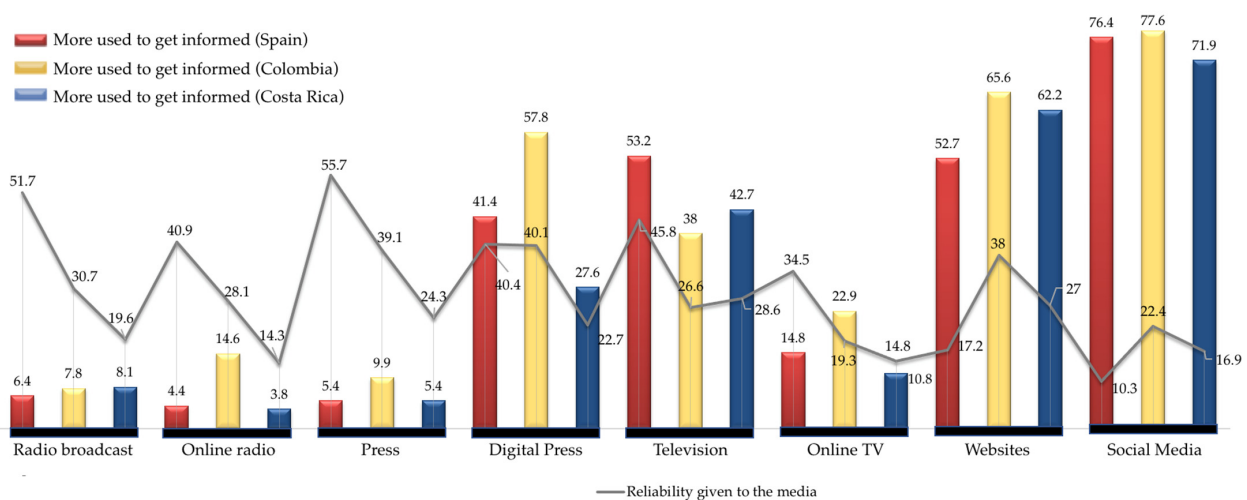


Figure 4. Percentage per country of media most used to get informed.

3.3. Students' Perceptions Related to the Reliability Given

In this third paragraph of analysis, the results are used to give an answer to RQ5: do students feel that they are well informed in terms of knowledge, and does the country constitute differences? We also answer RQ6: do students feel that their media diet is enough to be informed?

The feeling of the members of the sample when they were asked “Having such an amount of means to get informed makes you feel...” was quite astonishing (see Table 7), as they declared that they had poor knowledge: only 27.6% in Spain, 13% in Colombia, and 16.8% in Costa Rica answered “I know quite enough”, with lower percentages when declaring “I know quite a lot”, 1.5% in Spain, 6.8% in Colombia, and 1.6% in Costa Rica.

Table 7. Percentages per country for the variables C4 and C5.

(C4) Having Such an Amount of Means to Get Informed Makes You Feel. . .	I Do Not Know Nothing	I Do Know Something	I Know Enough	I Know Quite Enough	I Know Quite a Lot
Spain	15.8	28.6	26.6	27.6	1.5
Colombia	8.3	32.8	39.1	13	6.8
Costa Rica	8.6	35.1	37.8	16.8	1.6
(C5) Abundance of Information Makes You Feel. . .	Unconcerned	Misled	Poorly informed	Misinformed	Well informed
Spain	6.9	13.3	9.4	42.4	28.1
Colombia	6.8	8.9	17.2	33.9	33.3
Costa Rica	6	10.6	18.5	20.6	43

Own elaboration from data obtained in the study.

Finally, data from the item “Abundance of information makes you feel. . .” give us the results that, even when having access to a large amount of information and different media, students from the sample declared feeling “misinformed”, 42.4% in Spain, 33.9% from Colombia, and 20.6% from Costa Rica. The country in which we found more optimistic results was Costa Rica, in which 43.9% of students declared feeling “well informed”; on the contrary, in Spain, we found only 28.1% of students declaring this statement, and we found 33.3% from Colombia.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Today’s public sphere is increasingly shaped by a dynamic, global, cross-cutting digital landscape where ideas and people are the commodity that sustains the system [23]. Individuals are the raw material, the product, insofar as they generate and create information that coexists and is consumed alongside the information generated by the media. This phenomenon of decentralization and de-mediatization, studied by various authors [13,14], leads to a liquid society, lacking the primordial values that governed societies in the past, as Bauman proposed [24].

Social media has emerged and become more and more strong, nurturing a new state of affairs in which the era of prosumer is consolidated, changing the communication paradigm as never before. As explained and studied by many authors, such as Zúñiga and Kim [25] or Bastick [26], the current digital media landscape, as described, opens the door to the phenomenon of pseudo-information (misinformation, disinformation, fake news, post truth, etc.), increased during and after the pandemic situation and known as “infodemic”, providing a breeding ground for polarization in media discourses [27]. This background has led to a transformative scenario in which all social actors create and share in social media. Subsequently, a general distrust among populations begins to become a problem for democratic states and the legitimacy of institutions, as highlighted in previous works [2,28,29] and in line with results obtained in this study.

According to the research questions raised, the results point to the following conclusions: On the one hand, the sample analyzed is informed mostly through the digital environment (digital press, websites, and social media); regarding this issue, it is remarkable the subsistence of TV as a means of consumption to get informed no matter the country of origin. On the other hand, as previously observed by other studies [29–31], an increase trend is detected among the youngest population in regard to using social media as the main means of becoming informed. However, it is new in this kind of study to confirm that this is a generational phenomenon whatever the origin of young people, and, secondly, the lack of reliability in the media they use to get information. Last but not least, we conclude that the availability of massive information in the digital scenario does not guarantee the feeling of being well informed in terms of knowledge. Only 28.1% of the sample analyzed

from Spain feel well informed, 33.3% from Colombia, and 43% from Costa Rica (with the highest average). On the contrary, 42.4% of the sample from Spain feels misinformed, 33.9% in Colombia, and 20.9% from Costa Rica. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning as a limitation of the study presented that a nonrepresentative sample was used; it was a convenience sample, which does not allow us to generalize about the results.

In addition, it is important to highlight the high average of the sample declaring the feeling of being misinformed, poorly informed, or misled: 65.1% of Spanish students, 60% of Colombian students, and 49.7% of students from Costa Rica. These results are in line with recent research that certainly established strong connections of this feeling within eco-chamber and filter-bubble phenomena [32].

Having discussed the results, it could be said that a general awareness is perceived among academics regarding this issue. In response to an alarming situation in which young people get informed mostly by social media, which are not trustworthy for them and, so far, make them feel misinformed or poorly informed, digital literacy arises as the most convenient solution. Digital literacy appears to be the most effective solution to the erosion of the trustworthiness of the media that has merged with digital media. At a time when all human affairs (politics, entertainment, relationships, transactions, education, etc.) are mediated by the digital environment, only digital literacy seems to be the effective solution [33], as it appears not only in global forums such as UNESCO, OECD, or UN, but also in national legislations where such literacy is established as the only response to the transformations that social networks also impose on the communicative environment on which the formation of opinion and the guarantee of democracies depend.

This study, although descriptive, intends to be a warning light or a red flag to policy makers in each country where specific digital competency development programs or policies have been in place for years, but which do not seem to be sufficient in the face of the whirlwind of changes taking place in the digital environment. In the Spanish context, the National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teachers Training (INTEF) and the Cybersecurity National Institute, both depending on the government, strive to offer training and advice for citizens and teachers. From Colombia, the government offers specific support through “Colombia Aprende” for the development of digital skills based on the European framework established by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Professional Training [34] and in the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers [35]. As for the Costa Rica context, depending on the Public Education Ministry, we find the “Tecno@aprender” National Mobile Technologies Program, an initiative aimed at the development of Costa Rican education through the inclusion of digital technologies in the teaching and learning processes, to support the educational curriculum. Moreover, the educational website “Educativo” aims to provide support to the citizenship regarding the use of technologies.

Summarizing the situation, the results show empirical evidence of a digital scenario in which young people are natural dwellers, digital practitioners raised under the auspices of concrete digital competences plans but still needing a life-long digital literacy plan. This research opens up a pathway to wider developments with an earlier start during compulsory education to guarantee empowered citizens with bigger critical capabilities to avoid the massive consumption of media that they do not trust.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.B.-R. and L.M.P.-E.; methodology, A.P.-E.; validation, A.B.-R., L.M.P.-E., C.Á. and A.P.-E.; formal analysis, A.P.-E.; investigation, A.B.-R., L.M.P.-E., C.Á. and A.P.-E.; resources, A.B.-R., L.M.P.-E., C.Á. and A.P.-E.; data curation, A.P.-E.; writing—original draft preparation, A.B.-R., L.M.P.-E., C.Á. and A.P.-E.; writing—review and editing, A.P.-E.; visualization, A.P.-E.; supervision, A.P.-E.; project administration, A.P.-E. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data availability: Pérez-Escoda, A. (2024). Dataset study of three countries: Spain, Colombia, and Costa Rica. Figshare. Dataset. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25334386>.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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