

# Analysis of information consumption and credibility among Chilean Journalism students

## Análisis del consumo y de la credibilidad informativa en estudiantes chilenos de Periodismo

*Análise do consumo e da credibilidade informativa entre estudantes de jornalismo chilenos*

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**ABSTRACT** | This study examines the information practices of Chilean university students in a politically polarized context characterized by misinformation and information fatigue. It focuses primarily on Journalism students who, due to their academic training, should have the necessary tools to confront situations of information disorder. To this end, the relationship between the concept of information credibility and the field of study of Chilean university students is analyzed through a survey (n=338). The main objective is to delve into the study of information behavior and media literacy competencies of university students. The results show that Journalism students do not display a higher level of credibility toward the news than students of other disciplines. Additionally, the participants' political identity and engagement are unrelated to information credibility.

**KEYWORDS:** disinformation, Journalism students, public opinion, information consumption.

### HOW TO CITE

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**RESUMEN** | *En un contexto polarizado políticamente, marcado por un alto nivel de desinformación y fatiga informativa, este estudio explora prácticas informativas en universitarios chilenos. Se centra en los estudiantes de Periodismo quienes, debido a su formación académica, deberían contar con las herramientas necesarias para enfrentar situaciones de desorden informativo. Para ello, se explora la relación entre el concepto de credibilidad informativa y la carrera que cursan los universitarios chilenos a través de una encuesta (n=338). El principal objetivo es profundizar en el estudio del comportamiento informativo y las competencias mediáticas de los universitarios. Los resultados revelan que los estudiantes de Periodismo no muestran un nivel de credibilidad mayor hacia las noticias en comparación con estudiantes de otras carreras, así como que la identidad política y el compromiso de los participantes no están relacionados con la credibilidad informativa.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *desinformación, estudiantes de Periodismo, opinión pública, consumo informativo.*

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**RESUMO** | Este estudo explora as práticas de informação entre estudantes universitários chilenos em um contexto politicamente polarizado, caracterizado por desinformação e fadiga de informações. A pesquisa concentra-se principalmente em estudantes de jornalismo que, devido à sua formação acadêmica, deveriam ter as ferramentas necessárias para enfrentar situações de desordem de informações. Para isso, um inquérito explora a relação entre o conceito de credibilidade da informação e o campo de estudo dos estudantes universitários chilenos (n=338). O principal objetivo é aprofundar o estudo do comportamento informativo e das habilidades midiáticas dos universitários. Os resultados revelam que os estudantes de Jornalismo não apresentam um nível mais alto de credibilidade em relação às notícias do que os estudantes de outras áreas. Além disso, a identidade e o compromisso político dos participantes não estão relacionados à credibilidade das informações.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** desinformação; estudantes de Jornalismo; opinião pública; consumo de informação.

## INTRODUCTION

In Chile, the significant increase in digitalization, political polarization and misinformation (Bachmann et al. 2022; Cárcamo-Ulloa et al. 2023) has highlighted the crucial social function of the mass media. Nevertheless, trust in the mass media (Ramírez Friderichsen & Matus Lobo, 2022) and journalists (Del Hoyo-Hurtado et al., 2020) has declined. The above problem was underlined by the social unrest in 2019, as pointed out by various studies (Jiménez-Yañez, 2020; Grassau et al., 2019; Orchard & Venegas-Muggli, 2019; Lazcano-Peña et al., 2021). Young adults are the most affected population group (Brosius et al., 2022). In addition, the public in Chile is experiencing a sense of exhaustion and apathy towards information consumption, leading to its avoidance (Newman et al., 2023). The proliferation of information platforms - including those that offer news content - has exacerbated the information overload and confusion experienced by young people (Bustamante et al., 2019) and has led to distancing from these platforms (Serrano-Puche, 2020).

This phenomenon has been studied from various perspectives, including media credibility (Gutiérrez-Coba et al., 2012), interest and political orientation (Berlangua Ramírez et al., 2023) and the credibility of disinformation (Mayoral et al., 2019). However, there is a gap in relation to future journalists. To address this gap, we conducted a quantitative exploratory study using an online survey with a sample size of 338 individuals to investigate the relationship between information consumption habits and information credibility among Journalism students.

The study of Journalism students is crucial, as they become important actors in the media through their profession (Lazcano-Peña et al., 2021; Lazcano-Peña, 2022). Therefore, the skills they acquire during their college education form the basis for strengthening a democratic society. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing evaluation of Journalism education and its upcoming challenges.

### The relevance of informational behavior

The importance of informational behavior lies in the active and passive search for information and the need to access and use it. This behavior is associated with obtaining information indiscriminately via all media channels (Wilson, 2000). Passive consumption occurs, for example, when people obtain information from their surroundings, e.g. when listening to the radio or watching television programs, without explicitly searching for it (Hernández et al., 2007). This is similar to News Find Me, where users can stay informed about contacts on social networks without actively exposing themselves to mass media (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017).

However, access to information is associated with the disinformation effect (Loftus & Hoffman, 1989). The concept of disinformation has evolved and is now defined as a situation in which the audience is confronted with both true

and false content, resulting in a confusion of information that is difficult to distinguish (Derakhshan & Wardle, 2017). In this context, young people rely on social networks for their information intake (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018), mainly in a passive way. In addition, studies conducted in Chile indicate that young people are in an environment that fosters the emergence of information disorders, whereby they ironically share fake content and are unable to distinguish it (Bustamante-Pavez, 2023). As a result, they are more likely to fall for disinformation (Bachmann & Valenzuela, 2021). Student journalists are described as hyperconnected and overstimulated users (Romero-Rodríguez & Aguaded, 2016). Their extensive access to digital media characterizes them, and their media consumption is information-rich (Mellado & Scherman, 2017), which they actively pursue.

### **Information disorders, media literacy, and electoral processes**

Information disruption occurs when truthful content and disinformation contain erroneous, fabricated or malicious information (Bachmann & Valenzuela, 2021). As a result, the audience loses context, making it difficult to distinguish truth from lies (Bustamante-Pavez, 2023). Therefore, recognizing disinformation is becoming increasingly important, especially in democratic societies, elections and polarized political contexts (van Kessel et al., 2021). There is evidence that this type of content spreads faster on social media platforms and has a direct impact on political participation (Barbosa dos Santos et al., 2021; White et al., 2006).

In Chile, the spread of political disinformation increased after the social unrest in October 2019 (Jaramillo-Castro & Bustamante-Pavez, 2023). This led to increased skepticism and distrust of the media among the fatigued and over-informed Chilean public (Suazo Galdames, 2020; Del Hoyo-Hurtado et al., 2020).

However, in order to be able to distinguish between correct and incorrect information, it is crucial to have media literacy. This refers to the skills and competencies required to access, analyze, evaluate, understand and critically use media and information (Cho et al., 2022). To do this, it is necessary to understand the functioning, structures, genres and formats of the media and to distinguish between the press and social networks and their impact on society (Scolari et al., 2018).

Media literacy enables audiences to critically evaluate information and its provenance (Pérez Tornero, 2008) by recognizing bias, verifying information and distinguishing between fact and opinion (Potter, 2013). This is especially important for young people, who develop in an environment where misinformation abounds (Herrero-Diz et al., 2019), and for Journalism students, who are often considered

referents among peers and contact groups (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2022) and constitute an active and critical mass media audience (Herrero-Curiel & La-Rosa, 2022).

### **Young people, the credibility of the media and their trust in the media: a framework for the credibility of information**

We understand media credibility as a multi-layered and dynamic phenomenon that describes how audiences receive and believe informative content. It encompasses various factors and refers to the trustworthiness and accuracy of the information presented in news, reports or information sources (Agadjanian et al., 2023). The credibility of information is directly related to the perception of accuracy and objectivity based on verifiable facts. Factors that affect the credibility of information include the accuracy of the source, the objectivity of the presentation, the verification of facts and the reputation of the media. Various studies look at media credibility, focusing on expert opinion and the honesty of sources, while others examine factors such as journalists' knowledge, education, intelligence, social status and skills. However, research shows that credibility is perceived by the recipient rather than the characteristics of the source (Samuel-Azran & Hayat, 2019).

Nonetheless, determining the credibility of information remains a major challenge for social media users. A study focusing on young college students found a positive correlation between the credibility of the source, the credibility of the medium and the quality of the information. In addition, a study by Hussain et al. (2023) suggests that students living in rural areas are more likely to rely on information from Facebook than their urban peers. In addition, students' age and education level were identified as predictors of information credibility.

The media experienced a decline in trust during the social outbreak and in the months that followed, as shown by several studies (Centro de Estudios Públicos, 2023; Newman et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the media regained attention during the COVID-19 pandemic and recorded increased consumption (Mellado et al., 2021) and trust (Newman et al., 2020). For social networks, trust levels shifted in the opposite direction, dropping from 28% in 2019 to 17% in 2022 (Newman et al., 2022). A survey conducted by Feedback in 2020 found that 50% of Chileans have no trust in information published by online media, 60% have no trust in print media and 70% have no trust in television. The National Television Survey conducted by the Consejo Nacional de Televisión in 2021 found that 22% of the population believe that the media is manipulated. More recent and representative studies conducted in Chile with a sample size of 1200 participants show that 63% of people pay attention to the publication source when it comes to news, while 57% rely on their experience and ability to judge the accuracy of news. Furthermore,

only 34% consider information from news portals, television and written press to be reliable (Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2023). This is a global trend, with young people's trust in the role of the press decreasing significantly (Martín-Herrera & Micaletto-Belda, 2021).

Researchers have proposed three hypotheses to explain this phenomenon in the Chilean context. The first states that the concentration of media ownership in two large print media conglomerates (COPESA and El Mercurio), which also own television and radio channels, limits the diversity of topics, actors and visions presented. This lack of diversity creates distrust among viewers (Gronemeyer & Porath, 2013). The second issue is related to the emphasis that mass media place on specific topics in order to survive economically in a saturated and complex market. However, these strategies, although seemingly lucrative, can alienate the interest of young people. For example, the rise of the *matinee* genre (Centro de Estudios Públicos, 2023) and the exclusive mention of violence during the social outbreak, which disregarded peaceful and family demonstrations (Basulto Gallegos et al., 2023). Trust is often sacrificed to maintain audience loyalty, especially in this age group (Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2021). In addition, the high rate of internet and device usage and the long time spent on social networking platforms provide young Chileans with personally relevant content that they consider trustworthy (García-Avilés et al., 2014). These three factors lead to a reduced credibility of informative content and thus to a lack of interest in the country's political and social climate (Vizcaíno-Laorga et al., 2019).

Other important factors that contribute to media credibility are a person's identity and political commitment. In general, research suggests that individuals view media as more credible and trustworthy when these sources align with their ideological beliefs (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). This is especially true for individuals who identify strongly with a particular political affiliation, which increases the likelihood that they will selectively turn to media that share their ideological viewpoint (Stroud, 2010). This argument is especially true for a concentrated media system such as Chile (Gronemeyer & Porath, 2013). Research also shows that individuals with a fixed political identity tend to accept corrections that are consistent with their pre-existing beliefs. This can affect the trust and credibility of information and lead to echo chambers and political polarization (Bode & Vraga, 2015).

Political engagement plays a significant role in how the credibility and trustworthiness of the media is perceived. Politically interested people generally perceive the traditional media as reliable sources of political information. Political engagement therefore enhances the ability to recognize the quality of information

and strengthens the ability to make informed decisions (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). However, high engagement and a strong political identity can reinforce the echo-chamber phenomenon, making people more willing to accept information that confirms their beliefs (Stroud, 2011).

Additionally, ideological identification is considered a political identity that has the potential to influence various aspects of cognition (Jost, 2021; Mason, 2018). This study shows how the information students are exposed to can affect their perception of credibility and create cognitive biases such as confirmation bias (Bringula et al., 2021; Kahneman, 2012; Zaller, 1992). Consequently, students tend to reinforce their worldview by accepting messages that are consistent with their beliefs regardless of their accuracy. This has potentially significant consequences for understanding information consumption and information distribution in personal networks. This trait could lead to increased political polarization through participation in echo chambers if media literacy is not emphasized (Cinelli et al., 2021; Rodríguez, 2017; Sádaba & Salaverría, 2022).

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper focuses on Journalism students who are young college students because they are influential opinion makers in the future. The premise is that Journalism students have an active informational behavior. They voluntarily seek out and expose themselves to media and news, which leads to a high intake of information in their media diet (Mellado & Scherman, 2017; Suárez Villegas & Cruz Álvarez, 2015). This behavior makes them less susceptible to disinformation and increases their informational credibility. To accomplish our goal, we used a quantitative approach that utilized an online survey (n=338) to examine the relationship between information credibility and college students' career choices.

### **Hypotheses and procedures**

The research hypotheses are as follows:

- H1.* Journalism students will have higher news credibility than students in other disciplines.
- H2.* Students' information credibility is related to their political identity.
- H3.* Political engagement is related to the credibility of information among students.

To conduct a preliminary investigation, we developed a study and surveyed students from different academic disciplines and institutions in Chile. Specifically,

we used the questionnaire of the Millennium Nucleus for the Study of Politics, Public Opinion, and Media in Chile (MEPOP, by its Spanish acronym), which was conducted both before and after the September 2022 plebiscite, and adapted it to include 25 surveys. We then emailed the link to various universities across the country from November 2022 to April 2023.

### Analysis model

To test our hypotheses, we used linear OLS regression models. In these models, three different measures of news credibility were used as dependent variables. To create these measures, we presented participants with six headlines from online media and networks that were disseminated between 2022 and 2023 (table 1) and asked them to rate credibility on a scale of 1 (not credible) to 5 (very credible).

The news articles used in the study received a corresponding rating from *FastCheck*<sup>1</sup>. News verification system. Based on this analysis, all articles were among the most read and most important during the study period. The survey consisted of three fake and three authentic contents. Randomizing the order of headlines for each respondent helped to limit primacy and immediacy. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the articles and the corresponding *FastCheck* rankings.

News	<i>FastCheck</i> Qualification
Irací Hassler danced in Santiago in opposition to President Sebastián Piñera.	Fake
Gabriel Boric's government has stopped funding transplants, which was the basis for its zero co-payment initiative.	Fake
The Convention has approved a lifetime pension for Elisa Loncon.	Fake
The domain 'gabineteirinakaramanos.cl' was acquired in the first days of the government.	True
"All parliamentarians have taken the drug test, except five. The first three, whose cases had already been cleared, were not sanctioned by the ethics committee."	True
Meeting on the new constitution with "compulsory attendance" at Barros Luco Hospital.	True

**Table 1. List of *FastCheck* verifications selected for the design of the questionnaire applied in November 2022-April 2023**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

<sup>1</sup>. *FastCheck* is an independent news verification platform affiliated with the International Fact-Checking Network.

## Characterization of the sample

We used a non-probability sample to examine the level of informational credibility among college students. It should be noted that this sample cannot be considered representative of Chilean college students or Journalism students in Chile. Overall, only 3% of the national student population in Journalism participated in this survey<sup>2</sup>. The questionnaire was successfully administered to 338 university students from 19 different institutions<sup>3</sup>. Three variables were used to identify gender (0=male, 1=female or 2=other identification). In addition, we included the age of the students as a continuous variable, ranging from 18 to 55 years, with the highest proportion in the 18-25 age group.

We compared only nominal variables within specific groups to improve the interpretation of the results and increase accuracy. Specifically, we used Journalism students as a reference point for university careers. We identified those with a central ideology and men as the reference point for ideological and gender identification, respectively.

The ordinal variables were normalized to show their distribution from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating the minimum value and 1 the maximum value. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for political interest, use of platforms to discuss politics, gender and age of students.

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2. According to data from [mifuturo.cl](http://mifuturo.cl), there are 7,368 Journalism students in Chile as of 2022. The survey included responses from 228 Journalism students.

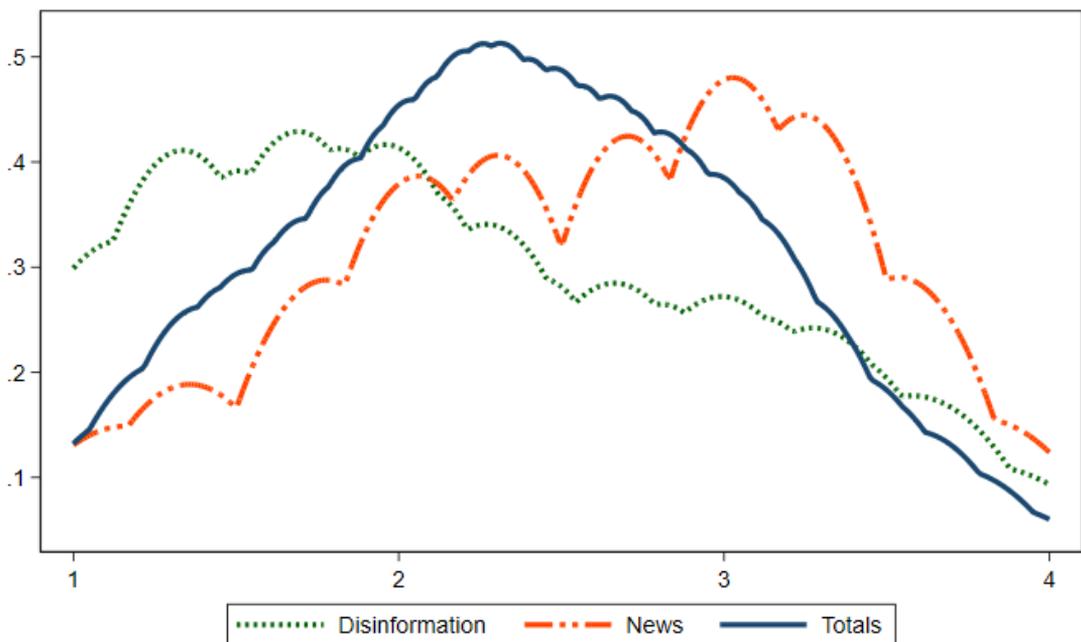
3. The following universities and their respective percentages of enrollment in the study are listed below: Academia de Humanismo Cristiano (0.3%); Adolfo Ibáñez (1.5%); Alberto Hurtado (1.5%); Andrés Bello (0.3%); Austral de Chile (0.3%); Autónoma de Chile (7.4%); Bernardo O'Higgins (0.3%); Católica de Chile (1.2%); Católica de Temuco (0.6%); Católica de Valparaíso (19.9%); Católica del Maule (0.6%); Central de Chile (0.3%), and de La Frontera (0%). Other institutions with notable attendance rates include Finis Terrae (6.3%), Santo Tomás (4.8%), U. de La Serena (3.9%), and Diego Portales (4.5%). The remaining institutions had attendance rates of 2.1% or less, including del Desarrollo, San Sebastián, U. de Concepción, Técnica Federico Santa María, U. Viña del Mar, Mayor, and U. de Santiago de Chile (all at 0.3%). 3% of individuals surveyed attended other higher education institutions. Of the remaining respondents, U. de los Andes had the highest attendance rate at 30.4%, followed by U. de Chile at 8.6%. The remaining institutions had attendance rates of 2.1% or less, including del Desarrollo, San Sebastián, U. de Concepción, Técnica Federico Santa María, U. Viña del Mar, Mayor, and U. de Santiago de Chile (all at 0.3%). The remaining institutions had attendance rates of 2.1% or less, including del Desarrollo, San Sebastián, U. de Concepción, Técnica Federico Santa María, U. Viña del Mar, Mayor, and U. de Santiago de Chile (all at 0.3%).

Variable	N	Average	SD	Min.	Max.
Man	338	0.393	0.489	0	1
Women	338	0.573	0.495	0	1
Age	338	0.117	0.090	0	1
Interest in politics	338	0.556	0.312	0	1
Use of platforms	338	0.361	0.223	0	1

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of sociodemographic variables and political engagement of university students**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

We have created three indices for informational credibility: the credibility of disinformation, the credibility of news and general credibility. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of these three indices, which represent the average credibility of each message. We used them as dependent variables in our statistical models to examine how young people perceive the credibility of news, regardless of its accuracy.



**Figure 1. Distribution of information credibility indicators for disinformation, accurate news, and news in general**

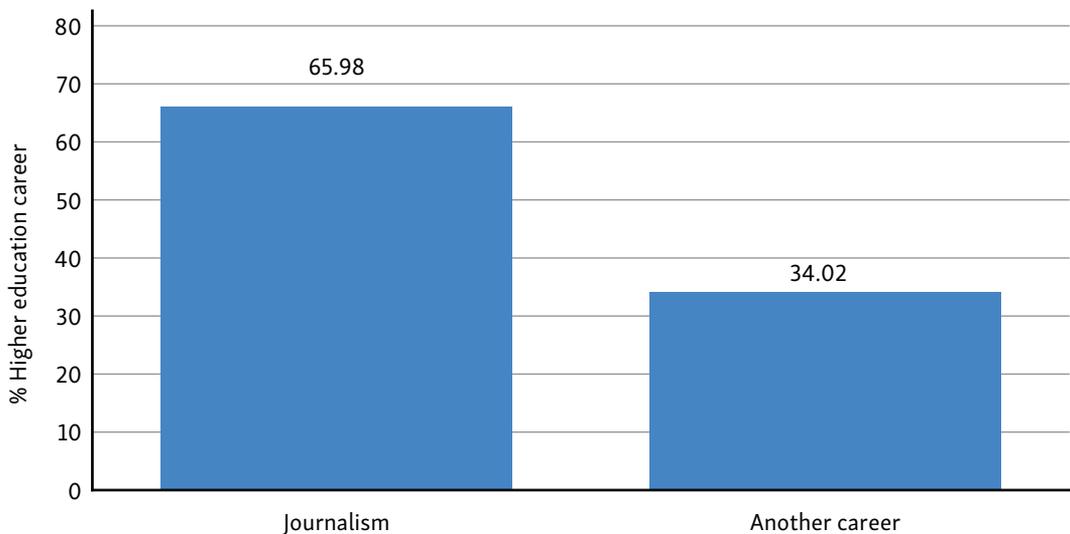
*Source: Own elaboration.*

### Variables

University degree (independent variable): this variable has two values: 0 for Journalism students and 1 for students pursuing a degree in another field. Figure 2 illustrates the proportion of respondents belonging to each category. Since the majority of our sample consists of Journalism students, we use this group as a reference in our statistical models.

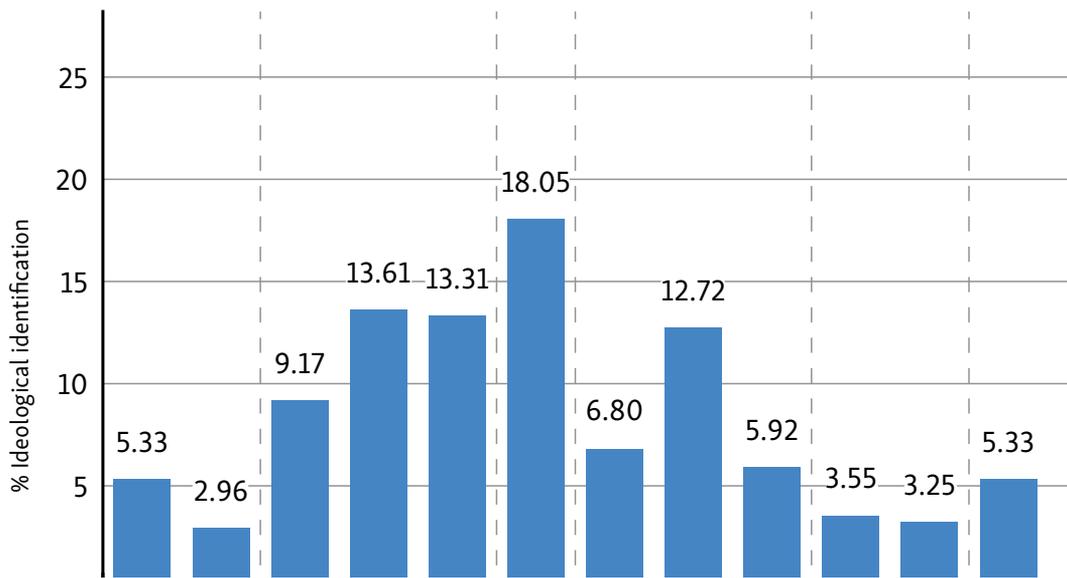
Political identity: we measured political identity using a self-definition scale in which participants were asked to rate their political position on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 representing left-wing views and 10 representing right-wing views. An option was also provided for those who did not identify with any particular political position. The scale was recoded for analysis to account for ideological groups in a newly created 6-point variable. 0=Not identified (11), 1=Left (0-2), 2=Center left (3-4), 3=Center (5), 4=Center right (6-7), and Right (8-10). The values for the variable are as follows: Figure 3 shows the distribution of the ideological scale using our recoded variable.

In this study, political engagement was measured as an intervening variable using two indices. The first index measured the respondents' interest in politics on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (very interested). The first index measured respondents' interest in politics on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (very interested). Attention was paid to grammatical correctness.



**Figure 2. Proportion of students surveyed by career**

*Source: Own elaboration.*



**Figure 3. Distribution of participants according to ideological scale**

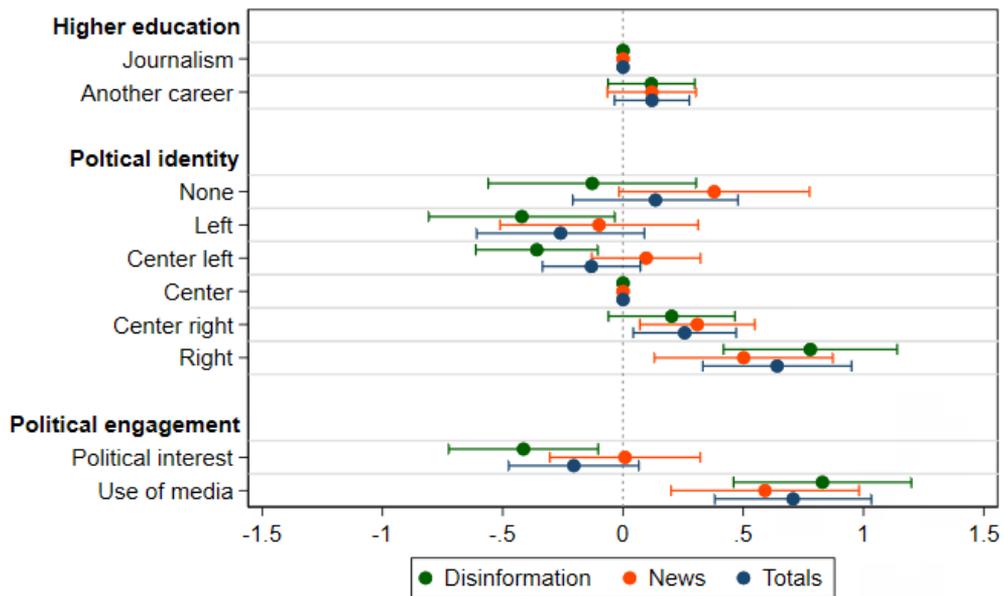
*Source: Own elaboration.*

The first index measured respondents’ interest in politics on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (very interested). The second index measured the average use of five digital platforms for accessing political news, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube. Abbreviations for technical terms were explained when they were first used. Consistent citation and footnote style was used throughout the text. The second index measured the average use of five digital platforms for accessing political news, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube. Bias and filler words were avoided while maintaining a formal tone.

## RESULTS

### Credibility level of students

H1 investigates whether there is a correlation between informational credibility and a university degree. Our results suggest that, contrary to our expectations, Journalism students do not have higher informative credibility (figure 4) than their peers pursuing other university careers. We had hypothesized that career choice would influence this result. However, our analysis of three models (disinformation, news and news credibility in general) confirmed the opposite. This result should be interpreted with caution as the relationship is moderate and does not reach a statistically significant level. Therefore, we can conclude that the study of Journalism is not a strong indicator of information credibility.



**Figure 4. Diagram of the coefficients on the determinants of the credibility of information among Chilean university students**

Source: Own elaboration.

Dependent variable	Belief in news		
	News	Disinformations	Totals
Higher education: Journalism	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Another career	0.119 (0.093)	0.118 (0.091)	0.120 (0.079)
Ideological ID: center	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Left	-0.099 (0.209)	-0.420** (0.196)	-0.259 (0.177)
Center-left	-0.099 (0.209)	-0.358** (0.128)	-0.131 (0.103)
Center right	0.308** (0.121)	0.202 (0.133)	0.256** (0.108)
Right	0.501*** (0.188)	0.788*** (0.183)	0.641*** (0.157)
Not identified	0.379* (0.201)	-0.127 (0.219)	0.134 (0.174)
Interest in politics	0.008 (0.158)	-0.413*** (0.157)	-0.204 (0.137)
Gender: man	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Woman	-0.168* (0.087)	-0.066 (0.086)	-0.116 (0.074)
Age	-1.302*** (0.405)	-1.315*** (0.353)	-1.307*** (0.340)
Use of platforms to discuss politics	0.590** (0.198)	0.829** (0.187)	0.707** (0.165)
Constant	2.403*** (0.149)	2.337*** (0.149)	2.371*** (0.127)
N	338	338	338
R2	0.120	0.277	0,227

Standard error in parentheses. Sig. \* at 90%, \*\* at 95% and \*\*\* at 99%.

**Table 3. Linear regression (OLS) on the determinants of information credibility among Chilean university students**

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of sociodemographic variables, the data suggests that women are less inclined to believe in the credibility of news than men. However, this result is not statistically significant. The data also show that belief in news, regardless of accuracy, decreases with age, which appears to be a consistent feature across all models in this sample.

### **Political identity and relationship with information credibility**

H2 suggests a relationship between college students' political identity and informational credibility. Two notable trends emerge from our analysis. First, university students who identify with the center-right and right have higher information credibility in all categories (misinformation, news, and general news) than their centrist peers. University students who identify as center-left and center have lower credibility than those who self-identify as center. These results raise the question of how ideological identification affects students' perception of news and influences their level of credibility.

### **Political engagement and information credibility of university students**

H3 examines the relationship between political engagement and the credibility of information among university students. The analysis of the data shows that the effects vary depending on the type of information. In particular, the data show that a higher interest in politics does not correlate with the credibility of news, but there is a negative and significant relationship with the credibility of disinformation. This suggests that an interest in politics can improve the ability to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information. While students with a higher interest in politics do not necessarily express more trust in accurate news, they show less trust in the spread of misinformation than students with a lower interest.

Access to political debate platforms is associated with higher credibility across news categories, suggesting that students are exposed to a greater amount of information via social networking platforms that could potentially influence their news credibility.

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between the information consumption habits of Journalism students and their credibility of information. The study is based on the assumption that Journalism students must engage in active information-seeking behavior (Wilson, 2020) and exhibit high informational consumption (Mellado & Scherman, 2017; Suárez Villegas & Cruz Álvarez, 2015), which explains their credibility and reduces the likelihood that they will accept misleading information.

Our research findings suggest that Journalism students exhibit similar informational behavior to other majors and have only slightly higher informational credibility than college students. These results contradict expectations and previous research by Suárez Villegas and Cruz Álvarez (2015). The lack of statistical significance in our sample suggests that university experience is not a definitive indicator of informational credibility for college students. Further research could examine this relationship with more extensive and diverse samples.

Our results show that students' political biases influence the way they interpret the news they are exposed to. This suggests that ideological identification can influence perceptions in various ways and highlights the potential influence of political identity (Jost, 2021; Mason, 2018). However, in this case, it suggests the ability to influence the perceived credibility of information and highlights cognitive factors, including confirmation bias (Kahneman, 2012; Zaller, 1992). This suggests that students strengthen their worldview by accepting messages that are consistent with their beliefs, regardless of their veracity. This discovery could have significant implications for understanding information consumption and its dissemination in personal networks. This trait is thought to contribute to the exacerbation of political polarization by promoting the participation of echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2021; Rodríguez, 2017), which should be taken into account when designing public and educational policies.

On the other hand, our findings suggest that increased curiosity and interest in political issues can lead to healthy skepticism, especially towards disinformation in politics. This can be interpreted in two ways: First, skepticism could protect students from the harmful effects of disinformation, which is the most favorable interpretation. The second and more complex possibility is that this distrust highlights a potential vulnerability: individuals with lower levels of political engagement may be more susceptible to disinformation, which could affect the development of public opinion and citizens' political beliefs and actions.

Finally, our results reveal two notable socio-demographic characteristics worth exploring. The first is the lower credibility of information among women compared to men, which may be related to gender differences in media consumption and credibility. The second is that people's credibility decreases with age, which is likely due to increased skepticism or an improved ability to discern the truthfulness of news. In both cases, further research is needed.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In a context characterized by high levels of misinformation (Jaramillo-Castro & Bustamante-Pavez, 2023) and information fatigue (Newman et al., 2023),

this paper focuses on young university students, especially Journalism students, who are crucial in shaping public opinion. Ideally, these students have the necessary skills to deal with information disruption. This paper therefore aimed to explore students' informational behavior and media literacy by conducting an online survey (n=338) to examine the relationship between information credibility and the course of study taken by university students.

The results of the study indicate that Journalism major does not predict informational credibility (H1). Although a relationship between Journalism and the credibility indices for news, misinformation and general information was found, it is only moderately pronounced and not statistically significant. Consequently, Journalism students tend to believe the news more than students in other disciplines.

The OLS multiple regression models confirmed the hypothesis that political identity is related to political credulity (H2). Comparing university students who identify as center with those who identify as center-right and right and center-left and left, there is a corresponding level of gullibility, suggesting a correlation between the two characteristics.

We suggest that political engagement correlates with the credibility of information (H3), and the results show different effects depending on the type of information, which we partially accept. Our statistical analysis shows that individuals who categorize themselves as right-wing and center-right exhibit higher levels of credibility than those who categorize themselves as center, while those on the left and left of center exhibit the highest levels of skepticism. This suggests that political identity and political engagement are related to the credibility of informational to varying degrees.

In terms of political identity, our results suggest the formation of echo chambers among participants, as perceived relationships may influence their interpretation of the news presented and reinforce their political beliefs. However, we acknowledge the limited scope of our work, which only explains the reality of the non-probabilistic sample analyzed. Future research should therefore expand the sample to other knowledge domains and genres to improve generalizability. (Cinelli et al., 2021; Rodríguez, 2017).

The use of a non-probabilistic and non-representative sample limits the study. To confirm these results, larger and more representative samples could be used in future studies. In addition, the online nature of the study introduces a bias, as only students with a stable internet connection and a strong interest in the topic participated. Finally, the sampling design led to an uneven distribution of students from Journalism and other study programs. However, the results open up new

research possibilities, particularly in terms of examining the role of ideological identification in news interpretation among university students. It would also be valuable to investigate whether college students' ideological engagement contributes to the formation of echo chambers and how factors such as age and gender influence this phenomenon. Finally, these findings encourage reflection on the necessary training of communication professionals and the need to reconsider the level of training expected for new professional standards of truthfulness, objectivity, impartiality and responsibility in the production and dissemination of news in a complex, digital context.

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