

# Perceptions of journalism and trust in news among traditionalist and digitalist media users: A comparative analysis of Denmark, Spain and USA

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## Abstract

This study analyses trust in news and the relevance granted to journalism by different user profiles in three countries (Denmark, Spain and the United States), each from a different media system as identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004). For this research we used two online surveys (2019, 2020) carried out by the Reuters Institute with more than 2000 people in each country. Our results show that users who consume news through newspapers, radios and television trust news more than those whose main source of information are digital devices. Traditionalist users also have a higher degree of satisfaction with the classic functions of journalism: making the powerful accountable (adversarial function), disseminating current information (disseminating function) and explaining current events to the public (interpretative function). There are differences between countries, especially in the evaluation of the adversarial function. Spaniards, who belong to the polarized pluralist system, are the ones who worst value its fulfilment among their country's media.

**Keywords:** journalism; trust; media repertoires; digital technology; media systems

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**Resum.** *Percepcions del periodisme i la confiança en les notícies entre usuaris de mitjans tradicionals i digitals: una anàlisi comparativa de Dinamarca, Espanya i els EUA*

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Aquest estudi analitza la confiança en les notícies i la rellevància atorgada al periodisme per diferents perfils d'usuaris en tres països (Dinamarca, Espanya i els Estats Units), pertanyents a cadascun dels sistemes mediàtics identificats per Hallin i Mancini (2004). Per a aquesta recerca utilitzem dues enquestes en línia (2019 i 2020) realitzades per l'Institut Reuters a més de dues mil persones en cada país. Els nostres resultats mostren que els usuaris que consumeixen notícies a través de diaris, ràdios i televisió confien més en les notícies que aquells que tenen com a principal font d'informació els dispositius digitals. Els usuaris tradicionals també tenen un major grau de satisfacció amb les funcions clàssiques del periodisme: vigilar els poderosos (funció de «gos guardià»), difondre informació d'actualitat (funció disseminadora) i explicar l'actualitat al públic (funció interpretativa). Existeixen diferències entre països, especialment en la valoració de la funció de «gos guardià». Els espanyols, que pertanyen al sistema pluralista polaritzat, són els que pitjor valoren el seu compliment entre els mitjans de comunicació del seu país.

**Paraules clau:** periodisme; confiança; repertoris mediàtics; tecnologia digital; sistemes mediàtics

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**Resumen.** *Percepciones del periodismo y la confianza en las noticias entre usuarios de medios tradicionales y digitales: un análisis comparativo de Dinamarca, España y EE. UU.*

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Este estudio analiza la confianza en las noticias y la relevancia otorgada al periodismo por diferentes perfiles de usuarios en tres países (Dinamarca, España y Estados Unidos), pertenecientes a cada uno de los sistemas mediáticos identificados por Hallin y Mancini (2004). Para esta investigación utilizamos dos encuestas en línea (2019 y 2020) realizadas por el Instituto Reuters a más de dos mil personas en cada país. Nuestros resultados muestran que los usuarios que consumen noticias a través de periódicos, radios y televisión confían más en las noticias que aquellos cuya principal fuente de información son los dispositivos digitales. Los usuarios tradicionalistas también tienen un mayor grado de satisfacción con las funciones clásicas del periodismo: vigilar a los poderosos (función de «perro guardián»), difundir información de actualidad (función diseminadora) y explicar la actualidad al público (función interpretativa). Existen diferencias entre países, especialmente en la valoración de la función de «perro guardián». Los españoles, que pertenecen al sistema pluralista polarizado, son los que peor valoran su cumplimiento entre los medios de comunicación de su país.

**Palabras clave:** periodismo; confianza; repertorios mediáticos; tecnología digital; sistemas mediáticos

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the internet has unquestionably risen to prominence as a space for interpersonal and public communication, marking a turning point in communicative practices and social interaction (Jordan, 2013). From a personal point of view, in addition to the traditional face-to-face context citizens have in the digital environment a new space for their personal development and socialization, with its own peculiarities given its

technological conditions (Serrano-Puche, 2013). As far as institutions are concerned, digital technology has made it possible to open new channels for corporate communication and, in the case of journalism, this is just the latest technological innovation that the profession has witnessed throughout its history since the first printed publications appeared (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2009; Sánchez Aranda, 2020).

According to a media ecology perspective (Postman, 1970), different types of media are interrelated, so that the emergence, evolution, hybridization or extinction of communication interfaces and practices can be understood through an *intermedia* dimension (media as species) and an *environmental* dimension (media as environments) when an ecological metaphor is applied to them (Scolari, 2015). On the one hand, media are like “species” that live in the same ecosystem and establish relationships with each other. On the other hand, technologies – from writing to digital media – create environments that affect the subjects who use them by shaping their perception and cognition. As McLuhan’s (1964) well-known aphorism states, “The medium is the message.” In other words, the media influence society not only through the content they convey, but also through the characteristics of the medium itself.

Against a context of continuous technological change in communication, it is still unknown how certain individual elements, such as consumer profile or nationality, influence perceptions of journalism and trust in news. The impact of technological change and the pandemic on journalism has had a notable effect on the trust and perception that citizens have of news and journalism. The growing polarisation of opinions and a distrust in the media has also led to greater fragmentation of the media and a reduction of shared points of reference.

Instead of relying on a set of reliable and shared news sources, citizens often turn to selective news sources that reinforce their own opinions (Rodríguez-Virgili, Sierra and Serrano-Puche, 2022), leading to greater division in society. This situation has been exacerbated by the pandemic, in which the media faced an increase in fake news and the consequences it had on citizens’ trust (Salaverría et al., 2020). Resolving these challenges lies not only in improving transparency, but also in educating people on the importance of trustworthy and quality journalism (Medina, Étayo-Pérez and Serrano-Puche, 2023). Moreover, as a staunch defender of democracy, journalism must continue to play its pivotal role in holding power to account, and in bringing to light issues that are of vital concern to the people. In this paper, we examine how overall satisfaction with the performance of journalistic roles is related to individual trust in news. Three countries are analysed, Denmark, Spain and the United States, each corresponding to one of the three different media systems categorized by Hallin and Mancini (2004): the North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model (Denmark), the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model (Spain), and the North Atlantic or Liberal Model (United States).

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the primary devices used by users to consume news in Denmark, Spain and the United States?
- RQ2: Are there significant differences in the perception of the relevance of journalism among users belonging to different profiles of news consumption?
- RQ3: Is there a difference in levels of trust in news between those who consume news through newspapers, radios and television and those whose main source of information is digital devices?
- RQ4: How does the degree of satisfaction with the performance of journalistic functions affect levels of trust in the news?
- RQ5: Are there differences in these issues, considering that the countries analysed belong to different media systems?

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. *News access*

Nowadays, there are several ways to get information about current affairs (Martínez-Costa, Sánchez-Blanco and Serrano-Puche, 2020). A variety of news sources are available to audiences, including print, audio-visual, digital and mobile platforms, creating a “news supermarket” in which perceived value and usefulness are determinant factors of users’ daily decisions (Schröder, 2015). Citizens evaluate what the media can offer them in a given situation, how they complement each other, and the emotional and social impact of their choices (Madianou and Miller, 2012). Thus, audiences routinely combine different technologies, brands and journalistic genres to satisfy their needs for information, opinion formation, sociability and entertainment (Hasebrink and Dömeier, 2012). This combination of different sources is one of the keys to media consumption, and although in some ways it has always been associated with news consumption, in the digital age “the emerging patterns of cross-media use are far more seamless and blurred, hybrid and complex than in the past” (Bjur et al., 2013: 15).

This is what the “media repertoire” perspective explores, which can be defined as “the set of media that a person uses regularly [and] can be viewed as relatively stable patterns of media practices across media” (Hasebrink and Hepp, 2017: 367). Aspects such as the familiarity that the citizen already has with the medium, the relative advantage of its use (greater benefits than costs), the fact that the medium fits into the person’s daily routines and lifestyle, its accessibility, and social pressure are all reasons that may lead users to choose a news medium or use it more frequently (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2017). This leads to diversity in the internal architecture of repertoires, which may oscillate between traditional and digital media, and may be complementary or exclusive. At the same time, some repertoires are built around

one medium (e.g., TV), while others are constructed according to the type of content (news), depending on whether the user prefers one element or another (Kim, 2016). All of this shows the complexity of motivations and choices in media consumption relating to daily habits and what users find valuable (Schröder and Kobbarnagel, 2010; Costera Meijer, 2013).

Thus, individual and structural factors influence the configuration of media repertoire, and contextualise it socially and spatiotemporally (Peters and Schröder, 2018). While it is true that the particular media constellation revolving around one individual may be quite different to that of another (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007), research identifies clusters of shared media often associated with particular characteristics of users, depending on factors such as gender, age, education, income level, political leanings, etc. (Lee and Chyi, 2014). Their configuration is also influenced by the characteristics of the media system of each country, as highlighted by Adoni et al. (2017), who coordinated an analysis of media repertoires from ten European countries. Precisely because of the specificity of the elements that shape media repertoires, research findings cannot be easily transferred to other environments. In any case, several studies on media repertoires confirm the complementarity of the use of traditional media and new platforms, even if the predominance of the former is increasingly losing ground (Molyneux, 2019; Taneja et al., 2012; Yuan, 2011).

## 2.2. *Functions of Journalism*

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, in the now classic book *The Elements of Journalism* (2001), elaborated the essential principles of journalism. These include a commitment to truth (coupled with the discipline of verification), loyalty to the citizenry, independence from those being reported on, ensuring completeness and proportionality of news, providing a forum for public criticism and compromise, and serving “as an independent check on power” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001: 112).

Among these principles, there are some that are more highly valued by both professionals and citizens. The watchdog role, for example, arises from the classical liberal view of the power relationship between government and society as a mechanism for enhancing accountability (Norris, 2014). This task of scrutinizing institutions and elites to expose irregularities (Schultz, 1998) is related to the characterization of the press as the “fourth estate”. In addition to the task of monitoring the powerful, journalism’s institutional status is linked to the social function of fulfilling citizens’ need to understand current events. This analytical task makes no sense if it is not accompanied by the informative function itself (keeping the citizen informed about what is happening), but it goes beyond the mere transmission of current events and is linked to a ritual vision of communication (Carey, 1989).

Following Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), journalism has three key functions: the adversarial function of controlling the powerful, the dissemination function

of immediacy, and the interpretive function of understanding. However, digitisation has led to a rethinking of the validity of these paradigms (Peters and Broersma, 2013, 2017). Journalists must incorporate new techniques and work dynamics not only in production and distribution, but also in their relationship with the audience (Mellado and Hermida, 2023). Moreover, the digital environment favours new intermediaries that extend beyond traditional media actors and borders (González-Tosat and Sádaba-Chalezquer, 2021; Hallin, Mellado and Mancini, 2023; Karlsson, Ferrer Conill and Örnebring, 2023).

As McLuhan (1964) argued, the characteristics of any medium have social implications that may affect citizens' perceptions of journalism itself and the functions it is called to perform, beyond the content conveyed. With technological and sociocultural changes, the question arises as to whether everyday citizens value journalistic work for a healthy democracy as much as the academic community does (Carlson, Robinson and Lewis, 2021; McNair, 2012; Schudson, 2008), especially as journalism is now delivered through both traditional media (press, radio, television) and digital devices.

### *2.3. Media Trust*

The performance of journalism's duties according to generally accepted professional standards is the basis for the media's trustworthiness. As Lee (2010) noted in examining the predictors of trust in the media, the truthfulness of the information disseminated, impartiality, the media's independence from external actors, and its commitment to the interests of the public are some of the variables associated with the credibility of the media that make it trustworthy.

Trust is one of the factors that influence people's relationship with the news and therefore affect their consumption of information (Tsfati and Ariely, 2014; Fletcher and Park, 2017). Therefore, and in a context in which traditional media have seen their centrality in the public space displaced to coexist with other news actors (Chadwick, 2017), trust in news has been a relevant issue in academic research on journalism in recent decades (Jakobsson and Stiernstedt, 2023; Kohring and Matthes, 2007; Meyer, 1988; Strömbäck et al., 2020). According to some previous research (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019; Vara-Miguel, 2018), those who inform themselves through traditional channels show higher trust in news and media than those who inform themselves primarily through social media or digital-native media.

The media cannot enforce trust but must earn it by being credible. Therefore, quality is a necessary ingredient to ensure credibility of information and thus trust in the media system as a reliable interpreter of social reality (Palau Sampio and Gómez Mompert, 2017). Trust is a question of attitude, the result of a cognitive process in which the person subjectively examines and evaluates the qualities of an information source (be it a media organisation or a journalist) or the content of its messages (Serrano-Puche, 2017).

However, it is worth considering both the political-cultural context in which this relationship develops, and the citizen's expectations of the media,

as these influence their perceptions and attitudes toward journalism. Previous research such as studies by Aalberg, van Aelst and Curran (2010) and Brüggemann et al. (2014) have consistently demonstrated that national traits influence media systems, following the seminal work by Hallin and Mancini (2004). These authors defined three models (the democratic corporatist model, the polarized pluralist model, and the liberal model) by applying four main dimensions of analysis: the circulation of the press and the structure of media markets; the degree of linkage or “political parallelism” between mass media, political parties and other civil society institutions such as trade unions; the level of professionalism of journalists; and the degree of state interventionism in the media. Following these assumptions, we expect to find clear national differences between those surveyed.

In the case of Spain, previous research shows that scepticism towards the media is higher among young people, those disinterested in current affairs, and those who prefer social networks to keep up to date with the news (Pérez-Escoda and Pedrero-Esteban, 2021; Vara-Miguel, 2020). Based on a representative survey of the Spanish population (n=1,000), Masip, Suau and Ruiz-Caballero (2020) point out that ideology plays an important role in media trust, and they observe a clear polarisation in consumption, giving rise to differentiated media ecosystems according to ideology, which is consistent with other studies (López-Rico, González-Esteban and Hernández-Martínez, 2020) and corresponds to a polarised pluralistic media system such as the Spanish one. Based on the Digital News Report, Moreno-Moreno and Sanjurjo-San-Martín (2020) also conclude that users who place themselves politically towards the right trust less in the journalistic brands they consume and, therefore, consumption is moderated, while users who place themselves on the left of the ideological spectrum are more faithful and trusting in their consumption of the media.

Regarding research on media consumption and trust in Denmark, authors such as Schröder, Blach-Ørsten and Kæmsgaard (2020) and Syvertsen et al. (2014) propose to integrate it into a new “Nordic media system” detached from the original democratic corporatist model suggested by Hallin and Mancini (2004). They point out that there are salient news consumption commonalities that are specific to the Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland), such as preferred sources of news, pathways to news, paying for online news, and trust in the news. According to Schröder, Blach-Ørsten and Kæmsgaard (2020), the Nordic countries stand out as a bastion for print newspapers. This conclusion is reinforced when considering their willingness to pay for digital news. Moreover, these countries exhibit a remarkable level of brand loyalty, particularly when compared to the Southern system. Additionally, the Nordic region is renowned for its high and unwavering confidence in political institutions and its societal trust as a whole, which extends to its trust in the media.

Finally, the report “American Views 2020: Trust, Media and Democracy” (Gallup and Knight Foundation, 2020) uses a survey of 20,000 American

adults to provide insights into media trust in the country. Despite the high value that Americans place on the media's traditional roles in society, such as providing accurate news and holding powerful interests accountable, citizens are increasingly critical of the media's performance in fulfilling these objectives. Although 81% of respondents believe that the news media is either "critical" or "very important" to democracy, an increasing number of citizens perceive the media as underperforming in these areas. This declining trust is linked to a growing perception of political bias in the news media, with perceived bias rising substantially from 62% in 2007 to 83% in 2020 (Gallup and Knight Foundation, 2020). This phenomenon is exacerbated by both conjunctural phenomena, such as the proliferation of fake news during the Covid-19 pandemic (Salaverría et al., 2020), and the transformation of the media ecosystem, which affords users a high degree of choice (Van Aelst et al., 2017) and results in a battle between various actors to capture their attention (Wu, 2016). Among these new media actors, partisan and alternative sources of information proliferate (Andersen, Shehata and Andersson, 2021), which precisely rely on attacking traditional media, accusing them of being unreliable, as part of their editorial strategy (Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou, 2022). Campaigns are also carried out by populist political entities to discredit and delegitimize journalistic work (Carlson, Robinson and Lewis, 2021; Van Dalen, 2021). All of this contributes to increasing scepticism, and even hostility, towards the media (Gunther et al., 2017).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. *Design and procedure*

This study is based on the annual survey conducted by YouGov for the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (DNR), an international study of digital information consumption sponsored by Oxford University since 2012 and published in Spain by the University of Navarra since 2014. The fieldwork was carried out between the end of January and the beginning of February in both 2019 and 2020, and is now available online at Reuters' website.<sup>1</sup> The YouGov organization selected about 2,000 users in each country to assemble national panels to survey digital news consumption. DNR participants are adult internet users who have consumed news in the past month and are representative of the online population by sociodemographic and geographic criteria. The data were weighted by age, gender, region, news consumption and education level using official census and industry-accepted majority data to reflect the population of the countries analysed.

Since the DNR does not always use the same list of questions, this study used the 2019 and 2020 surveys, which required an adjustment to the statistical tests performed. Specifically, the surveys included digital users from

1. <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report>>.

Denmark (2019: n=2011; 2020: n=2061), Spain (2019: n=2005; 2020: n=2006), and the United States (2019: n=2012; 2020: n=2055).

It is worth noting that the survey is limited by the samples used. Since the survey was conducted online, it is not representative of the population as a whole, but rather of the digital population. In addition, as with any survey, respondents' recollection or perception (self-reported data) does not always match actual use of the media and social networks analysed. Conversely, questions are asked about the stated preferences or motivations of the digital users.

A final notable limitation due to the sample would be that the study presented here is an analysis limited to 2019 and 2020. As mentioned earlier, the questions change from year to year, so the scope of the results in this sense is limited. Future studies should conduct longitudinal analyses (preferably with panel data) using other data sources.

### 3.2. Questionnaire and variables

The online questionnaire contains a wide range of questions about news consumption. Specifically for this study, a statistical analysis was performed on the following questions, which were correlated with variables related to the user's country of origin and profile. This last variable was created depending on the preferred news sources. Those who consume news using traditional sources (newspapers, radio or TV) were assigned to the "*traditionalist*" category, while those who consume mainly digital devices (smartphones, tablets or computers) were assigned to the "*digitalist*" category.

The questions chosen were:

- How important, if at all, do you think independent journalism is for the proper functioning of society? (Users had to show their opinion by choosing from a Likert scale ranging from "extremely important" to "not at all important")
- We are now going to ask you whether you think the news media in your country is doing a good job or not. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: (Users had to show their opinion by choosing from a Likert scale ranging from "extremely important" to "not at all important")
  - The news media monitors and scrutinises powerful people and businesses
  - The news media keeps me up to date with what's going on
  - The news media helps me understand the news of the day
- I think you can trust most news most of the time. (Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree")
- I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time. (Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree")
- I think I can trust news in social media most of the time. (Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree")

### 3.3. Data analysis

First, we identified the DNR questions related to the aspect we wanted to measure: perceptions of the role of journalism, trust in news, and level of satisfaction with the performance of journalistic duties. Since the DNR is a more general study than the one presented here, we selected the variables we were interested in, so as to limit the responses to the specific topic of our research. Because the responses were from a survey, the data were subjected to a reliability test. In all cases, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was above .73.

## 4. Results

A preliminary descriptive analysis shows significant national differences in the data analysed. In general terms, the profile of "traditionalists" is the least numerous and shows the least variation. This is not the case with the profile of "digitalists", where notable differences can be observed. As Table 1 shows, the majority profile in the three countries is the "half and half", consisting of users who migrate easily backwards and forwards between the two; the variations in this profile are close to ten percentage points. However, this difference does not seem to be in line with internet penetration, as the United States, which has lower penetration than Denmark, obtains higher values. Notwithstanding their volume, we have decided to focus the attention of our research on the first two profiles ("traditionalists" and "digitalists") as we believe that, since they are exclusive values, they will offer a greater contrast that will lead to more solid conclusions.

**Table 1.** Internet penetration and user type per country

Country	Internet penetration	Digitalist users <sup>a</sup>	Traditionalist users <sup>b</sup>	Half and half users <sup>c</sup>
Denmark	97.9%	30.4%	20.4%	49.2%
Spain	91.9%	24.2%	23.1%	52.7%
United States	94%	33.4%	21.6%	45%

<sup>a</sup> Users who mostly access news through electronic devices (smartphones, tablets and computers).

<sup>b</sup> Users accessing news via traditional sources (newspapers, radio, TV).

<sup>c</sup> Users who migrate easily backwards and forwards between the two.

Source: Internet World Stats and adapted from Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey (2020), conducted by YouGov.

Several different t-tests were conducted to compare responses to the variables on relevance of journalism, fulfilment of journalistic roles, trust in news in general, self-consumed news, and social media news between two groups ("traditionalists" and "digitalists"). Of the five variables analysed, the differences were not statistically significant in two of them: confidence in self-consumed news and fulfilment of journalistic roles. The means of the two groups analysed for the other three variables (journalism relevance, trust in all news, and trust in social media news) showed a significant difference. Regarding journalism relevance for the correct functioning of society, "digitalists" give

greater relevance to journalism ( $M = 1.72$ ,  $SD = 0,88$ ) than “traditionalists” ( $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ );  $t(2478) = 11.49$ ,  $p = <.001$ . Looking at trust in news, “traditionalists” show greater trust for all news ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and social media news ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) than “digitalists”, ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ );  $t(2478) = -3.45$ ,  $p = <.001$  for most news and ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ );  $t(2478) = -6.64$ ,  $p = <.001$  for social media news. As mentioned, trust in self-consumed news and the fulfilment of journalistic roles were the only variables where no statistically significant differences were found.

Analysis of the differences between profiles regarding the degree of satisfaction with journalistic functions yields interesting results. When comparing satisfaction with the adversarial, interpretative and disseminating functions, the first two show statistically significant differences. “Traditionalists” seem to be on average more satisfied with the degree of fulfilment of the adversarial function ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) than “digitalists” ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 1$ );  $t(2622) = -.62$ ,  $p = .01$ . The same is true for the interpretive function, where “traditionalist” users are also more satisfied ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) than “digitalists” ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = .99$ );  $t(2622) = -.89$ ,  $p = .05$ .

**Table 2.** One-way analysis of variance by profile

Variable	df	F	P
Journalism relevance	2 <sup>a</sup> , 2477 <sup>b</sup>	23.57	<.001
Trust most news	2 <sup>a</sup> , 2477 <sup>b</sup>	83.02	<.001
Trust my news	2 <sup>a</sup> , 2477 <sup>b</sup>	33.76	<.001
Trust social media news	2 <sup>a</sup> , 2477 <sup>b</sup>	20.56	<.001
Adversarial	2 <sup>c</sup> , 2620 <sup>d</sup>	3.83	.02
Disseminator	2 <sup>c</sup> , 2620 <sup>d</sup>	25.22	<.001
Interpretative	2 <sup>c</sup> , 2620 <sup>d</sup>	18.54	<.001

<sup>a</sup> 2020 Between groups comparison.

<sup>b</sup> 2020 Within groups comparison.

<sup>c</sup> 2019 Between groups comparison.

<sup>d</sup> 2019 Within groups comparison.

Source: Adapted from Reuters Institute Digital News Report surveys (2020, 2019), conducted by YouGov.

With regard to the influence of the country on the variables analysed, and given that this is a variable with more than two groups (Denmark, Spain and the United States), a one-way analysis of variance was chosen to test for differences between groups (Table 2). Our results show that there is a statistically significant difference in all the variables analysed between at least two groups. Tukey’s HSD Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of journalism relevance was significantly different between Spain and the other two countries ( $p = <.001$ , 95% C.I. = [.21, .43] with the US; and  $p = <.001$ , 95% C.I. = [.09, .31] with Denmark). Regarding trust in self-consumed news, Spanish results show statistically significant differences ( $p = <.011$ , 95% C.I. = [.12, .35] with the US; and  $p = <.001$ , 95% C.I. = [.29, .52] with Denmark). As for trust in most news and trust in social media news, all inter country differences are statistically significant according to Tukey’s HSD test.

Our results offer greater diversity when looking at journalism role fulfilment variations crossed with the country variable. Regarding the adversarial role, according to Tukey’s HSD test, there is no statistically significant difference in mean scores between the US and Spain ( $p = .89$ , 95% C.I. =  $[-.09, .13]$ ) or between Denmark and the US ( $p = .08$ , 95% C.I. =  $[-.21, .01]$ ). In contrast, the difference in mean scores is different between the European countries ( $p = .03$ , 95% C.I. =  $[-.23, -.01]$ ). As for the other two journalistic roles analysed, it is the mean comparison between European countries that shows not to be statistically significant, both for the disseminator role ( $p = .47$ , 95% C.I.  $[-.052, .16]$ ) and the interpretative role ( $p = .32$ , 95% C.I. =  $[-.04, .17]$ ).

Having analysed these descriptive results, we proceeded to conduct a more in-depth analysis to see to what extent nationality or profile explain the position on the relevance of journalism or the fulfilment of its functions. Given the nature of our variables, and since they belong to two independent years, two ordinal regressions were conducted. The predictor variables were tested a priori to verify there was no violation of the assumption of no multicollinearity. The first regression shows a significant improvement in fit of the final model relative to the intercept-only model [ $\chi^2(4) = 208.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. Both the Pearson chi-square test [ $\chi^2(17) = 23.42$ ,  $p = .136$ ] and the deviance test [ $\chi^2(17) = 23.41$ ,  $p = .136$ ] were non-significant. We found the two independent variables analysed to contribute to the model. As we can see in the first regression (Table 3), “digitalist” users are more likely to give journalism a greater importance for the proper functioning of society than “traditionalists”. Similarly, user nationality is also relevant, as Spaniards are more likely to think journalism is less relevant than Danish and American respondents.

**Table 3.** Ordinal regression to predict journalism relevance

Parameter	Parameter estimates						
	Odds (B)	S.E.	95% Wald confidence interval		Hypothesis test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald chi-square	Df	p-value
<i>Threshold</i>							
<i>Journalism relevance</i>							
Extremely important	-1.05	.09	-1.21	-.89	170.46	1	<.001
Very important	.19	.08	.03	.35	5.71	1	.02
Somewhat important	2.24	.12	2.02	2.45	433.11	1	<.001
Not very important	3.7	.19	3.33	4.07	382.55	1	<.001
<i>User profile</i>	-.82	.08	-.97	-.67	115.63	1	<.001
<i>Country</i>							
United States	-.61	.09	-.79	-.43	43.58	1	<.001
Denmark	-.31	.09	-.49	-.13	11.24	1	<.001
Spain	0	.	.	.	.	.	.

Dependent variable: journalism relevance model: (Threshold), journalism relevance, country.  
 Source: Adapted from Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey (2020), conducted by YouGov.

The second regression also shows a significant improvement in fit of the final model [ $\chi^2(4) = 950.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ], but significance varies. The Pearson chi-square test resulted significant [ $\chi^2(1625) = 3151.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ] while the deviance test was not [ $\chi^2(1625) = 1692.02$ ,  $p = .121$ ]. Thus, our model's fitness to the data should be handled cautiously. The four independent variables analysed do contribute to the model. In this case, "traditionalist" users are more likely to find news in general trustworthy, while "digitalists" do not,

**Table 4.** Ordinal regression to predict trust in news

Parameter	Parameter estimates						
	Odds (B)	S.E.	95% Wald confidence interval		Hypothesis test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald chi-square	Df	p-value
<b>Threshold</b>							
<i>General trust in news</i>							
Strongly agree	-7.07	.31	-7.67	-6.4	534.45	1	<.001
Tend to agree	-4.17	.29	-3.4	-2.26	203	1	<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	-2.82	.29	-3.39	-2.26	95.46	1	<.001
Tend to disagree	-1.26	.28	-1.8	-.71	19.93	1	<.001
<i>User profile</i>	.28	.08	.13	.43	13.86	1	<.001
<i>Country</i>							
United States	.23	.09	.05	.41	6.05	1	.014
Denmark	-.72	.09	-.9	-.54	59.94	1	<.001
Spain	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Disseminator role</i>							
Strongly agree	-2.38	.28	-2.9	-1.8	74.75	1	<.001
Tend to agree	-1.67	.26	-2.18	-1.15	40.69	1	<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	-1.19	.26	-1.70	-.68	20.63	1	<.001
Tend to disagree	-.61	.28	-1.16	-.07	4.83	1	.028
Strongly disagree	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Interpretative role</i>							
Strongly agree	-3.07	.26	-3.58	-2.55	135.75	1	<.001
Tend to agree	-2.23	.23	-2.69	-1.78	93.42	1	<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	-1.65	.23	-2.1	-1.2	52.64	1	<.001
Tend to disagree	-.87	.23	-1.33	-.42	13.99	1	<.001
Strongly disagree	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Adversarial role</i>							
Strongly agree	-.44	.21	-.85	-.03	4.4	1	<.001
Tend to agree	-.55	.18	-.9	-.2	9.6	1	.002
Neither agree nor disagree	-.52	.18	-.87	-.17	8.42	1	.004
Tend to disagree	-.3	.2	-.68	.08	2.36	1	.125
Strongly disagree	0	.	.	.	.	.	.

Dependent variable: journalism relevance model: (Threshold), trust most news, profile, country, disseminator, interpretative, adversarial.

Source: Adapted from Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey (2019), conducted by YouGov.

as can be seen in Table 4. In terms of national differences, Spaniards tend to trust the news more than Americans, although less than Danes. Finally, regarding the fulfilment of journalism roles, we found that a higher valuation of the former is related to a higher trust in news in general.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

This study presents an analysis of the viewpoints and inclinations exhibited by news consumers from Denmark, Spain and the United States concerning the salience of journalism, the level of confidence they have in news sources, and their overall contentment with the performance of journalistic functions. Against the backdrop of an era characterized by an excess of information and the presence of various analogue and digital media outlets, we aimed to ascertain the primary mode of news consumption among those surveyed (RQ1). Building on earlier investigations conducted in the three nations under examination (Edgerly, 2015; Schröder, 2015; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022), our findings evince the prevalence of cross-media utilization among the users surveyed, with electronic media constituting an entrenched fixture of their information consumption patterns, either as the sole medium or in conjunction with conventional outlets such as print media, radio or television. However, national disparities emerge in this regard: Americans and Danes exhibit a marked preference for digital media, while the discrepancy between adherents to digital versus traditional media among Spaniards is minimal, with a difference of only one percentage point observed.

The statistical tests carried out in this research show that there are statistically significant differences between “digitalists” and “traditionalists” in terms of the importance given to journalism for the proper functioning of society (RQ2). As has already been advanced in the results section, on average, those who access news through electronic devices grant journalism a greater importance for the proper functioning of society. The results suggest that “user profile” was a significant predictor of “journalism relevance” ( $B = -0.82$ ,  $S.E. = 0.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that as “user profile” changes from “digitalist” to “traditionalist”, the odds of being in a higher category of “journalism relevance” decrease. Thus, “digitalists” tend to grant a greater relevance to journalism. These differences are repeated when comparing respondents’ answers from a national perspective. Of the three countries analysed, the differences are only significant when comparing Spain with the other two countries. Spaniards attach less importance to journalism than their American or Danish counterparts. The greatest distance is between Spaniards and Americans (.32), leaving the Danes as the closest (.19). These data are consistent with the differences distinguished by Hallin and Mancini (2004) between liberal (USA) and pluralistic-polarized (Spain) media systems.

Regarding our third research question (RQ3), users who consume news through newspapers, radio or television on average show greater trust in news than users who access news through digital devices. The ordinal regres-

sion analysis presented in Table 4 shows that user profile is a significant predictor of trust in news. Individuals who consume news through newspapers, radio or television on average show greater trust in news than users who access news through digital devices. This finding suggests that users who are more invested in news may be more discerning in their consumption habits, and therefore more likely to trust high-quality sources that align with their interests and values. As we have shown, these differences are largely explained precisely through the user profile (“traditionalist”/“digitalist”). This may be due to the fact that traditional sources are associated exclusively with news consumption, while digital sources are a gateway to other types of content. Therefore, the reason for their use is more independent of the credibility given to the news sources.

When analysing the evaluation of the performance of journalistic functions, it is possible to see that greater satisfaction with their fulfilment is connected to trust in news in general (RQ4). Users who agree more with the statements “The news media monitors and scrutinises powerful people and businesses” (adversarial function), “The news media keeps me up to date with what’s going on” (disseminating function) and “The news media helps me understand the news of the day” (interpretive function) also have higher trust in news in general. These findings are consistent with a classical understanding of journalism as a fundamental actor for democracy (Schudson, 2008), deserving of trust when it fulfils its mandated social functions (Lee, 2010).

Finally, the opinion on the fulfilment of the interpretative and disseminator functions does not seem to respond to national characteristics, and no significant differences are found between Danes, Spaniards and Americans. Where nationality plays a differentiating role is in the adversarial function, in which the view of Spaniards, belonging to the polarized pluralist system, is significantly different to the other two groups. This finding is in line with what has been pointed out by other authors (Rodríguez-Virgili et al., 2022; Strömbäck and Luengo, 2008). Similarly, the opinion on the relevance of journalism for the proper functioning of society, as well as trust in news in general, are also affected by the nationality of the respondent. Americans and Danes consider journalism more relevant than Spaniards, but only Danes trust the news more than Spaniards. Consequently, national differences among respondents have also proved to be important (RQ5).

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