KOME – An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry Vol. 14. No. 1. (2026) • 73–94.
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.of.36

ARTICLE

Perception of Information and Disinformation on Social Media

Daily Access and Age of Adolescents and Young People as Predictive Factors

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Social media currently plays a key role for adolescents and young people in accessing information. The integration of these platforms into their media diet leads them to build their own digital architecture to stay informed and to avoid disinformation. Based on academic literature and a survey (n = 1,800), this study analyses the perceptions of Spanish young people and adolescents (aged 14 to 24) regarding various characteristics of social media in relation to information and disinformation. Our findings reveal that daily access to social media is a good predictor regarding propositions related to information, whereas age is generally a slightly better indicator for those related to disinformation. These results provide deeper insight into the components that influence adolescents and young people, helping to better understand how they shape their own media repertoires.

Keywords: adolescents, young people, social media, information, disinformation

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Article received on 23 December 2025. Article accepted on 23 February 2026.
Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.
Funding: This work is part of the R&D&I project 'Media repertoires and practices in adolescence and youth: uses, cyber wellbeing and digital vulnerabilities in social networks' (PID2022-138281NB-C21) has been funded by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities – Spain (MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033) and supported by 'ERDF a way of building Europe'.

Introduction

Social media platforms are a basic part of daily life for young people and adolescents, who use them not only for entertainment (Harff & Schmuck, 2025), but also as channels for information sources, which for them translates into a form of social connection (Anderson, 2026). This is a general trend among young Europeans aged 16 to 24, who place more importance on social media than television as a source of news (European Parliament, 2025). They are drawn to a variety of more engaging formats to them than traditional media (Chou et al., 2023), and appreciate the opportunity to personalise their own content (Anter & Kümpel, 2025). Although they do not always actively seek out information (Hendrickx, 2025), they are convinced of the importance of staying informed in order to take on the role of citizens through the cultural value that news provides (Tamboer et al., 2022).

The high level of digital exposure to news also means that social media has become the most common medium used by young people and adolescents (Farias-Batlle et al., 2024). However, this leads to the indiscriminate and widespread consumption of unverified news (Selnes, 2024), a situation made worse by their overconfidence – especially among adolescents – in their ability to detect disinformation (Zozaya-Durazo et al., 2024). This study examines how Spanish young people and adolescents perceive certain features that, according to academic literature, characterise information and disinformation. The findings will help to further understand the key factors shaping how this part of the population accesses information and, in turn, help clarify how they configure their media repertoires.

Status of the issue

Relationships with social media

The constant access to mobile phones and social media, linked to the need for social interaction and the search for entertainment, as well as the way digital behaviour is adapted to each platform, are some of the aspects that help explain the reality in which adolescents and young people live (García-Jiménez et al., 2020). At earlier ages, there is also a link with the risks posed by social media, such as cyberbullying, false information, certain addictions, and various aspects related to personal safety. It is similarly associated with opportunities in fields such as education and communication between individuals (Osepashvili, 2025).

Social media are presented as spaces where young people can share experiences, and where the content they consider relevant for keeping informed and for entertainment is increasingly found. In this respect, perceptions of the platforms depend on age, gender and family social class (López-de-Ayala et al., 2020). X (formerly Twitter) is a space for critical analysis of information and of social movements, especially climate change. In this space, adolescents defend their values and ideology. Meanwhile, Instagram provides a showcase for fashion and beauty, where brands promote an idealised and desirable lifestyle, and YouTube is geared towards entertainment (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2023).

Younger users display varying levels of trust depending on the type of content they access. The study by Neira Placer et al. (2025) shows that they trust content more on technical than on political platforms. Age has also been identified as a predictor of which platform they use: TikTok is more popular among younger users, while X is more common among older users. Similarly, perceptions of social media reliability are linked to age, with critical awareness increasing over time. Gender differences are also observed in the case of Instagram.

The detachment of news from traditional media is changing how citizens conceptualise it and how they distinguish it from other cultural objects, such as entertainment or advertising, particularly among younger generations. Currently, there are differences between what they recognise cognitively and affectively as news (Swart & Broersma, 2024). In addition, the decline of traditional media and news websites, compared with online aggregators, social networks, and video platforms, is evident. Public figures and influencers have already become significant actors in the public agenda. Fragmentation across social media platforms is increasing, including on WhatsApp (Newman et al., 2025).

It is in this context that the distinction between what constitutes journalism and what does not is becoming increasingly 'blurred' (Wunderlich et al., 2022), coinciding with the growing relevance of non-journalistic sources. Adolescents aged 15 to 17, for instance, perceive influencers as suitable media actors in staying well informed. This perception differs among young adults (18–25 years) and older adults (40–53 years), also in relation to the functions associated with journalistic and non-journalistic sources. Similarly, there are divergences in the level of trust placed in journalistic activity and in the various verification strategies applied, such that young people view journalistic work as reliable for staying informed and for cross-checking information, whereas not-strictly journalistic sources are associated with fulfilling social needs. Age continues to emerge as a key factor.

Young people tend to consume news incidentally, that is, through social media while using their phones. In a sense, they 'encounter' the news rather than actively seek it out, which ultimately makes such content indistinguishable from other types of content, and differentiates it from news consumption in other media contexts (Boczkowski et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some young people still actively seek out information on social media, often combining that with traditional media. Our research also draws on the theory known as 'the news finds me'. Indeed, this segment of the population considers itself well-informed just through the information they receive without actively searching for it, which can accordingly have personal and social consequences (Goyanes et al., 2023).

In Spain, under-24s obtain their news via social media, specifically: 28% on Instagram and 25% on TikTok (Sierra et al., 2025). In addition to high daily exposure to social media with its centrality as a news-consumption channel, there is generally little interest in verifying information, and it generates low levels of trust. Access is incidental, news is read sporadically, and it is often shared with contacts (Farias-Batlle et al., 2024). In this context, ideological stance, education and age all influence the credibility that adolescents and young people attribute to current news encountered on social media and its sources. However, according to Ceballos-del-Cid et al. (2025), while interest in news is increasing among these age groups, trust in social media remains lower than in traditional media (Neira Placer et al., 2025; Cureses, 2023),

likely due to the influence of parental opinions in certain age ranges, which emphasise the lower reliability of social media compared with conventional outlets (Smahel et al., 2020). At the same time, as young people get older, their ability to recognise certain mechanisms and biases in the media environment, such as clickbait, increases, which directly undermines credibility (Cureses, 2023; Pastor Ruiz et al., 2019).

Relationships with disinformation

Social media platforms present an environment in which the dissemination of misleading or false information is particularly easy (Bode & Vraga, 2018). This research also highlights the ease with which content goes viral, specifically the ability of influencers to spread information (Ouvrein et al., 2021) that may be incorrect, taking into account Kelman's (1974) theory of social influence. In fact, according to the findings of the work by Mulcahy et al. (2025), a greater virality of disinformation posts leads to a reduced perception of deceit, which in turn encourages the intention to share them. This, in its turn, could contribute to increased social radicalisation (Moskalenko & Romanova, 2022). Diaz Ruiz (2025) notes that disinformation is, in fact, an expected outcome rather than an anomaly within the economic logic of social media platforms.

Children aged 12 to 15 are already aware of the existence of false information. They are able to associate it with rumours, as well as posts and videos on social media. They also recognise that fake news can be generated and shared by individuals for ideological or economic purposes, linked to deception and intimidation (Vartiainen et al., 2023). Nevertheless, in some cases, exposure to disinformation prompts adolescents to consult traditional media to verify potentially false information (Selnes, 2024). Despite this, they constitute a vulnerable group because of the amount of time they spend on social media and the content they consume (Herrero-Diz et al., 2023).

Overall, susceptibility to both deliberate and inadvertent disinformation decreases throughout secondary education (Siani et al., 2024). The same trend applies to other educational attainment (Gómez-Calderón et al., 2023), with higher levels of education being associated with a greater ability to recognise false information and to cross-check and verify news. Other factors, such as urban/rural environments and political orientation, also appear to play a role. Likewise, perceptions of fake news on social media are not independent of context. As Shin et al. (2022) note, in the case of X, the assessment of whether a post is credible depends on whether it is received through a close contact and whether it has a high number of 'likes' and comments, compared with retweets from celebrities without these indicators. The evaluation of these attributes, as well as individual interactions, emerges as an important factor to consider.

In general terms, young people are aware that there is more disinformation on social media than in the traditional media (Galarza-Molina, 2023) and they understand that not all platforms carry such content to the same degree; for example, it would be more difficult to find disinformation among TikTok content than Facebook content. Other researchers refer to what is termed adolescents' 'invulnerability to disinformation'. In the study by

Papapicco et al. (2022), it was noted that adolescents are aware of the existence of fake news but find it harder to recognise or recall it. In fact, they tend to overestimate their ability to detect false information and often feel the need to share content with their network (Zozaya-Durazo et al., 2024). This connects with what Martínez-Costa et al. (2023) call the "perception that no one can deceive me". This cognitive bias, which is more pronounced at higher levels of education, is based on the perception that they are capable of detecting false information and are more immune to it than others, even if they have not internalised certain valid criteria for assessing news quality (Herrero-Diz et al., 2021). Likewise, young people perceive older adults as being more likely to believe false information, a condition known as the third-person effect (Galarza-Molina, 2023; Martínez-Costa et al., 2023).

Regarding the sharing of information, adolescents are more likely to share news on WhatsApp if it relates to their personal interests, regardless of its veracity. They also share content based on the appearance of journalistic interest (Herrero-Diz et al., 2020). Furthermore, the tendency to share content without prior analysis has been linked to moral disengagement (Herrero-Diz et al., 2023). In addition, the study by Paciello et al. (2023) highlights that self-efficacy beliefs about dealing with disinformation are connected both with perceptions of the validation of journalistic content and with the avoidance of sharing information of uncertain reliability. There are also links with the capacity for reflection and self-efficacy in managing negative emotions. Some approaches emphasise the potential of sharing fake news to raise awareness among contacts about certain content (Valencia-Arias et al., 2023).

Finally, Trninić et al. (2022) highlight the need for education in the realm of social and digital media, given the complexity of the media environment that adolescents and young people face. Such an educational approach should also take into account communication and interpersonal skills when addressing disinformation and false information, not merely technical knowledge (Vissenberg et al., 2023).

Objective and research questions

This study aims to understand the perceptions of minors and young people aged 14 to 24 residing in Spain regarding four propositions related, on the one hand, to access to news via social media, and on the other, to the possible relationship between the viral spread of disinformation and these digital platforms. The propositions established to assess the level of agreement among the participants are:

1. Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news.
2. Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world.
3. The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media.
4. Continuous exposure to information on social media helps distinguish fake from real news.

Based on age and frequency of social media use as possible predictors, three research questions are proposed: the first relates to information (propositions 1 and 2) and the following two relate to the spread of disinformation (proposition 3) and its detection (proposition 4):

RQ1: Do minors and young people perceive social media as an appropriate channel for accessing news and staying informed?
RQ2: Do they believe that social media constitutes the main channel for the spread of disinformation?
RQ3: Do minors and young people believe that frequent social media use helps detect disinformation?

Methodology

This study adopts a dual approach, combining descriptive analysis with regression analysis, using four dependent variables corresponding to the four established propositions, and two independent variables: age and daily time spent on social media.

The quantitative questionnaire technique was applied to a sample drawn from the population of residents in Spain aged 14 to 24. To ensure representativeness, sex, age, and geographic region were taken into account. The final sample comprised 1,800 participants who completed a web-assisted interview via online panels, with fieldwork carried out between 28 October and 27 November 2024. The study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Rey Juan Carlos University. The data were analysed using SPSS Statistics v.29.02.0.

To gauge young people's perceptions and level of agreement with the established propositions, a Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used, corresponding to the items 'Totally disagree', 'Somewhat agree', 'Moderately agree', 'Mostly agree', and 'Completely agree'. A sixth option, 'Don't know/No answer', was included and treated as missing data in the analysis. Regarding the independent variables, age was categorised into three groups: 14 to 16 years, 17 to 20 years, and 21 to 24 years. Daily social media use was divided into the categories 'Never', 'Less than 1 hour', '1 to 3 hours', '3 to 5 hours', and 'More than 5 hours'. However, for the regression analysis, these items were adjusted to avoid statistical instability, as only five participants (0.3% of minors and young people) reported not accessing social media at all. For this adjustment, the 'Never' category was merged with 'Less than 1 hour'.

In the first phase, a descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the frequency and distribution of the four propositions (dependent variables), using percentages, measures of central tendency, and standard deviation. Subsequently, the contingency associated with age and social media access time, established as predictors (independent variables), was calculated. To this end, the chi-squared (χ^2) coefficient was applied to determine whether significant differences exist and if a linear association can be detected within these differences.

In the second phase, an ordinal regression analysis was carried out, suitable for dependent variables measured on a Likert scale. In this phase, the goodness of fit for the two established predictors was analysed using the model's chi-squared significance and the Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke R-squared coefficients. Where results were statistically

significant, the Odds Ratio – Exp(B) and the regression coefficient B were calculated to determine the strength and direction of the association between variables. For this purpose, the highest-range items were taken as the reference groups for the predictors: the 21–24 age group for age and the 'more than 5 hours' group for daily social media access time.

Results

Frequency and distribution of the dependent variables (propositions)

Regarding the perception that 'Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news' (Proposition 1), a high level of agreement was recorded among young people, with a mean of 3.82 and a mode of 4, corresponding to the 'Mostly agree' item. The standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.162$) suggests a moderate level of dispersion, ranging roughly between 0.8 and 1.5. Therefore, there is some variability, but with a tendency towards higher levels of agreement. This trend is reflected in the 83.1% of young people who show the highest levels of agreement (25.6% 'Moderately agree', 30.3% 'Mostly agree', and 27.2% 'Totally agree'). The remaining percentages do not exceed 10 points.

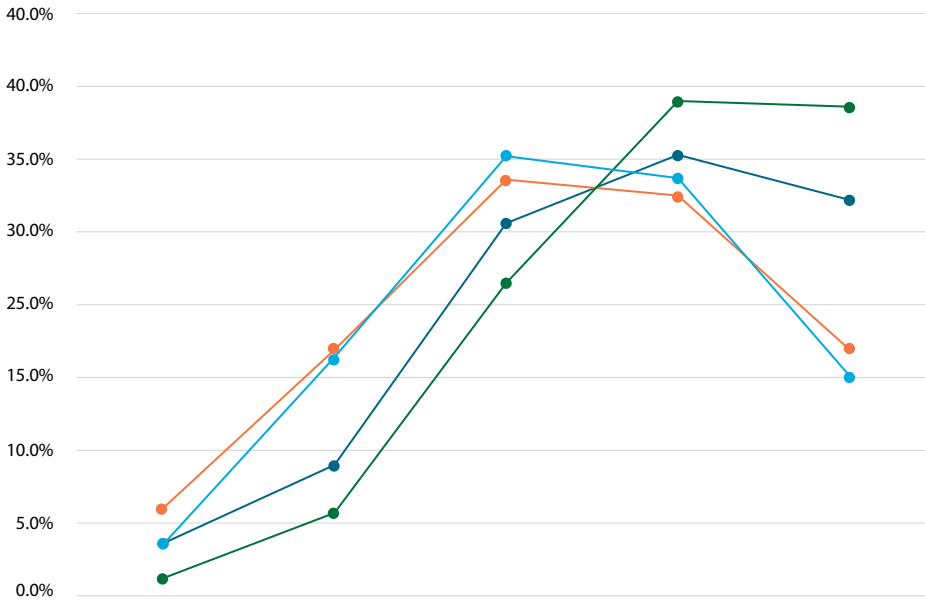
There is moderate consensus regarding young people's perception that 'Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world' (Proposition 2). The mean obtained is $\overline{x} = 3.45$ and both the median and the mode are 3, values that indicate that most responses fall under 'Moderately agree', although with a general trend toward 'Mostly agree'. In this case, the standard deviation is slightly higher, $\sigma = 1.237$, but remains at a moderate level, still far from complete dispersion.

In percentage terms, there is no clear linear trend. Although more than half fall within the categories of 'Moderately agree' (28.6%) and 'Mostly agree' (27.6%), the intermediate percentages are split evenly, with 16.9% in both 'Somewhat agree' and 'Totally agree'. It is also notable that only 6% of young people categorically reject this proposition.

As for the variables relating disinformation to social media, significant results are also observed. First, regarding the idea that 'The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media' (Proposition 3), the measures of central tendency fall around the value corresponding to 'Mostly agree' ($\overline{x} = 4.05$; Mo = 4; Med = 4). The standard deviation is the lowest found and, although it still falls within the moderate range, it is the value showing the greatest concentration of results at the higher end ($\sigma = 1.023$).

This strong concentration in the most favourable categories is confirmed by the 67.6% of responses positioned as 'Totally agree' and 'Mostly agree'. As support for the proposition decreases, the percentages also diminish progressively, from 21.5% in 'Moderately agree' to 1.2% of young people who reject it.

Secondly, regarding the idea that 'Continuous exposure to information on social media helps distinguish fake from real news' (Proposition 4), the mean value ($\overline{x} = 3.54$) lies almost exactly halfway between the items 'Somewhat agree' and 'Mostly agree'. However, both the mode and the median coincide at 3, and the standard deviation shows the highest figure among the dependent variables established. The value $\sigma = 1.208$ indicates that, although still



	Totally disagree	Somewhat agree	Moderately agree	Mostly agree	Totally agree
Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news	3.6%	9.0%	25.6%	30.3%	27.2%
Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world	6.0%	16.9%	28.6%	27.5%	16.9%
The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media	1.2%	5.7%	21.5%	34.0%	33.6%
Continuous exposure to information on social media help distinguish fake from real news	3.5%	16.4%	30.2%	28.0%	15.1%

Figure 1:
Percentage distribution of the dependent variables established
Source: Compiled by the authors.

within a moderate range, there is notable dispersion, which is confirmed by the percentages recorded for each item.

In this respect, there is a slightly higher tendency among young people to be moderately in agreement (30.2%). However, the next highest level is only one and a half points lower. The remaining categories are distributed in very similar percentages between somewhat (16.4%) and totally agree (15.2%). Only 3.5% do not support this statement. Figure 1 and Table 1 show the summary of the frequency distribution values of the dependent variables and the statistical indexes obtained.

Table 1:
Central tendency measures and standard deviation values for the dependent variables

	Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news	Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world	The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media	Continuous exposure to information on social media helps distinguish fake from real news
Mean ($\bar{x}$)	3.82	3.45	4.05	3.54
Median (Med)	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00
Mode (Mo)	4	3	4	3
Standard deviation (σ)	1.162	1.237	1.023	1.208

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Contingency based on age and daily frequency of access to social media

In the two dependent variables relating to how social media are rated as a channel for accessing current affairs information, age shows statistically significant differences according to Pearson's chi-squared test ($\chi^2 < 0.05$), with a linear trend that rises as the age group increases.

Looking closely at Proposition 1, that 'Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news', a clearly significant linear association is found, with $p = 0.001$. This is reflected in the categories of mostly and totally agree. In the first of these, responses are distributed as follows: 28% among those aged 14 to 16, 33.3% in the intermediate group, and 38.7% among those aged 21 to 24. In the fully supportive category, the respective values are 20.3% in the youngest group, 37.6% in the intermediate group, and 42.1% among the oldest. No linear trend appears in the rest of the agreement scale, where the highest percentages occur among those aged 17 to 20.

Regarding the statement 'Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world' (Proposition 2), a linear association also emerges, though with a slightly more moderate p-value of 0.006. Except for the extreme categories of this proposition, all other categories show higher percentages as age increases. However, the differences between those aged 17–20 and 21–24 are only a few tenths of a percentage point across all agreement levels. These minimal variations confirm the moderate nature of the linear association. It is also relevant that the oldest respondents show the strongest support for this proposition, with 38.8% in the Mostly agree category and 39.1% expressing full support, although the latter is slightly lower than that recorded among those aged 17 to 20 (39.4%). By contrast, the 14 to 16 age group records more responses in the categories expressing the greatest disagreement with the proposition: 7.7% say they do not agree at all (compared with 5.7% and 5.0% in the other two groups) and 18.6% are in the slightly agree category, in contrast with 15.7% in the intermediate group and 16.9% among the oldest.

Significant differences are observed by age, with a chi-squared value below 0.05, in both propositions that relate disinformation to social media. However, no linear association is found ($p = 0.634$) regarding young people's perception that 'The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media'. All age groups clearly support this statement, especially those aged 14 to 16. In this group, 70.2% are mostly or totally in agreement, compared with 64.5% in the intermediate group and 69% among the oldest. The group showing the least support is the 17 to 20 age range, but in none of the groups do the categories of somewhat or not at all in agreement reach a combined 10%.

A moderate linear association ($p = 0.020$) does emerge in Proposition 4, that 'Continuous exposure to information on social media helps distinguish fake from real news', with support increasing as age rises. According to the percentages recorded, 16.1% of young people aged 21 to 24 choose the totally agree category, compared with 15.4% in the intermediate group and 13.2% among those aged 14 to 16. At the opposite end, the trend reverses, with greater rejection among the youngest: 4.8% in this group, compared with 3.4% and 2.6% in the older groups.

Table 2 shows the statistical significance and the linear-by-linear association of the contingencies between the dependent variables established and age.

On the other hand, there are statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 < 0.05$) in the two propositions that link information on current affairs with the frequency of access to social networks, and a linear association is also observed in both cases with $p = 0.001$. Regarding the first one (Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news), the level of support expressed by young people is positively related to their frequency of access to social networks, such that those who most frequently show full agreement are those who connect for more than five hours, with 38.4%. As the frequency of access decreases, this percentage also drops, reaching 19.8% among the young people who spend less than an hour on these platforms.

The linear association is also evident when examining the statement Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world. In this case, the trend is mainly found in the values for Totally disagree, which decrease as time spent on social media increases – from 8.7% among those who spend less than an hour, compared with 2.5% among those who connect for more than five hours. In contrast, those with the lowest frequency of access show a Mostly agree level of 23.4% and a Totally agree level of 16.8%, figures well below those found among the group with the highest frequency of access, which display respective percentages of 30% and 22.6%.

For the propositions that link social networks with disinformation, the chi-squared tests show different results. For the statement that 'The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media', Pearson's value does not indicate statistically significant differences. In contrast, such differences do appear in 'Continuous exposure to information on social media helps distinguish fake from real news' ($\chi^2 = 0.001$), with a linear association of $p = 0.001$. Consequently, greater access corresponds to greater agreement. This is reflected in the Totally agree item, which is selected by 20.9% of the young people who connect for more than five hours, a percentage that decreases as frequency drops, reaching 11.5% among those who access for less than an hour (Table 3).

Table 2:
Chi-squared tests for the dependent variables by age

	Pearson's Chi-squared			Linear-by-linear association		
	Value	DF	Asymptotic significance	Value	DF	Asymptotic significance
Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news	42.144	10	0.001	10.262	1	0.001
Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world	24.419	10	0.007	7.626	1	0.003
The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media	38.798	10	0.001	0.226	1	0.634
Continuous exposure to information on social media helps distinguish fake from real news	36.674	10	0.001	5.429	1	0.020

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 3:
Summary of the chi-squared values obtained for the established propositions when cross-tabulated with daily time spent on social networks

	Pearson's Chi-squared			Linear-by-linear association		
	Value	DF	Asymptotic significance	Value	DF	Asymptotic significance
Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news	61.936	20	0.001	24.741	1	0.001
Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world	47.746	20	0.001	13.963	1	0.001
The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media	22.232	20	0.328	0.733	1	0.392
Continuous exposure to information on social media helps distinguish fake from real news	55.765	20	0.001	20.645	1	0.001

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Age and frequency of access as predictive factors: Regression analysis

Based on the ordinal logistic regression models, it is observed that agreement with the statement 'Social media is an appropriate space for accessing news' (Proposition 1) is mainly conditioned by the frequency of access to networks, which shows a good fit ($\chi^2 = 40.540$; $p < 0.001$). Although age also shows statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 6.506$), the fit is poor ($p = 0.039$), so this link should be interpreted with caution. In addition, the low Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke Pseudo R-Squared indices (0.004 in both cases) show that age has a very weak association and minimally explains the fluctuations of the dependent variable. In contrast, daily access is more relevant to the level of agreement that social media is an appropriate space for accessing news, according to the Cox and Snell (0.025) and Nagelkerke (0.027) indices.

The regression coefficients for age indicate that the 14–16 group is less likely to agree than the older group, with a negative value (B = –0.291), an Odds Ratio of 0.75 and significance at p = 0.012. In the case of young people aged 17 to 20, no significant differences are observed compared with the 21–24 group (p = 0.332). Frequency of access explains variability more effectively, with a higher probability of agreement with proposition 1 among those who use networks for more than five hours a day, although the p value (0.073) is not significant for those who access between 3 and 5 hours. The probability of agreement decreases as time spent on these platforms decreases, with increasingly negative B values and decreasing Exp(B) indices, data that indicate a clear relationship between frequency of use and degree of agreement (Table 4).

Table 4:
Overall statistics and group comparison for Proposition 1

Predictor	χ^2 model	p model	R^2_{CS}	R^2_N	Groups compared	B	Exp (B)	p-value	Significance
Age	6.506	0.039	0.004	0.004	14–16 vs. 21–24	–0.291	0.75	0.012	Yes
					17–20 vs. 21–24	–0.105	0.9	0.322	No
Daily access	40.540	< 0.001	0.025	0.027	Less than 1 hour vs. more than 5 hours	–0.891	0.41	< 0.001	Yes
					1 and 3 hours vs. more than 5 hours	–0.675	0.50	< 0.001	Yes
					3–5 hours vs. more than 5 hours	–0.257	0.77	0.073	No

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Age again proves to be a poorer predictor ($\chi^2 = 7.084$; $p = 0.029$) than frequency of access ($\chi^2 = 25.538$; $p < 0.001$) for the statement 'Consulting social media is sufficient to know what is happening in their environment and around the world' (Proposition 2). In both cases, a good fit is evident, with Pseudo R-Squared values explaining the variance based on both factors, mainly frequency of use, which reaches an index of 0.016 for Cox and Snell and 0.017 for the Nagelkerke coefficient. For age, the indices are lower (R2CS = 0.004 and R2N = 0.005).

Specifically for age, the 14–16 group [B = 0.271; p = 0.019; Exp(B) = 0.763] shows a lower probability of agreeing with this statement compared with the 21–24 age group. Those aged 17–20 do not show significant differences compared with the older group (p = 0.970). On the other hand, there is no linear regression for daily access to social media. While it is generally observed that lower usage corresponds with a lower probability of agreement, the lowest Odds Ratio is found in the group accessing networks between 1 and 3 hours [Exp(B) = 0.57]; this result, together with a negative B coefficient, indicates a 43% lower probability for this group to agree with Proposition 2. The only group that does not show statistically significant differences compared with the highest frequency group is the one accessing networks between 3 and 5 hours (Table 5).

For the statements linking disinformation to social media, in the first of them (The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media – Proposition 3), daily access time is not a significant predictor, with a chi-squared value greater than 0.05 (p = 0.404). Age is significant, although extremely moderately ($\chi^2 = 6.322$; p = 0.042), with a poor fit (goodness-of-fit tests with $p < 0.001$), and its effect on the level of agreement with the analysed statement is weak, as reflected in the Cox and Snell and

Table 5:
Overall statistics and group comparison for Proposition 2

Predictor	χ^2 model	p model	R^2_{CS}	R^2_N	Groups compared	B	Exp (B)	p-value	Significance
Age	7.084	0.029	0.004	0.005	14–16 vs. 21–24	–0.271	0.76	0.019	Yes
					17–20 vs. 21–24	0.004	1	0.970	No
Daily access	25.538	< 0.001	0.016	0.017	Less than 1 hour vs. more than 5 hours	–0.518	0.60	0.004	Yes
					1–3 hours vs. more than 5 hours	–0.569	0.56	< 0.001	Yes
					3–5 hours vs. more than 5 hours	–0.169	0.85	0.232	No

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 6:
Overall statistics and age comparison for Proposition 3

Predictor	χ^2 model	p model	R^2_{CS}	R^2_N	Groups compared	B	Exp (B)	p-value	Significance
Age	6.322	0.042	0.004	0.004	14–16 vs. 21–24	0.137	1.14	0.244	No
					17–20 vs. 21–24	–0.159	0.85	0.136	No
Daily access time	2.918	0.404	0.002	0.002					

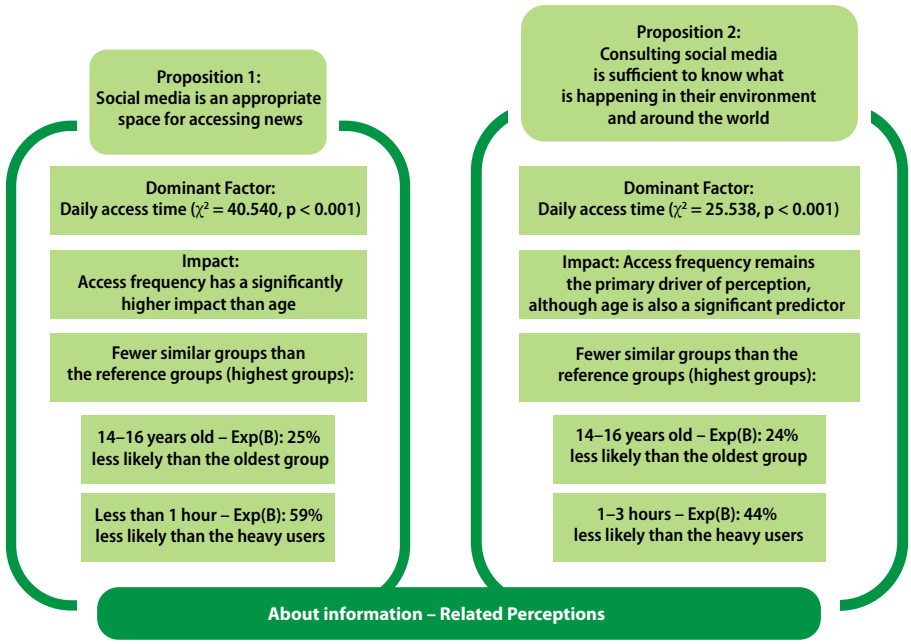
Source: Compiled by the authors.

Nagelkerke coefficients (0.004 in both cases). When both predictors are considered together, they also provide no significant value, exceeding the 0.005 threshold ($p = 0.058$).

The regression indices for age reinforce the weak effect it has on support for the statement that 'The greatest spread of rumours and disinformation on the internet occurs via social media' (Table 6). Although significance appeared in the overall model, none of the age groups are significant when using the 21–24 group as a reference. For the 14–16 group, the Odds Ratio is Exp(B) = 1.14, indicating a 14% higher probability of agreeing than the older group, but the values of B = 0.137 and $p = 0.244$ prevent this from being considered statistically significant. A similar pattern is observed for the 17–20 group. Table 6 details the overall coefficients but does not include a group comparison for daily access time, as the chi-squared value in the model does not show significant differences.

Regarding the second statement on the relationship between disinformation and social networks (Continuous exposure to information on social media helps distinguish fake from real news – Proposition 4), age is a good predictor of the level of agreement with this statement ($\chi^2 = 6.112$; $p = 0.047$), with a good model fit ($p = 0.114$ in the goodness-of-fit test), although the pseudo R-squared tests show low variability, with identical Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke values of 0.004. Daily access time to social networks is a stronger predictor than age ($\chi^2 = 30.484$; $p < 0.001$), although the model fit is not optimal ($p = 0.015$). Nevertheless, the Cox and Snell (0.020) and Nagelkerke (0.021) values indicate a somewhat stronger predictive capability than age.

The regression analysis shows that the 14–16 age group differs significantly from the 21–24 group ($p = 0.014$), with a 25% lower probability of agreeing with the statement [B = –0.288; Exp(B) = 0.75]. No significant differences are apparent in the 17–20 age group. Regarding daily access to social media, the 3–5 hours group is the only one that does not show any statistical differences compared with the highest-use group. In the other groups, significant values are recorded with $p < 0.001$. In these groups, a lower probability of agreement is observed as daily access time decreases. For young people accessing social media for less than 1 hour, there is a 48% lower probability of supporting Proposition 4 than those accessing more than five hours [B = –0.654; Exp(B) = 0.52]. This percentage decreases to 44% [B = –0.583; Exp(B) = 0.56] for those spending slightly more time on networks, between 1 and 3 hours daily (Table 7).



OUTLINE: INFLUENCING FACTORS ON PERCEPTIONS

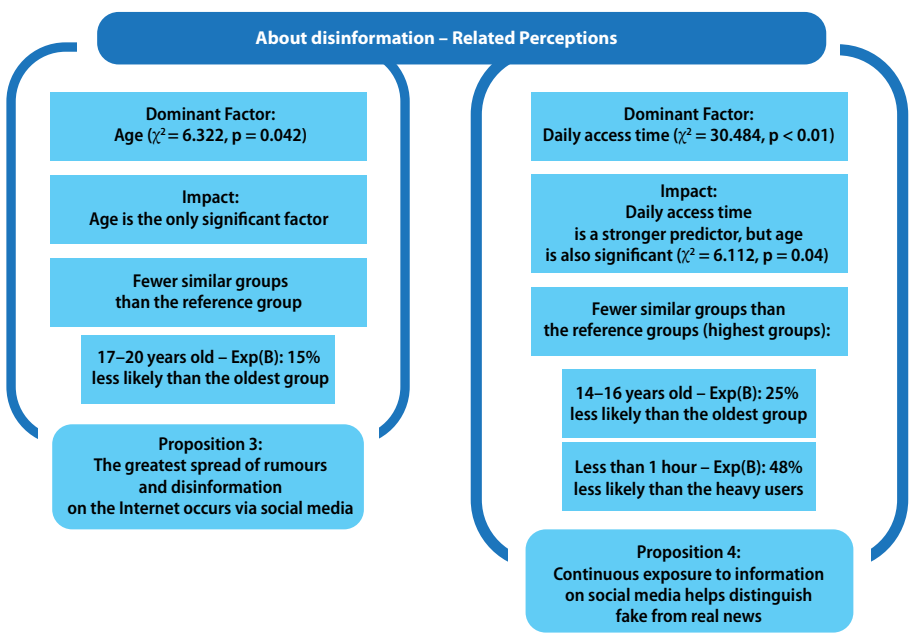


Figure 2: Outline: Influencing factors on perceptions
Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 7:
Overall statistics and group comparison for Proposition 4

Predictor	χ^2 model	p model	R^2_{CS}	R^2_N	Groups compared	B	Exp (B)	p-value	Significance
Age	6.112	0.047	0.004	0.004	14–16 vs. 21–24	–0.288	0.75	0.014	Yes
					17–20 vs. 21–24	–0.095	0.91	0.371	No
Daily access time	30.484	< 0.001	0.020	0.021	Less than 1 hour vs. more than 5 hours	–0.654	0.52	< 0.001	Yes
					1–3 hours vs. more than 5 hours	–0.583	0.56	< 0.001	Yes
					3–5 hours vs. more than 5 hours	–0.144	0.87	0.319	No

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Conclusions and discussion

The main contribution of this research relates to the study of age and frequency of access to social media as potential predictors in terms of information consumption, the spread of disinformation, and the ability to detect it.

Regarding the first research question – whether minors and young people perceive social media as an appropriate channel for accessing news – it can be stated that eight out of ten respondents fall within the three highest levels of agreement. This indicates a widespread acceptance of social media as a preferred information channel among young people. Although the recorded values suggest overall acceptance, there is a slight tendency towards the higher levels of agreement, which could be interpreted as growing trust in social networks as a primary source of information. This finding aligns with other studies on this issue (Newman et al., 2025; Sierra et al., 2025; Swart & Broersma, 2024). While the perception of social media as a suitable vehicle for consulting news achieves majority consensus, it was moderated if consumption was limited exclusively to this channel. In this regard, the contribution of our study lies in identifying through regression models that frequency of access to social media is a stronger predictor than age in determining whether adolescents and young people consider social networks an appropriate place to keep them informed.

Furthermore, regarding whether young people feel informed based on their consumption through social media, the fact that only 6% categorically reject this proposition indicates that negative perceptions about the informative capacity of social networks are in the minority. In this regard, age emerges as a less consistent predictor than frequency of access.

In relation to the second research question – whether young people associate the viralisation of disinformation with social networks – the high concentration of responses at the higher levels of agreement and the low dispersion demonstrate a consensus among the

young people surveyed. This allows us to conclude that, for adolescents and young adults, social media are the main channel for the dissemination of false information. The results indicate that more than two-thirds of respondents fall between 'Mostly agree' and 'Totally agree', revealing a widespread perception among young people of the prominent role of social media in spreading disinformation.

However, the results regarding the ability to discern between false and real information through continued access to social media show greater dispersion. This disparity indicates that, while some young people believe that frequent use of social networks can improve their information judgment, others do not share this view. Likewise, the percentage distribution of responses shows significant fragmentation, with similar percentages across the different levels of agreement and disagreement. We therefore find that those who are more predisposed to accessing social media – platforms that facilitate the spread of misinformation (Bode & Vraga, 2018) – tend to rely excessively on their own judgement to distinguish between truthful and untruthful content. These results are consistent with the idea of cognitive bias described by Kruger and Dunning (1999), according to which people with little skill in a given area tend to overestimate their own competence. This type of bias must be taken into account first and foremost in studies on perceptions of disinformation and, at the same time, in media literacy programmes that may assume adolescents and young people have skills that are not demonstrated in everyday life.

In this regard, access to social media cannot, in any respect, be associated with greater digital literacy. This research highlights the importance of fostering digital competencies that enable young people not only to identify false content but also to understand the mechanisms that make it viral, thereby promoting a more conscious and responsible use of digital platforms. Frequent access to information does not, by itself, guarantee greater competence; rather, it requires specific skills to evaluate sources, identify biases, or cross-check data, and incidental consumption impairs the ability to discern between different types of content (Boczkowski et al., 2017).

Since young people perceive themselves as properly informed solely through the information they receive, a false sense of informational competence can take hold. The high level of agreement among those who most strongly identify with the idea that social media is an ideal space for accessing news (Proposition 1) aligns with the findings of Campbell and Hawkins (2025) regarding the common perception among social media users of the 'news finds me' effect. The intensity of this perception is likewise associated with a greater tendency to believe false information, as users feel they are inured to such untruthful content. According to our findings, those who have greater access to social media are also more likely to agree that continued exposure to information on these platforms helps them distinguish between false and real content (Proposition 4).

This line of reasoning is concerning given the high level of exposure to information that young people experience on social media. At this point, it is important to distinguish between the quantity of exposure and the quality of cognitive processing, particularly among young populations who are still consolidating their critical skills. Regarding predictors that could anticipate the association of disinformation viralisation with social media, the results rule out daily access time but do confirm age, albeit in a very limited way.

Concerning the third research question – whether age and time spent on social media are good predictors of young people linking these platforms with information and/or disinformation – it is observed that frequency of access constitutes a more significant predictive factor than age regarding the level of agreement on the suitability of these platforms for accessing news. As daily social network usage decreases, so too does the probability of regarding these environments as appropriate for staying informed. Nevertheless, age remains a relevant factor in perceiving social networks as an informational channel, as agreement percentages regarding this proposition increase progressively from younger to older participants.

These findings suggest that maturity may be associated with a higher valuation of social media as an information source, possibly due to a greater capacity for critical selection of these platforms within their news routines. Considering the results obtained, in addition to age, gender, ideology, and educational level are presented as determining factors that influence the perception of fake news. Thus, older age and higher educational level would be associated with a greater ability to recognise and verify disinformation. When young people reach adulthood, their perception of disinformation appears to be more firmly established, and factors other than age – such as cultural differences or the frequency of social media use – begin to shape their perceptions.

In any case, our results indicate that age remains a determining factor in the perception of disinformation, and that Media and Information Literacy (MIL) interventions adapted to each age group are necessary. In this regard, Suárez-Perdomo et al. (2025) propose cognitive-intellectual techniques aimed at adolescents, focusing on searching for and evaluating sources, as well as axiological techniques for identifying biases in media content. For university students, Turpo-Gebera et al. (2025) argue that Media and Information Literacy must necessarily be linked to civic education that reinforces critical engagement.

Furthermore, the perception of adolescents and young people regarding the viral spread of rumours and disinformation on social media shows clear differences across age groups, but without an evident linear association. The uniformity in responses is reflected in the recognition of the problem, which is high across all age groups, indicating a widespread awareness of informational risks in digital environments. This finding suggests that, regardless of age, there is a shared understanding of the role of social media in the dissemination of false content, which supports the relevance of promoting educational interventions focused on media literacy from an early age.

Finally, based on our results, the preference for social media as an information source challenges traditional media and educational actors to foster critical skills in news literacy. It is necessary to reflect on the role that both traditional media and digital platforms should play in the critical formation of young people regarding the information they consume, since the quality, veracity, and diversity of the content circulating in these environments will, in turn, shape the public opinion of this more easily influenced population segment.

This study offers robust results based on a broad and representative sample of young people's perceptions of information and disinformation in Spain. However, its restriction to a single country constitutes a limitation, as it is difficult to extrapolate our findings to other regions of the world when taking into account data reported in other studies and international reports. Indeed, when comparing our results with those recorded in the European Parliament's

Eurobarometer (2025), we observe that young Spaniards follow a pattern similar to that of most of their counterparts across the continent. Nonetheless, they diverge from the trends observed among young people in neighbouring countries (France, Italy and Portugal), who show a slightly stronger preference for television as a source of information

In Latin America, a region with close historical and cultural ties to Spain, the trend is very similar, as reported in the *Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2025). According to this report, young people primarily access information through social media and content creators (influencers), relegating traditional media (television, radio and print press) to a secondary position. However, in line with our findings, they are largely aware of the disinformation circulating on social media. Latin Americans, however, express greater concern about not knowing how to detect disinformation and, overall, are more worried about this issue than Europeans. In summary, the trends observed in other countries within Spain's geographical or historical–cultural sphere reveal both similarities and differences. Therefore, as a continuation of this study, we suggest establishing a transnational comparison addressing the premises analysed in this research. Such an approach would provide valuable insights into the behaviour and information ecosystem developed by young people from a broader perspective.

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