

Identifying, Scrutinising, and Sharing Misinformation

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Abstract

With the rise of the internet and social media, misinformation has become a significant challenge for modern societies. Its spread can have serious consequences, including jeopardising democratic elections and endangering public health. Understanding whether and how people process misinformation is, therefore, crucial. In collaboration with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), we conducted a cross-country comparative survey experiment to assess people's ability to identify misinformation, their intentions to share it, and their reasons for refraining from sharing. The survey was administered to nationally representative samples in 21 countries.

This report presents results for Switzerland, compared with those for Germany, France, and the United States. It focuses on participants' ability to discern truth and sharing intentions across five thematic domains: international affairs, environment, parenting, health, and climate. We examine differences based on participants' use of and trust in public media, education, and income alongside their political identification. Beyond sharing intentions, we analyse why participants choose not to share misinformation and, if they do, with whom and through which communication channels. Additionally, the report provides insights into general patterns of media usage and trust, alongside attitudes toward politics, democracy, and the media in Switzerland.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the spread of misinformation has become a significant issue in many countries worldwide. With the rise of the internet and social media, people’s exposure to misinformation, as well as their opportunities to share it—both intentionally and unintentionally—has increased rapidly. Regardless of how it spreads, misinformation can result in a wide range of problems with serious consequences, including confusion, mistrust, and harmful decision-making. To mitigate these effects, it is crucial to identify which types of people are most likely to fail in recognising misinformation and are willing to share it.

To address this question, we conducted a comparative survey experiment in 21 countries to test whether and how people can accurately discern between true and false information online and whether they are inclined to share it. We confronted participants with different forms of true and false media posts from five thematic domains. In doing so, we accounted for participants’ tendencies to seek additional information in making decisions and captured with whom and how they intend to share information.

In this report, we present a portion of the results related to Switzerland, focusing on the analysis of truth discernment and sharing practices across thematic domains. To provide context, we compare Switzerland’s results with those of its neighbouring countries—France and Germany—as well as the United States. To gain deeper insights into the observed patterns, we examine them in relation to participants’ media usage, trust in media, education and income, and political identification. We then analyse sharing decision focusing on how and with whom participants share statements as well as their reasons not to. Finally, we explore general attitudes toward politics, democracy, journalism, and the media in Switzerland.

2 Methodology and data

This research project is based on a collaboration with a team at the Digital Policy, Economics and Measurement Unit of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). With our support and input, the team developed the OECD Truth Quest survey, which contains a series of survey experiments to assess participants’ ability to accurately identify true and false information and their intention to share it. The survey was conducted in January and February 2024 with samples from 21 countries, comprising a total of 40,765 participants, which are nationally representative in terms of age, gender, sub-national region, educational attainment, and income level using country-specific quotas. All questions were professionally translated and localized into national languages. For instance, the survey in Switzerland was available in German, French, and Italian. The full methodological description of the OECD Truth Quest survey contains additional details and other results not discussed in the context of this report (OECD, 2024).

The core of the survey featured an interactive task designed to simulate a social media experience. Participants reviewed a selection of media posts that included true and false statements,

each accompanied by a generic, non-informative image (see example in Figure 1). To ensure cross-country comparability, only information deemed relevant across all participating countries was included. Participants could click “more” to access additional details about a statement and had the option to “flag” or “star” it. All interactions, including response times, were recorded for analysis.

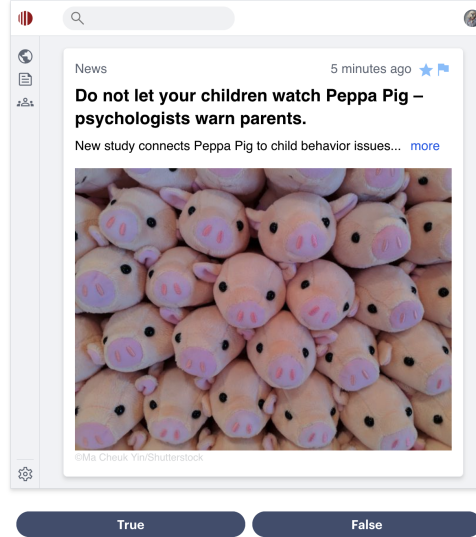


Figure 1: Example post on social media platform (parenting domain).

The main part of the survey comprised two survey experiments. In the first experiment, participants evaluated 28 statements as either true or false. These statements covered five domains—international affairs, environment, parenting, health, and climate change—and were randomly selected from a pool 66 statements which represent true information as well as various forms of false information, including disinformation, misinformation, contextual deception, propaganda, and satire.

To compile a sufficiently large pool of suitable statements, we utilised a dataset containing over 100,000 URLs that had been shared online and fact-checked by professional fact-checkers. From this dataset, we identified 267 potential true and false statements. These statements were then subjected to a pre-test, where participants rated a random selection of five statements each on various criteria such as arousal and valence. Based on the pre-test results, we matched true and false statements within all domains to ensure balance across these criteria.

In the second experiment, participants were presented with three additional statements from the parenting and climate domains. These included one true and one false statement previously evaluated and a new, unseen statement. Participants were then asked whether they would intend to share each statement. Those who answered “Yes” specified how and with whom they would share the content via a closed matrix question, while those who answered “No” provided reasons through an open-ended question.

Following the experimental tasks, participants completed a series of questions about their

attitudes and behaviours. They reported the frequency of their use (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often) and trust in information (Not at all, Not too much, Some, A lot) from various media sources, including public and private television and radio, news websites or apps, print publications, and social media platforms. Participants further shared their opinions on democracy, politics, and the media, focusing on their home country. This included responses to statements rated on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree):

- “All in all, democracy works well in [country].”
- “It is important to tolerate opinions that you disagree with.”
- “A democracy can function without independent journalism.”
- “Politicians and the media collude to manipulate public opinion.”

Finally, demographic information was collected to contextualise the responses, including which political party they had voted for in the last national election.

3 Findings

Below, we focus on analysing parts of the data from samples in Switzerland (1,531), Germany (2,006), France (2,002), and the United States (2,022).¹

3.1 Truth discernment

We begin our analysis by focusing on participants capacity to disentangle true from false and misleading information. For this purpose, we measure participants’ *truth discernment* defined as their average truth ratings of true news minus their average truth ratings of false and misleading news (e.g. Pennycook and Rand, 2019). Higher ratings of truth discernment thus signal an increased capacity to differentiate true from false and misleading information.

We first concentrate on comparing truth discernment across thematic domains and countries. As shown in Figure 2, there is considerable differences by domain. Switzerland, France, and Germany follow a similar trend as in truth discernment being the easiest for information on climate change, followed by health, parenting, and the environment; participants in these countries struggle the most with information pertaining to international affairs. For the U.S., the picture is different. Participants show substantially lower truth discernment scores in the climate change domain and higher values in the international relations domain compared to those in other countries. However, a closer look also reveals the lack of noticeable differences across domains for the United States, possibly indicating a general, non-discriminatory tendency to trust and distrust information online that is independent of the actual content. Across all domains, truth discernment in Switzerland is lower than in Germany and comparable with that in France.

¹The target sample size was 2,000 in every country but the survey firm could not deliver it for Switzerland.

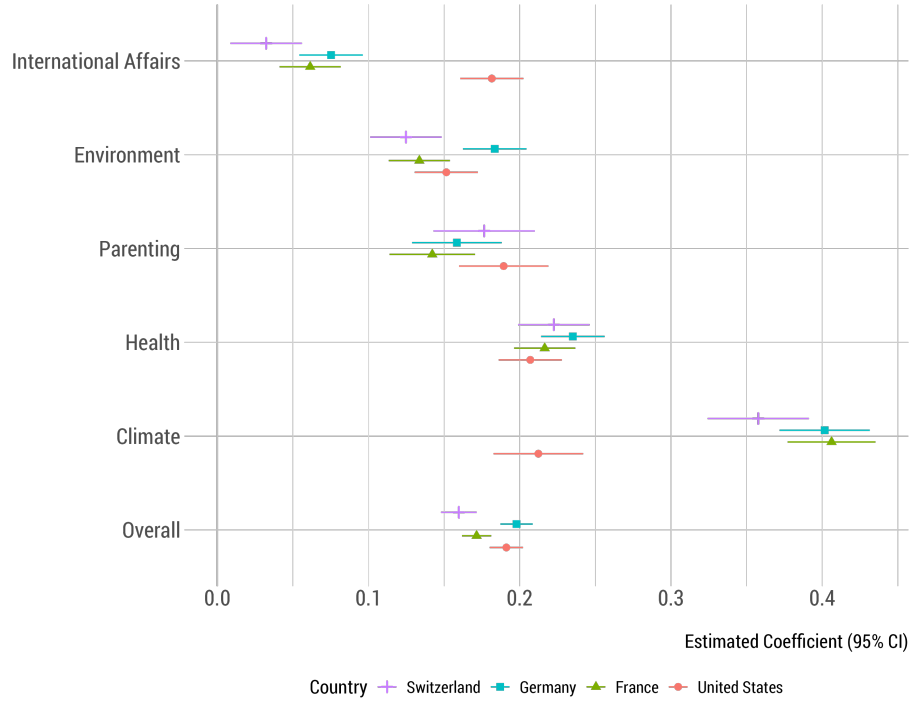


Figure 2: Truth discernment across domains and countries.

3.2 Sharing Discernment

Identifying true and false news is only one part of the equation. Equally important is whether people are more inclined to share true news over false or misleading news. To examine this, we measure participants’ *sharing discernment*, defined as the difference between their average sharing intention for true news and that for false or misleading news. Higher scores on this measure indicate better “sharing hygiene,” reflecting a stronger intention to differentiate true from false or misleading information when deciding what to share. Since this measure is derived from statements related to parenting and climate change, with only three statements evaluated per participant, we do not differentiate between thematic domains in the analysis below.

Comparing sharing discernment across countries (see Figure 3), we find Germany shows the highest sharing discernment, followed by France, Switzerland and the United States with a markedly lower rate of prioritizing true information in sharing. Focusing on Switzerland, it lags behind Germany at a position between France and the United States.

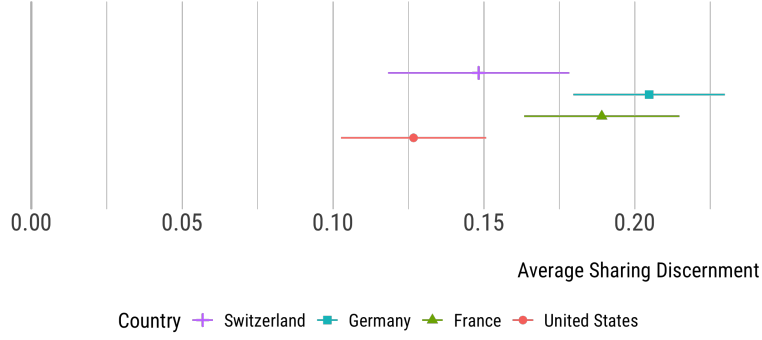


Figure 3: Differences in *sharing discernment* by country.

3.3 Truth and sharing discernment by media use and trust

In addition to assessing participants’ ability to identify and their intention to share true versus false and misleading information, we also examine their media use and trust. We first report on general patterns related to these dimensions in Switzerland before relating them to truth and sharing discernment.

3.3.1 Patterns of use and trust in different media as information sources

We begin by participants’ reported use of various media as information sources. Participants were asked “How often do you get news from...” across seven different types of media. Figure 4 shows frequency distributions for the Swiss sample. Accordingly, public television and radio show similar usage patterns, with 71% using the former and 64% the latter at least sometimes as a source of information. However, public television leads in high engagement, with 42% using it “A lot,” while only 12% never turn to it for news.

Private television and radio present a more polarised picture. While 49% and 41% of participants use these sources for information, only 18% and 15%, respectively, use them often, and substantial portions of the population (28% and 25%) never rely on them.

News websites/apps and social media apps are consumed by the majority of participants at least sometimes (72% and 62%). It is important to note that we cannot distinguish between publicly-funded news websites/apps, e.g. SRF/RTS/RSI/RSR.ch and the corresponding apps, and private media website, e.g. *tagesanzeiger.ch* here. In contrast, print publications stand out as the medium with the least polarised usage, with a relatively small proportion of users relying on them either very frequently or not at all (together 36%).

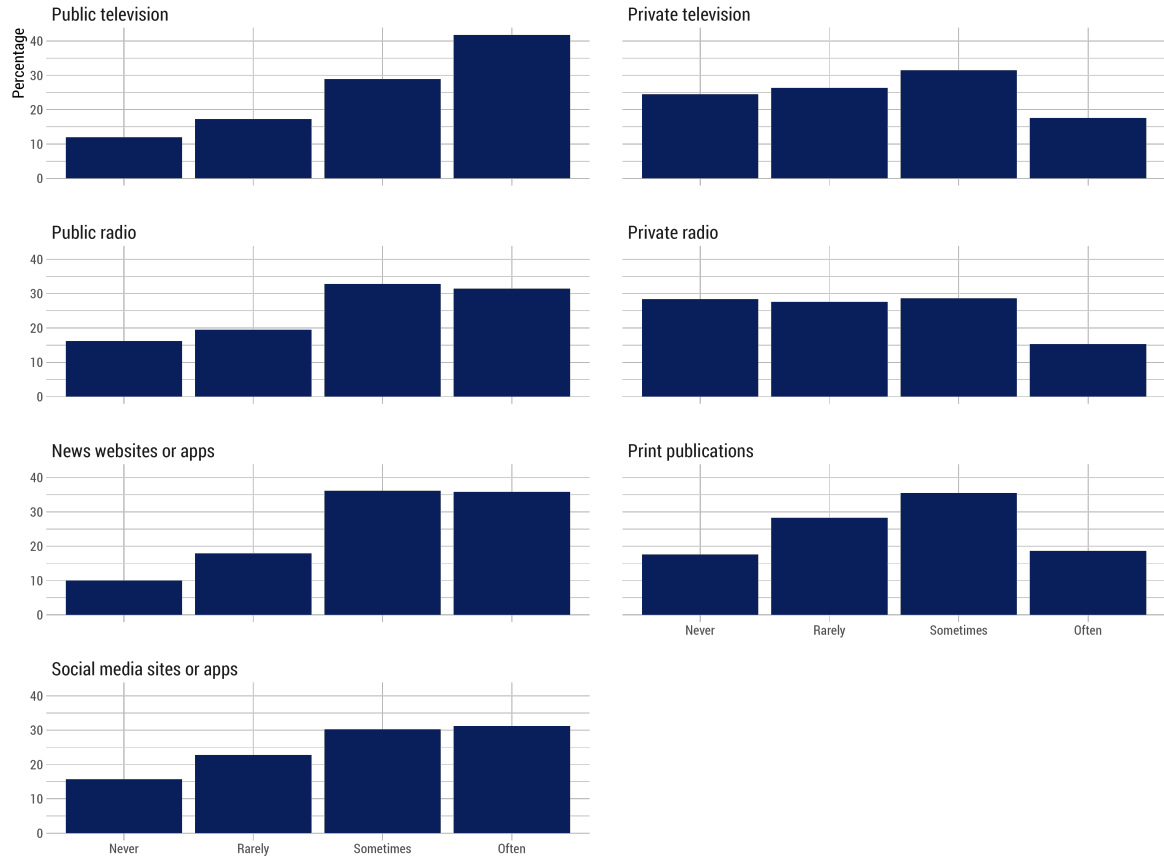


Figure 4: Use of different media as source of information in Switzerland.

Beyond their usage, we also asked participants, “How much, if at all, do you trust the information you get from...” Figure 5 reveals a pattern notably different from media usage. With the exception of social media sites/apps, most sources exhibit a lack of extremely low trust levels. For nearly all other media types, the largest share of users assigns *some* trust to the information they provide, although high levels of trust vary across sources.

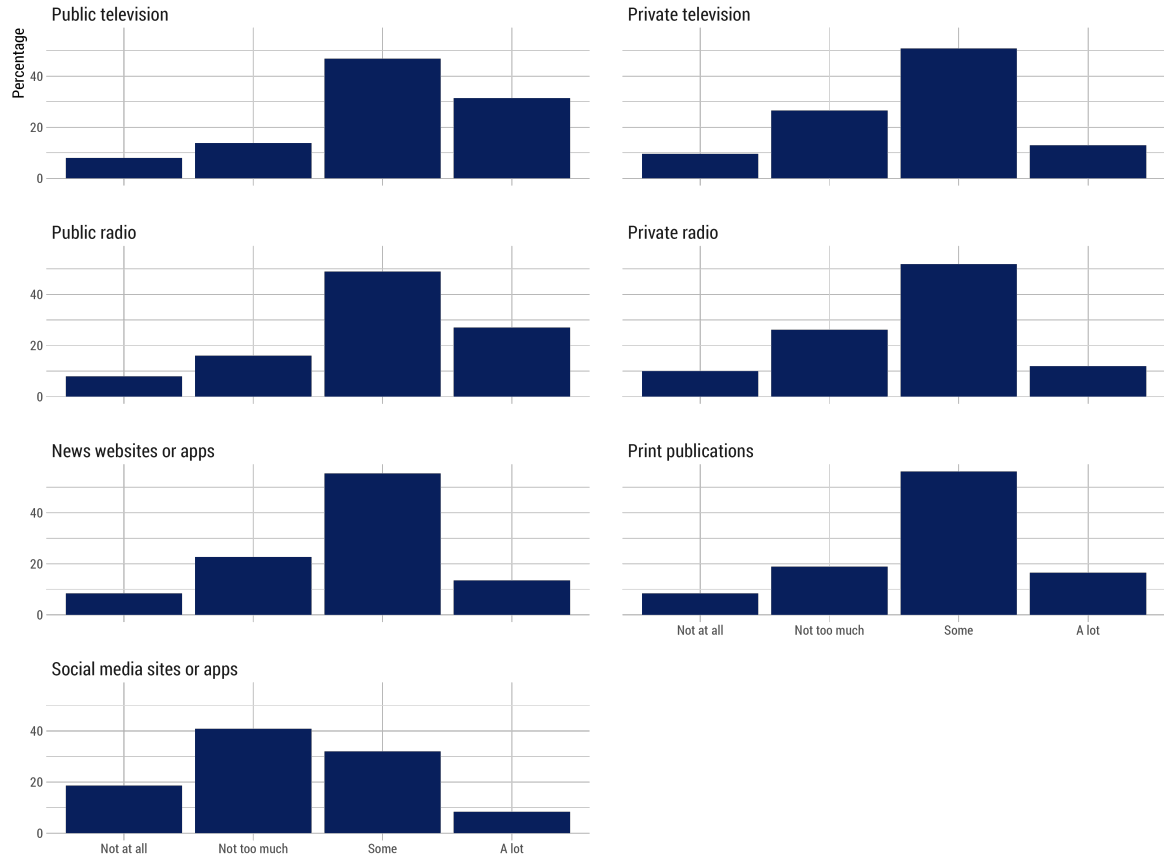


Figure 5: Trust in information obtained from different media (Switzerland).

Public television and radio inspire the most trust, with 78% and 76% of participants, respectively, expressing *at least some* confidence in the information they deliver. Private television and radio also earn the trust of a substantial share of respondents (51% and 52%), though significantly fewer place *a lot* of trust in these sources (13% and 12%). Similar patterns emerge for news websites/apps and print publications. Social media sites/apps, however, stand out as the most polarising source, with 27% of participants expressing either no trust at all or very high trust in the information they provide.

Our data allows us to compare public and private channels with regard to TV and radio—a point we will return to below. Given this opportunity, we expand our analysis to explore how patterns of radio and TV use differ by age groups. Figure 6 shows the proportion of respondents who report different levels of radio usage broken down by age.

We find that the proportion of people who *never* or *rarely* use public radio declines with age, while the share of those who use it *often* increases steadily. This suggests that older individuals are more likely to regularly listen to public radio, whereas younger people tend to avoid it. In contrast, private radio use shows a much weaker age gradient. While there is a modest increase in

often-listeners with age, the effect is considerably smaller than for public radio. The proportions of those who listen *sometimes* or *rarely* remain relatively stable across age groups. Taken together, the results suggest that younger people are generally less likely to get their news from radio while older individuals are more frequent users, with public radio showing the clearest age gradient. Private radio, by comparison, displays a more even distribution across age.

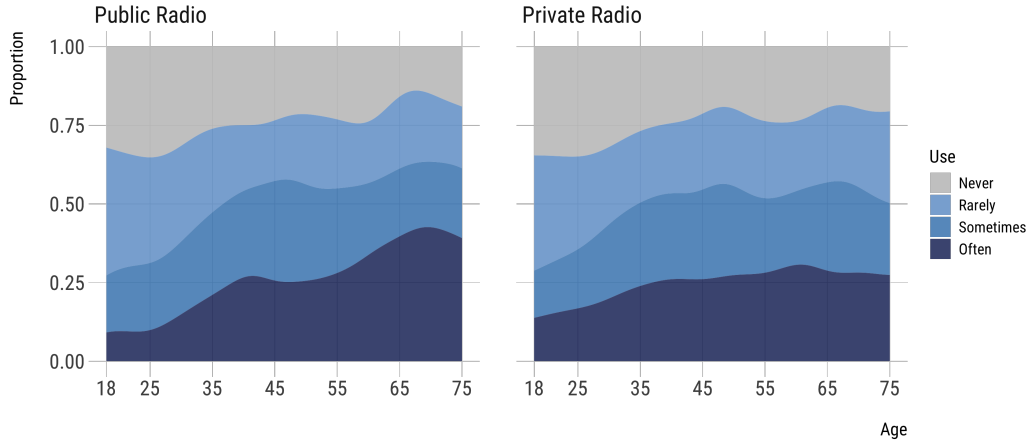


Figure 6: Public and private radio use across age.

Figure 7 shows patterns of TV use across participants' age. We find that neither public nor private TV news reach younger respondents effectively. With increasing age, however, news consumption via public TV rises steadily. The share of people who get news from public TV grows from below 10% at age 20 to over 50% by age 66, while the proportion who do not watch any news on public TV drops from about 37% to just above 10%.

The age pattern for private TV starts from a similar baseline among younger respondents but follows a different trajectory. Although news consumption on private TV also increases with age, the trend is weaker and starts to reverse around age 50. This suggests that news on public TV not only has a broader reach among older viewers but also continues to gain users across a wider age range than private TV.

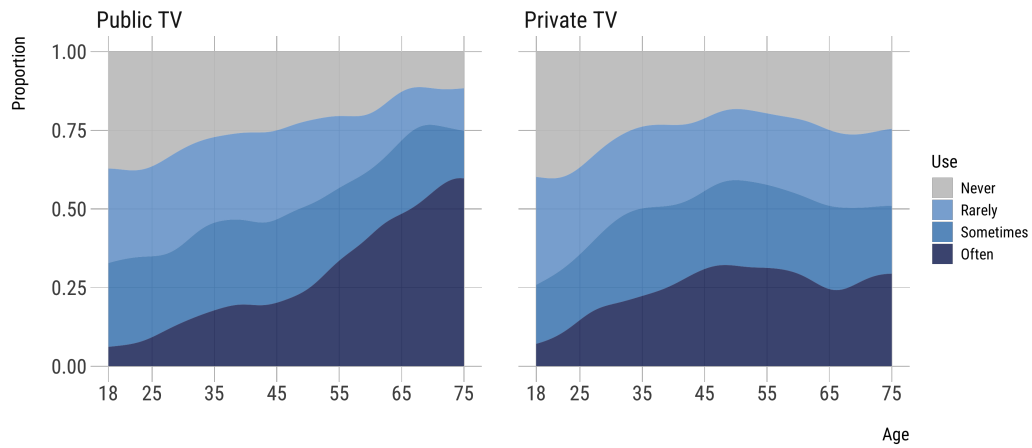


Figure 7: Public and private TV use across age.

Turning to the trust participants place in information from private and public radio and TV (Figures 8 and 9), we observe similar—but less pronounced—age-related patterns compared to media use. As with public radio use, trust in information from public radio increases with age: while around 35% of the youngest respondents express *at least some* trust, this share rises steadily to about 62% by age 75, with the most marked increase occurring between the ages of 25 and 35. Trust in private radio also increases initially, reaching approximately 50% by age 35, but then remains relatively stable across older age groups, with even a slight decline among the oldest respondents.

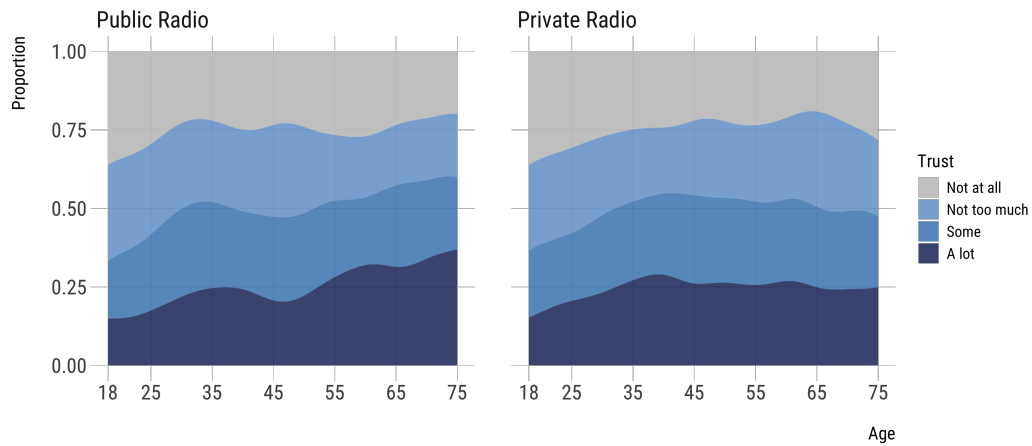


Figure 8: Public and private radio trust across age.

We also observe clear age-related trends in trust in TV. The share of participants who

express *at least some* trust in information from public TV rises from about 32% at age 18 to approximately 58% at age 75. Trust in private TV follows a similar trajectory in early adulthood, starting at a comparable level and increasing through the younger age groups. It peaks around age 35 at roughly 53%, but then levels off and declines noticeably among those over 65. Thus, while overall levels of trust in TV and radio remain moderate, we observe marked generational patterns—most notably a steady rise in trust in public broadcasters with age, and a more limited, age-specific trust in private media that peaks in early- to mid-adulthood.

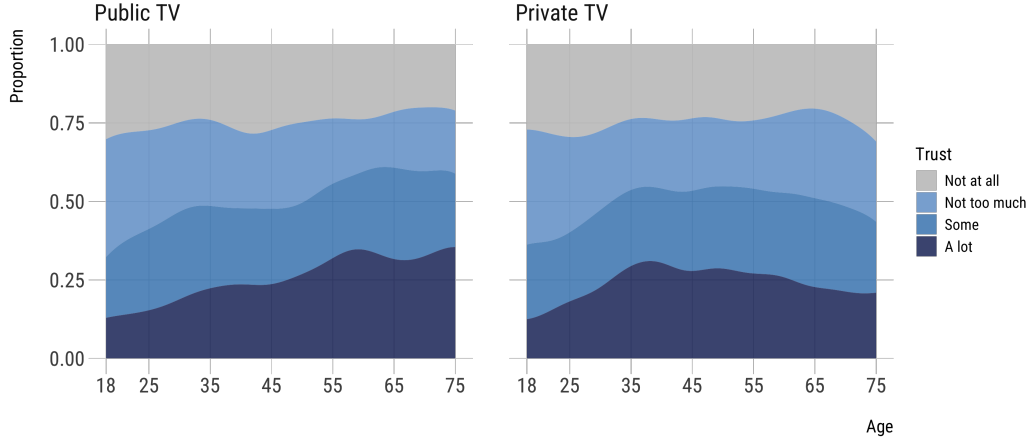


Figure 9: Public and private TV trust across age.

3.3.2 Discernment by use and trust of public media (radio and television)

To better understand the role of public media for people’s ability to identify true from false and misleading information as well as their intention to share it, we analyse respective differences in our two main scores: *truth discernment* and *sharing discernment*. We focus on radio and TV, which, as mentioned above, allows us to directly compare public and private channels. To do so, we aggregate the data in multiple ways.

First, we compare levels of use and trust in public versus private media channels. We construct variables that capture whether a respondent places more trust in information from—or makes more use of—public media relative to the corresponding private channel. For instance, the *radio trust* variable in Figure 10 indicates whether a respondent reports, say, *some* trust in public radio but only *not too much* trust in private radio. This would classify them as having *higher* trust in public than in private radio.

Figure 10 displays the average *truth discernment* scores for respondents grouped by whether they place *lower or equal* versus *higher* trust in—or make more use of—public compared to private media. This comparison helps illustrate whether favouring public media over private media is associated with a greater ability to distinguish true from false or misleading informa-

tion. In Switzerland, respondents who place greater trust in public radio and TV than in their private counterparts show, on average, noticeably higher *truth discernment* scores—0.18 and 0.19, respectively—compared to 0.11 and 0.08 among those who trust private media equally or more. While those who report higher use of public versus private media also show higher average discernment scores, the differences are considerably smaller. A similar pattern appears in Germany, where the differences are even more pronounced.

The pattern differs in France and the United States. In France, only greater trust in public over private radio is associated with higher *truth discernment*, while no such effect is observed for television. Interestingly, the largest difference overall is found in the United States, where greater trust in public compared to private radio is linked to a 0.25-point increase in truth discernment.

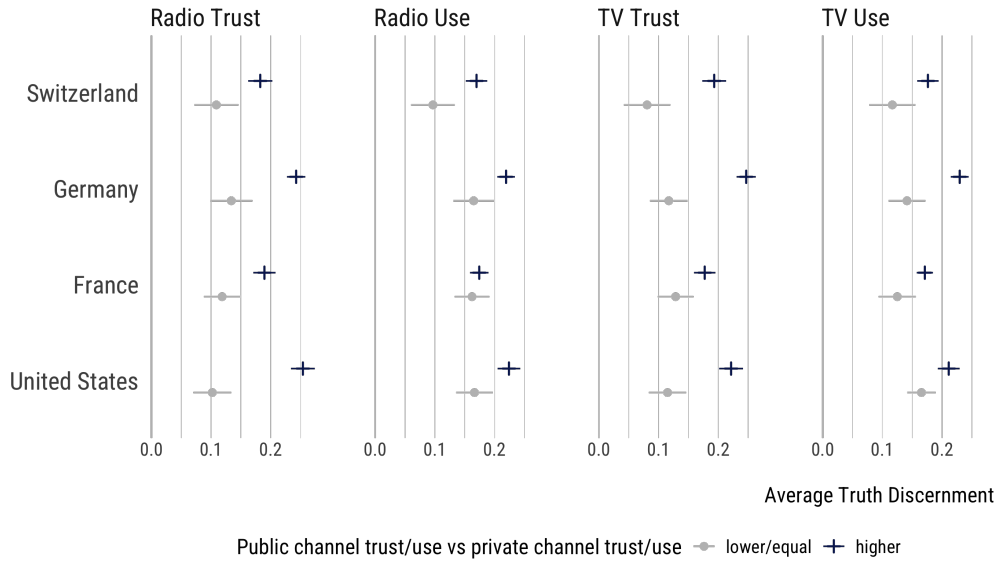


Figure 10: *Truth discernment* by relative trust and use of public versus private media channels (radio and TV) across countries.

Second, we focus on the role of public media more generally. To do so, we categorise participants who report trusting either public radio or TV at least *somewhat* as having “Some / A lot” trust in public media (*public media trust (radio/TV)*); those who do not are categorised as having “Not at all / Not so much” trust. Similarly, we define *public media use (radio/TV)* by combining responses about public TV and radio consumption: participants who report receiving news from either source *sometimes* or *often* are classified as “Sometimes / Often” users, while those who report doing so less frequently are not.

To examine the relationship between public media and truth discernment, we then regress truth discernment separately on *public media trust (radio/TV)* and *public media use (Radio/TV)*. Figure 5 presents a caterpillar plot displaying the estimated effects of each variable (in blue) alongside the respective intercepts (in grey).

Across all countries, we find a consistent positive association between trust in at least one public media source and higher *truth discernment*. This relationship is strongest in Germany, where truth discernment increases by 0.13 points, followed by Switzerland with an increase of 0.08 points if participants trust at least somewhat either public radio or public TV.

To the extent that answer categories for our trust and use variables are comparable, the effect of public media use appears notably smaller than that of trust. Still, it is statistically significant in both Germany and Switzerland, with increases of 0.09 and 0.03 points, respectively. These findings suggest that trust in public media plays a more robust role in fostering truth discernment than mere use—and that this relationship is more pronounced in Switzerland and Germany than in France and the United States.

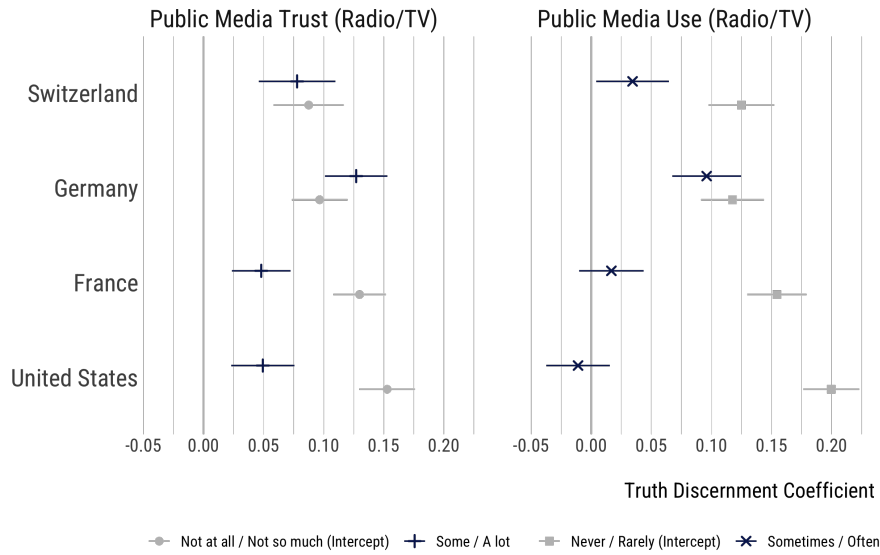


Figure 11: *Truth discernment* by trust and use in public media.

Use and trust in public media are closely linked, making it both important and analytically challenging to determine which of the two primarily drives *truth discernment*. While we cannot fully disentangle their individual effects using observational data, we can model both their separate and interactive influence on truth discernment. As shown in Figure 12, neither the use of public media nor its interaction with trust shows a significant effect. This suggests that the relationship between public media and truth discernment is driven primarily by trust, not mere exposure. In other words, simply using public media is insufficient—what matters more is whether individuals perceive these sources as trustworthy.

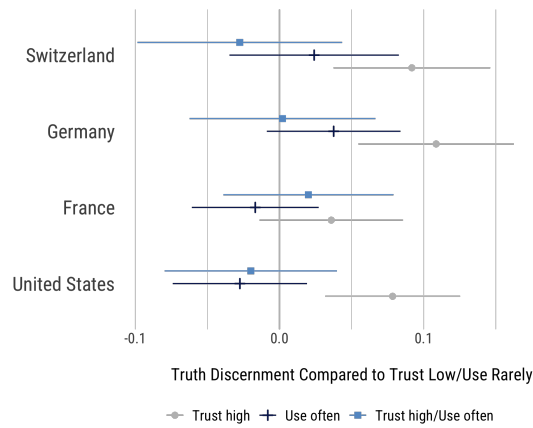


Figure 12: Truth discernment by trust and use in public media with interaction effect.

When it comes to *sharing discernment*, the differences associated with public media use and trust are even more pronounced. Analogous to Figure 11, results for *sharing discernment* shown in Figure 13 rely on the same composite variables—*public media trust (radio/TV)* and *public media use (radio/TV)*—to compare participants who at least *somewhat* trust, or at least *sometimes* use, public media to those who do not. In the United States, public media use is not significantly related to sharing discernment, while in other countries the associations are both significant and substantial, ranging from 0.09 in France to 0.18 in Germany. Trust in public media is linked to higher sharing discernment in all countries, with particularly strong effects observed in Germany (0.22) and Switzerland (0.15).

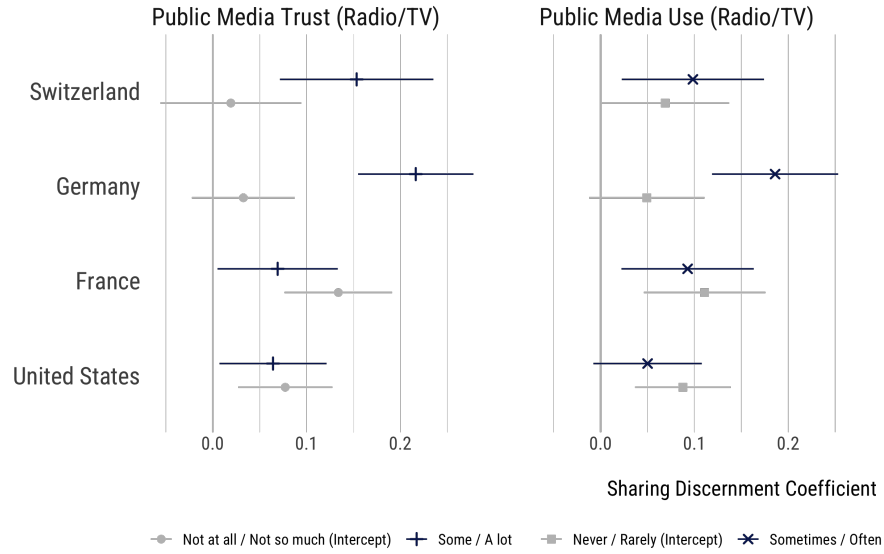


Figure 13: *Sharing discernment* by relative trust and use of public versus private media channels (radio and TV) across countries.

As with *truth discernment*, Figure 14 shows that participants' trust in public media—independent of their level of use—is associated with higher sharing discernment, whereas use of public media alone is not.

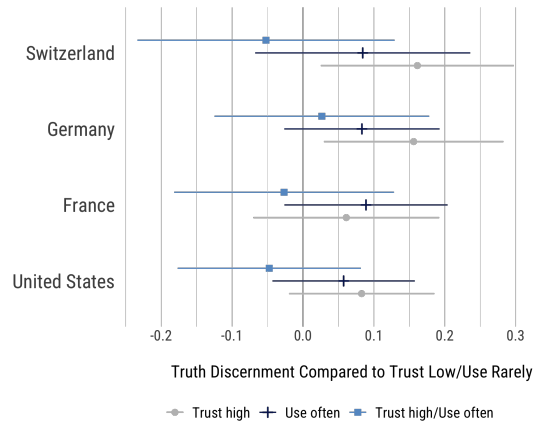


Figure 14: *Sharing discernment* by trust and use in public media with interaction effect.

3.4 Discernment by education and income

In addition to the analyses of truth and sharing discernment by public and private media use, we also examine how education and income are correlated with identifying and sharing true instead of

misleading/false information. Education is measured as the highest (formal) degree a respondent has obtained, which does not capture education and training that occur outside schools and institutions of higher learning. Keeping this limitation in mind is especially important when interpreting results in countries like Switzerland and Germany, given their well-developed dual educational systems which place strong emphasis on vocational and workplace-based training.

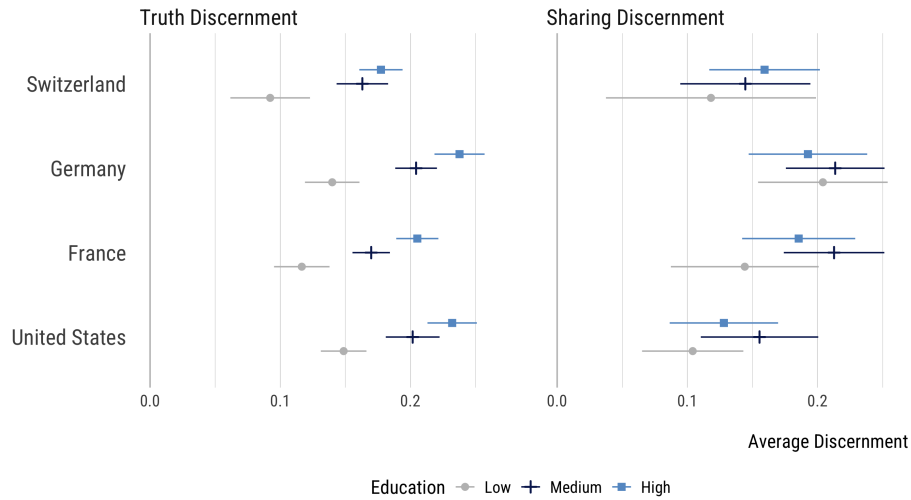


Figure 15: Truth and sharing discernment by education.

The results displayed in Figure 15 show that higher education is associated with higher truth discernment across all countries. Despite minor variations across countries, this result is highly consistent. It aligns with established findings in the literature, which show that correctly identifying misinformation is strongly correlated with cognitive processing measures (e.g., Pennycook and Rand, 2019). The picture for sharing discernment shows a less consistent pattern. When directly comparing the means between groups, people with higher education are not necessarily better than people with lower education because the standard errors around the means are very wide in this analysis based on a composite measure of sharing.

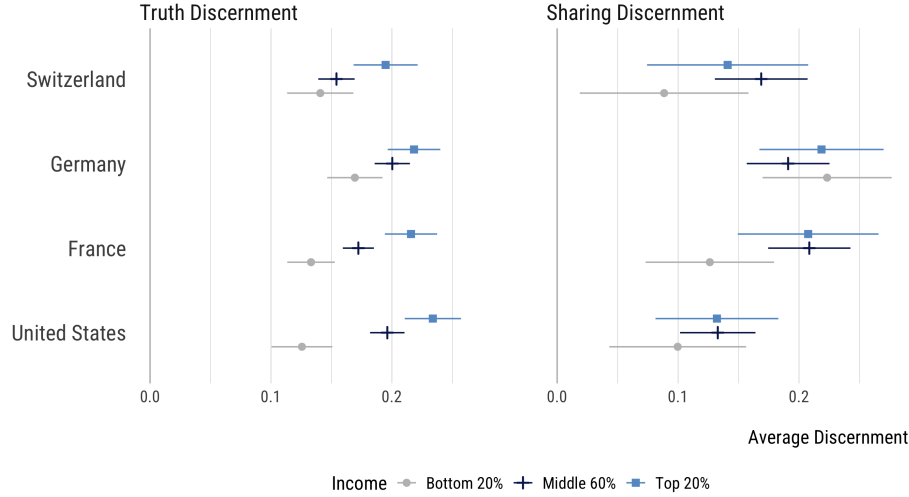


Figure 16: Truth and sharing discernment by income.

Turning to the association between income and truth and sharing discernment in Figure 16 shows a broadly similar pattern. Higher income levels are associated with higher truth discernment across all countries but this difference is less pronounced for Switzerland and Germany, which might be due to less skewed income distributions in these countries. There is no clear association between income and sharing discernment as is the case for education above.

3.5 Discernment by parties in Switzerland

We also accounted for participants' political identity by asking them to indicate their vote in the last general election. We included the main parties as options, along with "Other," "I did not vote," and "I don't know." For the analysis below, we excluded the latter three categories, resulting in a sample of 951 participants.

Analysing differences in truth and sharing discernment by political party reveals some disparities across the Swiss political spectrum. This is especially evident in *truth discernment*, where voters of the SVP demonstrated the lowest levels of accuracy. Those who voted for the Centre and the Liberals also exhibited lower levels of truth discernment. Conversely, voters from the SPS and GLP showed a higher ability to distinguish between true and false/misleading information. For the latter, this may be partly due to a generally higher awareness and knowledge of facts related to climate change and the environment.

Regarding participants' *sharing discernment*, differences are less pronounced, which may be due to a smaller sample size. However, it is notable that SVP voters do not stand out as significantly different from others, while GPS voters do.

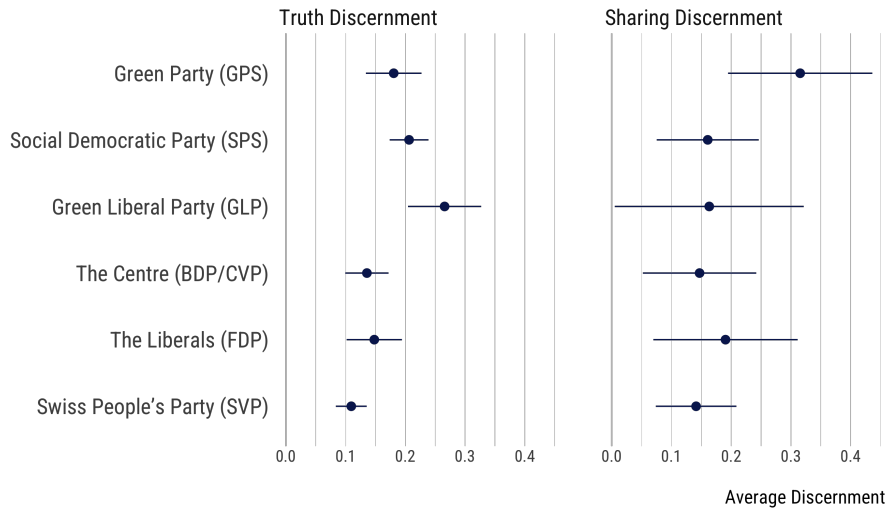


Figure 17: Truth and sharing discernment by political party (Switzerland).

3.6 Sharing channels and audiences in Switzerland

Another way to understand participants' sharing practices is to focus on whom they would share information with and through which channels. To account for this, all participants who answered that they would share a statement were asked: "With whom would you share this statement, and how? Select all options that apply." Responses were registered in a matrix with the rows "Personal messaging (WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, etc.)", "Public messaging (Facebook, Twitter/X, etc.)", "Private conversation", "Group/public conversation", and "Not in any way", and the columns "Family", "Friends", "Colleagues", and "General public".

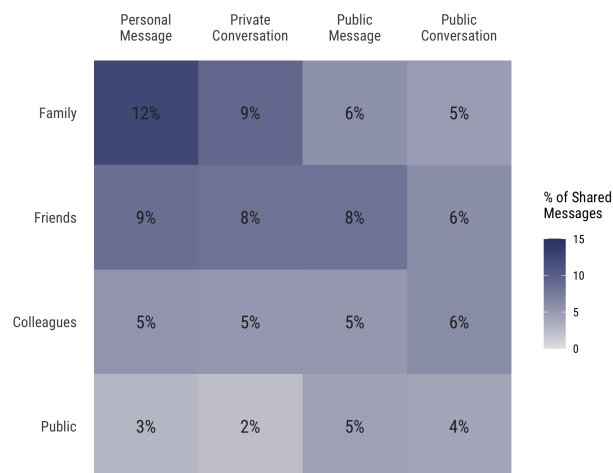


Figure 18: Sharing channels and audiences.

As shown in Figure 18, the majority of participants who chose to share a statement did so primarily with close contacts (family and friends) and through personal channels (personal messaging or private conversations). Importantly, this pattern does not vary meaningfully by the veracity of the statement being shared (see Figure 19), nor differ meaningfully by participants’ educational backgrounds (Figure 20). This is an important finding, as it suggests that most sharing of misinformation occurs in communication channels that are, by design, private and not subject to regulatory oversight, and thus in an area mostly absent from current public policy debates.

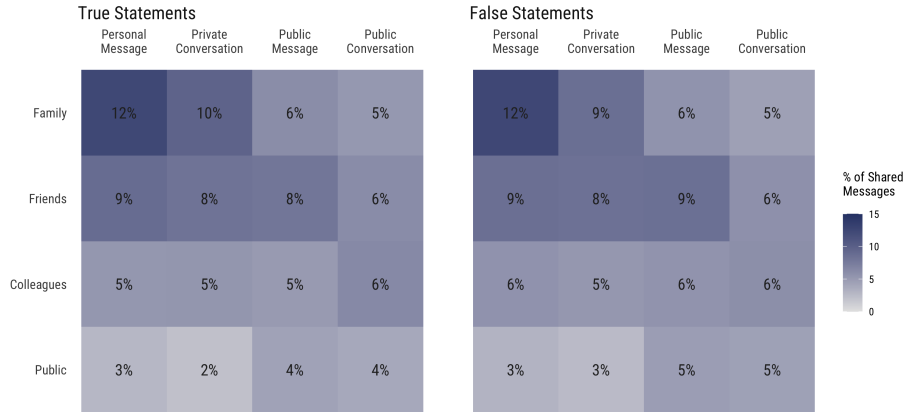


Figure 19: Sharing channels and audiences by statement veracity.

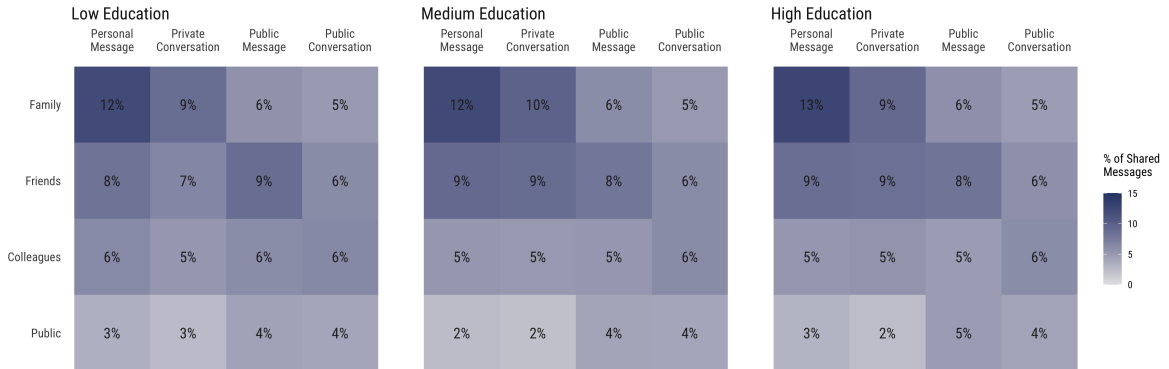


Figure 20: Sharing channels and audiences by education.

3.7 Reasons for deciding not sharing in Switzerland

The answers to the open-ended question on why participants did not share a statement were analysed by Welk (2025) in her Master’s thesis. Welk used an inductive, bottom-up qualitative coding

approach to code a random sample of 1,000 such answers provided by participants in Switzerland. We aggregate the original 46 categories into four conceptual categories for ease of interpretation and comparison. These categories group reasons for not sharing that reflect established mechanisms of why such decisions are taken. Accuracy/Credibility Concerns captures responses indicating that the message was perceived as false, misleading, exaggerated, strange, or otherwise untrustworthy. Constraints/Ability Barriers includes practical, knowledge-based, or contextual limitations such as lacking understanding, time, appropriate context, technological ability, or willingness to engage due to privacy or platform constraints. Emotional/Social/Reputational Risk refers to concerns that sharing the message might upset or mislead others, provoke backlash, express unwanted emotional valence, or negatively affect the sharer’s reputation or social standing. Low Relevance/No Value encompasses explanations that the message was unimportant, uninteresting, unnecessary, not useful, or lacked any compelling reason to be shared.

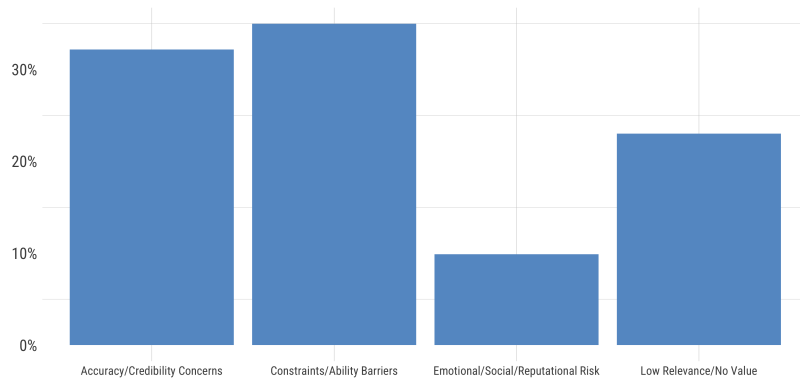


Figure 21: Reasons for not sharing (random sample of 1,000 responses from Switzerland).

The distribution of these categories in Figure 21 shows that about one in three participants perceived the statement as broadly untrustworthy, which led them to decide not share it with anyone. Another third was unable to share the statement due to various limitations, whilst 20% of participants saw no reason to share a statement they had no interest in. Interestingly, only about 10% of respondents indicated that they considered their own reputation or the risk for the well-being of their contacts when declining to share a statement, a result that contrasts with Altay, Hacquin and Mercier (2020) who argue that reputational costs are a key reason people refrain from sharing misinformation.

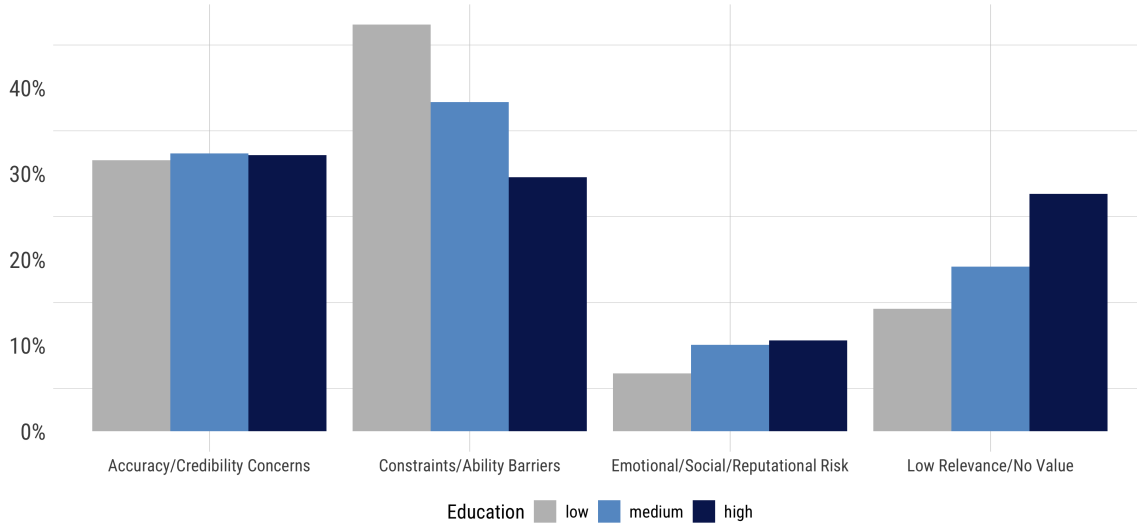


Figure 22: Reasons for not sharing by education (random sample of 1,000 responses from Switzerland; percentages within each educational group sum to 100%).

Breaking the categories down by education in Figure 22 reveals interesting differences between education groups. Regarding accuracy/credibility concerns, there are no differences among education groups, suggesting that all groups place the same value on accuracy. Conversely, there are considerable differences between the relative importance of barriers to sharing. Almost 50% of participants in the low education group report difficulties as the reason for not sharing, whereas this accounts for only 30% of reasons among participants in the high education group. Respondents in the medium and high education groups tend to place more emphasis on potential risks to their reputation or the well-being of their peers than the low education group, but these differences are less pronounced (6% vs 11%). Finally, almost 30% of the high education group refrained from sharing because they found the statement not interesting to themselves or their contacts, compared to only 15% in the low education group.

3.8 Attitudes towards politics, democracy, and media

Finally, we present participants' general attitudes toward politics, democracy, journalism, and the media. To assess these attitudes, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the four statements mentioned above. Figure 23 shows the respective results. In Switzerland, participants are generally optimistic about the quality of democracy in Switzerland. Around 58% of participants agree that democracy works well in Switzerland, with 28% neutral and only 13% that disagree. Participants also overwhelmingly support (69%) the need to tolerate disagreeing opinions, which is a testament to the deliberative culture and consensus-oriented political system in Switzerland (e.g. Kriesi and Trechsel, 2008).

In a similar vein, almost 44% of participants think that democracy needs independent jour-

alism to function, while 32% are undecided and only 24% disagreeing. This result underlines the finding in Figure 5 that, with the exception of social media, the trust in media is generally high, and especially high for public TV and radio. Conversely, nearly half of the respondents (47%) agree that the media and politics collude to manipulate public opinion—a statement which features in many conspiracy theories. This finding is puzzling because it seems to go against earlier results showing a pattern of overall satisfaction with the political institutions and relatively high trust in (traditional) media. Unfortunately, it is difficult to contextualise this finding because the survey’s focus was on misinformation identification and sharing.

Across the four countries, the proportion of people that consider democracy to work well are the largest in Switzerland. Together with Germany, Switzerland has the lowest share of people believing in a conspiracy between politicians and the media.

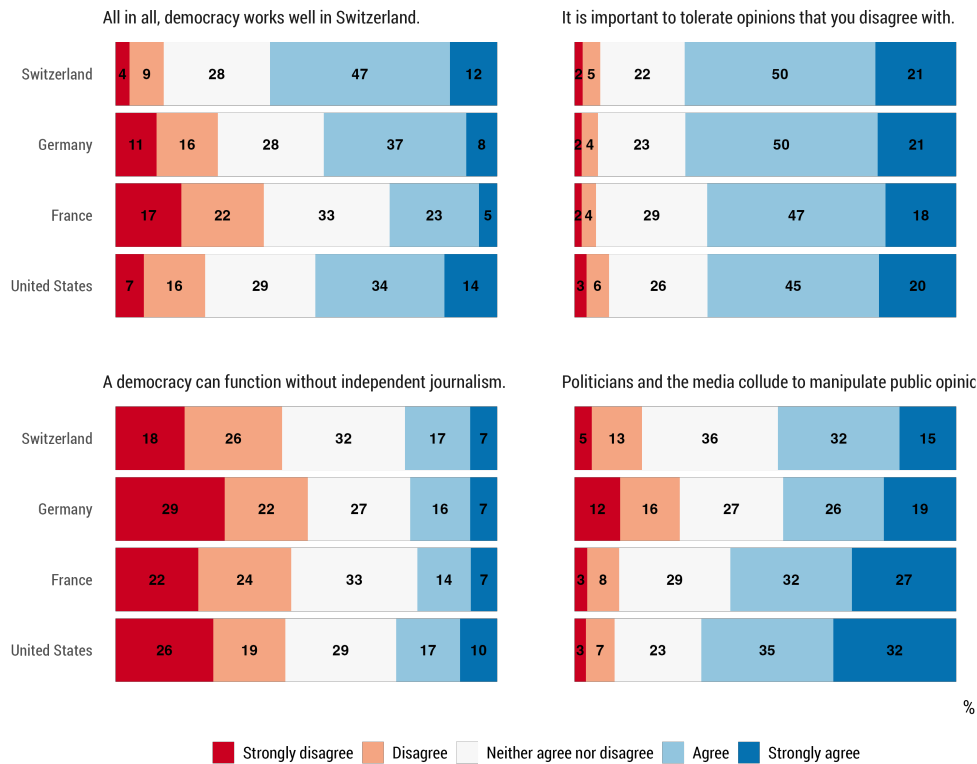


Figure 23: Attitudes related to politics, democracy, journalism, and the media. Note: Sums can exceed 100% due to rounding.

Given the importance of beliefs that media and politics collude to manipulate public opinion, we examine whether individuals who hold such conspiratorial views differ in their ability to distinguish true from false or misleading information. Figure 24 compares the respective means across countries and reveals a similar—though differently pronounced—pattern: participants who agree with the idea of media-political collusion score significantly lower on *truth discernment* than those who disagree. While this pattern is present in all countries, the gap between the two groups is substantially larger in Switzerland and Germany than in France and the United States.

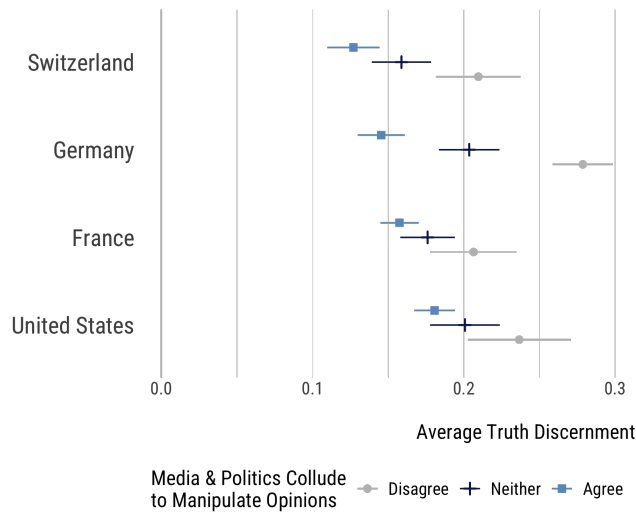


Figure 24: *Truth discernment* by belief in media & politics collusion.

This suggests that trust—particularly in public institutions like the media—is key for informed information processing. When that trust is eroded by conspiratorial thinking, individuals may become more vulnerable to misinformation or adopt a generalised scepticism that prevents them from recognising truth. Moreover, the fact that the gap is more pronounced in Switzerland and Germany suggests that public media may play a more central or trusted role in those countries, making distrust more consequential. In contrast, in France and the United States—where media trust may already be more polarised or fragmented—the effects of conspiratorial beliefs on discernment appear less stark. These results also suggest that efforts to improve truth discernment—through media literacy or public communication—may need to be tailored to the institutional and trust landscape of each country. Protecting that trust may be especially important in high-trust systems.

4 Conclusion

This report presents the main findings of the OFCOM-funded project *Identifying, Scrutinising, and Sharing Misinformation*. Throughout the project, we collaborated with a team at the OECD to support the design and implementation of the OECD Truth Quest survey—a cross-country comparative survey experiment conducted in 21 countries. The survey consisted of three parts. In the first part, participants evaluated a series of statements shown as media posts, classifying them as either true or false. In the second part, they indicated whether they would share three specific statements. In addition, participants were asked about reasons for not sharing statements, and if they did choose to share, about the channels and audiences through which they would do so. Finally, the survey included questions about media usage and trust, attitudes toward democracy

and journalism, and demographic information, including party identification.

Examining the results in Switzerland, in comparison with Germany, France, and the U.S., reveals patterns regarding truth and sharing discernment. These patterns vary across thematic domains and are associated with media usage and trust in public media. In Switzerland and its European neighbours, truth discernment is highest in the climate domain, moderate in health, parenting, and environment, and lowest in the international affairs domain. In contrast, truth discernment in the U.S. sample fluctuates around a similar average across all domains. The analysis of sharing discernment reveals that the U.S. exhibits the lowest discernment, followed by Switzerland, France, and Germany.

In the descriptive analysis of media usage and trust patterns, we show that approximately two-thirds of the Swiss population rely on public media as a source of news. Specifically, 71% of participants report obtaining news from public television, and 64% from public radio, either *sometimes* or *often*. In contrast, private television and radio show a more polarised usage pattern. While 41–49% of participants use these sources at least occasionally, only about 16% report using them frequently, and roughly 25% never rely on them. News websites/apps and social media apps are consumed by the majority of participants at least sometimes (72% and 62%), while the consumption of print publications is more polarised with 19% consuming it frequently and 17% not at all. Public television and radio inspire the most trust, while private television and radio also earn the trust of a substantial, but lower, share of respondents. Both media use and trust are marked by strong age gradients, especially for public radio and television: older participants report higher levels of usage and trust, whereas younger respondents tend to have lower levels of usage and trust. This generational divide points to differing informational environments and may help explain variation in discernment outcomes across age groups.

Based on this descriptive work, we analyse how media as a news source and trust relates to truth and sharing discernment. Explicitly comparing respondents' use of and trust in public media against private media reveals that those who place higher trust in or show more frequent use of public instead of private media are better at truth discernment in Switzerland.

Focusing on the role of public media in truth and sharing discernment, we find that respondents who trust and use public media as a source of information are consistently associated with higher truth discernment across all countries. Similarly, higher levels of trust in public media are associated with higher sharing discernment in all countries, especially in Switzerland and Germany. Moreover, combining levels of trust, use and their interaction in a single analysis shows that higher trust in public media—independent of its use—is associated with higher sharing discernment, whereas levels of use of public media alone are not.

Moving to education and income as potential covariates of truth and sharing discernment, we find that both variables have a clear association with truth discernment, with higher education/income groups show higher truth discernment scores. Conversely, there is no pattern for sharing discernment.

Breaking down truth and sharing discernment by party in Switzerland shows that parti-

cipant who voted for centre/left parties in the 2023 Federal Elections have higher truth discernment values than voters for other parties. Conversely, there are no party differences for sharing discernment, with the exception of Green party voters, who have higher values.

Beyond discernment, our analyses reveal that reasons for not sharing primarily reflect concerns about accuracy and credibility as well as practical barriers, while social and reputational risks play a comparatively minor role. When sharing does occur, it is mainly directed towards close contacts through private channels, largely independent of statement veracity or participants' educational background.

In the final part, we analyse attitudes towards politics, democracy, and media in Switzerland. These analyses show that participants are generally optimistic about the state of democracy in Switzerland, overwhelmingly support tolerating different opinions, and think that independent journalism is important for democracy, while also suspecting collusion between politics and the media to manipulate public opinion. Respondents who endorse such conspiratorial beliefs perform significantly worse in truth discernment. This pattern is most pronounced in Switzerland and Germany, possibly because public institutions, including public broadcasters, traditionally enjoy higher levels of trust in these countries. These results indicate that the erosion of trust through conspiratorial thinking can undermine individuals' ability to recognise truthful information, especially in high-trust systems.

Taken together, our findings suggest that trust—particularly in public media and political institutions—plays a central role in shaping how people evaluate and engage with information, while highlighting that misinformation is predominantly shared in private communication channels that fall outside of the reach of regulatory oversight and interventions. While the Swiss public remains relatively trusting and discerning, generational divides, partisan differences, and the spread of conspiratorial beliefs highlight vulnerabilities that may require targeted public communication strategies, media literacy initiatives, and institutional transparency to safeguard informed citizenship.

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