Alternative approaches to news: the role of media distrust, perceived network homophily, and interests in news topics

Rutas alternativas a las noticias: desconfianza en medios, homofilia percibida e interés en temas

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ABSTRACT: This study focuses on three contemporary alternative users' attitudes to news previously detetected in the literature: 'News finds me', 'The information is out there' and 'I don't know what to believe. It analyzes the role of users' media distrust and social network homophily perception as predictors of each considered attitude. Secondly, the study also considers the effect of the mentioned attitude on user's interests in different news topics. Last, it compares the reciprocal influence of the aforementioned attitudes among them. A survey (n = 279) was developed among Spanish Facebook users. Data was analysed through multiple regression test. Results show that media distrust positively predicted "The Information Is Out There" but was not relevant in the cases of "News Finds Me" and "I Don't Know What To Believe". "News Finds Me" negatively predicted interest in hard news (domestic, international politics, and economy), and "The Information Is Out There" predicted interest in lifestyle news and stories about celebrities. Perceived network homophily was not predicted by any of the observed attitudes. A reciprocal influence was detected between "The Information Is Out There" and "News Finds Me" but no influence was identified from or to "I Don't Know What To Believe". We conclude that "The Information Is Out There" may have the same negative effects on political knowledge and participation that "News Finds Me" as it drives users away from hard news item and towards softer topics.

Keywords: news users; hard news; soft news; media distrust; perceived network homophily.

RESUMEN: Este estudio se centra en tres actitudes alternativas al consumo tradicional de noticias definidas previamente en las noticias: "Las noticias me encuentran", "La información está ahí fuera" y "No sé Qué Creer". Analiza el papel de la desconfianza de los usuarios respecto a los medios y la homofilia percibida de los contactos en sus redes sociales como predictores de cada una de estas actitudes. Por último, compara la influencia recíproca de las mencionadas actitudes entre sí. Los datos se extrajeron de una encuesta (n = 279) entre usuarios españoles de Facebook y se analizaron mediante pruebas de regresión lineal múltiple. Los resultados muestran que la desconfianza en los medios predijo positivamente "La información está ahí fuera" pero no resultó relevante en los casos de "Las noticias me encuentran" ni "No sé qué creer". "Las Noticias Me Encuentran" predijo negativamente el interés en las noticias duras (política nacional, internacional y economía) y "La información está ahí fuera" predijo el interés en noticas de estilo de vida y sobre famosos. La homofilia percibida de la red no predijo ninguna de las actitudes observadas. Se detectó una influencia recíproca entre "La Información Está Ahí Fuera" y "Las noticias

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me encuentran" pero no respecto a "No sé qué creer". Concluimos que "La Información Está Ahí Fuera" puede causar los mismos efectos negativos en la participación y conocimiento sobre política que "Las noticias me encuentran" en tanto que deriva a los usuarios de noticias duras hacia temas más blandos.

Palabras clave: usuarios, noticias duras, noticias blandas, desconfianza mediática, homofilia percibida de la red

1. Introduction[2].

The media environment is being transformed by digital intermediaries such as search engines and social media (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). Users no longer connect with news exclusively through traditional mass media. News reaches the audience through other vehicles and actors such as the individual's social contacts or computer algorithms (Thorson & Wells, 2016).

Social media platforms like Facebook have evolved into channels where users discuss and are exposed to social and political issues (Masip, Ruiz-Caballero & Suau, 2019), and they have potentially become the most important content distribution channel ever created (Dafonte-Gómez, 2018). Almost half of Spanish Internet users (48%) receive news primarily through Facebook (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy & Nielsen, 2018). The exposition of social and political issues through social media increases the bubble effect and the resonance campaign, promoted from current digital scenarios, due to the overabundance of information that these can produce (Flaxman, Goel & Rao, 2016). A reality that would lead to a false sense of being informed or at least of being able to be, limiting under these effects, our ability to see the social environment surrounding us, and the possibility of having contact with other ideas and beliefs. The scenario before described results from the constant repetition of messages that are not necessarily true and reduce the informational contrast space.

This prevalence of social media as an 'ambient journalism' environment where news and information are displayed, collected, communicated, and shared by users pursuing different purposes (Hermida, 2010) In this context, some 'news avoiders' have either stopped or reduced their news consumption through conventional and traditional venues (Edgerly, Vraga, Bode, Thorson & Thorson, 2018). This 'news avoidance' does not necessarily imply that users are refusing to follow the news or to keep updated with current events, but instead, they prefer to access information about news topics through other different channels, such as incidental news exposure -that is, the unintentional contact of users with the news while developing other activities- and social media filtering -the curation and sharing of news in social media by user's online contacts (Feezell, 2018).

Such an environment has led to new ways users make sense of the news. This paper deals with three of such attitudes: 'News Finds Me', 'The Information is Out There', and 'I Don't Know What To Believe', that are defined below.

1.1. News Finds Me.

The 'news finds me' perception is followed by users who believe they can be well informed without actively following the news media, given that they believe relevant information will find them through general media use and their contacts, in particular through social media (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017). "News Finds Me" perception assumes that relevant enough information will reach users through their personal networks, be it on offline conversations or as part of their day-to-day

use of social media for other purposes, mainly, socializing. As a consequence, this perception leads users to believe that there is no need to actively following traditional media (Toff & Nielsen, 2018)

1.2. The Information is Out There.

"News Finds Me" is not the only attitude to explain contemporary alternative approaches to news. Toff and Nielsen (2018) have identified two additional 'folk theories' -that is, sets of beliefs and attitudes that users rely upon to make sense of their information environment-: 'The information is out there' and 'I don't know what to believe'.

"The Information Is Out There" implies a more active role for those individuals involved. In this case, users prefer not to follow traditional news media because they believe that whenever they want to find information about any issue, such information would be available online and it would be easily findable mainly through Google search (Toff & Nielsen, 2018). In contrast to "News Finds Me" perception, "The Information Is Out There" implies that users can actively seek and find any information they need through search engines, not just by looking or consuming news media. Thus, "The Information Is Out There" believers feel that the Internet offers a vast amount of easily available and retrievable information about every topic of choice.

1.3. I don't know what to believe.

As exposed, "News Finds Me", and "The Information Is Out There" expressed users' certainty that they can be informed and get the facts and information to keep updated about current events without actively following traditional media. Meanwhile, "I Don't Know What To Believe" belief implies users' lack of faith in their ability to make sense of the news or information surrounding them. In the case of perceptions regarding users' self, overload, and a low self-perception of media literacy were mentioned as factors difficulting how to make sense of information The sensation of news overload reduces user's perception of news self-efficacy, which leads to news detachment (Park, 2019). Users felt they lacked self-efficacy to deal with the complexities of current events and information. Users expressing "I Don't Know What To Believe" belief also confessed their disinterest and distrust in the political process. This distrust was also expressed in the case of news media, which were seen as biased and manipulative (Toff & Nielsen, 2018).

1.4. Aims and objectives.

The introduced study follows a three-fold objective, with the general aim to led to a wider understanding of "News Finds Me", "The Information Is Out There", and "I Don't Know What To Believe" folk theories are recently identified behaviors in the literature. Thus, this study wants to identify how such theories are predicted by media distrust and by the perceived audiences of individuals on their social media. Also, it wants to measure how the three identified folk theories predict user's interest in hard and soft news. Lastly, we aim to explore how each considered folk theory predict the rest of them, as theoretically these attitudes are not mutually exclusive

Below are introduced and exposed the reasons upon the presumptions and hypothesis of our work is theoretically based. Also, a research question is prompted related to the former aim introduced in the paragraph above.

1.5. Media distrust.

Even though news consumption patterns and preferences help to understand the current news environment, media perceptions should also be taken into account (Goyanes, 2019). The crisis of

diminishing trust is one of the biggest problems faced by contemporary journalism (Fink, 2019). Worldwide, only four of ten individuals are said to trust in the media (Newman et al, 2021). In Spain, this problem has been especially acute since the 2008 economic crisis. The collapse weakened the financial situation of the media giants and made them more dependent on political and economic actors. As a consequence, Spanish citizens perceived traditional media as being subjugated to elite powers (Barrera, 2018). This fact is relevant because perception and evaluations of media performance influence how citizens use the media (Gil de Zúñiga, Diehl & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2018), especially in the case of younger people (Elvestad, Phillips & Feuerstein, 2018).

Media distrust potentially explains why users demand news from not traditional sources (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). In this sense, it has been positively related to the use of non-mainstream media such as alternative news websites (Schultz, Jackob, Ziegele, Quiring & Schemer, 2017) and social media (Amaral & Silveira, 2018). Media distrust is related to "The Information Is Out There", because users who share this perception considered that Internet searches allowed them to overcome unreliable sources of information, especially mentioning the ideological bias and lack of trust of conventional news media. Many times their searches were addressed to find official sources such as government agencies instead of traditional news articles, which were considered unreliable (Toff & Nielsen, 2018)

IDKWTTB was also characterized, among other factors -information overload, low perceived media literacy, political detachment- by low media trust. Users expressed that even though there was a huge amount of information available, they thought that much of it was biased and reliable and they lacked the knowledge or energy to identify trustworthy pieces of news (Toff & Nielsen, 2018).

As stated by Toff and Nielsen (2018), media distrust is related to folk theories such as "I Don't Know What To Believe" and "The Information Is Out There". That said, their study was based on qualitative data and did not offer quantitative evidence to support their claim. Thus, one objective of this study was to measure the relationship between media distrust and these news alternative approaches to news. The following hypotheses were posited:

- H1.1 Media distrust will positively predict "News Finds Me" perception.

- H1.2. Media distrust will positively predict "The Information Is Out There" folk theory.

- H1.3. Media distrust will positively predict "I Don't Know What To Believe" folk theory.

1.6. Perceived network homophily.

In other sense, perceived network homophily, that is, the closeness or similarities to themselves that users perceive in their contacts on social media, has been shown to play a relevant role in information and participation behavior on social media. When users perceive their social media contacts as being more similar to themselves, they tend to rate the news they found in those shared environments as more credible (Tandoc, 2019). Also, when people think their networks and contacts will disagree with something, they are generally reluctant to share such messages (Matthes, Knoll & von Sikorski, 2017). Conversely, the perception that others in their social network agree with one's opinions encourages them to engage in online conversations (Hampton et al., 2014).

As previously stated, "News Finds Me" perception relies on people's confidence in their social network and social media contacts. "News Finds Me" use of social media is not carried by information seeking but for socializing purposes (Toff & Nielsen, 2018).

As mentioned, social networks are relevant mechanisms for people to receive news. The digital intermediaries who dominate the current media environment have also swayed users to prefer other methods of curating the content they consume, beyond the traditional, journalistically curated selection.

In particular, users are starting to prefer algorithmic selection (Araujo, Helberger, Kruikemeier & de Vreese, 2020; Thurman, Moeller, Helberger & Trilling, 2019). These social media algorithms filter prime content and fit each user's preferences (Cohen, 2018). Through algorithmic selection, people who rely heavily on social media as a source of news might perceive that their contacts share similar news preferences. Yet, even in contexts where the algorithmic selection of content is less prominent than in Facebook, users are exposed mainly to like-minded information (Halberstam & Knight, 2016) In other words, social media selectively displays a more homophilic range of issues. Therefore, given the importance of social contacts in "News Finds Me" perception, we expect such users to attribute more common interests to their peers on the platform. In this sense, people who rely on "News Finds Me" perception might deduce that their peers are closer to their interests than the journalists and the media, thereby preferring this channel to access information. Given the importance of social media and personal contacts in "News Finds Me" perception, we believe that "News Finds Me" perception will be predicted by users' perceptions that their social media contacts share the same interests and beliefs.

In the case this homophily between "News Finds Me" users and their social links exists, it might point to a vicious circle where citizens not only become detached from news media but also get instead a view of current affairs dominated by its same prejudices and existing beliefs.

We did not expect network homophily to predict "The Information Is Out There" and "I Don't Know What To Believe" folk theories, as social media appears to play no significant role in those attitudes. We, therefore, posited the following hypotheses:

- H2.1 Network homophily perception will predict "News Finds Me" perception.

- H2.2. Network homophily perception will not predict "The Information Is Out There" folk theory.

- H2.3. Network homophily perception will not predict to IDWTB folk theory.

1.7. Interest in media topics.

This study also aimed to identify the relationship between the observed attitudes and interests in specific news topics. Users' attitude toward news is not homogeneous but depends on the kind of news they are faced to and their previous interests. In fact, in high-choice media environment users do not only avoid the news because of a given lack of interest in civic and social affairs but also because they rather show a higher preference towards other issues or contents (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020) Thus, interest on a topic plays a relevant role on influencing which kind of news do people consume and engage with (Karnowski, Kümpel, Leonhard & Leiner, 2017; Kümpel, 2019). For instance, users with low interest tend to avoid news articles as soon as they find a cue showing that the post deals with political issues (Bode, Vraga & Troller-Renfree, 2017). Previous research has stated that considered perceptions ("News Finds Me", "The Information Is Out There", "I Don't Know What To Believe") relate differently to different topics.

Users who shared "News Finds Me" perception differed that some 'big stories' (such as the British referendum on leaving the European Union) deserved to be known in comparison to other, less relevant, news content that can be ignored. These users considered that those pieces of news would 'reach' them through their social networks and, especially, through social media. (Toff & Nielsen, 2018). Yet "News Finds Me" perception has been negatively associated with political knowledge and political interest (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019) and suspected of provoking negative effects on democratic participation (Gil De Zúñiga, Huber & Strauß, 2018). A similar phenomenon could be expected with the "I Don't Know What To Believe" folk theory. Given that people who expressed such belief are considered uninterested in politics and detached from the political process (Toff & Nielsen, 2018) it could be expected that they are less interested in political information.

Yet users who followed "The Information Is Out There" perception expressed a proactive attitude towards political information. Not only, as stated above, showed preference to governmental sources, but also indicated that when they needed to take a political decision, such as deciding their vote, they preferred to look for information on the Internet than on social media (Toff & Nielsen, 2018).

Based on previously detected negative attitudes toward politics regarding "News Finds Me" and "I Don't Know What To Believe", we expected them to be negatively predicted by *hard news* (politics, science and technology, and economy and business). Contrarily, based on the proactive attitude expressed in "The Information Is Out There", we expected to find a positive prediction in this regard. Previous research has only analyzed the relationship between users' engagement and interest in political matters according to "News Finds Me". We propose to measure the influence of the said attitudes ("News Finds Me", "The Information Is Out There", "I Don't Know What To Believe") and different kinds of news topics. Therefore, we posited the following hypotheses:

- H3.1 Higher levels of "News Finds Me" perception will predict lower interest toward *hard news* topics.

- H3.2. Higher levels of "The Information Is Out There" folk theory will predict higher interest in *hard news* topics.

- H3.3. Higher levels of "I Don't Know What To Believe" folk theory will predict lower interest in *hard news* topics.

Last, as previously exposed, we want to measure the relationship among the three considered folk theories. The logic behind this aim is that we consider justifiable that "News Finds Me" and "The Information Is Out There" could be related between themselves, given that both of them express some disaffection or disinterest toward legacy news media but provide alternative approaches or ways to get in touch with the news that can be complementary among them. That is, users could expect to follow current news by their social media peers and also, by actively seeking information through Google or other Internet search engines. Yet, as "I Don't Know What To Believe" has been defined in terms of information overload sensation, perception of self-efficacy, and disinterest towards politics, we expect that users with such attitude show a deeper detachment from news and information leading them not to follow any news at all. In this regard, we expect that "The Information Is Out There" negatively predicts "News Finds Me" and "The Information Is Out There", which -at least- show some partial interest toward news. Accordingly, we propose Research Question RQ1: How are "News Finds Me", "The Information Is Out There", and "I Don't Know What To Believe" related among them?

2. Methods.

The article aims to measure the relationship between mistrust in the media and attitudes regarding the news considered in this work ("News Finds Me", "The Information Is Out There", and "I Don't Know What To Believe") and identify the topics that are of interest to each of them by Facebook users in Spain. This study relies on survey data collected from a representative sample of the dominant age group of Spanish Facebook users (18–39 years) that represents 52%, according the Social Media Family (2018).

Facebook is the social media platform with the highest number of users in Spain, with 87% of all Internet users into it (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018). As authors like Serrano Puche, Fernández and Rodríguez-Virgili (2018) point out, Facebook is the most important platform for consumption of information compared to all social media platforms. In fact, 69% of Spanish adults usually receive news through Facebook (Mitchell et al., 2018). Young people provide a relevant subject for study, not only because younger adults are particularly active on social media but also because their behavior is likely to remain a key feature of news distribution and consumption models (Bobkowski, 2015). Also,

this age range falls in the range studied by Toff and Nielsen (2018) in their study about news avoiders, and "News Finds Me" perception is statistically more common in young adults (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019). Last, Facebook is the most important social media where interviewed users mention they receive news in the case of "News Finds Me" Perception (Toff & Nielsen, 2018)

The Facebook users participating in the survey applied were recruited (n=300) through online ads on Facebook itself by the polling group Societae, from December 2nd until December 12th . The initial aim for the sample size was to guarantee a sample which guaranteed a CI=95% and a margin of error<5.8. To participate in the study, users had to be active on this social media and posted at least one message on the platform in the previous twelve months. The survey did not specifically ask for traditional media consumption, so participants were not discriminated according to the kind of media habits they followed regularly. In the final sample, twenty-one participants were excluded because they did not complete the entire questionnaire. For this reason, the final sample consisted of 279 users, with an error of +/- 5.9 and a confidence level of 95%. A power test was carried on, resulting that a design with a sample size of 279 will reliably (with probability greater than 0.9) detect effect sizes of $\delta \geq 0.195$, assuming a two-sided criterion for detection that allows for a maximum Type I error rate of a=0.05.

Table 1 summarizes the sociodemographic features of the sample. The average age of each participant was 27.85 years (SD=5.87). As socioeconomic features have been proven to influence media consumption (Bergström, Strömbäck & Arkhede, 2019; Yates & Lockley, 2018), participants had to indicate their educational level, their monthly income (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2018). Ideology was also considered as a control variable, given that extremists and conservative individuals tend to be more homophilous than liberals and moderates (Boutyline & Willer, 2017). Moreover, most ideologized Internet users are less incidentally exposed to news (Serrano Puche, Fernández & Rodríguez-Virgili, 2018). The study did ask for the frequency of news consumption (1= never, 2=Quite sporadically, 3= Once a month, 4=Once a week, 5=Some times a week, 6=Once a day, 7=Some times a day, 8= Virtually every hour; avg=2.59. SD=1.12).

Table 1. Sociodemographic features of the sample

Feature	Items	n	%
Gender	Male	109	39.07
	Female	167	59.86
	I'd rather not tell	3	1.08
Education	Basic	5	1.79
	Secondary	40	14.34
	Vocational	71	25.45
	Degree or master's degree	162	58.07
	PhD	1	0.36
Monthly incomes	No income	9	3.23
	€ 0 < 300	6	2.15
	€ 301 < 600	14	5.02
	€ 601 < 900	17	6.09
	€ 0 < 1,200	36	12.90
	€ 1,201 < 2,400	67	24.01
	€ 1,801 < 2,400	46	16.49
	€ 2,401 < 3,000	38	13.62
	€ 3,001 < 4,500	29	10.39
	€ 4,501 < 6,000	7	2.51
	€ > 6,000	2	0.72
	I'd rather not tell	8	2.87

The news attitudes measurements included a set of several Likert-type questions (1=lowest agreement, 5=highest agreement). The scale for "News Finds Me" perception was adapted from Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks & Ardèvol-Abreu (2017). It included the sum of the answers to the following questions (α=0.61):

- 'I rely on my friends to tell me what is important when news happens',

- 'I can be well informed even when I do not actively follow the news',

- 'I do not worry about keeping up with the news because I know the news will find me', and

- 'I rely on information from my friends based on what they like or follow through social media'.

Scales for "The Information Is Out There" and "I Don't Know What To Believe" were built upon the qualitative results of Toff and Nielsen (2018). "The Information Is Out There" (α = 0.66) measured as the sum of the answers to the following statements:

- 'Internet offers information about any topic or issue',

- 'I can easily find any information I need on the Internet',

- 'I trust the information I search for on the Internet (through Google or other search engines) than what I find on social media or just browsing the web',

- 'If I want to find more about a topic of interest, I search for it on the Internet', and

- 'If I want to know more facts or viewpoints about a story, I search for them on the Internet'.

Alphas between 0.6 and 0.7 are often deemed as questionable (see f.i, Adawi et al. 2019). In the case of an exploratory analysis for variables not quite well defined by the literature, such as "The Information Is Out There" and "News Finds Me", we believe that our measurement in the study can be taken as acceptable, even though they are below the standard of 0.7. Additionally we carried on an Exploratory Factor Analysis that pointed acceptable levels for the measurements with the lowest alphas: "The Information Is Out There" and "News Finds Me" both reached a TLI Tucker-Lewis Index above 1. Anyway, as the standard alpha values are below the common standard of 0.7, such limitation has been addressed in the conclusions

Meanwhile, "I Don't Know What To Believe" (α = 0.69) was evaluated through the following statements:

- 'I feel that I receive more information than I can manage',

- ' I find it hard to understand and interpret the information I find on the Internet.',

- ' I find it hard to identify trustworthy from untrustworthy information'.

All the three scales ("News Finds Me", "The Information Is Out There", and "I Don't Know What To Believe") reach above the minimum Cronbach's alpha of 0.60 standard requirements (Loewenthal & Lewis, 2018).

Participants were also asked to rate their interest toward a series of news topics on a Likert scale (1=not interested at all, 5=very interested). They also had to rate the perceived value they believed their Facebook friends would place on the same topics. (See Table 2)

Table 2. Expressed interest and perceived Facebook friends' interest in news topics

Topic	Self-expressed interest		The perceived interest of Facebook friends	
	Avg.	SD	Avg.	SD
Foreign affairs and international politics	3.03	1.21	2.94	1.19
Domestic politics	3.39	1.24	3.39	1.18
Local politics	3.13	1.24	3.18	1.25
Lifestyle	3.36	1.13	3.55	1.04
Celebrities and entertainment	2.82	1.25	3.23	1.24
Science and technology	3.51	1.09	3.33	1.00
Economy and business	2.7	1.19	2.64	1.13
Sports	2.71	1.39	3.58	1.21

A hard news interest ratio (α=0.76, avg.=15.75, SD=8.89) was calculated by the sum of the expressed interest in foreign affairs, domestic politics, local politics, science and technology, and economy and business. A soft news interest ratio (α=0,31, avg.=8.89, SD=2.45) was built as the sum of the expressed interest in lifestyle, celebrities and entertainment, and sports. As the sum of soft news does not reach the minimum Cronbach's alpha standard, interest toward such topics is analyzed disaggregated.

Perceived network homophily was rated in two dimensions. The first evaluated the perceived thematic homophily, that is, the degree to which the user believed that their peers were interested in the same issues. This index was calculated by the total sum (avg. = -1.18, SD = 0.504) of the difference between self-expressed interest and Facebook friends' perceived interest on each topic (see Table 2). Lastly, negative differences were converted to positive as our interest was not to indicate whether the participants believed their peers were more or less interested in the different topics, rather rate only the amount of perceived difference (avg. = 3.78, SD = 3,53). This final index was addressed as 'perceived thematic heterophily'.

The second dimension of homophily was measured by the sum of the answers to four Likert-type (1=lowest agreement, 5=highest agreement) questions (α=0.78) (avg.=9.34, SD=3.09):

- 'My Facebook friends have the same professional interests as me',

- 'My Facebook friends and I share the same political orientation',

- 'My Facebook friends have the same religious beliefs as me', and

- 'My Facebook friends and I share the same hobbies and interests'.

Distrust towards the media (α = 0.76) was measured by the sum of three different Likert-type questions (1 = lowest agreement, 5 = highest agreement), following Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga (2017):

- 'The media selects news according to what attracts the bigger public',

- 'Media production techniques can be used to influence the perceptions of the public', and

- 'Media owners influence the content produced by media'.

Follow the approach of previous studies (Kalogeropoulos, Negredo, Picone & Nielsen, 2017), participants of the survey were asked to rate themselves on an 8-point ideological scale, where

zero identified the participant politically as extreme left and seven as extreme right (avg.=3.80, SD=1.14). These answers were later recoded to measure participants' ideological extremism. The participants located at extremes of the scale (0 and 7) were recorded as a maximum extremism score of 4, and those on the central scale (3 and 4) were assigned the lowest level of ideological extremism of 1 (avg.=1.48; SD=0.74).

Statistical analysis was conducted use R programming language. Multiple linear regression tests were run to identify the relationships between the considered variables. Each DV is not considered a dichotomous scale, but a continuous scale. Our measurements does not classify participants into a group (be it "News Finds Me", "The Information Is Out There" or "I Don't Know What To Believe"), but they calculate the degree up to each participant follows such attitude in their news consumption. Participants are not assigned to their 'main' attitude to news given a number of reasons.. For instance, users may follow different strategies or habits in their news consumption, more media focused or more 'traditional', that would lead to low scores in "News Finds Me", "The Information Is Out There" and "I Don't Know What To Believe". Other reason might be that the three measure attitudes theoretically do not exclude each other and we consider the possibility that participants might show a high degree of "News Finds Me" and "The Information Is Out There" and a moderate "I Don't Know What To Believe" presence or whatever consideration. The measurement are considered intervals as the combination of Likert questions they are built upon resalt on a scale where the differences in each of their points or degrees is theoretically the same. The difference between point 10 and point 11 is the same that between point 20 and 21.

In the multiple linear regression tests:

- A significant *b*-weight indicates the beta-weight and semi-partial correlation are also significant.

- *b* represents unstandardized regression weights. *beta* indicates the standardized regression weights.

- sr^2 represents the semi-partial correlation squared.

- *r* represents the zero-order correlation. *LL* and *UL* indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively.

3. Results.

3.1. Predictors of news attitudes (H1 & H2)

Media distrust has been found a positive predictor of "The Information Is Out There", as expected (H1.2). No relationship was found between "News Finds Me" Perception (H1.1) and "I Don't Know What To Believe" (H1.3) (See Table 3).

Table 3 also shows that perceived network homophily does not influence any of the observed variables. Neither thematic heterophily nor network homophily predicted the observed attitudes. Thus, Hypothesis 3.1-3.3 could not be verified.

Table 3. Regression results of attitudes

News Finds Me								
Predictor	b	b 95% CI [LL, UL]	beta	beta 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	r	Fit
(Intercept)	11.42**	[7.11, 15.73]						
Media distrust`	0.04	[-0.16, 0.24]	0.02	[-0.09, 0.14]	.00	[-.00, .01]	.01	
Perceived homophily	-0.00	[-0.11, 0.11]	-0.00	[-0.12, 0.12]	.00	[-.00, .00]	.01	
Perceived thematic homophily	0.05	[-0.05, 0.15]	0.06	[-0.06, 0.18]	.00	[-.01, .02]	.08	
Incomes	-0.02	[-0.17, 0.14]	-0.01	[-0.13, 0.10]	.00	[-.00, .00]	-.01	
Education	-0.57*	[-1.01, -0.12]	-0.15	[-0.27, -0.03]	.02	[-.01, .06]	-.15*	
Age	0.08**	[0.02, 0.14]	0.16	[0.04, 0.28]	.02	[-.01, .06]	.14*	
Ideology	-0.04	[-0.37, 0.29]	-0.02	[-0.14, 0.11]	.00	[-.00, .00]	.03	
Partisanship	0.24	[-0.26, 0.73]	0.06	[-0.06, 0.18]	.00	[-.01, .02]	.07	
								R^2 = .055
								95% CI[.00,.09]

The Information is Out There								
Predictor	b	b 95% CI [LL, UL]	beta	beta 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	r	Fit
(Intercept)	13.07**	[9.14, 16.99]						
Media distrust`	0.45**	[0.27, 0.64]	0.28	[0.17, 0.39]	.08	[.02, .13]	.26**	
Perceived homophily	0.09	[-0.01, 0.19]	0.10	[-0.02, 0.21]	.01	[-.01, .03]	.06	
Perceived thematic homophily	0.12*	[0.02, 0.21]	0.14	[0.03, 0.26]	.02	[-.01, .05]	.12*	
Incomes	0.09	[-0.05, 0.23]	0.07	[-0.04, 0.19]	.01	[-.01, .02]	.06	
Education	-0.45*	[-0.85, -0.05]	-0.13	[-0.24, -0.01]	.02	[-.01, .04]	-.16**	
Age	0.02	[-0.04, 0.07]	0.03	[-0.08, 0.15]	.00	[-.01, .01]	.01	
Ideology	0.42**	[0.13, 0.72]	0.17	[0.05, 0.29]	.02	[-.01, .06]	.14*	
Partisanship	-0.31	[-0.76, 0.14]	-0.08	[-0.20, 0.04]	.01	[-.01, .02]	-.00	
								R^2 = .146**
								95% CI[.06,.20]

I Don't Know What To Believe								
Predictor	b	b 95% CI [LL, UL]	beta	beta 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	r	Fit
(Intercept)	8.59**	[4.61, 12.57]						
Media distrust`	0.08	[-0.10, 0.27]	0.05	[-0.07, 0.17]	.00	[-.01, .02]	.06	
Perceived homophily	0.04	[-0.06, 0.15]	0.05	[-0.07, 0.17]	.00	[-.01, .01]	.04	
Perceived thematic homophily	-0.03	[-0.12, 0.07]	-0.03	[-0.16, 0.09]	.00	[-.01, .01]	-.02	
Incomes	0.02	[-0.12, 0.17]	0.02	[-0.10, 0.14]	.00	[-.00, .00]	.01	
Education	-0.22	[-0.63, 0.18]	-0.07	[-0.19, 0.06]	.00	[-.01, .02]	-.05	
Age	-0.02	[-0.07, 0.04]	-0.04	[-0.16, 0.08]	.00	[-.01, .01]	-.06	
Ideology	-0.04	[-0.34, 0.26]	-0.02	[-0.15, 0.11]	.00	[-.00, .00]	-.05	
Partisanship	-0.41	[-0.87, 0.04]	-0.11	[-0.24, 0.01]	.01	[-.01, .04]	-.10	
								R^2 = .024
								95% CI[.00,.04]

3.2 News topics (H3).

Regression tests show that "News Finds Me" predicted a negative interest towards hard news topics, but no effect was found of "The Information Is Out There" or "I Don't Know What To Believe" in this regard (see Table 4). Thus H2.1 was verified but H2.2 and H2.3 could not be supported.

Table 4. Regression results using interest in Hard News as the dependent variable

Predictor	b	b 95% CI [LL, UL]	beta	beta 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr2	sr2 95% CI [LL, UL]	r	Fit
(Intercept)	12.17**	[6.25, 18.09]						
"I Don't Know What To Believe"	-0.06	[-0.25, 0.12]	-0.04	[-0.16, 0.07]	.00	[-.01, .01]	-.06	
"The Information Is Out There"	0.21*	[0.02, 0.40]	0.14	[0.02, 0.26]	.02	[-.01, .05]	.06	
"News Finds Me"	-0.34**	[-0.52, -0.17]	-0.24	[-0.36, -0.12]	.05	[.00, .10]	-.21**	
Incomes	0.28*	[0.06, 0.49]	0.15	[0.03, 0.26]	.02	[-.01, .05]	.17**	
Education	0.45	[-0.18, 1.08]	0.08	[-0.03, 0.20]	.01	[-.01, .02]	.11	
Age	0.01	[-0.07, 0.10]	0.01	[-0.10, 0.13]	.00	[-.00, .00]	.01	
Ideology	-0.16	[-0.62, 0.29]	-0.04	[-0.17, 0.08]	.00	[-.01, .01]	-.01	
Partisanship	0.32	[-0.38, 1.02]	0.06	[-0.07, 0.18]	.00	[-.01, .01]	.04	
								R2 = .096**
								95% CI[.02,.14]

The analysis of disaggregated soft news topics shows that "The Information Is Out There" positively predicts the interest in Celebrities and Lifestyle (see Table 5).

Table 5. Regression results using interest in Soft News topics as the dependent variable

Lifestyle								
Predictor	b	b 95% CI [LL, UL]	beta	beta 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	r	Fit
(Intercept)	0.52	[-1.06, 2.11]						
"I Don't Know What To Believe"	0.03	[-0.02, 0.08]	0.06	[-0.05, 0.18]	.00	[-.01, .02]	.05	
"The Information Is Out There"	0.07**	[0.02, 0.12]	0.18	[0.06, 0.31]	.03	[-.01, .07]	.21**	
"News Finds Me"	0.04	[-0.01, 0.09]	0.11	[-0.01, 0.24]	.01	[-.01, .03]	.16**	
Incomes	-0.03	[-0.08, 0.03]	-0.05	[-0.17, 0.07]	.00	[-.01, .01]	-.03	
Education	0.12	[-0.05, 0.29]	0.09	[-0.03, 0.21]	.01	[-.01, .03]	.02	
Age	-0.00	[-0.03, 0.02]	-0.02	[-0.14, 0.10]	.00	[-.00, .00]	.01	
Ideology	0.11	[-0.01, 0.23]	0.11	[-0.01, 0.23]	.01	[-.01, .03]	.11	
Partisanship	-0.04	[-0.23, 0.14]	-0.03	[-0.15, 0.09]	.00	[-.01, .01]	-.01	
								R^2 = .075**
								95% CI[.01,.11]

Celebrities								
Predictor	b	b 95% CI [LL, UL]	beta	beta 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	r	Fit
(Intercept)	1.43	[-0.28, 3.13]						
"I Don't Know What To Believe"	0.04	[-0.01, 0.10]	0.09	[-0.02, 0.21]	.01	[-.01, .03]	.09	
"The Information Is Out There"	0.06*	[0.01, 0.12]	0.14	[0.02, 0.26]	.02	[-.01, .05]	.20**	
"News Finds Me"	0.04	[-0.01, 0.09]	0.10	[-0.02, 0.22]	.01	[-.01, .03]	.14*	

Incomes	-0.06	[-0.12, 0.01]	-0.10	[-0.22, 0.01]	.01	[-.01, .03]	-.10	
Education	-0.11	[-0.29, 0.07]	-0.07	[-0.19, 0.05]	.00	[-.01, .02]	-.15*	
Age	-0.02	[-0.05, 0.00]	-0.10	[-0.21, 0.02]	.01	[-.01, .03]	-.09	
Ideology	0.23**	[0.10, 0.37]	0.21	[0.09, 0.33]	.04	[-.00, .08]	.20**	
Partisanship	-0.15	[-0.35, 0.05]	-0.09	[-0.21, 0.03]	.01	[-.01, .03]	-.03	
								R^2 = .126**
								95% CI[.04,.18]

Sports								
Predictor	b	b 95% CI [LL, UL]	beta	beta 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	r	Fit
(Intercept)	1.81	[-0.17, 3.78]						
"I Don't Know What To Believe"	-0.01	[-0.07, 0.05]	-0.02	[-0.14, 0.10]	.00	[-.00, .00]	-.03	
"The Information Is Out There"	0.04	[-0.02, 0.10]	0.08	[-0.05, 0.20]	.01	[-.01, .02]	.08	
"News Finds Me"	-0.05	[-0.11, 0.01]	-0.11	[-0.24, 0.01]	.01	[-.01, .03]	-.06	
Incomes	-0.02	[-0.09, 0.05]	-0.04	[-0.15, 0.08]	.00	[-.01, .01]	-.01	
Education	-0.10	[-0.31, 0.11]	-0.06	[-0.18, 0.06]	.00	[-.01, .02]	-.06	
Age	0.03	[-0.00, 0.05]	0.11	[-0.01, 0.23]	.01	[-.01, .04]	.10	
Ideology	0.23**	[0.08, 0.38]	0.19	[0.06, 0.31]	.03	[-.01, .07]	.19**	
Partisanship	-0.12	[-0.36, 0.11]	-0.07	[-0.19, 0.06]	.00	[-.01, .02]	-.01	
								R^2 = .065*
								95% CI[.00,.10]

3.4. Relationship among attitudes.

As expected, "I Don't Know What To Believe" failed to predict either "News Finds Me" (beta=0.05, t=0.83, p=0.41) or "The Information Is Out There" attitudes (beta=-0.08, t=-1.31, p=0.19). On the contrary, "News Finds Me" positively predicted "The Information Is Out There" (beta=0.33., t=-5..54, p=<.05), with a coefficient of determination r2=.101. Simultaneously, "The Information Is Out There" positively predicted "News Finds Me" by similar values (beta=0.30., t=-5..54, p=<.05, r2=.104).

These results imply that "News Finds Me" and "The Information Is Out There" can be complementary attitudes and predict each other.

4. Discussion

Results show that media distrust might partially explain why individuals express "The Information Is Out There" attitudes. This should not be surprising given that it is one of the main characteristics defining this folk theory (Toff & Nielsen, 2018). Still, despite its relevance in explaining the current public detachment from news, media distrust cannot explain other behaviors such as "News Finds Me" or "I Don't Know What To Believe". People might choose not to actively follow the news for some reason other than distrust of the media. In the case of "I Don't Know What To Believe", reasons might include information overflow, self-perceived low knowledge, or (lack of) media literacy.

Similarly, the study found no evidence of the expected prediction of social media homophily on "News Finds Me" perception. This might dampen the idea that "News Finds Me" perception creates echo chambers and filter bubbles that might lead to small, fractured communities, thereby negating the idea of one large and common public agenda (Cardenal, Galais & Majó-Vázquez, 2019). As

exposed by our results, the danger of "News Finds Me" perception is not that people are exposed to the same political ideas, rather that they are not exposed to any political information at all.

Perceived network thematic homophily did moderately predict "The Information Is Out There". This could be understood as a sign that such attitude is common in social groups or niche communities which gather and organize around specific issues of interest. In other words, we hypothesyse that when a topic or issue attracts users in such an intense way to structure online communities, such users are more prone to develop active attitudes in their media consumption habits.

Regarding the considered control variables, educational level negatively predicted "News Finds Me" and "The Information Is Out There", while not affecting "I Don't Know What To Believe". This finding implies that when individuals reach higher stages of educational level they are less prone to follow such attitudes. This finding goes in line with previous research about precedents of 'News Finds Me' perception (Strauß, Huber & Gil de Zúñiga, 2021) and might be not surprising as more , educated citizens might consider social media and social links as less accurate sources of information and rely on more traditional media.

'News Finds Me', as explained, implies a 'passive' attitude where users expect that news will 'reach' them with virtually no effort from their part. Yet, 'The Information Is Out There', oppositely assumes a more proactive attitude from individuals, requiring effort and initiative to look for information and data for themselves. In this sense, it could be expected that subjects with higher educational levels would show greater autonomy and higher 'The Information Is Out There' presence. In fact, the relationship between education and this variable is a negative prediction,as happens with 'News Finds Me'. This could be understood as that mere educational level does not lead thus to higher media literacy perception and to higher confidence on the online searching skills, or well that users with higher educational level are also more aware of search engine algorithmic bias and other features that might be considered as undesirable, such as personalization. Or, in a third hypothesis, that educational level implies higher confidence levels on traditional media venues. As for the absence of relationship between education and 'I Don't Know What To Believe' this might be in line with the absence of influence of educational level on news avoidance attitude pointed by other recent studies such as Toff & Kalogeropoulos (2020).

Ideology was identified also as a positive predictor in the case of "The Information Is Out There", suggesting that the more individuals identify with conservative values, the more they tended to follow such an attitude. This might be a consequence of the perception in the right political wing that 'mainstream media' is biased to liberal values (Holt, 2018). Thus, more conservative individuals might rather look for 'alternative' -such as online forums- sources and have a stronger presence of 'The Information Is Out There'

As expected we found a negative influence between "News Finds Me" perception on interest in hard news topics. This fact supports the concerns that "News Finds Me" might lead to greater detachment from political and civic issues (Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2018) which linked to evidence that it also lowers journalistic quality expectations (Segado-Boj et al, 2020), leads to worries in the effect of this perception on the quality of democratic life and the public sphere.

Another troubling result relates to the proactive attitude in "The Information Is Out There". This includes the belief that users can search at will for additional and more profound information on the Internet. This could be considered positively, at least theoretically. Even though users intentionally avoid traditional mass media, they might actively be searching for relevant information for democratic and political processes. Still, these searches for information are not necessarily addressed in that manner. As the negative relationship between "The Information Is Out There" and interest in soft news proves, this active behavior might be the pursuit of engagement with stories totally unre-

lated to civic and political issues. As Table 5 shows, these users seem to be using search engines to look for the latest news about celebrities and lifestyle rather than politics or the economy.

The lack of influence between "I Don't Know What To Believe" and expressing interest in the news should not be interpreted as positive or hopeful evidence for our societies' civic development. The absence of relationship might mean that users with moderate or low "I Don't Know What To Believe" showed disinterest toward any news, both soft and hard.

The results implied that "News Finds Me" and "The Information Is Out There" attitudes are intimately related between them. This finding might imply that disaffection to traditional media does not necessarily lead to a unique alternative route to feel informed. In other words, we interpret that users can choose and alternate different strategies to make sense of the news. As "News Finds Me" and "The Information Is Out There" are positively related among them, it looks like they overlap and the same users can share up to some degree tendences to use or follow one or other attitude. This interpretation is also based on the fact that "News Finds Me" negatively predicted interest in hard news and that "The Information Is Out There" developed a positive influence on interest towards soft news topics. We theorize then that users can choose and switch between different attitudes to satisfy their informational needs. In brief, we believe that as "News Finds Me" and "The Information Is Out There" are positively related among them, it looks like they overlap and the same users can show up to some degree tendences to use or follow one or other attitude

4.1. Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations. The universe for the survey is limited to a segment of the Spanish population, that is Facebook users aged 18 to 39. Findings, then, cannot be blindly extrapolated to population aged 40 and over.

Another limitation to be considered lies in the moderate value of the alphas for the "News Finds Me" and "I Don't Know What To Believe" values, that reach in the 'questionable' margin of 0.6-0-7 for their Cronbach's alpha. Anyway, CFA resulted in some positive indexes (TLI>1 in both cases), which support at least some evidence of cohesion in the measurement of the attitudes in the collected responses. Yet, stronger and more well designed measurements might be necessary in future analyses.

Also, it should be remembered that our study measured the 'perception' of homophily rather than measure network homophily factually. Future research should measure homophily itself instead of individuals' perception. Users' networks might be set up by individuals with similar features or interests even though a given person considers him or herself different to his/her contacts.

Finally, accordingly to our results, we propose that growing literature on the adverse effects of "News Finds Me" on political knowledge and behavior (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Lee, 2020; Song, Gil de Zúñiga & Boomgaarden, 2020) needs to be complemented by further research on the effects of "The Information Is Out There" attitude. Another direction for future works lay on checking our interpretation that users combine different attitudes in their daily routines, as we interpret from our quantitative data. Ethnographic surveys might be of help in this regard

5. Conclusion

The study deepens our understanding on why individuals choose alternative pathways to news, concretely, the attitudes 'News Finds Me', 'The Information is Out There' and 'I Don't Know What To Believe'.

Even though media distrust has been deemed as a powerful motivator for people to look alternative ways to get their news, our results suggest that this lack of trust only partially explains such deta-

chment from traditional media. Of all the considered attitudes, media distrust could only predict the presence of 'The Information Is Out There'. Media distrust cannot thus be used as a universal predictor of detachment from traditional media. Ideology (for 'The Information Is Out There'), educational level (for 'The Information Is Out There' and 'News Finds Me') and age (for 'The Information Is Out There) where also relevant predictors.

We expected to find a connection between network homophily on 'News Finds Me' but our data did not support such expectation. In turn, 'The Information Is Out There' was moderately predicted by thematic network homophily. We interpret that this might lead that this proactive search for information attitude is more common in online communities gathered around strongly shared interests.

The results also confirm that the considered alternatives to traditional news venues are not linked to higher interest in Hard News. In fact, 'News Finds Me' leads to disinterest in this matter. 'The Information Is Out There' predicted individuals interest toward lifestyle news and celebrity stories. The proactive attitude assumed by this folk theory is not addressed to political or civic issues.

Finally, we conclude that disinterest towards traditional media does not lead exclusively to a specific attitude, but individuals can 'switch' among different behaviors according to different factors.

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