**Democracy and social media: Between the dialogue and the strategy**

Andrés Sherman\*1, Pedro Fierro2 and Leo Yuanliang Shan3

1 LEAS at School of Communication and Journalism, Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez.

2 Business School at Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez; and Department of Media and Communication, London School of Economics.

3 School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison

\* Corresponding Author: [andres.scherman@uai.cl](mailto:andres.scherman@uai.cl)

**Democracy and social media: Between the dialogue and the strategy**

**Abstract**

This study examines the role of news consumption in fostering public deliberation within democratic systems. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas’s concepts of Understanding Orientation (consensus-oriented, communicative rationality) and Strategic Orientation (goal-oriented, instrumental rationality), it explores how news media can either facilitate rational communication in public debates or, alternatively, encourage strategic interventions. To investigate these relationships, this study utilizes a two-wave online panel survey conducted in Chile during a period of heightened political polarization surrounding the constitutional referendum of September 4, 2022. The first wave (T1) included 2,117 respondents, while the second wave (T2) included 903 **[con esto tengo dudas, yo pondría que usamos 903 casos reclectados entre tal y tal fecha. Así como está da a entender que hacemos panel análisis y nos puede jugar en contr**a]. The findings reveal that traditional media and social media are significantly and positively associated with a strategic orientation, whereas exposure to digital media is negatively associated with such an orientation. Additionally, incidental exposure emerges as a key factor in shaping the relationship between media consumption and deliberative predispositions.

**Keywords:** Understanding and strategic orientations; news consumption; incidental exposure; public deliberation; Chile

1. **INTRODUCTION**
2. **LITERATURE REVIEW**
   1. **On deliberative democracy and public deliberation [Acá creo que debiese ir un subtítulo, puse este, pero puede ser otro…]**

In recent decades, the concept of deliberative democracy has increasingly appeared in theoretical discussions (Dahl, 1989; Delli Carpini and Jacobs, 2004; Habermas, 1996; Rawls, 1971) and empirical studies on the formation of public opinion (Fishkin, 2005). As Page (1996) stated, “public deliberation is essential to democracy.” The expansion of the deliberative democracy concept broadens the idea of political participation, which for decades was restricted to electoral participation. The vote-centric view of politics considers the political system a mere aggregator of individual preferences, assuming that citizens form opinions in isolation and express them periodically in elections to determine majority positions (Delli Carpini and Jacobs, 2004). In contrast, deliberative democracy processes opinions before voting occurs in democratic systems (Delli Carpini and Jacobs, 2004). Through dialogue and reasoning, citizens can build agreements. However, this facet of citizenship does not compete with electoral democracy; rather, they complement each other. Fishkin (2005), who has conducted both theoretical reflection and extensive empirical research, argues that deliberative democracy must reconcile deliberation with democratic values, political equity, and avoid majority dictatorship. This requires an attitude of listening to others (Burkhalter et al., 2002). Listening is central, but so is the ability to speak and argue in the public sphere under equal conditions.

Regarding the characteristics of deliberation, Moy and Gastil (2006) assert that for deliberation to occur, certain conditions must be met: openness to political conflict, absence of conventional forms of domination, clear and responsible arguments, and mutual understanding. They argue that not all media stimulate democratic deliberation; for example, written media facilitate it through face-to-face interactions, while television complicates it by making rational arguments harder to present and for recipients to grasp as intended.

Not all conversations, however, constitute democratic deliberation. Many face-to-face conversations are merely social interactions without a clear objective or problem to resolve (Moy and Gastil, 2006; Schudson, 1997). The key difference between democratic deliberation and other forms of conversation lies in its conflictual nature, the use of rational arguments, and the goal of reaching a consensus (Moy and Gastil, 2006). Since the mid-20th century, research has demonstrated the relationship between democratic deliberation and interpersonal conversations. Interpersonal conversation is a privileged space for dialogue, where several characteristics converge to facilitate reaching agreements, such as: a) participants being in the same spatiotemporal context, b) use of multiple symbolic signals, c) specific orientation toward others, and d) the possibility of feedback (Thompson, 1998). The importance of interpersonal communication in deliberation was first found in research by the Columbia School, which analyzed the role of personal conversations in shaping undecided voters' choices. These findings were later extended by other authors who have continued studying the importance of interpersonal communication (Delli-Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Habermas, 1962; Rawls, 1971; Rojas et al., 2005).

Alongside interpersonal conversation, the relationship between deliberation and the media has also been intensely studied (Habermas, 1962; Moy and Gastil, 2006; Page, 1998). The debate began with Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), who measured how the media influenced personal conversations and found that the effect varied according to audience characteristics. Later, Habermas gave a central role to the media—particularly the press—in constructing the public sphere, stating that the media fuels rational debate among private individuals, constituting a public sphere for discussing issues of common interest (1962). This debate, now including digital media and social media, continues to evolve. Moy and Gastil (2006) argue that consuming news through the media opens up political conflicts that are part of deliberation, and Mais (XXX) claims that the media can promote deliberation, despite skepticism about their impact.

**[Quizás estos dos párrafos que siguen irían major en la sección de “media and deliberation”, más abajo]** Digitalization, especially the emergence of social media, has renewed interest in political deliberation studies, raising questions about differences between the effects of traditional media and new digital platforms. Social media have significant potential to boost political participation by reducing organization time, lowering economic costs of participation, helping build collective identities (Dalton, Sickle, and Weldon, 2009), reaching critical masses, forming groups with common interests, accessing vast amounts of information, and increasing social capital (Ellison et al., 2014; Valenzuela, Park, and Kee, 2009). These characteristics make social media a space of constant interaction, though these interactions do not necessarily lead to political deliberation and may also foster other forms of personal interaction.

Since 2016, doubts have increased about the beneficial effects of social media on public deliberation. The proliferation of fake news, echo chambers, election campaigns using micro-targeting techniques to understand voters, and opaque algorithms have heightened skepticism about these platforms' contribution to democracy (Chambers, 2023). In this context, Volker (2019) explains that the quality of deliberation on social media depends on various factors and their interaction: a) infrastructure quality, b) political context, c) legal framework, and d) discourse participants.

* 1. **Chilean Political Context [Creo que esto quedaría major como Case Study, después de la presentación de las hipótesis]**

In October 2019, Chilean democracy faced a wave of mobilizations. The protests began due to a fare increase on the Santiago subway—the capital city—amounting to just $0.031 USD. These demonstrations quickly spread across the country, becoming the largest citizen protests in Chile since the return to democracy in 1990. The mobilizations took place in a country that, over the past 30 years, had stood out in Latin America for its political stability and economic growth (González and Le Foulon, 2020).

Various elements can explain this social unrest. One of them is high income inequality (UNDP, 2017). According to the World Inequality Database (2020), Chile ranked among the most unequal countries in the region, surpassed only by Brazil. This inequality also created a significant gap between the elites and the citizens.

The mobilizations also had political causes. In the preceding years, the political system increasingly struggled to address voters' demands. As a result, party identification sharply declined (Bargsted and Maldonado, 2018), trust in political parties fell significantly (Segovia, 2017), electoral participation progressively decreased since 1990 (Morales, 2020), and the ties between political parties and social movements weakened to the point of becoming almost non-existent (Disi, 2018).

On November 25, 2019, following over a month of protests, nearly all of the country’s political parties—excluding those on the far right and far left—signed the Agreement for Social Peace and a New Constitution. This pact established a timeline to overcome the crisis and called for the creation of an assembly to draft—and later submit to a referendum—a new Political Constitution to replace the 1980 Constitution, which had been written during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship. The proposal outlined three key milestones: a) A plebiscite to let citizens decide whether they wanted a new Constitution or to maintain the 1980 one; b) If the new Constitution option won, an assembly of 155 members would be elected to draft the new charter; c) The text created by the assembly would be subjected to a referendum for approval or rejection.

The first referendum was scheduled for April 26, 2020. However, the COVID-19 health emergency forced its postponement, and it was finally held on October 20, 2020. In that vote, the option for a new Constitution won by a wide margin, but due to the health crisis, the 155 members of the assembly tasked with drafting the text were only elected in May 2021. The constitutional assembly operated for one year (from July 4, 2021, to July 4, 2022). Its proposed constitution was ultimately rejected in a referendum by a substantial margin. However, during that year, there were constant discussions and debates among citizens regarding the constitutional norms being considered **[Creo que acá falta una cita. A mi entender, los datos muestran que el interés ciudadano en el proceso se desplomó bien rápido en los primeros meses. Si se puede justificar dejaría la frase, pero si no, reemplazaría “ciudadanos” por “grupos políticos”, “sociedad civil organizada”, u otro]**. These conversations were accompanied by disinformation (Saldaña et al.) and polarization (Bellolio, 2002; Scherman and González, 2023). [**Yo acá le sumaría marginación. El debate, además de polarizado, estuvo super coaptado. Se puede citar a Larraín et al** [**https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-023-01046-z**](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-023-01046-z) **.. y yo tengo un pre-print que también se puede citar** [**https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/jb8hq**](https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/jb8hq)**]**

* 1. **Public Sphere and Action Orientations [Acá creo que debiesemos ocupar understanding and strategic en el subtítulo]**

One of the most important authors on the relationship between public opinion, deliberation, and democracy is Jürgen Habermas. In 1962, he published The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, a seminal text in the debate on this topic. One of Habermas’ central concepts is the “public sphere.” In this work, Habermas describes the public sphere as a space where individuals use reason to discuss public issues in accessible places. His research focuses on three European countries—France, Germany, and England—and highlights a new social structure that emerged in the 18th century in bourgeois gathering places, where debates were fueled mainly by print media publications (Habermas, 1991). The public sphere not only allows individuals to use reason to debate public issues but also acts as a hinge between the public sphere (where state action occurs) and the private sphere (where work, intimate relationships, and family life reside) (Habermas, 1991).

One of the most significant consequences of the public sphere’s emergence is the equality it creates between people, transcending origin and economic status. When differences are addressed through reason, only the strength of arguments and persuasion matters. Social differences tend to fade in the public sphere, where the principle of equality is affirmed through the use of reason. In his work, Habermas takes a critical view of the public sphere’s evolution since the late 19th century. He argues that public space is no longer driven by reason but has become dominated by manipulation and the public representation of interests, a phenomenon he calls “representative publicity.” He also criticizes the media for no longer fostering rational dialogue among citizens, having instead succumbed to commercial logic, interest defense, and cultural consumption (Habermas, 1991; Thompson, 1998).

Despite his pessimistic view of the public sphere’s function in the 20th century, Habermas later revised and modified some of his initial positions (Calhoun, 1992; Habermas 2006, 2022, 2023). In these later works, he reexamines various aspects of his proposal, most notably reassessing the idea of the public sphere’s decline throughout the 20th century and the media’s role in this process. He argues that two key actors are necessary for the public sphere to function: media professionals who generate mediated public opinion and politicians who occupy the center of the public sphere. Additionally, he asserts that the public sphere can function properly as long as media professionals maintain independence from surrounding actors and feedback occurs between media publications and civil society (Habermas, 2006).

In his most recent writings, Habermas (2022, 2023) further explores the media’s role, stating that one of their tasks is to generate "competing public opinions" (p.157) to meet the standards of public deliberation. He argues that the media’s space is the only venue where effective opinions can reach a broad audience (Habermas, 2022). He also highlights that political messages’ effectiveness varies depending on individuals’ interest, education, and economic situation. Consistent with his description of the public sphere, Habermas proposed two orientations for social interactions: a) strategic (goal-oriented) and b) communicative (understanding-oriented). The first seeks to manipulate others to achieve predefined objectives, while the second seeks to establish relationships through language and reason, aiming to reach consensus, which all actors in the situation deem legitimate.

Habermas’s proposal contrasts with a long-standing tradition that views reason as operating solely instrumentally—or strategically—in social life (Coleman, XXX; Dewey, 1988; Weber, XXX). Habermas offers a counterproposal, suggesting that face-to-face interactions can involve reason and achieve significant levels of understanding. Achieving agreements, according to Habermas, is essential for societies’ symbolic and normative interactions. His proposal underscores the importance of rationally established decision-making processes, as adherence to norms shaped by collective participation leads to final decisions being considered legitimate by all affected parties.

Strategic and understanding-oriented interactions play roles in different moments of social life. Strategic orientation is appropriate for decisions emphasizing technical efficiency, while understanding orientation is essential in situations involving normative aspects or when actors seek to harmonize their objectives with others in a shared definition of from the situation in which they find themselves (Habermas, 2003).

As in his proposal of the public sphere, in the description of the orientations of conversation, the use of reason—or its absence—plays a fundamental role. In his work, Habermas seeks to expand the instrumental action or rational action oriented towards ends, as defined by Max Weber, by incorporating a rational action in which language plays a central role, which he calls communicative action (Habermas, 2003). Although both actions have a basis in rationality, their differences are significant. Instrumental action is non-social—it does not involve other actors—and aims to use means as rationally as possible to achieve a desired state of affairs in the world. Finally, Habermas argues that there are social actions that are not instrumental, which occur when actors are not driven by selfish calculations but seek, through language, to reach a consensus with others. In this way, success orientation is typical of strategic actions, and understanding orientation happens in communicative actions (Habermas, 2003).

This proposal by Habermas has undergone few empirical tests. One of them is the work of Rojas (2008), who studied how the orientations of conversations impact relevant variables of the democratic system, such as political interest and political efficacy, in addition to establishing the determining variables of strategic orientation and understanding orientation (Rojas, 2008). In this latter analysis, the influence of news consumption in traditional media—TV, newspapers, and radio—on the two described forms of orientation was studied. Although it has its differences, Habermas’s proposal brings him closer to other authors who have also highlighted the importance of deliberation in democratic life (Dahl, 1989; Delli Carpini and Jacobs, 2004; Fishkin, xxxx; Page, 1996).

* 1. **Media and deliberation**

The nature of the relationship between media use and public deliberation has been a longstanding subject of study, dating back to the publication of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962), where Habermas highlighted the role of media in shaping the public sphere in the 18th century but was highly critical of its function in the first half of the 20th century.

Today, this debate has shifted, particularly to the digital world and social media, where contested positions exist regarding how these platforms influence citizen debates. Various authors have presented an optimistic view of social media, especially in fostering political participation. Social media reduces the economic costs of organizing, enables messages to reach a large audience, contributes to the formation of social and individual identity (Dalton, Sickle, and Weldon, 2009), builds trust among individuals pursuing similar political goals, and engages those uninterested in politics through incidental exposure (Xenos, Vromen, and Loader, 2014, p. 154). Additionally, it has been argued that social media use promotes democratic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga, Diehl, Huber, & Liu, 2019), fosters empathy for opponents (Borah, Edgerly, Vraga, & Shah, 2013), and increases tolerance (Mutz, 2002). On the other hand, some studies have found a negative impact of social media on political participation (Mutz, 2006; Taber & Lodge, 2006), particularly associating it with high levels of polarization due to the creation of echo chambers. In these spaces, users interact only with those who share similar political views, reinforcing their beliefs in a comfort zone devoid of challenges to their ideas (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2021). Similarly, social media can foster incivility, marked by offensive language, ridicule of dissenting opinions, and heightened polarization (Kabat-Farr, Cortina, & Marchiondo, 2018; Rosner, Winter, & Kramer, 2016). Using representative panel data from the United States, Goyanes, Borita, and Gil de Zúñiga (2021) demonstrated that consuming news on social media correlates with various measures of political incivility.

Beyond positive or negative effects, research has shown that different platforms have distinct impacts on deliberation. Studies indicate that comments on news websites contain more deliberative elements than discussions about the same events on social media (Esau, Friess, and Eilders, 20XX; Rowe, 2015). In traditional media, differences are also observed. Newspapers tend to elevate and refine political discussion, whereas television makes it harder to use reason and understand opposing opinions (Moy and Gastil, 2006).

Considering Jürgen Habermas's concepts of Understanding and Strategic Orientations, as well as the ongoing debate about the relationship between media use, the political system, and public discussion, our first three research questions are as follows:

**RQ1.1:** What is the relationship between news consumption on social media and Understanding and Strategic Orientations?

**RQ1.2:** What is the relationship between news consumption in traditional media and Understanding and Strategic Orientations?

**RQ1.3:** What is the relationship between news consumption in digital media (excluding social media) and Understanding and Strategic Orientations

**[Estas tres preguntas las transformaría en una sola]**

* 1. **Incidental Exposure**

Media exposure can be voluntary, where individuals consciously seek specific content—known as "selective exposure" (Festinger, 1957; Frey, 1986; Hart et al., 2009; Hart et al., 2020; Iyengar and Khan, 2009). However, another form of consumption exists where people encounter unintentional content while using media. For instance, individuals may end up consuming news content even if they initially engaged with media for entertainment or leisure. This secondary form is referred to as "incidental or accidental exposure" (Ahmed et al., 2014; Lee & Masood, 2024; Goyanes, 2019; Masip, Suau, & Ruiz-Caballero, 2020; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2014; Weeks et al., 2017). Various studies show that incidental exposure, especially on social media, has positive effects on participation and helps mitigate polarization. Research by Vaccari and Valeriani (2021) in nine countries found a positive relationship between incidental exposure and persuading others about political ideas, signing petitions, and participating in meetings or protests.

Other studies highlight additional positive relationships between incidental exposure and political variables. Weeks et al. (2017) found that incidental exposure increases information exchange and willingness to share information on social media. Moreover, research suggests that incidental exposure raises political knowledge levels (Ahmed et al., 2024; Lee & Kim, 2017) and enhances the likelihood of individuals encountering diverse perspectives (Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic, 2015; Tucker & Bonneau, 2015). For this reason, the first and second hypothesis of this article set forth that:

**H1:** There is a positive relationship between incidental exposure and Understanding Orientation.

**H2:** There is a negative relationship between incidental exposure and Strategic Orientation.

Finally, we are interested in studying the relationship between incidental exposure and different platforms in order to know if selective exposure has an impact on deliberation according to the platform used or if the link may vary depending on the communication support. Thus, we pose the followings research questions:

**RQ2.1:** Is there an interaction between incidental exposure and news consumption in social media with respect to Understanding and Strategic Orientations?

**RQ2.2:** Is there an interaction between incidental exposure and news consumption in traditional media with respect to Understanding and Strategic Orientations?

**RQ2.3:** Is there an interaction between incidental exposure and news consumption in digital media (different to social media) with respect to Understanding and Strategic Orientations? **[también transformaría estas tres preguntas en una sola]**

1. **METHODOLOGY**
   1. **Data**

The data for this study was obtained from a national survey conducted in Chile under the supervision of the Millennium Nucleus for the Study of Politics, Public Opinion, and Media in Chile (Nucleo MEPOP). The complete survey consisted of three waves, but this study only utilizes data from the first and third waves. Wave 1 was conducted between August 25 and September 8, while Wave 3 was conducted between [insert dates]. The total sample size for this analysis was 950 individuals, specifically those who participated in both Wave 1 and Wave 3. It is important to note that the survey instrument did not necessarily include the same questions across all three waves. As a result, the analyses presented in this paper are cross-sectional in nature. While the dependent variables were constructed from responses in Wave 3, all independent variables—except incidental exposure—were drawn from Wave 1. The survey design employed quotas based on gender, age, and socioeconomic level, ensuring alignment with national distributions. Data used in this study is publicly available.

* 1. **Variables**

***Understanding orientation:*** Following the previously mentioned literature, understanding orientation was measured by asking respondents to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the following statements:

[u\_3\_1] "In political conversations, it is essential to listen carefully to what others have to say."

[u\_3\_2] "When I talk about politics, learning is more important to me than convincing."

[u\_3\_3] "Through my conversations, I promote solidarity with others."

[u\_3\_4] "At its core, politics aims to reach agreements through conversation."

[u\_3\_5] "When I talk about politics, I feel connected to the people I talk with."

[u\_3\_6] "Through conversation, political interests can be directed toward the common good."

[u\_3\_7] "Talking about politics allows me to understand why others see things differently."

[u\_3\_8] "Political conversations are important for protecting people's rights."

All responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement. A factor was constructed using the eight responses (α = 0.86).

***Strategic Orientation:*** Similarly, to measure strategic orientations, all respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the following statements:

[s\_3\_1] "Saying one thing while thinking another is fundamental when talking about politics."

[s\_3\_2] "I talk about politics if I gain something from it."

[s\_3\_3] "In political conversations, form is more important than content."

[s\_3\_4] "When talking about politics, it is sometimes better not to express what you truly think."

[s\_3\_5] "People are tired of being asked to talk in order to reach political agreements."

[s\_3\_6] "The head of the household decides and does not need to reach an agreement with other family members."

[s\_3\_7] "Instead of so much discussion, it's better for someone to just say how things are."

[s\_3\_8] "Trying to reach agreements through conversation is a waste of time; it's better if someone decides what to do and gets it done."

All responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement. A factor was constructed using the eight responses (α = 0.75).

***Interpersonal Confidence:*** To measure interpersonal trust, respondents were asked: "Generally speaking, do you think most people can be trusted, or do you think you need to be careful when dealing with others?" Those who answered that most people can be trusted were coded as 1, and all others were coded as 0 (mean = 0.13).

***Political Efficacy:*** In line with the literature, political efficacy was divided into three distinct dimensions. First, external efficacy---i.e., beliefs about system responsiveness---was measured using the following statements:

[ex1] "Politicians don't really care about what voters think."

[ex2] "Politicians waste a lot of taxpayers' money."

[ex3] "People like me have no influence over what is decided in parliament or government."

Similarly, internal efficacy---self-competence beliefs---was measured with the following statements:

[in1] "In general, I don't find it difficult to take a stance on political issues."

[in2] "People like me are qualified to participate in political discussions."

[in3] "People like me have political opinions that are worth listening to."

Finally, following recent literature, an additional set of questions was used to measure online political efficacy---i.e., the belief that, because of the Internet, it is possible to have more influence on politics and public issues:

[op1] "Using the internet, people like me have more political power."

[op2] "Using the internet, I can have more say over what the government does."

[op3] "Using the internet, it is easier for me to understand politics."

[op4] "Using the internet, public officials care more about what I think."

All responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement. A factor was created for each of the dimensions (external efficacy: α = 0.74; internal efficacy: α = 0.74; online political efficacy: α = 0.84).

***Political Interest:*** To measure political efficacy, respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in the following areas:

[pln] Politics

[prc] The constituent process

[plb] The exit plebiscite

All responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated low interest and 5 indicated high interest (α = 0.88).

***News Consumption:*** To measure news consumption, respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they informed themselves using different channels. Specifically, we used three sets of questions: one related to traditional media, i.e., broadcast TV, cable TV, print media, and radio (α = 0.74); another focused on digital media, i.e., online versions of traditional media, digital-only outlets, news podcasts, and social media platforms of traditional media (α = 0.76); and a third set focused solely on social media, i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok (α = 0.84). All questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated low frequency and 5 indicated high frequency.

***Incidental Exposure in social media:*** To measure incidental exposure on social media, respondents were asked to answer a set of questions, indicating how frequently they encounter the following:

[nws\_g] Do you come across opinions and/or messages with which you agree?

[nws\_d] Do you come across opinions and/or messages with which you disagree?

[nws\_pl] Do you come across news/information about public or political matters even though you're not looking for current news?

[nws\_plb] Do you come across political news or news about the plebiscite purely by accident?

[nws\_l] Do you come across posts and information about the elections simply because other people in your network shared the news?

Each of these questions was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "never" and 5 represents "very often." A scale was created using these questions (α = 0.75) through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

***Sociodemographic Variables:*** Additionally, we controlled the models by incorporating various sociodemographic variables. These included education level, sex (mean = 0.45, where 0 = male and 1 = female), socioeconomic status (range: 1 to 5, mean = 3.2), and age (range: 18 to 84, mean = 44.91).

* 1. **Analysis**

To test our hypothesis, the analysis was divided into two parts. First, as mentioned in the previous section, different factors were created for the variables described in the previous section using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). We chose this technique because the selection of variables was theoretically grounded and supported by previous literature. Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 present the measurement models for the nine factors we developed.

**Figure 1.** CFA for Political Efficacies and Political Interest.

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated

*Source: Own elaboration.*

**Figure 2.** CFA for understanding and strategic orientations.

A green lines with white text

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

*Source: Own elaboration.*

**Figure 3.** CFA for news consumption.

A green lines and dots

Description automatically generated

*Source: Own elaboration.*

**Figure 4.** CFA for incidental exposure.

A diagram of a network

Description automatically generated

*Source: Own elaboration.*

The second part of the analysis explored which variables might be related to the propensity for having an understanding or strategic orientation toward political discussion using traditional OLS estimations. We recognize that, given the nature of our data and the design of the analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could also be an appropriate method to test these interactions. The potential advantage of SEM is that it allows us to create latent factors from observable variables—as we did—and simultaneously test the interactions between variables in the model. Thus, to ensure the robustness of our results, we also applied SEM for the two orientations under studied. These results, which are presented in the appendix (Appendix 1), are consistent with the findings described in the following section.

1. **RESULTS**

Regarding the first research question, as shown in Figure 5 (and Appendix 2), our initial models suggest that exposure to different types of media may indeed be differently associated with understanding and strategic orientations. While the consumption of traditional media and social media is significantly and positively associated with a strategic orientation, the consumption of digital media (e.g., online versions of traditional media, digital-only outlets, news podcasts, and social media platforms of traditional media) is negatively associated with such orientation. However, our models do not yield significant results for any variable of interest in relation to an understanding orientation. Nonetheless, incidental exposure is positively and significantly associated with an understanding orientation, indicating that individuals exposed to content they were not actively seeking—whether news they agree or disagree with—are more likely to adopt a deliberative approach. These initial findings support H1 but do not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis for H2.

**Figure 5.** OLS estimates for understanding orientation and strategic orientation.

A diagram of a graph

Description automatically generated

*Source: Own elaboration.*

*Note: Larger circles indicate statistically significant results (p-value < 0.05). The specific coefficients and standard errors are provided in Appendix 2.*

Beyond our research questions, these results provide valuable insights into the factors that may explain predispositions toward deliberation. For instance, older individuals appear more likely to adopt an understanding approach, while younger individuals tend to lean toward a more strategic approach. Similarly, men and individuals from lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to exhibit a strategic orientation in political conversations.

To address the second research question, additional models were estimated to examine interactions between incidental exposure and news consumption (see Table 2). These interactions were explored under the assumption that they might influence the propensity for understanding or strategic orientations. While no specific hypotheses were proposed regarding this issue, the results suggest that such interactions may indeed be relevant, particularly in explaining the understanding orientation. Our findings indicate that in all interactions—namely, with news consumption through traditional media, digital media, and social media—the interaction is positively and significantly associated with a greater likelihood of adopting a deliberative approach to political discussions.

Figure 6 provides a graphical representation of these interactions to facilitate their interpretation. It is important to note that the incidental exposure variable was categorized into two levels—low and high—solely for the purpose of the plot. The figure reveals that the relationship between understanding orientation and media consumption, particularly traditional media and digital media consumption, appears to depend on the level of incidental exposure. For individuals with high incidental exposure, the relationship is positive, whereas for those with low incidental exposure, the relationship is negative.

**Table 2.** OLS estimates, considering interactions.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Understanding | | | Strategic | | |
| Sociodemographic | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| Socioeconomic Status | -0.014 | -0.012 | -0.01 | 0.039\* | 0.04\* | 0.041\* |
|  | (0.018) | (0.018) | (0.018) | (0.019) | (0.019) | (0.019) |
| Sex | -0.035 | -0.038 | -0.031 | -0.113\* | -0.114\* | -0.109\* |
|  | (0.042) | (0.042) | (0.043) | (0.046) | (0.046) | (0.046) |
| Age | 0.003\* | 0.003 | 0.003 | -0.005\*\* | -0.005\*\* | -0.005\*\* |
|  | (0.002) | (0.002) | (0.002) | (0.002) | (0.002) | (0.002) |
| Media Exposure |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Traditional Media | -0.01 | -0.003 | 0.002 | 0.21\*\*\* | 0.212\*\*\* | 0.214\*\*\* |
|  | (0.052) | (0.052) | (0.052) | (0.057) | (0.057) | (0.057) |
| Digital Media | -0.005 | -0.007 | 0.006 | -0.102\* | -0.103\* | -0.1\* |
|  | (0.045) | (0.045) | (0.045) | (0.049) | (0.05) | (0.049) |
| Social Media | 0.048 | 0.047 | 0.039 | 0.067\* | 0.067\* | 0.062\* |
|  | (0.028) | (0.028) | (0.028) | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.03) |
| Incidental Exposure | 0.272\*\*\* | 0.27\*\*\* | 0.26\*\*\* | 0.081 | 0.081 | 0.082 |
|  | (0.051) | (0.051) | (0.051) | (0.056) | (0.056) | (0.055) |
| Political Attitudes |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| External Efficacy | 0.021 | 0.026 | 0.031 | -0.041 | -0.039 | -0.038 |
|  | (0.037) | (0.037) | (0.037) | (0.041) | (0.041) | (0.041) |
| Internal Efficacy | 0.13\* | 0.139\* | 0.133\* | -0.145\* | -0.142\* | -0.144\* |
|  | (0.058) | (0.058) | (0.058) | (0.063) | (0.063) | (0.063) |
| Online Political Efficacy | 0.04 | 0.038 | 0.037 | 0.074\*\* | 0.073\*\* | 0.072\*\* |
|  | (0.023) | (0.023) | (0.023) | (0.025) | (0.025) | (0.025) |
| Political Interest | 0.074\*\* | 0.07\*\* | 0.063\* | -0.022 | -0.024 | -0.025 |
|  | (0.027) | (0.027) | (0.027) | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.029) |
| Personal Interconfidence | 0.2\*\* | 0.183\*\* | 0.187\*\* | -0.119 | -0.125 | -0.122 |
|  | (0.063) | (0.063) | (0.063) | (0.069) | (0.069) | (0.069) |
| Interactions |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Incidental Exposure\*Traditional Media | 0.259\*\*\* |  |  | 0.087 |  |  |
|  | (0.064) |  |  | (0.07) |  |  |
| Incidental Exposure\*Digital Media |  | 0.175\*\*\* |  |  | 0.061 |  |
|  |  | (0.049) |  |  | (0.054) |  |
| Incidental Exposure\*Social Media |  |  | 0.129\*\* |  |  | 0.087 |
|  |  |  | (0.046) |  |  | (0.05) |
| Adjusted R2 | 0.212 | 0.207 | 0.201 | 0.104 | 0.104 | 0.107 |

Note: Coefficients are shown. Standard errors are in parentheses. p-value < .05 = \*; p-value < .01 = \*\*; p-value < .001 = \*\*\*. In order to include the interactions, variables are centralized.

**Figure 6.** Graphical representation of significant interactions

A graph of a blue line

Description automatically generatedA graph with blue lines and white text

Description automatically generatedA graph showing a blue line

Description automatically generated

*Source: Own elaboration based on the results from Table 2. For easier interpretation, and solely for the purpose of plotting the results, the incidental exposure variable was categorized into two levels: high and low exposure.*

In the specific case of social media, both low and high incidental exposure groups show a positive relationship between social media news consumption and understanding orientations, but the magnitude of this relationship differs between the two groups. These findings suggest that, as anticipated, incidental exposure is a key variable in understanding the relationship between media consumption and deliberative predispositions.

1. **CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**
2. **REFERENCES**
3. **APPENDIX**

**Appendix 1.** SEM for understanding and strategic orientations

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Understanding | Strategic |
| Sociodemographic |  |  |
| Socioeconomic Status | -0.014 | 0.053\* |
|  | (0.020) | (0.025) |
| Sex | -0.045 | -0.159\*\* |
|  | (0.047) | (0.061) |
| Age | 0.004\* | -0.007\*\* |
|  | (0.002) | (0.002) |
| News Consumption |  |  |
| Traditional Media | -0.011 | 0.293\*\*\* |
|  | (0.058) | (0.081) |
| Digital Media | 0.007 | -0.134\* |
|  | (0.052) | (0.068) |
| Social Media | 0.048 | 0.083\* |
|  | (0.032) | (0.042) |
| Incidental Exposure | 0.286\*\*\* | 0.061 |
|  | (0.067) | (0.079) |
| Political Attitudes |  |  |
| External Efficacy | 0.049 | -0.060 |
|  | (0.044) | (0.057) |
| Internal Efficacy | 0.156\* | -0.206\* |
|  | (0.068) | (0.088) |
| Online Political Efficacy | 0.04 | 0.111\*\* |
|  | (0.027) | (0.036) |
| Political Interest | 0.066\* | -0.036 |
|  | (0.031) | (0.039) |
| Personal Interconfidence | 0.21\*\* | -0.172 |
|  | (0.071) | (0.089) |

Note: Coefficients are shown. Standard errors are in parentheses. p-value < .05 = \*; p-value < .01 = \*\*; p-value < .001 = \*\*\*.

**Appendix 2.** OLS estimates for understanding and strategic orientations [Creo que esta table debiese ir en apéndice. Estamos replicando los resultados con la figura 5, lo que no se ve muy bien. Además que luego presentamos la otra tabla con las interacciones…].

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Understanding | Strategic |
| Sociodemographic |  |  |
| Socioeconomic Status | -0.012 | 0.04\* |
|  | (0.018) | (0.019) |
| Sex | -0.04 | -0.115\* |
|  | (0.043) | (0.046) |
| Age | 0.003\* | -0.005\*\* |
|  | (0.002) | (0.002) |
| News Consumption and Exposure |  |  |
| Traditional Media | 0.001 | 0.213\*\*\* |
|  | (0.053) | (0.057) |
| Digital Media | 0.008 | -0.098\* |
|  | (0.046) | (0.049) |
| Social Media | 0.047 | 0.067\* |
|  | (0.028) | (0.03) |
| Incidental Exposure | 0.246\*\*\* | 0.072 |
|  | (0.051) | (0.055) |
| Political Attitudes |  |  |
| External Efficacy | 0.032 | -0.037 |
|  | (0.038) | (0.041) |
| Internal Efficacy | 0.133\* | -0.145\* |
|  | (0.058) | (0.063) |
| Online Political Efficacy | 0.041 | 0.074\*\* |
|  | (0.023) | (0.025) |
| Political Interest | 0.06\* | -0.027 |
|  | (0.027) | (0.029) |
| Interpersonal confidence | 0.183\*\* | -0.125 |
|  | (0.064) | (0.069) |
| Adjusted R2 | 0.19 | 0.104 |

Note: Coefficients are shown. Standard errors are in parentheses. p-value < .05 = \*; p-value < .01 = \*\*; p-value < .001 = \*\*\*.