



# News literacy and online news between Egyptian and Spanish youth: Fake news, hate speech and trust in the media

Alfabetización periodística entre jóvenes egipcios y españoles:  
Noticias falsas, discurso de odio y confianza en medios

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## ABSTRACT

Exposure to harmful content, fake news, and hate speech, calls to question whether citizens are 'responsible' when it comes to their online news behavior. This exploratory study aims to positioning news literacy as a mediating factor toward fostering civic responsibility by investigating its role in enhancing youth's online news experience and preparing them against harmful content. News literacy is defined as a multi-structural construct with three main constituents: motivation, knowledge, and skills. The study's main goal is accomplished through delving into youth's online news experience, and assessing their level of news literacy through a mixed methods approach relying on focus group discussions as a qualitative method and survey as a quantitative method. The study is applied to a sample of youth from Egypt and a sample of youth from Spain, on whom comparative analysis is conducted. Findings reveal a positive correlation between news literacy and: the ability to identify fake news, the ability to identify hate speech, engagement with news, caring about the veracity of content before sharing, and motivation to seek news. Negative perceptions about professional news media's performance have been expressed by respondents from both countries, with the main justification being that news media are not fulfilling their role as should be.

## RESUMEN

La exposición a contenidos nocivos, noticias falsas y discursos de odio hace que nos preguntemos si los ciudadanos son «responsables» cuando hablamos de su comportamiento online. Este estudio exploratorio pretende posicionar la alfabetización periodística como un factor mediador hacia el fomento de la responsabilidad cívica, investigando su papel en la mejora de la experiencia de los jóvenes con las noticias online, preparándolos contra los contenidos nocivos. La alfabetización periodística se define como un concepto multiestructural con tres componentes principales: motivación, conocimientos y habilidades. Un objetivo del estudio es profundizar en la experiencia de los jóvenes con las noticias online, evaluando su nivel de alfabetización periodística mediante un enfoque de métodos mixtos que se basan en discusiones de grupos focales y en una encuesta. El estudio se aplica a una muestra de jóvenes de Egipto y a otra de jóvenes de España, a partir de las cuales se realiza un análisis comparativo. Los resultados revelan una correlación positiva entre la alfabetización periodística y: la capacidad de identificar las noticias falsas y el discurso de odio, el compromiso con las noticias, la preocupación por la veracidad del contenido antes de compartirlo y la motivación para buscar noticias. Los encuestados de ambos países han expresado percepciones negativas sobre la eficacia de los medios de comunicación profesionales, con la justificación principal de que los medios de comunicación no están cumpliendo su función como deberían.

## KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

News literacy, news, disinformation, social media, youth, media consumption.  
alfabetización periodística, noticias, desinformación, redes sociales, juventud, consumo de medios.

## 1. Introduction

Although disinformation and misinformation existed historically in the media environment, the current state of "information disorder", as named by Wardle and Derakhshan (2018), is unprecedented. It is having an impact on an individual basis, and on societies and countries, symptomized by division and polarization. March 2020 marked the eruption of a global crisis, which began as a health emergency. Then, the World Health Organization as well as UNESCO announced that we are simultaneously witnessing a "massive infodemic" referring to the waves of COVID-19-related disinformation (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020). "Vaccine hesitancy" has been one of the major consequences of disinformation, and conspiracy theories, and was reported by 90% of the countries worldwide (Schiavo, 2020). With the chaotic online information environment charged with fake news and hate speech, created with the intention to misleadingly manipulate public opinion, news literacy is positioned as a weapon against harmful content online and as a key toward a responsible news experience through which youth can make informed decisions and become more politically engaged. Scholars support the importance of critical analysis and evaluation of online material to face the impact of harmful content; fake news (Pérez-Tornero et al., 2018; Lee, 2018; McGrew et al., 2017; Lotero-Echeverri et al., 2018; Rosenzweig, 2017) and/or hate speech (Gagliardone et al., 2015; Livingstone et al., 2008; Daniels, 2008).

An experiment conducted by Adjin-Tettey (2022) shows that those who received Media and Information Literacy training show a higher ability to detect disinformation and are less likely to share content impulsively. Accordingly, with the current news environment loaded with such harmful content, the study intends to understand how news literacy relates to this context. Are news literate individuals more responsible news users? Can news literacy become a weapon against harmful content online? Stemming from these ideas, conducting this study on samples from two completely different countries, with different cultures, languages, and democratic status; Egypt and Spain, provides essential implications for designing news and media literacy interventions for youth empowerment. The two countries are to a great extent, dissimilar with respect to geographical location and hence culture. Egypt is an African and Arab country with a population that exceeds 105 million. Spain is a European country with a population that exceeds 40 million. This exploratory study is developed with the main goal of positioning news literacy as a mediating factor toward fostering civic responsibility, by investigating its role in enhancing youth's online news experience, and preparing them against harmful content intertwined with the current online information environment. To investigate that, the study addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1: What is the level of news literacy of Spanish and Egyptian youth?
- RQ2: What are the patterns of news use on social media among Spanish and Egyptian youth?
- RQ3: How far are youth exposed to harmful content online and how do they perceive it?
- RQ4: What is the level of news engagement of youth from both countries?
- RQ5: How far do youth from Egypt and Spain trust professional news media?

## 2. Methodology

The study relies on a mixed-method approach, using the survey as a quantitative method and the focus group discussions as a qualitative one. Results from the qualitative study directed the design of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire and focus group discussion session plan were validated by consulting academic experts. The universe of the study is defined as university students who are social media users coming from media and communication academic backgrounds. Accordingly, these criteria were considered for selecting a purposive sample, which includes Egyptian and Spanish youth in the age category of 16 to 25.

Regarding the survey, being an exploratory study, the questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 110 students from Cairo University, Egypt and a sample of 74 students from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), Spain, both being highly ranked universities in big cities. The demographics of respondents from Egypt are as follows: Gender; 85% are females and 15% are males, Age; 98% of respondents are in the age group of more than 20 to 25, with 2% in the age group of 16 to 20. As for the demographics of respondents from Spain: Gender; 66% are females and 34% are males, Age; 57% are in the age group of more than 20 to 25, with 43% in the age group of 16 to 20.

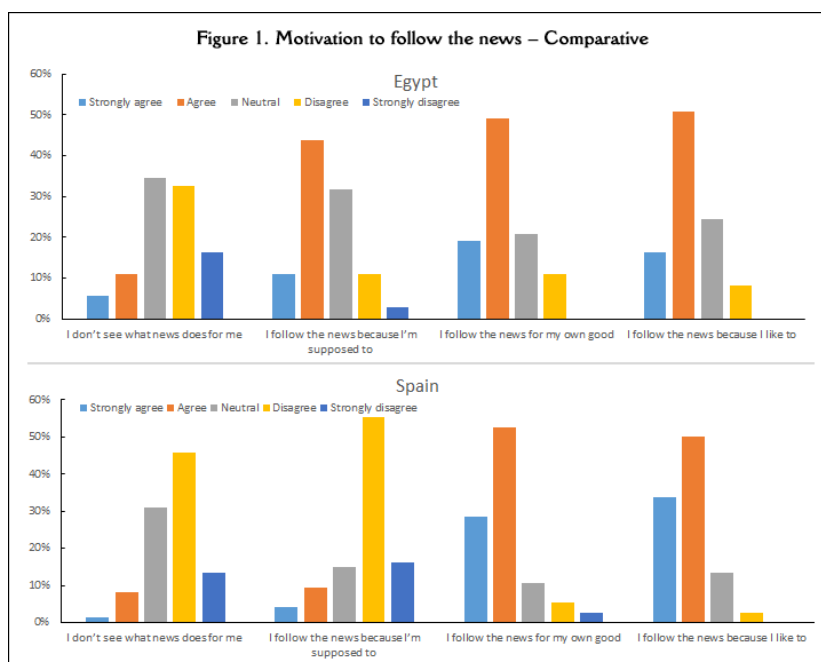
Regarding the focus group discussions, two pilot focus group discussions were conducted with students from two public universities in Egypt and one more conducted with students from a private university: The Arab Academy for Sciences, Technology and Maritime Transport. One focus group discussion was conducted with students from UAB, Spain. Respondents in the focus group discussions were ten in each; half males and half females. Being an exploratory investigation, the study used a purposive sample with a number of participants less than that required for the results to be representative. It is also important to mention that given some access difficulties, the number of participants from Spain is fewer than that of participants from Egypt.

### 3. Findings: Youth's online news experience

Highlighting the similarities and differences between both countries, this section is divided into sections of pertinence to the main research question.

#### 3.1. High levels of news literacy

News Literacy, regarded as a multi-dimensional construct, was measured by measuring motivation and knowledge areas based on Maksl et al. (2015) News Literacy Scale which is based on Potter's (2004) Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy, in addition to measuring skills of credibility assessment and verification based on Flanagin and Metzger (2000).



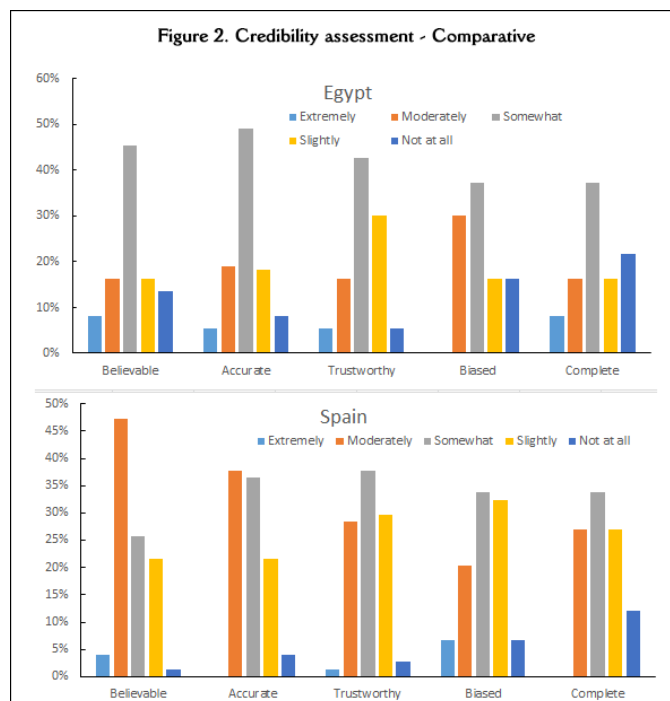
Based on the findings demonstrated, most respondents in both countries showed high levels of news literacy, assessed in terms of motivation, knowledge and skills. Based on the Likert scale statements used to assess respondents' motivation, youth from both countries demonstrate high levels of motivation to seek news. More than half of the Egyptian respondents (50.9%) agreed that they follow the news because they like to, with 16.4% strongly agreeing to the statement. Also, almost half of the Egyptian respondents (49.1%) agreed to the statement that they follow the news for their own good with 19.1% strongly agreeing. Half of the Spanish respondents (50%) agreed that they follow the news because they like to, with more than a third (33.8%) strongly agreeing to the statement. More than half of the respondents (52.7%) agree to the statement that they follow the news for their own good, with almost a third (28.4%) strongly agreeing to the statement. Hence, youth from both countries are considerably motivated to follow the news. Regarding knowledge areas, despite the general level being similar, differences could be noted when it comes to different knowledge areas.

- Knowledge of news content: using a Likert scale, more than a third of Egyptian respondents (37.3%) strongly agreed that news companies choose stories based on what will attract the biggest audience, with more than a third (32.7%) agreeing. The results displayed show that most respondents from both countries are aware about news content selection from both sides, the journalists' and the audience's.
- Knowledge of the news media industry: In this area of knowledge, similarities and differences could be found. Respondents from both countries show awareness of ownership's influence. Almost half of the Egyptian respondents (46.4%) agreed to the statement that the owner of a media company influences the content that is produced, with almost a third (27.3%) strongly agreeing. More than half (54.1%) of the Spanish respondents strongly agreed that the owner of a media company influences the content that is produced, with more than a third (33.8%) agreeing. Egyptian respondents demonstrate confusion between the roles, definition and impact of the different persons involved in the industry (reporters, producers, cameramen, anchors, etc.), unlike Spanish respondents who demonstrate awareness about the same area.
- Testing awareness about the concept of objectivity, more than a third of Egyptian respondents selected the correct answer to the question "One common criticism of the news is that it is not objective. What do people who make that criticism typically mean by it?"; 35.5% selected the meaning that the reporter puts his/her opinion in the story, with 26.4% stating that they don't know. More than half (58.1%) of the Spanish respondents selected the correct answer to the same question, with 16.2% stating they don't know. Here, another difference is spotted, with Spanish respondents demonstrating stronger awareness about the meaning of objectivity and its impact on content. The implications of these differences are discussed as correlating with the level of trust in the media in the specified section below.
- Knowledge about the news media effects: Findings from Egypt and Spain indicate awareness of respondents that a considerable part of the process depends on the audience's interpretation and not just on the meaning intended by the reporter/journalist. The majority of respondents support the statement that two people might see the same news stories and get different information from it, with 42.7% agreeing and 35.5% strongly agreeing
- Knowledge about the real world: Respondents from both countries demonstrated awareness about the constructed nature of news. For instance, the majority of respondents support the statement that news makes things more dramatic than they really are, with 59% agreeing and 16.4% strongly disagreeing.
- Knowledge of the self: The results from both countries show that youth believe that they control media influences but not entirely; they still perceive some influences as not fully under their control. Respondents believe they are in control of how far they are informed and knowledgeable about the world, and how they can possibly avoid being misinformed.

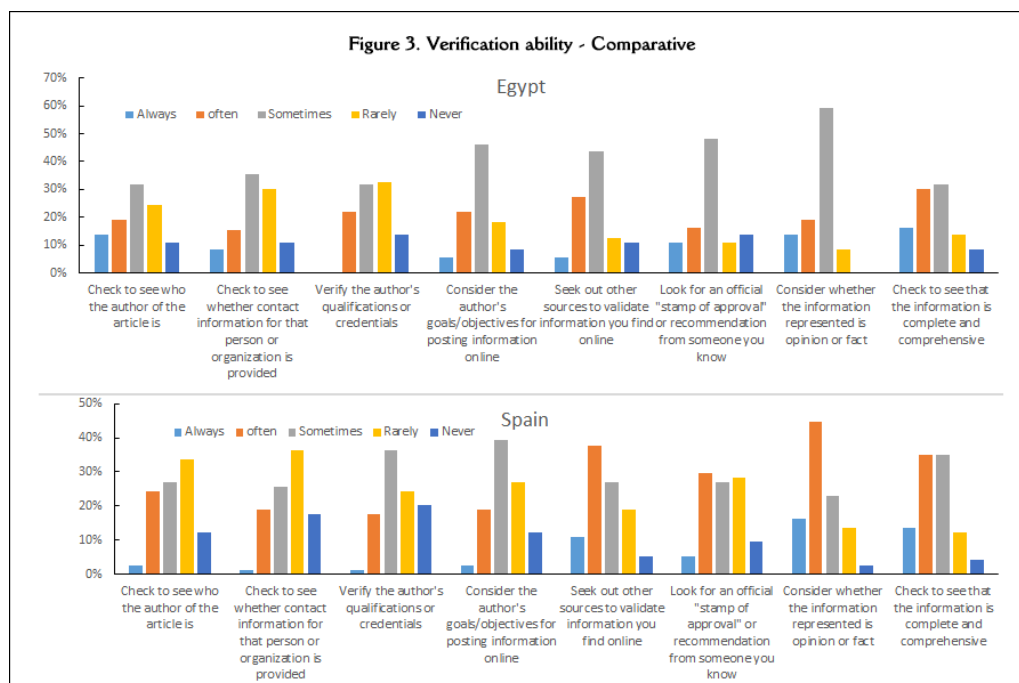
Regarding skills of credibility assessment and verification ability, there were differences between both countries. For credibility assessment, respondents were asked to assess the extent to which they find online news media credible by asking them to evaluate believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and completeness. Common among Egyptian respondents is the fact that the evaluations have almost all been average, with the biggest percentages of respondents selecting the response "somewhat" on the scale provided (with alternatives ranging from extremely to not at all).

Most responses in the case of Spain are dispersed among "moderately", "somewhat" and "slightly", except for believability where a more significant percentage of respondents choose "moderately" believable, as demonstrated. These findings go in line with those of media skepticism. Most Spanish respondents give responses more inclined towards a higher credibility assessment of the information provided by news media online. This especially applies when it comes to believability.

Taking into account that news media's websites are important sources for the sampled Spanish youth, the results are compatible. Regarding Egyptian respondents, doubtful stances were most prevalent going in accordance with their media trust findings.



In order to measure verification ability, respondents were asked about the frequency of doing specific actions when they read news online, by giving them statements to which they have to respond using a 5-point scale ranging from always to never.



Findings in the case of Egypt go in line with Flanagin and Metzger's (2000), with most Egyptian respondents verifying information online mostly sometimes or rarely. However, in the case of Spain, based on the findings, the verification activities need to be divided into content-related verification activities

and author-related ones. When it comes to author-related activities (such as checking the author's goals, verifying qualifications, etc.), Spanish respondents verify sometimes or rarely. On the other hand, when it comes to content-related verification activities, the majority of Spanish respondents' responses range from often to sometimes (such as seeking other sources, checking for completeness, verifying if the information is opinion or fact, etc.).

Based on the findings demonstrated, in both cases of Egypt and Spain, the majority of respondents demonstrate a high level of news literacy (65% in Egypt, 66% in Spain). Most respondents in both cases displayed motivation to seek news by supporting the statements that imply their understanding of the importance of news to them and rejecting statements that marginalize this role. Regarding knowledge areas, respondents from both countries demonstrate a good level of awareness about the concepts covered under each knowledge area. This applies to all, except for knowledge about the news industry; Egyptian youth demonstrated a weaker level than their Spanish counterparts in this area, specifically regarding the roles played by the different individuals involved in the news-making process. Differences between both countries exist when it comes to the tested skills. In the case of Egypt, findings for both (credibility assessment and verification ability) confirm the need to work on respondents' awareness about the essentiality to carry on certain inspections when reading news online, to be able to evaluate the credibility and verify the used information. In the case of Spain, the respondents appear to have a good level in both skills with the exception of author-related verification as highlighted.

Despite the close results between respondents from both countries, it is essential to note that *neutral* responses are more prevalent among Egyptian respondents than their Spanish counterparts. Scholars suggest that there are two possible scenarios behind reporting neutral stances; "true neutral"/"indifferent" or "don't know"/"undecided" (Raaijmakers et al., 2000). Accordingly, based on the nature of statements, it is suggested that neutral stances reported by Egyptian respondents can be analyzed as a lack of knowledge in support of Sturgis et al. (2012) findings; most respondents giving neutral answers were found to be either with no opinion or do not know. This has been demonstrated most in knowledge about news media effects results. On the other hand, Spanish respondents demonstrate better results when it comes to decisiveness by mostly reporting positive or negative stances.

### 3.2. Patterns of online news use and news engagement

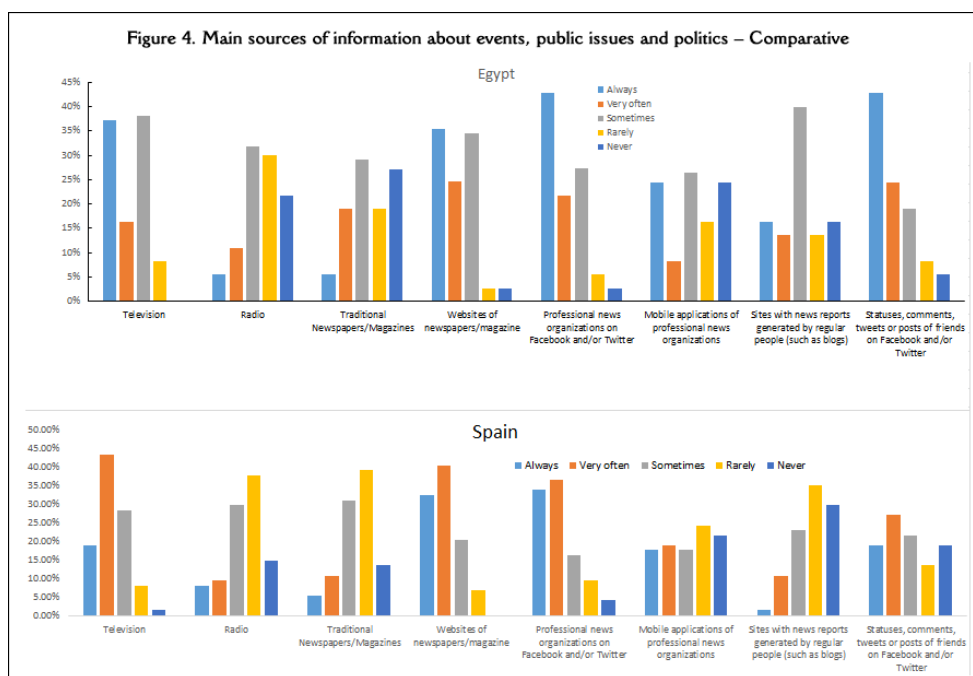
Respondents from both countries displayed a preference for online sources of news over traditional media; there is especially a decline in newspaper readership. However, Spanish respondents' news use reveals a higher level of engagement with news than their Egyptian counterparts.

Egypt's findings show that the primary source(s) of news for respondents are accounts of professional news organizations on social media, followed by content generated by their peers on social media (statuses, tweets, comments, etc.) and websites of newspapers/magazines coming third. On the other hand, for Spanish respondents, newspaper/magazine websites come in the first place as a source of news, followed by accounts of professional news organizations on social media, then television comes third.

The fact that Egyptian respondents ranked professional news media's websites third as a source of news, leaves social media as the main news carrier. This implicates the ramifications that could result from relevant issues such as personalization algorithms based on which such platforms work. In other words, are social media/online news users aware of how content appears to them? According to empirical findings of a study done on university students in the US, youth "are largely unaware of whether and how news sources track user data and apply editorial judgments to deliver personalized results" (Powers, 2014).

In contrast with the findings from the Egyptian case, social media use for news does not come at the expense of professional news media's websites for Spanish respondents. This is reflected in the fact that such websites were ranked as the primary source of news for the sampled Spanish young people. This choice was followed by accounts of professional news organizations on social media, with peer-generated content pushed forth as a source of news. These findings reveal the extent to which Spanish youth are able to differentiate between social media as carriers of news content rather than sources, and professional sources to get their information. This supports Braun and Gillespie's (2011) statement about the importance that users realize such difference.

Analyzing youth's preference to get their news on social media, Hermida et al. (2012) state that: "the traditional gatekeeping function of the media is weakened as a significant proportion of news consumers turn to family, friends, and acquaintances to alert them to items of interest". This statement is supported by the qualitative findings of the study in the case of Egypt, where Egyptian respondents emphasized the importance of the opinions/views of trusted individuals. It further applies—in a weaker sense—in the case of Spanish respondents. A respondent from Egypt mentioned that she has become "less interested in getting ... news from [the] TV, they lie and if not, they try to manipulate us... this is why checking opinions around us became much more important than before".



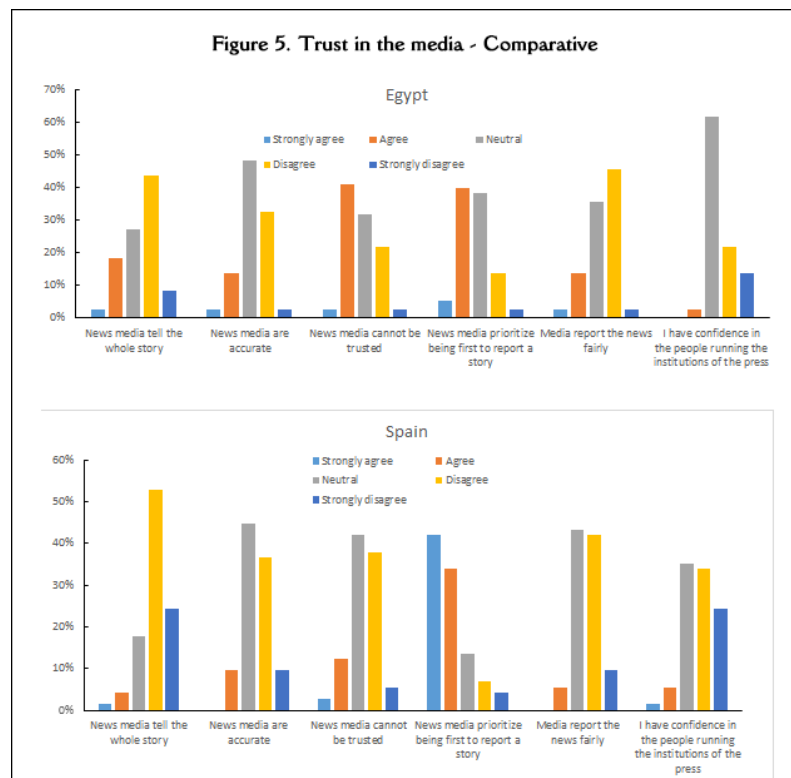
When it comes to social media platforms, priorities are completely different in both countries. With Facebook and YouTube being the most frequently used among Egyptian respondents, Instagram and Twitter are most used by Spanish respondents. Since the study focuses on Facebook and Twitter, it is then essential to note that Facebook is massively declining among Spanish youth, and Twitter is minimally used among their Egyptian counterparts, based on the qualitative and quantitative findings for both countries. This is confirmed when asked about different news sources. Egyptian respondents reported Facebook as a major source of news, followed by Google News, and then YouTube; while Spanish respondents reported Twitter as a major source of news, followed by El País Online (newspaper), and then El Diario (newspaper).

Scholars suggest that the decision to use one platform and not the other is related to major personality traits (Hughes et al., 2012). Accordingly, with a focus on information seeking, Facebook's users are believed to get their information while/through "socializing", while Twitter's users are believed to intentionally seek information for its utility and "value" (Hughes et al., 2012). Contradictorily, Egyptian respondents report Facebook's primary information use is to get news about current events from mainstream media; Spanish respondents barely agree. Moreover, Spanish respondents report Twitter's primary information use is getting news about current events from friends, similar to findings from Egypt. These findings contradict Hughes et al. (2012) aforementioned findings. However, it is important to note that in the focus group discussions, Egyptian respondents emphasized the importance of the views of others which justifies their dependence on social media (especially Facebook) for news. Spanish respondents also mentioned during the discussions that they check what their peers have to say about the different issues raised, which is well-matched with their first informational use of Twitter. Accordingly, Egyptian and

Spanish youth in the study demonstrated different levels of engagement with professional news media as shown.

### 3.3. Perception of news media, knowledge, and trust

Negative perceptions about professional news media's performance have been expressed by respondents from both countries, with the main justification being that news media are not fulfilling their role as should be. Respondents from both countries are well aware that the news media's main role is to inform the citizenry. As previously discussed, youth from both countries generally show a good level of knowledge in the five knowledge areas investigated. Findings from both countries support Arendt et al.'s (2016) media-related selection which highlights journalists' gatekeeping function as filters of content and the audience's selective exposure and sharing behavior. Media-related selection (MRS) is an attempt by Arendt et al. (2016) to combine three theoretical tenets of selection taking into account the two main actors in the news experience; journalists and users. The three theoretical concepts addressed under MRS are gatekeeping (journalists' selection), selective exposure (users' selection where confirmation bias is taken into account), and news sharing on social networking sites (journalists' and users' sharing behavior is considered). As previously demonstrated, three knowledge areas reflect MRS; knowledge of content, knowledge about media effects and knowledge about the world. Hence, in the three areas, respondents from both countries demonstrate similar results, being aware of how journalists' and audience's selection affects the product (the news story). Respondents showed awareness about factors that impact audience selection, such as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 2009) and confirmation bias (Jonas et al., 2001) in qualitative and quantitative findings.



On the other hand, when it comes to knowledge of the news media industry, differences between both groups of respondents from Egypt and Spain emerged. Egyptian respondents demonstrate confusion between the roles, definitions, and impact of the different people involved in the industry (reporters, producers, cameramen, anchors, etc.), unlike Spanish respondents who demonstrate awareness about the same area. Scholars (Craft et al., 2017; Pérez-Rodríguez & Delgado-Ponce, 2012) emphasize



the essentiality of knowledge about the media industry for trust and engagement with the news after establishing correlations between these variables. This study supports such correlations as shown in the findings on media skepticism.

By assessing respondents' trust in the media, it was found that Spanish respondents, despite being skeptical, show a better level of trust than their Egyptian counterparts. Egyptian respondents in the qualitative and quantitative responses demonstrate the essentiality of views of peers or trusted persons in their circles for them to be able to form an attitude or an opinion toward different issues. This comes at the expense of intentionally seeking information through official news websites; which further justifies depending on social media for news. On the other hand, Spanish respondents demonstrate a lack of trust in a more critical manner; consciousness about the reasons why they do not trust the media, yet they acknowledge that professional news media is what they should follow to remain up to date and informed. One of the Spanish respondents commented: "we should be aware that we only receive part of the occurrences that are happening as a result of what the journalists select ... I think that news contributes to the image that we have about the world; which gives us an image/a vision that doesn't perfectly reflect reality or the society". This is emphasized through their primary source of information being websites of newspapers/magazines, while still using social media and their friends' networks for elaboration and context.

In light of these findings, it is worth noting that the results from the different variables tested in each of the two cases are compatible with each other as displayed. Adding to that, reference to the argument on criticism versus cynicism is essential for the different consequences each has on news engagement and also political engagement. Being cynical refers to having a general judgment, usually negative in case of cynicism towards the media, based on which an individual takes a decision of disengagement. For example, the judgment that news media lie or present negative content all the time, and so I am not interested in following news anymore (Buckingham, 2000; Mihailidis, 2008).

### 3.4. Fake news and hate speech: Exposure and detection

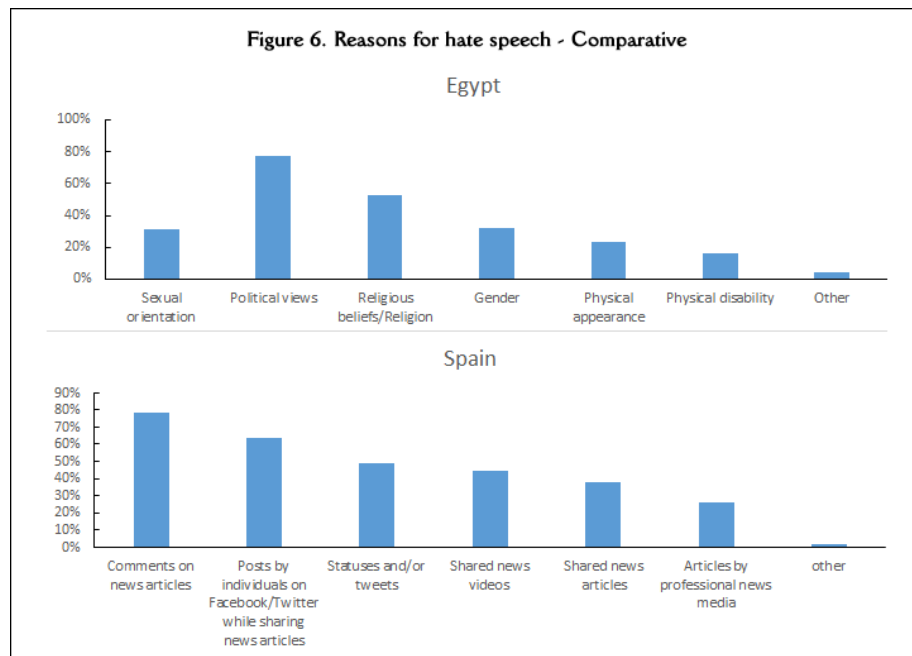
When asked whether or not they are aware that some news stories shared on social media are fake news, a massive majority of respondents from both countries (97.3% Egypt, 97.3% Spain) reported that they are aware of it. Also, the majority of the respondents support the statements that fake news on social media can cause confusion; it is important to check the credibility of a news article before sharing it.

Respondents displayed rejection of the statement; if the headline is interesting, I share without reading; sharing news stories shared by friends without reading; that they do not necessarily check the sources of information in a news story before they share it. When asked whether they believe they have the competencies to tell whether or not a news story is fake; Egyptian respondents' responses were more dispersed than their Spanish counterparts, who mostly supported the statement. In the case of Egyptian respondents, a discrepancy between their awareness of the problem and their actions could be noted, besides the prevalence of neutral responses indicating doubts. The percentages displayed reveal awareness from the side of the Egyptian youth about the potential impact of fake news and their reported perception that it is important to consider the source which delivers the news, which was barely reflected in the previously mentioned findings on verification ability. However, there is also a high percentage who reported neutral positions, in that sense, indicating confusion, indifference, or lack of enough awareness (like the case with sharing news stories only from professional sources, where more than a third stated being neutral about it).

In the case of Spanish respondents, in line with the findings on verification ability, the percentages displayed reveal that youth are more aware of the essentiality of double-checking content than of verifying sources. This has been reflected through their more dispersed responses to the statement about checking sources of information in a news story before sharing. In line with the qualitative findings, respondents show that they care about the credibility of information and understand their responsibility when sharing content.

Regarding their ability to detect fake news, Spanish respondents show more confidence in their competencies than their Egyptian counterparts with the majority reporting "neutral". Interestingly,

respondents from both countries reported that the hateful writings they encounter attack individuals/groups for political views most (77% Egypt, 86.5% Spain). Egyptian respondents encountering hate speech for religious beliefs/religion (52.7%) and gender (32.4%) come next. Spanish respondents encountering hate speech for gender (74.3%) and sexual orientation (70.3%) come after political views.



When asked about their reactions to harmful content (fake news or hate speech), the majority of respondents stated that they ignore it (50.9% in Egypt, 47.3% in Spain). Findings from both countries reveal that harmful content does shape a considerable part of youth's online news experience.

### 3.5. Reading, sharing and content generation

Scholars (Fletcher et al., 2018; Parlapiano & Lee, 2018) note that false material multiplies on social media much more than truthful content thanks to algorithms which makes individuals' exposure to content in line with their beliefs higher, creating a filter bubble (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Dornan, 2017; Hawdon et al., 2015). Hence, many scholars agree that human behavior online complicates the problem of mis/disinformation (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Anderson & Rainie, 2017; Newman et al., 2017; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Consequently, youth's news behavior was investigated by understanding how they read, share and generate content online.

**Reading:** According to the qualitative findings of both countries, Egyptian and Spanish respondents only read headlines of news stories on social media most of the time. Respondents from both countries demonstrate awareness that professional journalists in many instances use sensationalism and write misleading headlines (clickbait content) with the sole purpose of attracting users at the expense of content quality. Despite this, respondents still barely read full stories, unless it concerns "big events" as noted by Egyptian interviewees, or "interesting" to them as noted by their Spanish counterparts. It is paradoxical that, despite being aware and clear that fabricated news and misleading headlines are common on social media, still the majority of students just read the headlines and rarely clicks on them for full stories. Spanish respondents shed light on how reading nowadays has changed; "more like skimming through the overload of information encountered". Besides headlines, what else do young people read? Comments.

Based on the findings from both countries, minor percentages of respondents stated that they never read comments (8.2% in Egypt, 9.2% in Spain), which means that the majority do. Investigating their motivations (four categories), Egyptian and Spanish respondents were found to have different priorities, with seeking information being the primary motive for Egyptian respondents, it becomes clear how important the

role of peer citizens in creating content has become, and especially how it is regarded by a majority as complementary to the information provided by journalists through the news article itself. This should be taken into account bearing in mind how studies (Erjavec, 2014; Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012) revealed that hate speech exists in many instances in comments on news, as previously highlighted. Furthermore, the problem is aggravated, with scholars emphasizing how hate speech producers use techniques of rewriting and reshaping the meanings in the news articles consistently to serve their purposes (Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012). For Spanish respondents, social interaction is the primary motive to read comments. Hence, it becomes clear how peer citizens can impact each other's opinions by creating an online public sphere for deliberations. This means, in the context of this study, that being conscious of the creators of content is necessary not to be misled. Entertainment motivation comes second for Egyptian respondents, while information motivation is second for Spanish respondents.

**Sharing:** Motivations behind youth's sharing behavior on social media being investigated. The motivations were divided into four categories: information seeking, socializing, entertainment and status-seeking (Lee & Ma, 2012). For respondents from both countries, information-seeking and socializing motivations are most influential. For information-seeking motivation, most respondents stated that sharing news on social media:

- Helps them store useful information (64.5% Egypt, 33.8% Spain).
- Helps them keep up to date on the latest news and events (32% Egypt, 50% Spain).
- It becomes easy to retrieve information when needed (41% Egypt, 33.8% Spain).

Socializing is also regarded as an essential motive for respondents to share information on social media; the sampled youth stated that:

- It is effective to exchange ideas with other people (44% Egypt, 39.2% Spain).
- It makes them keep in touch with people (40% Egypt, 13.5% Spain).
- It helps them interact with people when sharing news (30% Egypt, 47.3% Spain).

Entertainment and status-seeking were less important as motivations to share news in the cases of both countries. However, how likely are respondents to share in the first place? According to the quantitative findings, Egyptian respondents are more likely to share news than their Spanish counterparts as reflected by the percentage of participants reporting they never share news on social media (8.2% Egypt, 21.6% Spain). In contrast, based on the qualitative findings, most Egyptian interviewees demonstrated reluctance to share news on social media, mainly for fear of being judged for views and of unintentionally misinforming. While Spanish interviewees demonstrated the fear of unintentionally misinforming their community as the main reason for not sharing. Such findings go in line with the fact that youth from both countries demonstrated care about the veracity of any material they share.

#### 4. Conclusion and discussion: Implications to consider

Overall, there are more similarities than differences between the findings of the Egyptian and Spanish cases. The same correlations were concluded in both cases as demonstrated in the findings and analysis. The most important differences between the findings of the two countries are in the level of engagement to news as concluded, based on differences in:

- Trust in the media; cynicism versus criticism.
- Knowledge about the news media industry.
- Primary sources of news.
- Informational use of social media platforms.

Furthermore, motivations to read were found to be different. Such a finding is related to primary sources of news; Egyptians' being social media and Spanish individuals' being professional media. This leads to a conclusion that Spanish respondents use social media for their original role as news disseminators/carriers and are aware of how socializing (and being informed while doing so) is its first purpose, rather than counting on it for obtaining information on which to build opinions.

When discussing hate speech, one common argument between respondents from both countries is the fact that media polarizes and separates people by using stereotypes, labels and the 'us and them' rhetoric. Such polarization exists in both Egyptian and Spanish societies.

In light of such findings, youth from both countries suffer an environment charged with misleading content which is a symptom that potentially affects citizens' political engagement negatively. According to scholars, the two main prerequisites of a healthy democracy are the dissemination of relevant facts and information by politicians and the media, and citizens' use of such information in a manner that suits their preferences and, at the same time, "correct mistaken conceptions" (Kuklinski et al., 2000). With the majority of youth in both countries demonstrating the existence of confirmation bias in their news/information-seeking behavior, the task of the news to "correct mistaken conceptions" is more challenging than ever before. This especially applies to levels of media trust playing an essential role; the lack of it leads to the lack of engagement with the news.

Now more than ever, quality journalism became a need for survival. In that sense, involving current and future journalists in the field of news literacy is essential to provide a practical perspective, regain users' trust and reflect on their own work. The first step is admitting that the current online environment has taken its toll on the quality of journalism. Journalists are under pressures such as the immediacy of breaking news versus accuracy and verification, and audience trust versus maintaining their economic survival. This inevitably aggravates the information chaos problem by allowing false and misleading content to grow. Respondents in this study accuse the professional media of inciting hatred primarily for political views and hence dividing the people and labeling them. Hence, news literacy is deemed essential for journalists to incorporate and regain their image as legitimate sources of information to citizens by proving transparency and educating the public about their work. Setting the theoretical grounds for news literacy is still underway. Hence further research is necessary in order to seek defining and examining theoretical tenets for news literacy.

### Authors' Contribution

Idea, S.T; Literature Review (state of the art), S.T, C.P, S.T.; Methodology, S.T; Data analysis, S.T, S.T, C.P; Results, S.T.; Discussion and conclusions, S.T, S.T, C.P; Writing (original draft), S.T; Final revisions, S.T; Project design and funding agency, S.T.

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