User habits and social media type as predictors of news consumption and sharing

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Abstract

User behavior patterns when consuming and sharing information on social networks are analyzed, paying special attention to the effects of the type of presentation and the type of social network. As is common when analyzing activity on social networks, the experience sampling method was used, in which a group of volunteer participants are asked, at different times, a set of questions about their recent activity or experience. The sample consisted of 279 subjects. The results show that news that requires a greater effort is usually shared through closed networks, while in open networks there is a tendency to share more superficial information. No significant differences are found between the degree of reading of the news and the type of social network where it is shared. Moreover, the level of consumption does not influence the degree of reading of the shared material. The level of enjoyment of the news is found to influence its degree of reading. The differences between networks highlight that, on *Facebook*, the frequency of use influences the dynamics of consumption and sharing, with shared news being more impactful and useful. In contrast, in the case of *Twitter*, there is a greater preference for so-called soft information.

Keywords

Social networks; Social media; News consumption; News dissemination; *Facebook*; *Twitter*; *WhatsApp*; News; Digital journalism; Virality; Incidental exposure.

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http://newssharing.es

1. Introduction

The media ecosystem has recently undergone a profound transformation that translates into a series of changes in the dynamics of news distribution and consumption by citizens. These changes affect both the sources from which information is extracted and the nature of the news that is consumed (**Jansson**; **Lindell**, 2015). Thus, platforms and channels multiply; content circulates in a much more unpredictable way, generating an overabundance of information; and the line that defines what constitutes a relevant and quality source becomes increasingly blurred (**McNeill**, 2018).

One of the elements that plays an important role in these processes is information and communication technologies, specifically the Internet and social networks, because they have become a relevant news distribution channel (**Bright**, 2016; **Dafonte-Gómez**, 2018). Thus, the latest editions of the Digital News Reports prepared by the Reuters Institute (**Newman** *et al*., 2018; 2019; 2020) show a double trend:

- A decrease in news consumption through traditional media, and
- An increase in the use of social networks as an information source.

At the same time, and as a result, there is a radical transformation of the news distribution model, moving from the classic one-way paradigm, in which the media exercised control, to a new multidirectional paradigm, in which the users themselves control the dissemination (**Noguera-Vivo**, 2018), since they are the ones who decide what specific content they share with other users they are in contact with on social networks. Therefore, transmission is much more complex, and is not based solely on a line that goes from the sender to the receiver but is articulated via a network where users constitute the nodes that redistribute media content (**Carlson**, 2016; **Guallar** *et al*., 2016; **Klinger**; **Svensson**, 2016). Thus, users with greater willingness to use networks to search for news content and subsequently disseminate it on said networks are usually people with high news consumption: those who use a variety of sources and who usually spend quite a lot of time reading the news (**Kümpel**; **Karnowski**; **Keyling**, 2015).

Factors such as user participation, permanent connectivity, and multiscreen or mobile devices are therefore increasingly decisive in news consumption (**Picone**; **Courtois**; **Paulussen**, 2015; **Peters**, 2015). That is, it is an exercise that, on the one hand, is increasingly individual, since each user has their own digital device, or even more than one in some cases, but on the other hand, and in a certain way paradoxically, acquires increasingly social nuances (**Papacharissi**, 2015) thanks to the interconnection that occurs on networks and platforms.

Another influencing factor is whether the content is disseminated through an open social network (such as *Facebook* or *Twitter*) or a closed one (such as *WhatsApp*) (**Salaverría** *et al*., 2020). Delving further into this distinction, **Kim** and **Ihm** (2019) differentiate between open and asymmetric social networks (OASNs) and closed and symmetric social networks (CSSNs). In the case of OASNs, when a user publishes a post, all their contacts can see it without discernment between some users and others (**Yang**, 2016). This elicits, among other things, a practice of self-censorship among users; that is, they publish news that they consider potentially controversial (**Kim**; **Ihm**, 2019).

Meanwhile, on CSSNs, it is the user who takes the initiative when creating their networks and controlling who can join them. They are therefore not open to the general public. This is the case with mobile messaging applications or certain OASN features such as private groups. In this case, the dissemination of news follows a much more selective pattern, since the posts are aimed at a smaller and more specific group of contacts (**Goncalves**; **Kostakos**; **Venkatanathan**, 2013; **Karapanos**; **Teixeira**; **Gouveia**, 2016). In short, the type of content being shared is influenced by the type of network the user is a part of (**Kümpel**; **Karnowski**; **Keyling**, 2015).

Emotions also influence the decision-making process, in that users are more likely to share content that generates a more positive affect on them (**Bakshy** *et al*., 2012), and in turn, this content generates greater interest in the users on the receiving end (**Berger**, 2011).

It thus becomes quite common for users to utilize the Internet when seeking, for example, social contact or entertainment, but they end up accessing the news, even when not looking for it directly. This is a trend related to the ubiquity of news on the Internet and that translates into news being there and the idea that the "news will find me" (**Gil de Zúñiga**; **Weeks**; **Ardèvol-Abreu**, 2017), an increasingly widespread perception (**Toff**; **Nielsen**, 2018; **Bergström**; **Jervelycke**; **Belfrage**, 2018; **Segado-Boj** *et al*., 2020).

In short, the exercise carried out by the user when they are ready to consult news content on any platform or digital medium can follow different strategies, some direct or intentional but others involuntary and indirect. There are three main strategies (**Antunovic**; **Parsons**; **Cooke**, 2018; **Boczkowski**; **Mitchelstein**; **Matas**, 2018; **Gunter** 2015; **Molyneux**, 2018; **Schrøder**, 2015):

> "Through social networks, it is the users –and no longer traditional media– who control the dissemination of the news. In addition, the search for information is made much more specific and direct"

- Routine monitoring or surveillance of networks and platforms: consisting of a kind of constant checking or verification of the news sources the user has access to through mobile devices (**Antunovic**; **Parsons**; **Cooke**, 2018);
- Incidental exposure to the news: defined as the way in which
  "people find information about current affairs when they have not been actively seeking it" (**Tewksbury**; **Weaver**; **Maddex**, 2001, p. 534); and
- Direct consumption: when users have a special interest in seeking more detailed information regarding a specific issue or subject matter (**Antunovic**; **Parsons**; **Cooke**, 2018).

Routine monitoring refers to users who include among their daily habits the regular consultation of a series of information sources to try to remain informed regarding what is happening in the world (**Antunovic**; **Parsons**; **Cooke**, 2018). This process, although not new in nature, has changed in terms of the media and information sources consulted. What a few decades ago was limited to the written press, radio, or television now includes various modalities, starting with habitual visits to media websites, followed by applications, newsletters, or alert services that send the user automated summaries of the news with highlights published in certain sources or that refer to specific topics (**Yuan**, 2011). Current monitoring thus encompasses a greater number of aspects and modalities.

Among these three strategies, the most widely studied in literature is, by far, incidental exposure, which had already been introduced by the end of the twentieth century in a media context characterized by the prominence of printed and audiovisual media (**Erdelez**, 1995). The emergence of the Internet and social networks has increased research interest and scientific work in this regard (**Feezell**, 2018; **Fletcher**; **Nielsen**, 2018; **Kümpel**, 2019).

Over the years, the perception of incidental exposure has evolved, from the ability of the Internet to make a much greater and more diverse amount of information content than initially sought available to the user (**Tewksbury**; **Weaver**; **Maddex**, 2001), to the attempt to identify the factors that most influence the process, such as the characteristics of the media environment or personal predispositions (**Lee**, 2009), and to the individual's focus on the perception that they can feel informed despite not having carried out an active search for news (**Hermida**, 2016; **Hermida** *et al*., 2012; **Toff**; **Nielsen**, 2018).

The various investigations carried out have also concluded that two of the aspects that positively correlate with incidental exposure are the greater or lesser heterogeneity of the network of contacts and the fact that weak connections prevail in that network (**Lee**; **Kim**, 2017).

Fletcher and **Nielsen** (2018) concluded that individuals who are exposed to news incidentally tend to turn to a greater number of digital sources and that the effect of this type of exposure is greater in younger people with less previous interest in the news, in a paper focusing on users from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Italy.

Park and **Kaye** (2020) concluded that incidental exposure reinforces the perception that the "news will find me," and that in turn, this perception is an element that influences the relationship between incidental exposure and news consumption in a study of South Korean adults.

The positive aspects of incidental exposure have also been addressed by a number of authors, particularly in the field of public opinion. From them it is possible to learn more about public affairs, increase the civic commitment of individuals, or have greater and easier access to more diverse news sources (**Bode**, 2016; **Feezell**, 2018; **Fletcher**; **Nielsen**, 2018; **Valeriani**; **Vaccari**, 2016).

Thorson (2020) introduced a new perspective regarding the study of that concept and advocates paying greater attention to the ability of platforms and algorithms to configure the greater or lesser probability of being exposed to news through digital media. In this vein, he insisted on the ubiquity of news content on social networks and highlighted that incidental exposure does not always imply accidental exposure, as has sometimes been pointed out in the literature regarding this issue (**Prior**, 2007; **Valeriani**; **Vaccari**, 2016). This idea is summarized in the concept of "attraction to the news".

Finally, direct consumption represents an evolution with respect to the process of the monitoring routine, which occurs when there is a news item that arouses special interest on the part of the user, so that they go beyond their habitual routine of consulting certain sources or topics and devote more time to seeking out everything that has to do with that event in a concrete way (**Rubin**; **Perse**, 1987).

As was the case with the monitoring routine, over time, the nature of the sources which the user consults has also changed significantly. Thus, in the written press, this would translate into reading beyond the headline or the news entry, and in the digital context, to clicking on links related to the pieces of news or even to related information. Lastly, it should

be noted that, if this search is prolonged over time and becomes habitual, it can lead to and become routine monitoring (**Antunovic**; **Parsons**; **Cooke**, 2018).

2. Objectives

This study analyzes the behavior patterns of users when consuming and disseminating information on social networks, paying special attention to how such behaviors influence

- the type of exposure: incidental, routine surveillance, or direct consumption; and
- the type of social network: open or closed.

On the basis of this objective, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> H1. The type of exposure (incidental, routine, or direct) is related to the degree of reading of the news item (in depth, superficially, or only the headline), the type of social network on which the news is shared (open or closed), and the type of news (hard or soft).
>
> H2. The frequency of habitual news consumption will influence the degree of reading of news items that are shared.
>
> H3. The level of enjoyment of the news will influence the degree of reading.
>
> H4. The evaluation of the news items (positive affect and usefulness) will be different in the news items that are shared on the different networks. Thus, the news evaluated as most useful will be shared more on open networks, in a way that helps to build one's own image, while those that generate more affect will be shared on closed networks.

Affect can be expected to especially influence those platforms that normally serve to strengthen existing connections, as is the case with *WhatsApp* (**Bano** *et al*., 2019) and *Facebook* (**Shane-Simpson** *et al*., 2018).

> H5. The news topics that are consumed and disseminated will be distinct on different social networks. Thus, hard news will tend to be shared more in closed networks, in which some self-censorship is generated to avoid controversy (**Marwick**; **Boyd**, 2011; **Kwon**; **Moon**; **Stefanone**, 2015).

3. Methodology

Following the recommendations of **Witschge** *et al*. (2018), this study does not consider individuals as a unit of analysis, but rather the situations they go through, given that a user can react in different ways and be motivated by different factors at different times. An experience sampling method (ESM), common in the analysis of social network user activity (such as that employed by **Hall** (2018) and **Trieu** *et al*. (2019), is applied. This method implies that a group of volunteer participants must answer, at different time points, a series of questions about some activity they have carried out or some experience they have gone through (**Kubey**; **Larson**; **Csikszentmihalyi**, 1996).

The study subjects sought for the sample correspond to the Spanish population of young people and young adults (18–39 years), since their attitudes regarding news use can indicate the patterns of future trends regarding social distribution and news consumption (**Bobkowski**, 2015). The recruitment of the 300 initial volunteers participating in the study was carried out by the demographic company *Societae*. It was based on a stratified random sampling, although the final sample shows some discrepancies with respect to the study population, as mentioned in the limitations section.

Three time points were set out: Saturday 16 November, Sunday 24 November, and Monday 2 December 2019. These dates were spaced equidistantly using a balanced criterion throughout the period considered, so that a greater number of different experiences could be obtained. Similarly, dates close to the end of the week were chosen, since the participants would have more time to dedicate to reading news, as this was a leisure period. As pointed out above, this study focuses on situations and not individual subjects. Therefore, to increase the information about the situations that the subjects go through, they were asked to respond three times.

For each of the three time points, an email was sent to all participants with questions regarding the latest news item they had shared on social networks, over instant messaging, or through any other medium. These questions were common and were repeated at all three points in the study. That is, each subject was able to answer the questions related to the last news item that they shared with any contact up to three times. Participants were advised that, if they had not shared any new news items since the previous time point, they should not reply to the email. Duplication of information regarding identical experiences was thus avoided.

3.1. Information-gathering measures and tools

Participants had to evaluate each news item they shared.

Positive affect (α = 0.86) was calculated as the sum of the answers to four Likert questions (1 = minimum agreement, 5 = maximum agreement): "I liked the content," "I enjoyed the content," "The content is positive," and "The content is entertaining."

To calculate usefulness (α = 0.85), five Likert-type questions were asked on a scale of 1 to 5: "Content is valuable (in general, to me, to my friends or to society)," "Content is good and of quality", "Content is useful," "Content has helped me to be informed," and "Content is relevant to my life." The order of the questions in this block was randomized in each questionnaire and for each participant.

The participants had to specifically indicate the way in which they accessed the information that they subsequently shared (Table 3), the depth with which they read the news item before sharing it (in depth, superficially, or only the headline; Table 4), and the network or platform on which they shared the news item (Table 5).

Participants also provided the link to the news item they shared. It specified a broad concept of "news," which did not require it to have been published by a traditional or mass medium. If the news item did not include a link, users were asked to provide the headline. Subsequently, a team researcher categorized the news item according to the topics defined by **Kilgo** *et al*. (2018). Finally, the question blocks were grouped into four major themes: hard news, soft news, culture, and other (Table 7).

For the first of the three time points, a specific set of questions was also included regarding the personal data of the subjects for sociodemographic purposes: age, gender, province of residence, highest level of education, and monthly income level. In addition to these sociodemographic questions, the subjects also had to indicate their level of enjoyment of the news in general (Likert question on a scale of 1 to 5, "I enjoy being aware of the news and current events"). Regular news consumption was also recorded, utilizing the question "How often do you watch, listen to, or read news, whether on television, on the radio, in the press, or via the internet?" on a scale from 1 to 8: 1, never; 2, very sporadically; 3, once a month; 4, once a week; 5, several times a week; 6, once a day; 7, several times a day; 8, almost every hour.

Questionnaire items are presented in Appendix I.

3.2. Data analysis

Statistical processing of the data was carried out using the R software. To contrast the hypotheses that raise relationships between categorical variables (H1, H3, and H5), Pearson's chi-square independence test (χ^2) was used. In this test, the value of χ^2 indicates the extent to which the categories are related. The further away the index is from 0, the greater the likelihood that the related categories are independent of each other. For each test, information is also provided about the number of cases considered on each occasion (*N*) and the degrees of freedom, i.e., the different possible associations between categories. The test also offers a significance value (*p*) for hypothesis testing. The closer this *p*-value is to 0, the more certain it is that there is a statistically significant association between the variables considered. The significance threshold for this value is 0.05. The result of the Pearson chi-square test is indicated in the "Results" section, presenting first the degree of freedom (in parentheses) and the total number (*N*) of observations on which the test is calculated, then the values of chi-square *p* (following the recommendations of the American Psychological Association, only the decimal values are offered). Thus, the expression χ^2 (8, *N* = 830) = 8.78, *p* = .36 indicates that the chi-square test has been calculated with a set of 830 observations belonging to eight combinations of categories, with a result of 8.78 and significance of 0.36, which leads to rejecting of the hypothesis.

Tables 8 and 9 present the observed and theoretical distributions for each of the category relationships proposed in the hypotheses.

Nonparametric contrast tests were used to test the hypothesis involving the existence of differences in values between two or more categories (H2, H4). A nonparametric test was chosen since the quantitative variables were calculated in ordinal terms (Likert scales) and not Gaussian ones.

In the case (H4) where only two groups were compared (news shared on a particular type of social network or platform versus news shared on another type of social network or specific environment), the Mann–Whitney *U* test was used. This test also calculates the significance of the differences found with the calculation of a *p*-value, with the threshold to determine whether a hypothesis is met set at <.05. The result of this value is indicated in the text. Tables 11 and 12 present the average values obtained in each comparative set, the standard deviation (σ) of each mean, and the number (*N*) of observations belonging to each case. The difference between the averages obtained from the two sets is also presented. This information is only provided in cases where the *p*-value shows a significant difference.

In those cases where the differences were compared between more than three groups (for example, the reading levels of the news items), a one-way (Kruskal–

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

		n	%
Gender	Male	109	39.07
	Female	167	59.86
	Prefer not to say	3	1.08
Education	Primary school	5	1.79
	Secondary school	40	14.34
	Vocational training	71	25.45
	University	162	58.07
	Postgraduate	1	0.36
Monthly income	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
	Prefer not to say	8	2.87

Wallis) analysis of variance (Anova) was used. Like the Mann–Whitney test, this test calculates a *p*-value that indicates significant differences between the sets considered when said index reaches or falls below .05. If the *p*-value is set to significant values, it is necessary to apply a post hoc test to identify the groups between which this significant difference occurs. Thus, the Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner test (Table 10) calculates a *p*-value for the bilateral differences between each of the observed sets. Once again, if that *p*-value is equal to or less than 0.05, the differences between the two categories can be considered significant. Table 10 provides that *p*-value, as well as the difference between the average of each group compared.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptives

4.1.1. Participants

The final sample was reduced to 279 subjects after 21 did not answer the initial study questionnaire, with an average age of 27.9 years (σ = 6.08 years). Table 1 presents the rest of the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.

Participants were recruited from 33 Spanish provinces, although the regions most represented were Madrid, Granada, and Barcelona (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of participants by province

Province	n	%	Province	n	%	Province	n	%
A Coruña	18	6.2	Castellón	1	0.3	Navarra	1	0.3
Álava	1	0.3	Córdoba	5	1.7	Palencia	1	0.3
Albacete	12	4.1	Cuenca	2	0.7	Pontevedra	8	2.8
Alicante	1	0.3	Granada	62	21.4	Salamanca	5	1.7
Almería	4	1.4	Guadalajara	2	0.7	Sevilla	4	1.4
Asturias	1	0.3	Guipúzcoa	2	0.7	Tarragona	1	0.3
Badajoz	2	0.7	Jaén	2	0.7	Toledo	2	0.7
Islas Baleares	2	0.7	León	1	0.3	Valencia	4	1.4
Barcelona	31	10.7	Madrid	75	25.9	Valladolid	5	1.7
Burgos	6	2.1	Málaga	5	1.7	Vizcaya	13	4.5
Cádiz	3	1.0	Murcia	6	2.1	Zamora	2	0.7

The participants' average news consumption, calculated on the scale referred to above, where 1 is never and 8 is almost every hour, is 2.59 (σ = 1.12). The average level of users' enjoyment of news consumption is 3.82 (σ = 0.943) on a scale of 1 to 5.

The positive affect of shared news has an average of 13.72 (σ = 4.44) out of 20, and the perceived usefulness, an average of 18.82 (σ = 4.39) out of 25.

4.1.2. Experiences collected

In total, information was collected regarding 830 shared news items from the three time points, which was then used to conduct the analysis.

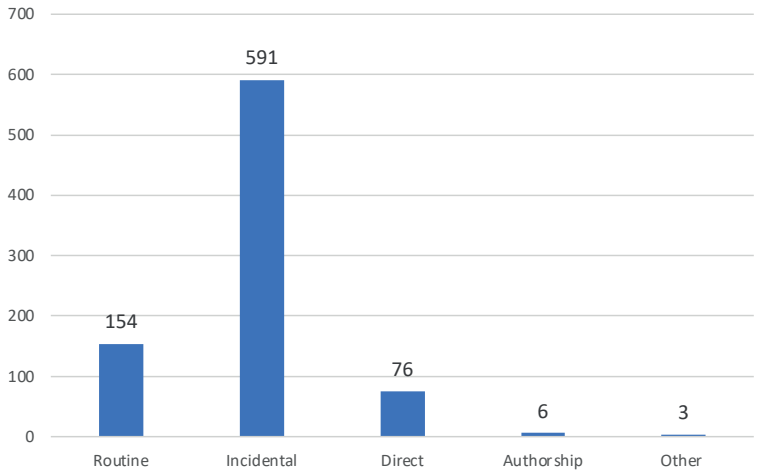
Incidental exposure was the main access point to shared news (Table 3).

Table 3. Information access points

	n	%
1. I was surfing the Internet, not looking for anything in particular, and I came across the news item.	194	23.37
2. I found the news item on a website that I usually visit to read about the latest news.	120	14.46
3. I was looking for information on the subject (on *Google* or another search engine such as *Bing*), and I found the news item.	69	8.31
4. I have the website's app installed on my phone and received an automatic or personalized notification.	13	1.57
5. I learned about it from a website's alert service that I am subscribed to, from a newsletter, or from other means such as the website's *Telegram* channel.	18	2.17
6. A friend or contact gave me the link or notified me of the news item by email, mobile messaging, or by tagging me on social networks.	122	14.70
7. I was looking at my social networks, and I found the news item in a post that someone published but without mentioning me directly, nor posting it in a group I am part of.	255	30.72
8. Other.	39	4.70

Options 1, 6, and 7 were categorized as "incidental exposure"; options 2, 4, and 5, as "routine surveillance"; and 3 as "direct consumption." In the case of option 8 (39), "other", participants had to specify and provide further information.

These responses were reviewed by one of the researchers, and 30 were added to the previous categories. Of the nine remaining, six referenced that the user themselves had been the author of the news item (creating, for example, a post on a blog), while the remaining three did not fit into any other category. In the end, these nine answers were not used for the analysis. Thus, routine accounted for 28.55% of responses, incidental for 71.20%, and direct for 9.16% (Graph 1).



Graph 1. Frequency of information access categories

In most cases, users report having read the news item in depth before sharing it with their contacts (Table 4).

Table 4. Frequency of shared news items that were read in depth

	n	%
I visited the link to the full text, and I read the news item in depth.	569	68.55
I visited the link to the full text, but I only read the news item superficially or skimmed it.	177	21.32
I only read the headline or preview of the news item; I did not visit the link with the actual text.	84	10.12

The news was shared preferentially on a social network in an open way or in a private, instant messaging group (Table 5).

Table 5. Platforms where the news item was shared

	n	%
1. On a social network (*Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, etc.) as a post so that all my contacts could see it.	414	49.88
2. On social networks, but I tagged a specific person, either on *Facebook* or *Instagram* or by mentioning them on *Twitter*. Nevertheless, the post was public and could be seen by all my contacts.	25	3.01
3. In a private group or restricted community on *Facebook* or any other social network, so that only members of that group or community could see it.	12	1.45
4. In a private *WhatsApp*, *Line*, *Telegram*, or *Facebook Messenger* group.	252	30.36
5. I sent it to a specific contact via instant messaging (*WhatsApp*, *Line*, *Telegram*, or *Facebook Messenger*).	112	13.49
6. By email, with a given person or group of people.	6	0.72
7. By mass email to a large group of people (more than 50).	0	0
8. Other.	9	1.09

		n	%
OASN (53.37%)	1. On a social network (*Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, etc.) as a post so that all my contacts could see it.	414	49.88
	2. On social networks, but I tagged a specific person, either on *Facebook* or *Instagram* or by mentioning them on *Twitter*. Nevertheless, the post was public and could be seen by all my contacts.	25	3.01
	Other OASNs.	4	0.48
CSSN (46.14%)	3. In a private group or restricted community on Facebook or any other social network, so that only members of that group or community could see it.	12	1.45
	4. In a private *WhatsApp*, *Line*, *Telegram*, or *Facebook Messenger* group.	252	30.36
	5. I sent it to a specific contact via instant messaging (*WhatsApp*, *Line*, *Telegram*, or *Facebook Messenger*).	112	13.49
	6. By email, with a given person or group of people.	6	0.72
	7. By mass email to a large group of people (more than 50).	0	0.00
	Other CSSNs.	1	0.12
Other	8. Other	4	0.48

Options 1–2 were categorized as OASN and 3–6 as CSSN. Option 8 ("Other") required the user to provide more information. After obtaining the participants' explanation, the answers were recoded; one was categorized as CSSN and four as RAA. The other four did not offer enough information to be included in either of the two groups.

Table 6. News item shared by platform

Platform	Frecuency
Facebook	362
Twitter	59
Instagram	30
Other	95
WhatsApp	88
Telegram	2
LinkedIn	3
Facebook Messenger	4

As such, the users who chose options 1 to 5 could also indicate the specific platform where they shared the news item, with *Facebook* being the preferred platform (Table 6).

In terms of which types of news items were shared, news relating to crimes and events, national politics, and entertainment were shared more frequently (Table 7).

Table 7. Type of news item shared

	Tema	n	%
Hard news	International relations	45	5.74
	Army/defense	2	0.26
	Government	102	13.01
	Crime/incidents	128	16.33
	Economy/business/finance	38	4.85
	Civil rights	28	3.57
	Environment	63	8.04
	Religion	3	0.38
Soft news	Sports	46	5.87
	Entertainment	96	12.24
	Lifestyle/health	67	8.55
Culture	Education	69	8.80
	Science/technology	25	3.19
Other	Other	72	9.18
	Total	784	100

The sample of news items shared according to topic is composed of 784 news items instead of the 830 from the global sample because 46 did not have enough information to assign them to a category and were thus left out of the analysis. This means that the *N* used in the calculation and involved in the categorization of news (1 and 5) and thus the hypotheses is 784 instead of 830.

4.2. Hypothesis testing

4.2.1. Relationship between type of exposure and degree of reading, social network where the news item is shared, and type of news (H1)

The results of Pearson's chi-square refute the hypothesis that the type of exposure regarding the news item is associated with the degree of depth of the reading of the news item shared, since the *p*-value obtained exceeds .05: χ^2 (8, *N* = 830) = 8.78, *p* = .36.

Similarly, the relationship between the depth of reading of the news item and the subject of the news item does not reach sufficient levels of significance: χ^2 (6, *N* = 784) = 7.74, *p* = .258.

On the contrary, Pearson's chi-square yielded positive results [χ^2 (8, *N* = 830) = 117.03, *p* < .001] for the relationship between the type of exposure and the type of social network where the news item is shared. As detailed in Table 8, the frequency of direct exposure in the case of news found directly and routinely is above the theoretical distribution when there is no relationship between the two variables. Similarly, the frequency observed in the case of news shared on OASNs found by incidental exposure also exceeds the theoretical distribution.

Table 8. Distribution of observed and theoretical cases according to the means of exposure to the news item and type of social network where it is share

		Exposure to the news item					
Type of social network	**Distribution**	**Other**	**Authorship**	**Direct**	**Incidental**	**Routine**	**Total (rows)**
Other	Observed	1	0	0	1	2	4
	Theoretical	0.014	0.029	0.366	2.848	0.742	
Open	Observed	2	6	21	352	62	443
	Theoretical	1.601	3.202	40.564	315.437	82.195	
Closed	Observed	0	0	55	238	90	383
	Theoretical	1.384	2.769	35.070	272.714	71.063	
Total (columns)		3	6	76	591	154	830

A significant relationship [χ^2 (12, *N* = 784) = 24.08, *p* = .016] was also observed between the type of exposure to the news item and the subject of the news item. More specifically, it was identified that direct consumption is related to a greater presence of hard news. Conversely, incidental exposure is linked to a lower frequency of this type of information (Table 9). These findings imply that the consumption of hard news is related to direct consumption.

Table 9. Distribution of observed and theoretical cases according to access and subject of the news item

Means of access	Distribution	Soft	Culture	Hard	Other	Total (rows)
Other	Observed	1	0	0	0	1
	Theoretical	0.267	0.120	0.522	0.092	
Authorship	Observed	0	2	3	0	5
	Theoretical	1.333	0.599	2.608	0.459	
Direct	Observed	12	4	55	5	76
	Theoretical	20.260	9.112	39.648	6.980	
Incidental	Observed	158	74	272	56	560
	Theoretical	149.286	67.143	292.143	51.429	
Routine	Observed	38	14	79	11	142
	Theoretical	37.855	17.026	74.079	13.041	
	Total (columns)	209	94	409	72	784

4.2.2. Relationship between frequency of news consumption and degree of reading of news item shared (H2)

The result of the unidirectional (Kruskal–Wallis) Anova for the differences between the degree of reading of the news item shared as a function of the frequency of news consumption does not reach a significant value [χ^2 (6, N = 830) = 9.95, p = .127], which leads to refuting the hypothesis that the habit of news consumption entails a more or less in-depth reading by the subjects of the news shared.

4.2.3. Relationship between the level of news enjoyment and the degree of reading of news item shared (H3)

The unidirectional (Kruskal–Wallis) Anova test obtains a p-value within the significance threshold [χ^2 (2, N = 830) = 6.06, p = .048], indicating that (at the very least) the differences between the two categories are sufficiently relevant and thus not considered as due to chance. The results of the Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner post hoc test indicate that, the greater the degree of enjoyment, the greater the tendency to read the news item in depth, while subjects with higher levels of enjoyment obtain a higher average degree of reading than those who are in the lower positions. These differences are significant among those individuals who place themselves in the extreme values of the news enjoyment scale (Table 10).

4.2.4. Differences in evaluation of news item according to the social network where it is shared (H4)

The Mann–Whitney test indicated significant differences in the evaluation obtained by the news item shared in different environments. In particular, the news items that are shared on OASNs are evaluated in a significant way (p < .001) with a greater positive affectivity (Table 11). Symmetrically, news items shared on CSSNs show a significant difference (p < .001) in an opposite direction. That is, the news items shared in CSSNs are evaluated with a lower affective load. The differences noted in the general environment of OASNs are also found in the specific environment of *Facebook* (p < .001). However, no significant differences are found in other examples of OASNs, such as *Twitter* or *Instagram*, perhaps because the number of news items shared in the sample is too small.

Table 10. Differences between the degree of reading according to the level of enjoyment of the news

Post hoc Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner			
Level of enjoyment		Average difference	p
1	2	−2.11	.295
1	3	−3.08	.075
2	3	−1.42	.576

Table 11. Comparison of positive affectivity in the news

	News items shared in OASNs	
	No	Yes
Mean	13.125	14.255
σ	4.335	4.471
N	391	439
Difference of means	1.130	
	News items shared on CSSNs	
	No	**Yes**
Mean	14.241	13.115
σ	4.473	4.330
N	448	382
Difference of means	1.126	
	News items shared on Facebook	
	No	**Yes**
Mean	13.102	14.393
σ	4.345	4.451
N	431	399
Difference of means	1.291	

Table 12. Comparison of affectivity of the news items found on Facebook

Found on *Facebook*	No	Yes
Mean	13.400	14.438
σ	4.428	4.394
N	572	258
Difference of means	1.038	

Facebook's position as a vehicle for affective news dissemination is confirmed by the finding that the news items that users find on *Facebook* have a significantly greater affective load statistically (p < .001), according to the Mann–Whitney test (Table 12).

In terms of usefulness, the news items shared on *Facebook* also show a significant difference ($p < .001$) in the sense that they obtain a higher rating (average = 19.398, σ = 4.324) than those shared on other platforms (average = 18.306, $\sigma = 4.399$). The result of the Mann–Whitney test was not significant for the other types of social networks and specific platforms.

> Social news consumption varies between the incidental reader, who connects for leisure or entertainment, and the routine reader, who monitors the networks for news items of interest

4.2.5. Differences between news topics and the social network where they are shared (H5)

According to Pearson's chi-square, no relationship was found between the type of news item or the type of social network on which the news item is shared in the cases of

- OASN χ^2 (3, N = 784) = 4.77, p = .190
- CSSN (3, N = 784) = 6.70, p = .072
- Instagram χ^2 (3, N = 784) = 2.21, p = .530
- WhatsApp χ^2 (3, N = 784) = 0.50, p = .918

This leads to the conclusion that these categories are independent of each other.

On the contrary, the *p*-value was significant for the relationship between news topics and two social networks: *Twitter* and *Facebook*. In the case of *Twitter*, Pearson's chi-square yielded values of χ^2 (3, N = 784) = 0.50, p = .006, and in the association with *Facebook* the result was χ^2 (3, N = 784) = 8.03, p = .045.

The biggest differences between the expected and observed distribution for *Twitter* are in a lower presence of hard news than expected and, conversely, an appearance of soft news that exceeds the theoretical distribution (Table 13). In other words, soft news is shared more often on *Twitter* than hard news.

Table 13. Observed and theoretical distribution of cases according to news items shared on *Twitter* and news topic

Shared on *Twitter*	Distribution	Soft	Culture	Hard	Other	Total (rows)
No	Observed	183	84	386	70	723
	Theoretical	192.739	86.686	377.177	66.398	
Sí	Observed	26	10	23	2	61
	Theoretical	16.261	7.314	31.823	5.602	
	Total (columns)	209	94	409	72	784

In the case of news items shared on *Facebook*, the differences are found in culture news and soft news, which are above and below the theoretical distribution, respectively (Table 14). That is, culture news is more commonly shared on *Facebook* compared with the other platforms and services.

Table 14. Observed and theoretical distribution of cases according to news items shared on *Facebook* and news topic

Shared on *Facebook*	Distribution	Soft	Culture	Hard	Other	Total (rows)
No	Observed	121	38	218	39	416
	Theoretical	110.898	49.878	217,020	38.204	
Sí	Observed	88	56	191	33	368
	Theoretical	98.102	44.122	191,980	33.796	
	Total (columns)	209	94	409	72	784

5. Conclusions

The results obtained show that the type of social network has a greater influence than the type of exposure on user behaviors when they consume and disseminate information on social networks.

Thus, on the one hand, it has been found that there is no relationship between the type of exposure and the degree of reading of the news item. However, the relationship with the type of social network on which the news is shared was verified, so that routine exposure and direct consumption usually lead to sharing on closed networks, while incidental exposure usually leads to sharing on open networks.

These data can be interpreted as meaning that exposures that require more effort or are linked to a greater interest in the content are more likely to be shared on closed networks; That is, when the reader performs an active search (direct consumption) or carries out a monitoring routine, they usually share that news in more private environments that are also aimed at a more specific

> Among the factors that influence the dissemination of news on social networks is whether the network itself is open –like *Facebook* or *Twitter*– or closed –like *WhatsApp*

audience. Meanwhile, on open networks, there is a tendency to share more superficial information that users simply "bump into."

> News items that require more effort are often shared in closed networks, while in open networks there is a tendency to share more superficial information

This conclusion confirms the finding of **Kümpel**, **Karnowski**, and **Keyling** (2015), who already pointed out that the type of network was one of the factors that determines the kind of content that is shared. In contrast, this differs from the results collected by **Thorson** (2020), who established that there were hardly any differences between the consumption and spreading of news on *Facebook* (open social network) or *WhatsApp* (closed network).

Likewise, this conclusion has interesting implications when connected with that obtained by **Salaverría** *et al*. (2020), who found that hoaxes or false information, related precisely to more relevant news, are shared much more easily on closed networks. This begs the question of whether the false information is shared primarily in closed environments because of the type of information they contain, or whether the reason for this dynamic is that users find this information not so much incidentally, but rather routinely, or whether it is a type of content they actively seek.

In this sense, the fact that the type of exposure does not have such a clear influence coincides with the conclusions obtained by **Park** and **Kaye** (2020), although it contrasts with other previous studies, such as that of **Fletcher** and **Nielsen** (2018), who established that incidence more clearly, especially in reference to incidental exposure and the consumption and sharing of news items on social networks.

In view of the results obtained, H2 has likewise been refuted. That is, the level of habitual news consumption does not influence the degree of reading of the content that is shared. This conclusion is also a novelty with respect to the study by **Fletcher** and **Nielsen** (201), who found that the frequency of habitual consumption positively correlated with the type of exposure and the degree of reading, or that of **Kümpel**, **Karnowski**, and **Keyling** (2015), who also established a relationship between the level of consumption and the degree of reading.

It was also found that the level of enjoyment of the news influences the degree of reading, verifying H3. Thus, the more the user enjoys reading the news item that is shared, the more deeply it is read.

This conclusion is also a novelty compared with the results obtained by **Fletcher** and **Nielsen** (2018), who concluded that the characteristics of the subjects, in particular their age, clearly influenced their behavior patterns when it came to consuming and disseminating news. This finding may be conditioned by the nature of our sample, since the users were adults and young adults. Habits of older or younger age groups may show different characteristics in this regard.

H4, as well as the fact that the evaluation of the news items varies according to the type of network, was also verified:

- news items shared on *Facebook* have more affect and are more useful than those shared on other platforms;
- the most emotionally charged news items are mainly shared on open social networks; and
- news items with the highest perception of usefulness are shared outside of *Twitter*.

These conclusions confirm those obtained by **Fletcher** and **Nielsen** (2018), who also found a relationship between the usefulness of the news item and a greater probability of being shared on *Facebook* rather than *Twitter*. Likewise, it is also noted that affective content predominates on open social networks.

Finally, there are differences in the topics of the news items that are consumed and disseminated according to social network (H5). Thus, while on *Twitter* a greater preference toward soft news was found, on the rest of the social networks and platforms no significant difference was found. This last conclusion relates to that obtained by **Salaverría** *et al*. (2020) regarding the distribution of content, specifically that of hoaxes and false information, which are more easily disseminated on networks such as *WhatsApp*.

The findings and conclusions of this study should be interpreted with a number of limitations in mind. First, the population studied only refers to adults between the ages of 18 and 39 years, so the characteristics and traits found may not be common to other age groups, such as adolescents or the more mature public. In addition, the population of female subjects with university studies and higher income levels is overrepresented in the sample as a whole, which must be taken into account when interpreting the results.

> There are no significant differences between the degree of reading of news items and the type of social network where they are shared, nor does the level of habitual news consumption influence the degree of reading of news items that are shared

This study highlights a number of significant differences that future studies could subject to experimental designs to verify whether there is a causal relationship between the factors compared in this study.

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7. Appendix

Questionnaire text and questions

Presentation

In this questionnaire we will ask you to think about the latest news item or link you shared on social media or sent to a person or group of people (for example, a *WhatsApp* or *Facebook* group).

Please think about your last *Facebook* post, the last email you sent, or the last mobile message or text message you sent that contains a link to some kind of content or that reports on an event.

It doesn't have to specifically be a news story published in traditional media; it can be a blog post or any other type of content.

Once you have identified the piece of information that you sent, keep it in mind, because all the questions we are going to ask you next will refer back to that specific news item or piece of information.

BLOCK 1:

Q1. Did you read the news item before you shared it?
Answer: Multiple choice

Yes, I visited the link to the full text, and I read the news in depth.
Yes, I visited the link to the full text, but I only read the news superficially or skimmed it.
I only read the headline or preview of the news item; I did not visit the link to the actual text.

Q2. Please indicate the URL of the latest news item you shared, whether on *Facebook*, in instant messaging (*WhatsApp*, *Telegram*, *Line*, etc.), by email, or by any other means. Please include the full URL, and not just the website. For example, please provide: *https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/3472075/0/china-inaugura-puente-mar-mas-largo-mundo/*

instead of only providing *www.20minutos.es*.
If the news did not link to any URL, please copy the headline or first sentences.

Q3. How did you find the news item that you shared? Please specify which of the following is most correct.
Answer: Multiple choice

1	I was surfing the Internet, not looking for anything in particular, and I came across the news item.
2	I found the news item on a website that I usually visit to read about the latest news.
3	I was looking for information on the subject (on *Google* or another search engine like *Bing*) and I found the news item.
4	I have the website's app installed on my phone and it notified me through an automatic or personalized notification.
5	I learned about the news item from a website's alert service that I am subscribed to, from a newsletter, or from other means such as the website's *Telegram* channel.
6	A friend or contact gave me the link or notified me of the news item by email, mobile messaging, or by tagging me on social networks.
7	I was looking at my social networks and I found the news item in a post that someone published but without mentioning me directly, nor posting it in a group I am part of.
8	Other (specify).

Q4. [Only for those who chose option 6 in Q3] **Specifically, how did you get the news item? Please specify the option that best fits your situation.**
Answer: Multiple choice

By email.
By private message on a social network (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, etc.).
Someone tagged me in a *Facebook* post or mentioned me on *Twitter* to notify me of the news item.
They sent me a private message through a mobile messaging app (*WhatsApp*, *Telegram*, *Line*, *Facebook Messenger,* etc.).
I read the news in a private mobile messaging group (*WhatsApp*, *Telegram*, *Line*, *Facebook Messenger*, etc.).
Other (specify).

Q5. [For those who chose option 7 in Q3] On which social network did you find the question?
Answer: Multiple choice

- *Facebook*
- *Twitter*
- *Instagram*
- Other (specify)

BLOCK 2

Q6. How did you share this news item?
Answer: Multiple choice

1	On a social network (*Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, etc.) as a post so that all my contacts could see it.
2	On social networks, but I tagged a specific person, either on *Facebook* or *Instagram* or by mentioning them on *Twitter*. Nevertheless, the post was public, and all my contacts could see it.
3	In a private group or restricted community on *Facebook* or any other social network, so that only members of that group or community could see it.
4	In a private *WhatsApp*, *Line*, *Telegram*, or *Facebook Messenger* group.
5	I sent it to a specific contact via instant messaging (*WhatsApp*, *Line*, *Telegram*, or *Facebook Messenger*).
6	By email, with a given person or group of people.
7	By mass email to a large group of people (more than 50).
8	Other (specify).

Q7A. [Only for those who chose option 1 or 2 in Q6] On which specific social network did you share this news item? (You can specify more than one if you shared it on more than one.)
Answer: Multiple choice, more than one option can be chosen.

- *Facebook*
- *Twitter*
- *Instagram*
- Other

Q7B. [Only for those who chose option 4 or 5 in Q6]. What specific application, tool, or channel did you use to share this news item? (You can specify more than one if you shared it on more than one.)

- *WhatsApp*
- *Line*
- *Telegram*
- *Facebook Messenger*
- Other

Q8. Below we present a series of statements about the content that you shared that you previously specified, and that we are talking about.

Please indicate to what extent you agree with each of these statements. 1 means "Do not agree" and 5 means "Strongly agree."

1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Strongly disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Strongly agree, 5 = Strongly agree

I liked the content.
I enjoyed the content.
The content is positive.
The content is entertaining.
The content is valuable (in general, to me, to my friends, or to society).
The content is good and of quality.
The content is useful.
The content helped me to be informed.
The content is relevant to my life.