



Believe it or not. The role of ideology as a predictor of trust in mainstream and social media during COVID-19

Créetelo o no. El rol de la ideología como predictor de la confianza en los medios convencionales y los medios sociales durante la COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The goal of this article is to analyze the extent to which ideology intervenes in citizens' trust in the news that appears in traditional and social media during COVID-19. **Methodology:** To do this, a quantitative

approach based on the online survey technique is used. The questionnaire was launched in July 2021 through the Qualtrics platform and was answered by 2,803 citizens residing in Brazil (726), Spain (682), the United States (694), and India (702). **Results:** We found a connection between ideology and confidence in traditional media, strongly conditioned by the socio-political context. In addition, right-wing citizens tend to trust the information they receive from digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp better than left-wing citizens. This uneven impact of trust in the media could result in a heterogeneous effect of fake news, with right-wing citizens most likely believing political news appearing on social media. **Discussion and Conclusions:** This article contributes to expanding prior knowledge about the trust in mainstream and social media, with considerable emphasis on the factors that have a predominant influence in four countries with different social and political structures and media systems: Spain, United States, India, and Brazil. In this context, it has been observed how ideology is an essential factor in all of them. When this relevant variable is controlled for, and despite what previous studies had determined (Newman et al., 2021), factors such as educational or income level do not seem to play a significant role.

Keywords: Political communications; Ideology; Trust; News; Social media; Mainstream media; Information.

RESUMEN

Introducción: El objetivo de este artículo es analizar en qué medida la ideología interviene en la confianza de los ciudadanos en las noticias que aparecen en los medios tradicionales y sociales durante la COVID-19. **Metodología:** Para ello se utiliza un enfoque cuantitativo basado en la técnica de la encuesta online. El cuestionario se lanzó en julio de 2021 a través de la plataforma Qualtrics y fue respondido por 2.803 ciudadanos residentes en Brasil (726), España (682), Estados Unidos (694) e India (702). **Resultados:** Encontramos una conexión entre ideología y confianza en los medios tradicionales, fuertemente condicionada por el contexto sociopolítico. Además, los ciudadanos de derecha tienden a confiar más en la información que reciben de plataformas digitales como Twitter, Facebook, Instagram o WhatsApp que los ciudadanos de izquierda. Este impacto desigual de la confianza en los medios podría resultar en un efecto heterogéneo de las noticias falsas, con ciudadanos de derecha con una mayor confianza en las noticias políticas que aparecen en las redes sociales. **Discusión y Conclusiones:** Este artículo contribuye a ampliar el conocimiento previo sobre la confianza en las redes sociales y los medios convencionales haciendo énfasis en los factores que tienen una influencia predominante en cuatro países con diferentes estructuras sociales y políticas, y distintos sistemas mediáticos. En este contexto, se ha observado cómo la ideología es un factor esencial en todos ellos. Cuando se controla por esta variable, y a pesar de lo que habían determinado estudios previos (Newman *et al.*, 2021), factores como el nivel educativo o los ingresos no parecen jugar un papel significativo.

Palabras clave: Comunicación política; Ideología; Confianza; Noticias; Medios sociales; Medios convencionales; Información.

1. Introduction

The traditional media play a fundamental role in modern democracies (Brundidge et al., 2014), and for years have been society's preferred information source. Societies have trusted the media to know what goes on around them (Holbert, 2015), granting people the knowledge required to become socially and politically aware and thus able to exercise their rights and duties as citizens (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014; Strömbäck, 2005). Along these lines, they help set the agenda (Catalán-Matamoros and Peñafiel-Saiz, 2021; McCombs and Valenzuela, 2021; Gilardi et al., 2022) and influence the policy-making process (Casero-Ripollés and López-Rabadán, 2014; Barberá et al., 2019; Grossman, 2022).

However, in recent decades, the communication landscape has undergone numerous transformations, such as the emergence and consolidation of the internet, social media, and mobile instant messaging applications, generating a hybrid media system in which old and new logics coexist (Chadwick, 2017).

"In this research, therefore, we intend to cover this gap by analyzing, in a comparative way, the extent to which ideology plays a prominent role in the trust that citizens have in legacy media and social media."

This evolution has had a profound impact on trust in the media (Carlson, 2017; Garret et al., 2012; Casero-Ripollés, 2018). By "trust in the media" we mean the reliability of the mass media (Tsfati, 2010), specifically to the citizens' conviction that the media meet the expectations associated with their profession (Vanacker and Belmas, 2009). It implies that the media conforms to the traditional values that characterize journalism, such as rigor, truthfulness, freedom of expression, independence, and neutrality, among others (López-García, 2015; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014). Distrust in the media can lead to inattention to and nonconsumption of news (Lee, 2010), eroding the basic principles of democracy (Tsfati and Cohen, 2005).

But can different levels of trust in the media be explained by individual characteristics? This study seeks to identify to which extent respondents' ideology influences their trust in conventional and social media to inform themselves about politics during COVID-19. By implementing a strategy of "most different cases" (Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Seawright and Gerring, 2008), we start from a survey of 2,804 citizens in Brazil, India, Spain, and the United States. Our results show how the ideology of the respondents acts as a determining element in levels of social media trust. Right-wing citizens display the highest levels of trust in platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to learn about politics. This has a significant effect on the potential impact of fake news considering the ideological profile of the information consumer.

2. Trust in mainstream media in the COVID-19 era

Information is an essential resource for citizens. The complexity of modern societies makes it impossible for citizens to know first-hand about almost everything around them (Luhmann, 2000). In this context, the media play a fundamental role in the production, reproduction, and distribution of social knowledge, enabling us to make sense of the world (Wolf, 1988). Additionally, it helps us to structure our perception of the social problems around us (Lippmann, 1997). Therefore, to ensure proper functioning of the democratic process, it is necessary to guarantee a certain level of trust in the media (Tsfati and Cohen, 2005).

In this sense, democratic quality increases when citizens participate in political processes. That is, when they go beyond simply voting in elections, to debating public affairs, demanding accountability from political powers and/or participating in political parties and civil organizations (Diamond and Morlino, 2005). Traditional media acted as mobilizing agents of the citizenry, urging people to participate in political life (Norris, 2000; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012).

However, aspects such as the increase in news sources, the rise of spectacularization, political polarization, the consolidation of large media companies and the increase in misinformation have led citizens to lose trust in conventional (or legacy) media in recent years (Bennett and Livingstone, 2018; Carr et al., 2014; Lewis, 2020). Users also mistrust legacy media because they find news biased, boring, negative, and complicated (Lewis, 2020). This conditions the consumption of this type of media in terms of frequency and influences the type of platform and brand (McCullough, 2022; Tsfati and Cappella, 2003). Moreover, Hanitzsch et al. (2017) found that trust in the media is strongly linked to the way in which citizens view political institutions, this link being stronger in politically polarized societies.

COVID-19 seems to have changed some of these trends (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). The Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2021) found that trust in the news (44%) has increased (approximately 6%) over the last year in all countries in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic. Finland has the highest levels (65%), while the United States has the lowest (29%), in the context of a prolonged decline since 1968 when US citizens' trust in the media was at 68% (Jones, 2018; Hanitzsch et al., 2017). However, it is striking how despite having very low levels of trust in the conventional media, during COVID-19 US citizens chose to get information through conventional media instead of social media (Casero-Ripollés, 2020).

A little above are countries like India (38%) and Spain (36%). As for India, its citizens trust newspapers more than television, which creates more polarized news and sensationalistic news coverage (Newman et al., 2021; Chakravartty and Roy, 2013). In the case of Spain, the level of trust in conventional media is at its lowest value since 2015 (Newman et al., 2021). In this context, radio is positioned as the best-valued medium (42%), ahead of the press (34%) and television (31%) (European Commission, 2021). Among the reasons to explain these data are the significant political and economic interest of several media companies, the lack of independence and rigor in professional practice, and misinformation generated through social media (APM, 2020). The Spanish media system is highly partisan (Baumgartner and Chaqués, 2015). In general, media trust is low and is associated with the mainstream media's ideological bias (Masip et al., 2020). Some investigations have detected that educational level and a left-wing ideological position are associated with a higher level of average mistrust (Roses and Gómez-Calderón, 2015).

Finally, Brazil, with 54%, is among the countries that present the highest values of trust in the media, especially concerning television and local newspapers. These media became the preferred sources of information for citizens to learn about COVID-19 (Newman et al., 2021). This data is striking given that its president, Jair Bolsonaro, very harshly attacked legacy media in his speeches (Pereira and Núñez, 2021; Vieira and Matos, 2020), fostering a climate of hatred and mistrust towards them (APM, 2020).

Even though interest in the news and general consumption of the media have decreased considerably in several countries after COVID-19, trust in media remains higher than before the pandemic (Newman et al., 2022).

3. Trust in social media in the COVID-19 era

The way of obtaining information from society is also changing. The digital environment has created an ecosystem where old and new communication logics coexist and hybridize (Chadwick, 2017). Some research highlights the fact that conventional media no longer plays a preferential role within the current media system (Bennett and Pfetsch, 2018), and in general terms has lost the authority and credibility they had for decades (Carlson, 2017). Some users believe that social media can provide all the information they need, with practically no effort, because the digital environment generates the "news find me" effect. That is, users believe that they do not need to actively follow the news because the users with whom they maintain contact on social networks will do so for them and provide them with relevant and necessary information (Gil-de-Zúñiga et al., 2017). However, some research demonstrates that digital platforms might not create well-informed and committed citizens (Gil-de-Zúñiga et al., 2018), but the opposite. Individuals using these channels to get informed could have less political interest and lower knowledge of social reality than those who do not use them for that purpose (Gil-de-Zúñiga and Diehl, 2019; Lee and Xenos, 2019).

In any case, the use of social media to obtain information has increased in recent years in many countries. In these countries, people use one or more social media to inform themselves, share or discuss news (Newman et al., 2021). While WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok and Telegram attract more and more users, Facebook is losing its relevance in some countries. COVID-19 has accentuated this dynamic, especially among youngsters and those with lower educational levels (Newman et al., 2021). In this context, the use of mobile instant messaging applications has been frequent, especially in the Global South. The use of these platforms has promoted the circulation of fake news about Coronavirus (Schaewitz et al., 2022; Ricard and Medeiros, 2020). Thus, in Brazil (35%), Indonesia (33%), and India (28%), users recognize that WhatsApp is the platform through which they receive the most misinformation, while in countries such as the United States (26%) or the United Kingdom (35%) citizens acknowledge having received more hoaxes through Facebook (Newman et al., 2021).

The concern about receiving false and misleading information through social media and mobile instant messaging platforms is not new. In the 2018 presidential campaign in Brazil, the massive use of misinformation made by Bolsonaro through WhatsApp to discredit the other presidential candidates was already questioned (Nemer, 2021). However, in the case of Brazil, the spread of fake news has increased after COVID-19, when President Bolsonaro used social media live-streamed videos to spread false information about the effects and treatment of the Coronavirus (Recuero et al., 2022; Ricard and Medeiros, 2020). It is also significantly high in the

United States, where President Donald Trump denied the efficacy of using masks and even suggested ingesting disinfectants to cure the disease (Lasco, 2020).

In a world characterized by information overload (Eppler and Mengis, 2004), users often become “accidental information consumers” as someone in their network shares content published by another (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2021). Additionally, the fact that users can self-produce and self-disseminate unlimited messages (Castells, 2013) means that social media users are exposed to a partial view of reality as they communicate with those having similar opinions, thus causing echo chambers (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Sunstein, 2009) or filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). An enclosed informative environment emerges within these echo chambers that reinforces pre-existing beliefs and strengthens political polarization (Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng, 2011; Strauß et al., 2020; Sunstein, 2006). Thus, users isolate themselves from political information that do not reflect or support their interests or beliefs (Prior, 2007). These contexts can encourage a greater spread of misinformation, since feedback occurs between individuals in the same network (Dubois et al., 2020).

All these issues have caused distrust in these platforms, although employing social media to obtain news is high throughout the world (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2018; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). Users who often use social media trust it the most for information. Thus, older, and white people tend to consume less news through social media resulting in skepticism towards these platforms (Ardèvol-Abreu and Gil-de-Zúñiga, 2017). However, trust in social media decreases when users regularly use mainstream media to get information (Ardèvol-Abreu and Gil-de-Zúñiga, 2017).

Nevertheless, the focus of this paper relies on the analysis of ideology as an individual determinant of trust in traditional and social media. Lee (2010) has found that ideology and partisanship are strongly connected to trust in the case of legacy media. Some studies indicate that, in the United States, the most conservative are those who most distrust legacy media (Lee, 2005). More recently, in countries such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, connections have been found between populist attitudes and greater distrust of traditional media (Mitchell et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2020). The same is true in the United States (US), where Trump voters are suspicious of the mainstream media, while being more exposed to misinformation than voters for other candidates (Koc-Michalska et al., 2020). Also in the US, it has been found that Republicans are more likely to believe fake news (Guess et al., 2018). In Brazil, for example, users with a higher level of conservatism have much more confidence in the information they receive about COVID-19 through platforms such as WhatsApp than through legacy media (Ramos et al., 2022).

However, a joint analysis of trust in traditional and social media in different contexts does not exist in the literature. In this research, therefore, we intend to cover this gap by analyzing, in a comparative way, the extent to which ideology plays a prominent role in the trust that citizens have in legacy media and social media. Based on the previous literature, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: Ideology is a determining factor in the four countries considered, being left-wing citizens those who trust the most in traditional media.

H2: On the contrary, right-wing citizens trust the most in social media when it comes to being informed about politics.

4. Methodology

In this study we draw on our own survey of 2,804 citizens from Brazil (726), India (702), Spain (682), and the US (694). The authors undertook an online survey applied to a sample provided by the international company Qualtrics, whose fieldwork took place between June 28 and July 12, 2021. The sample is divided by sex (50% male and 50% female) and age (general population, between 18 and 99). During the fieldwork period, the

impact of COVID-19 was beginning to decline significantly in the four countries included in the sample. However, until that moment, the impact of the disease had been very profound, and the pandemic was still leading on the media's agenda¹.

The selection of Brazil, India, Spain, and the US responds to a strategy of “most different systems” analysis (Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Seawright and Gerring, 2008). Starting with social media level of penetration, our sample allows the analysis of cases with very widespread use: such as Spain with 86%; countries with medium use, such as Brazil and the US, at around 72%; and countries with low use of social media, such as India, with 33% of social media penetration (Statista, 2023). At the same time, these are countries with different democratic traditions. In terms of the “democratizing waves” proposed by Huntington (see Huntington 1994 for more details), the US and Brazil are considered consolidated democracies, as they are the result of the first (1828-1926) and second (1945-1960) waves, respectively. In contrast, Spain and India are part of the third wave (from 1974) and are, therefore, considered late democracies. Finally, we find differences regarding the media system to which they belong. Spain and Brazil are part of what Hallin and Mancini (2004) call a polarized pluralist system, where there is strong media instrumentalization, and the US is a liberal system, where the media are governed by market rules within a non-interventionist state. Although India was not included in the classification by Hallin and Mancini (2012), McCargo (2012) argues that India responds to a model known as “partisan polyvalence”, in which the media and journalists adapt, through personalized relationships, to the different parties and political options.

We use trust in news received through traditional media (newspapers, television, and radio) and social media (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) as our two dependent variables², calculating separate empirical models for each. With this strategy, we analyze the factors that are behind the fact that news consumers trust the first or second group of information sources, focusing primarily on the effect that ideology plays in each.

Therefore, our key independent variable is left-right ideology. To measure this concept, we used a question easily applicable to the four different countries included in our sample -Brazil, India, Spain, and the US (Power and Rodrigues-Silveira, 2019; Chhibber and Verma, 2018; Johnston and Ollerenshaw, 2020; Freire, 2006). Specifically, the respondents were asked, "On social issues, where would you place yourself ideologically on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 corresponds to extreme left and 10 to extreme right?". Despite political ideology differing across countries and contexts, this variable provides a general framework to categorize and comprehend ideological positions. In the four countries included in the sample, and in very broad terms, the left tends to be understood as an ideology that prioritizes the promotion of inclusivity and the expansion of rights and freedoms, while the right tends to promote traditional values as well as individual liberty and personal responsibility. As the previous literature has demonstrated, a scale ranging from 0 to 10 allows respondents to position themselves somewhere in between these extreme values (extreme left and extreme right) according to their preferences in social terms (Knutson, 1995; Kitschelt, 2004).

However, the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ tend to be associated to a greater extent with economic aspects in some contexts (Kitschelt, 2004). Broadly, leftist advocate for increased government intervention in society to address inequalities and protect marginalized groups, rightists refer to individualism, free markets, and limited government intervention to promote economic growth. For this reason, our analyses have been replicated using

¹ In Spain, other important news that we found during those two weeks were the pardons that the Spanish Government granted to the Catalan independence leaders and the restructuring of the Council of Ministers promoted by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. In the United States, apart from advances in vaccination, the biggest news during these two weeks was the withdrawal of the US Army from Afghanistan after 20 years of war. In Brazil, the most relevant news was the appearance of accusations of corruption against President Jair Bolsonaro for irregularities in the purchase of vaccines against COVID-19. Likewise, Bolsonaro questioned the possible holding of the 2022 presidential elections in a context of growing competition from former President Lula da Silva. In India, the leading news was a massive government reorganisation following the resignation of 12 ministers causing the appointment of 43 members. Likewise, other important news related to the pandemic was the scandal over the administration of false vaccines or the appearance of hundreds of deaths from COVID in the Ganges due to the flooding of the river.

² The original wording was: “How much do you trust the news you get through... News from mainstream media (e.g. newspapers, television, radio). News from social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook or Instagram)”, being 1 “I don't trust at all” and 10 “I trust completely”.

the average of the aforementioned variable and the variable "economic ideology", obtaining the same results. This variable has the following wording: "On economic issues, where would you place yourself ideologically on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 = extreme left and 10 = extreme right?". By replicating the analyses with these two alternative variables, we ensure that the results of the paper are consistent and that they hold regardless of the conception of ideology that we consider.

Besides this, in our multivariate analyses we control for the country of origin, sex, educational level, income level (with eight categories, depending on the country's income level), interest in politics (on a scale of 1 to 10) and internal efficacy (degree of agreement, from 1 to 10, with the phrase "people like me can influence the government"). Table 1 shows the descriptions of the variables included in the empirical models.

Table 1. *Descriptive.*

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Trust media	2,803	5.75	2.62	1	10
Trust social media	2,803	5.13	2.60	1	10
Country	2,804	2.51	1.12	1	4
Gender	2,775	0.50	0.50	0	1
Age	2,797	33.74	13.49	18	98
Education	2,803	0.60	0.49	0	1
Income	2,803	3.49	2.09	0	8
Ideology	2,803	5.08	2.74	0	10
Political interest	2,803	6.82	2.68	1	10
Political efficacy	2,803	5.81	2.76	1	10

Source: Made by authors.

Given the continuous nature of our two dependent variables (level of trust from 1 to 10), we ran two linear regressions, one for each variable. In these models, we include our independent variable and the aforementioned controls based on the factors that, according to previous research, have a greater effect on the degree of media trust (gender, age, level education, income, interest in politics, and internal efficacy). Since the data comes from four different countries, we also have controlled the country of the interviewee.

5. Results

From the data presented in Table 2, we can conclude that in Brazil and India the levels of trust in traditional media are higher than those observed in the US (our reference category). In India, trust in social media is also higher than in other countries in the sample. By gender, women show higher levels of trust, both from traditional and social media. Although citizens with higher levels of education and income are expected to show higher levels of trust in traditional media and less in social media, our data indicate that neither education nor income influence those levels of trust. However, interest in politics and level of "internal efficiency" are decisive. Citizens who are more interested in politics and those who show higher levels of efficacy (those who consider that they can influence the government) trust the news they receive the most, across all kinds of channels (media and digital platforms).

However, our main goal is to study the impact of ideology on trust in different media. Specifically, and against our first hypothesis, there is no apparent universal connection between ideology and trust in the mainstream media. However, regarding trust in social media -our second hypothesis, we found a phenomenon present in the four countries studied: the closer the individual is to the right on the political spectrum, the greater the trust in the news from digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Considering the lack of quality control and the proliferation of fake news on these channels, especially during the pandemic's height (Rocha et al., 2021; Gabarron et al., 2021), the dissimilar effect of fake news on right-wing citizens could have significant implications in misinforming these voters.

Table 2. Linear regression on trust in political information through the mainstream media (Model 1) and social media (Model 2).

	Model 1: Mainstream Media	Model 2: Social Media
Country (Ref: US)		
Spain	0.173 (1.33)	0.202 (1.59)
Brazil	0.417** (3.09)	0.0900 (0.68)
India	0.658*** (4.65)	1.179*** (8.52)
Gender (Ref: Male)	0.264** (2.97)	0.237** (2.73)
Age	-0.004 (-1.02)	-0.0195*** (-5.58)
Studies	0.165 (1.71)	-0.0412 (-0.44)
Income	0.002 (0.10)	0.015 (0.70)
Ideology	0.0244 (1.44)	0.138*** (8.29)
Political Interest	0.226*** (11.07)	0.131*** (6.58)
Political Efficacy	0.240*** (12.64)	0.244*** (13.15)
Constant	2.252*** (10.65)	2.255*** (10.90)
<i>R-Squared</i>	0.22	0.24
<i>N</i>	2,771	2,771

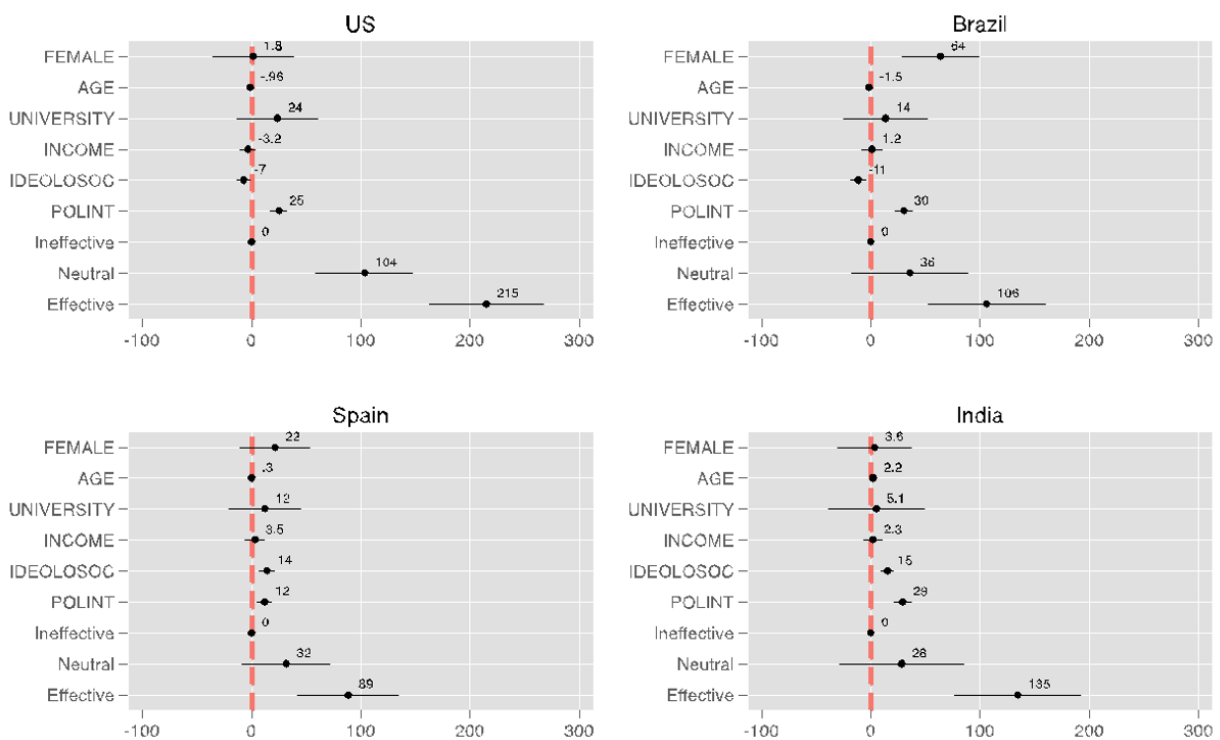
Source: Made by authors.

Given that the contexts of the countries included in the sample are diverse, it is worth analyzing these same relations independently. In Figure 1 we focus on the Average Marginal Effects (AMEs) on the degree of trust in traditional media in each of the four countries included in the sample. As shown in this figure, the stronger women's trust in the traditional media seems to occur significantly only in Brazil. When the horizontal lines intersect with the red vertical line, the differences in confidence by gender in the other countries and those given by level of education and income are still not statistically significant in any of the case studies.

Citizens who show a greater interest in politics and consider themselves more politically involved trust traditional media more if we analyze each country individually. Curiously, in the US, the youngest show greater confidence in digital platforms (this also occurs in Spain and India, but the differences are not statistically significant); while in Brazil, the young are more skeptical about these sources. It is also interesting to observe that education and income levels do not play a significant role in trust in social media either. Once again, however, interest in politics and internal political efficacy does.

As for our fundamental independent variable, we find that trust in traditional media is an issue influenced by context. While in countries like the US and Brazil it is the left that trusts the media the most, in Spain and India it is the right that trusts most. It should be noted that, in recent years, in the US and Brazil, incumbent right-wing populist presidents have strongly criticized the role of traditional media, which has undermined their credibility among their sympathizers (Mudde, 2019, 2022). Although a conservative right-wing populist government is also in power in India, the media in this country are highly diverse (Chakravartty and Roy, 2013). Also, in general, there is stronger cooperation between political powers and the media. In Spain, the media options on the right are more varied than on the left, so this bias in perception is understood (Casero-Ripollés, 2012).

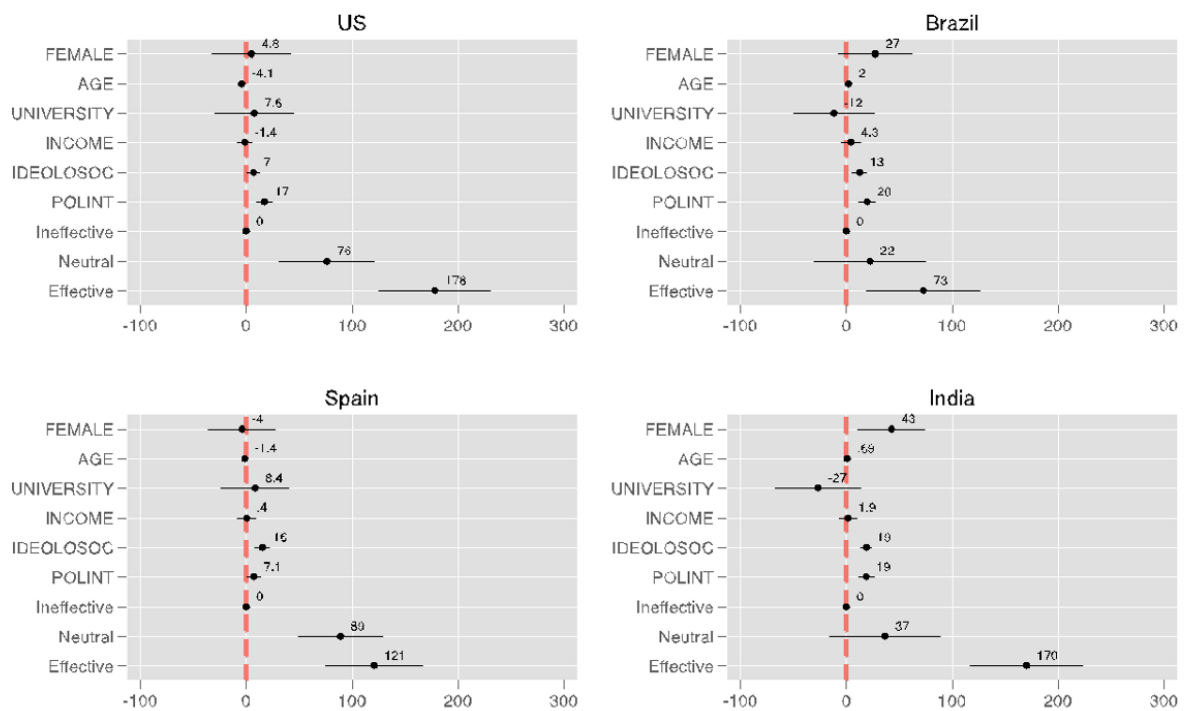
Figure 1: AMEs on trust in political information through the mainstream media in the US, Brazil, Spain, and India.



Source: Made by authors.

We might expect that citizens who least trust the news from traditional media (those of the left in Spain and India, and those of the right in the US and Brazil) also trust social media to a greater extent when it comes to getting informed. However, as we see in Figure 2, this is not the case. Right-wing citizens, in a universal and significant way in all the countries included in the sample, trust more in digital platforms to inform themselves about politics. This fact could significantly affect the dissimilar impact of fake news between citizens of the right and left. Regardless of whether the left uses social media more or less to obtain information, the right tends to believe more in the political information that appears on channels such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. This fact predisposes these individuals to trust news whose quality controls are much lower than those of traditional media.

Figure 2: AMEs on trust in political information through social media in the US, Brazil, Spain, and India.



Source: Made by authors.

In sum, as proposed in our hypotheses, we have found that ideology plays a fundamental role when trusting traditional media and social media. The context potentially determines how citizens of diverse ideological profile trust traditional media. However, the greater confidence of right-wing citizens in the news published on social media might have a universal scope. Also, the greater mistrust of the right in the US and Brazil seems to correlate with several discredited campaigns promoted by right-wing populist leaders against traditional media in recent years.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In an era marked by an overabundance of information, misinformation, political instability, and COVID-19, it is necessary to identify the factors that influence the trust generated by different types of media. In line with the goal of the article, we have established a relationship between citizens' ideology and trust in traditional and social media in contexts as diverse as Brazil, India, Spain, and the US. It has been observed that right-wing

citizens trust more in digital platforms for information than those on the left in all the countries analyzed. In general, respondents from all four countries trust the mainstream media more than social media for information. This trend is especially notable in Brazil, where citizens consider the news, they receive from conventional channels much more reliable than digital platforms. These data question theories about the loss of credibility of traditional media after the emergence and consolidation of digital platforms (Carlson, 2017; Garret et al., 2012). As happened at the beginning of the health crisis (Casero-Ripollés, 2020), in a context conditioned by the fifth wave of COVID-19, legacy media could have recovered part of its centrality as preferred information sources for citizens. In this sense, even though COVID-19 is no longer considered a pandemic, there are studies (Newman et al. 2022) that highlight that trust in media remains above the values registered in 2019 in most countries. However, we must point out that hybridisation (Chadwick, 2017) is very present in countries like India, where credibility in conventional and social media is very high. Therefore, in this context, a dynamic of complementarity may occur, where users are informed through both types of media.

Among the factors that influence trust in mainstream and social media, the following factors stand out: the ideology of those surveyed, interest in politics, and the level of political efficacy. Confirming our hypotheses, ideology is a fundamental variable, although it is seemingly affected by the countries' political context. In countries like the US and Brazil, the intensification of campaigns to discredit traditional media by right-wing populist leaders could explain that left-wing citizens show a higher level of trust. These countries' leaders, in both cases in power in recent years, led a discourse against the media, whom they consider part of the elite, by accusing them of manipulating and fabricating information to harm them (Mudde, 2019, 2022). This might be behind these differences, in line with those found in countries such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland, where connections have been found between populist attitudes and greater distrust in both legacy and social media (Koc-Michalska et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2020).

In contrast, in Spain and India, respondents to the right of the political spectrum have a higher level of trust in traditional media. This fact challenges previous research that suggested that left-wing citizens had higher levels of trust in legacy media (Roses and Gómez-Calderón, 2015). The expansion of misinformation associated with COVID-19 may be an explanatory factor for this change since people on the left are more critical of this phenomenon. However, this will need to be verified in further investigations.

Looking at trust in information from social media, it can be seen how regardless of political context, it is higher among right-wing citizens. In other words, the more the person is to the right on the political spectrum, the more s/he trusts the information received through platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, spaces where the proliferation of fake news is particularly intense (Newman et al., 2021; Ricard and Medeiros, 2020). These results suggest that right-wing users are more exposed to misinformation, especially in crisis contexts, such as that generated by COVID-19.

One potential limitation of the article is that the survey categorized media sources into "traditional" (television, radio, and newspapers) and "social" media (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram). However, this categorization overlooks the possibility that respondents may have varying levels of trust or preference within each category. Future research should consider incorporating more nuanced questions or categories to better understand the respondents' trust in specific media sources within each broader category. Another limitation of the article is that the survey was conducted through digital means, which may have excluded a significant portion of the population in countries like Brazil and India where many people do not have access to the internet. However, to mitigate this impact, the sample was designed to be representative of the population in each country.

Despite these potential limitations, the article contributes to expanding prior knowledge about trust in mainstream and social media, with considerable emphasis on the factors that have a predominant influence in four countries with different social and political structures and media systems: Brazil, India, Spain, and the United States. When ideology is controlled for, and despite what previous studies had

" In Brazil, the most relevant news was the appearance of accusations of corruption against President Jair Bolsonaro for irregularities in the purchase of vaccines against COVID-19. "

determined (Newman et al., 2021), factors such as education or income level do not seem to play a significant role. Much of the previous research (Lee 2005, 2010; Roses and Gómez-Calderón, 2015) analyses this phenomenon in a context where social media had not been consolidated and, therefore, had not acquired the current informative relevance. Additionally, the legacy media maintained both an information monopoly and social relevance. For all these reasons, the contributions made by this research represent a theoretical advance in the field of communication that expands knowledge about the trust in mainstream and social media for news in a comparative context influenced by COVID-19.

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