



## MEDIA COMPETENCE IN JOURNALISM EDUCATION: An Empirical Assessment in Chilean Universities

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### KEYWORDS

*Media competence  
Media literacy  
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### ABSTRACT

*This article presents a quantitative study of the level of media competence among journalism students at three Chilean universities. A questionnaire validated by the Alfamed Network and adapted to the Chilean context was administered, based on the model developed by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012) and structured around six dimensions. The analysis, conducted using Jamovi, included reliability testing as well as descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The results reveal an intermediate overall level of media competence, with strengths in language and interaction processes and weaknesses in technology and aesthetics. The study concludes that media competence should be strengthened as a core curricular component of journalism education.*

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## 1. Introduction

In the current information ecosystem, characterised by the convergence of media, digital platforms and algorithmic logics, media competence has acquired a central role in communication education. From a critical perspective, it is not limited to the decoding of content but encompasses the ability to interpret, analyse, produce and share media messages in an ethical, reflective and creative manner, bringing together technological, semiotic and civic knowledge (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012). In other words, its development entails an educational articulation between critical understanding, expressive capacity and responsibility in the use and circulation of content within the digital public sphere.

Within this framework, media competence emerges as a key tool for the exercise of citizenship in communicative environments increasingly shaped by commercial logics, disinformation and discursive polarisation (Buckingham, 2023; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019). In this sense, it has ceased to be a merely desirable competence and has become an urgent necessity in journalism education, given that journalists are expected to play a critical role in the construction of collective meaning and in the defence of democratic values (López-García et al., 2021). Strengthening media competence in higher education is therefore not an optional addition but a fundamental condition for the responsible practice of contemporary journalism.

From this perspective, media competence constitutes a central construct for understanding the relationship individuals establish with media, technologies and audiovisual languages in complex contexts characterised by information overload and disinformation (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019). This competence involves not only the technical mastery of digital tools but also skills in critical analysis, multimodal literacy, creative expression, active participation and aesthetic appreciation (Aguaded et al., 2018). Its study therefore requires a broad perspective capable of integrating cognitive, technical, expressive and evaluative dimensions within a single analytical framework.

Various studies have shown that, within the Ibero-American context, the incorporation of media competence into university curricula remains at an early stage, including within journalism programmes, where a more advanced command of media and digital languages might paradoxically be expected (Aguaded et al., 2021; Marín-Gutiérrez et al., 2019). This gap between the media culture that permeates young people's everyday lives and university educational provision poses an urgent challenge for educational policies and pedagogical strategies in higher education (Area & Pessoa, 2012; Pérez-Tornero & Varis, 2010). Moreover, this disconnect between media practices and the formal curriculum reveals an insufficient pedagogical response to the communicative transformations that shape students' everyday experiences.

In the Chilean context, empirical evidence regarding the development of media competence among journalism students remains limited, making it difficult both to design relevant educational programmes and to evaluate their impact systematically (Montaner & Rivera, 2024). This gap is particularly critical in the post-pandemic context, where digital consumption practices, the risks of information overload and the demand for cross-cutting skills in the production and management of content within new media environments have intensified. Consequently, the availability of context-specific evidence is essential for informing curriculum adjustments and educational decision-making.

This article seeks to contribute empirical evidence to this field through an analysis of the level of media competence among journalism students at three Chilean universities. To this end, a questionnaire previously validated by the Alfamed Network and adapted to the Chilean context was administered. Its theoretical framework is based on the six dimensions proposed by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012): language, technology, interaction processes, production and dissemination processes, aesthetics, and ideology and values. In order to determine whether significant differences exist according to gender, age or institution, the data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis and comparisons of means, making it possible to characterise students' profiles and identify strengths and weaknesses in their media education. In line with the quantitative-descriptive design of the study, the following descriptive-comparative research hypothesis was formulated: The level of media competence reported by journalism students displays a heterogeneous profile across dimensions but does not exhibit statistically significant differences according to participants' self-reported gender, age or university affiliation. This framework also makes it possible to identify more precisely the specific areas

in which university media education appears more consolidated and those in which more substantial educational gaps remain.

This hypothesis was tested using non-parametric statistical analyses, which were appropriate for the measurement scale employed. It should also be noted that the hypothesis is descriptive-comparative in nature and does not seek to establish causal relationships.

This approach is particularly valuable for guiding curriculum strategies in higher education aimed at strengthening critical education in a context of accelerated communicative transformation (Labio-Bernal et al., 2020). Its relevance lies in providing concrete criteria for reordering pedagogical priorities while taking into account the complexity of the contemporary media environment.

Within the Latin American context, comparative evidence on media competence among journalism students remains scarce and heterogeneous, making it difficult to derive clear curricular recommendations. This study contributes recent and comparable data based on the six dimensions that constitute media competence, using an internationally validated instrument adapted to the Chilean context and administered to students from three universities in the central-southern macro-region of the country. As such, the study not only describes a specific reality but also provides a useful benchmark for future comparisons in similar educational contexts.

Its contribution is twofold. Substantively, it offers a detailed profile of strengths and weaknesses across the different dimensions of media competence, which is relevant for journalism education. Methodologically, it reports reliability indicators and effect sizes that strengthen the interpretability and usefulness of the comparisons. In both respects, the article seeks to contribute evidence to academic debate while providing relevant inputs for curriculum decision-making.

In doing so, it offers an empirical basis for prioritising areas of weakness, sequencing learning outcomes and evaluating performance in communicative products. On this basis, the following section presents the theoretical framework that guides the operationalisation of the construct.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Media competence has become a fundamental pillar of critical education in higher education, particularly in contexts where university students face information overload mediated by algorithms and digital platforms (Sibrián Díaz & Maureira González, 2024). These cultural and technological transformations require an educational approach that goes beyond instrumental skills and promotes interpretative, expressive and ethical capacities in relation to media messages and structures. Consequently, its incorporation into university education responds to a structural rather than merely circumstantial need.

The concept of media competence, as formulated by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012), integrates dimensions that bring together knowledge, skills and attitudes distributed across language, technology, interaction processes, production and dissemination processes, ideology and values, and aesthetics. This model has been widely validated and adapted within the Ibero-American context, becoming a key reference for assessing levels of media literacy among different social groups (Aguaded et al., 2018). Its principal contribution lies in enabling an integrated understanding of the phenomenon without reducing it to a single indicator or skill.

In operational terms, media competence is structured around the six dimensions identified by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012): technology (functional use of devices and software, and basic problem-solving skills); language (understanding and use of codes, genres and expressive conventions); interaction (participation, collaboration and the ethical management of identity in digital environments); production and dissemination (the planning, editing and responsible distribution of content, including notions of authorship and licensing); ideology and values (critical analysis of representations, biases and communicative purposes); and aesthetics (judgements regarding formal quality, creativity and expressive coherence). These dimensions guide both the selection of questionnaire items and the interpretation of findings, making it possible to identify profiles of strengths and gaps that are relevant from a curricular perspective. In line with the proposal advanced by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012), this study adopts a multidimensional conception of media competence and therefore prioritises interpretation by dimensions rather than relying on a unidimensional synthesis that lacks empirical justification. This approach avoids oversimplified understandings of the construct and supports more useful diagnoses for pedagogical and curricular purposes.

Consistent with the multidimensional nature of the construct, interpretation by dimensions has been prioritised, since aggregation into a single index is justified only when there is robust evidence of a dominant general factor. In the absence of such evidence, interpretation based on profiles or subscales provides a more accurate representation of the construct and is more useful for educational decision-making (Rodríguez, Reise, & Haviland, 2016). From this perspective, a subscale-based approach offers a more consistent interpretative foundation for informing educational strategies.

Recent studies have reaffirmed the usefulness of this approach among university populations (Sibrián Díaz & Maureira González, 2024), for example in identifying levels of self-perceived media competence among academics involved in journalism education and in fostering critical approaches from pedagogical, political and methodological perspectives (Mateus et al., 2019). With regard to empirical findings, Marín-Gutiérrez et al. (2019) found that, in Latin American universities, self-reported levels of media competence tend to be intermediate, with greater weaknesses in the technology dimension and strengths in attitudinal and critical aspects. These findings provide a comparative framework within which the results of the present study can be situated.

From an epistemological perspective, the media competence paradigm advances a comprehensive conception of literacy that extends beyond access to and use of technologies, incorporating an understanding of processes of meaning-making, power relations mediated through discourse, and the aesthetic competencies required for full citizenship (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012). Within this framework, media literacy entails educating individuals who are capable of understanding, evaluating and producing messages critically and responsibly.

In the Chilean context, recent research has highlighted the fragmented curricular treatment of media literacy, with a predominance of technocratic approaches focused on basic digital skills, thereby limiting the development of a deeper and more transformative form of media competence (Jarpa-Candia et al., 2024). This situation is reflected in the limited presence of critical components within the curricula of degree programmes such as journalism, where—paradoxically—media competence should constitute a core educational pillar. As a result, there is a risk that media literacy may be reduced to operational skills disconnected from its critical and cultural dimensions.

In summary, the theoretical framework underpinning this study advances a complex and up-to-date understanding of media competence, integrating recent contributions and empirical evidence from the Latin American context. By applying this approach in three universities located in the central-southern macro-region of Chile (National Agency for Research and Development [ANID], n.d.), the study seeks not only to assess levels of development but also to identify gaps and strengths associated with socio-demographic variables, with the aim of improving the professional education of future communication practitioners. Consequently, its application to university journalism education is particularly relevant for informing discussions on pedagogical improvement.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, non-experimental and cross-sectional approach, employing a descriptive-comparative research design. This strategy makes it possible to analyse the level of media competence within a defined population without the deliberate manipulation of variables, relying instead on observable and measurable empirical indicators that reflect participants' self-reported perceptions. The cross-sectional nature of the design involves data collection at a single point in time, making it suitable for comparing socio-demographic groups—in this case, gender, age and university affiliation—according to their scores across the different dimensions of the questionnaire. The descriptive logic of the study is complemented by non-parametric inferential analyses, which make it possible to identify potential statistical differences without compromising the study's internal validity, particularly in contexts where the assumption of normality is not met (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2021).

As Bisquerra (2009) and Morales-Vallejo (2021) have argued, non-experimental designs are particularly appropriate for social research in which the priority is to observe educational or communicative phenomena as they occur in their natural context, making use of previously validated instruments and comparative analysis as a legitimate means of identifying differential patterns across defined groups. Consistent with this perspective, the design adopted prioritises the rigorous description of trends and contrasts rather than the formulation of causal explanations.

### 3.1. Participants

The study sample consisted of 87 journalism students from three universities located in the central-southern macro-region of Chile. Participants were selected through non-probability convenience sampling, a methodological approach commonly employed in exploratory research in higher education, particularly when the aim is to obtain first-hand information in institutional contexts where feasibility and participants' voluntary willingness to take part are key considerations (Battaglia, 2011; Etikan et al., 2016). This strategy enabled an initial exploration of the phenomenon under investigation without requiring strict statistical representativeness, which is consistent with the descriptive and comparative objectives of the present study.

The distribution of participants by institution was as follows: University A ( $n = 38$ ), University B ( $n = 27$ ) and University C ( $n = 22$ ). The anonymity of each institution was preserved, and the ethical principles of confidentiality were strictly observed. Although the sample is relatively small, its composition makes it possible to identify sufficiently clear trends for an initial comparative characterisation of the phenomenon under study.

### 3.2. Instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by the Alfamed Research Network, based on the model proposed by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012), and has been employed in a range of Ibero-American studies (Aguaded, Jaramillo Dent, & Delgado-Ponce, 2021). It is structured around the six dimensions outlined above. The version used in this study was adapted to the Chilean context while maintaining both the original Likert scale and the instrument's overall structure. Consequently, its design facilitates a differentiated reading of the construct and a more precise interpretation of the areas displaying the greatest strengths and weaknesses.

To verify its internal consistency in the present application, Cronbach's alpha was calculated both for each subscale and for the instrument as a whole. The overall coefficient obtained was  $\alpha = 0.884$ , a level considered "good" according to the criteria proposed by George and Mallery (2019), thereby supporting the reliability of the instrument. Furthermore, Tavakol and Dennick (2011) argue that Cronbach's alpha is an appropriate measure of internal consistency, although they recommend recalculating it whenever an instrument is applied in a new context. Consequently, the analysis is supported not only by previous validation studies but also by the satisfactory empirical performance of the questionnaire in the present application.

### 3.3. Procedure

Data were collected digitally through an online questionnaire implemented using Google Forms and distributed via the official virtual learning environments of the three participating universities, following authorisation from the respective academic units. Student participation was voluntary and anonymous and was preceded by explicit informed consent provided at the beginning of the questionnaire, ensuring compliance with the fundamental ethical principles governing research involving human participants (Wiles, 2013). Confidentiality was guaranteed throughout all stages of the study, and the data collected were stored on secure servers in accordance with the ethical and legal standards applicable to social and educational research (Israel, 2015).

Statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi software (version 2.4). The analytical procedures included descriptive statistics, reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha, and non-parametric inferential analyses (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests), selected according to the measurement scale employed, the distribution of the data and the sample size, following methodological recommendations for robust analyses in educational contexts (Field, 2018). This procedure facilitated the consistent collection of information and the systematic management of the dataset for subsequent analysis.

## 4. Results

The results are presented below by dimension, in accordance with the multidimensional nature of the construct, and are summarised using descriptive statistics consistent with the reference instrument. Mean scores are also reported in line with the instrument's assessment scale. Inferential analyses were

conducted using non-parametric tests, which were appropriate to both the measurement scale and the distribution of the data. The homogeneity observed across subgroups in the comparative analyses does not invalidate the substantive interpretation of the findings, as the value of the analysis lies in the differential profile across dimensions, which provides guidance for specific curricular decisions. This analytical approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of students' profiles and avoids overstating the significance of a single overall score.

The descriptive analysis of the data collected through the media competence questionnaire administered to journalism students from three universities in the central-southern macro-region of Chile provided an overview of the levels achieved by participants across the different dimensions assessed. In accordance with the theoretical model proposed by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012), mean scores were calculated for each dimension and classified according to the assessment scale previously defined by the Alfamed Network, which distinguishes between Basic (1.0–2.9), Intermediate (3.0–3.9) and Advanced (4.0–5.0) levels of performance. This initial analysis confirms that self-reported levels are not distributed uniformly across the different areas assessed.

As shown in Table 1, the results indicate that the dimension displaying the highest level of development is Language, with a mean score of 3.69, followed by Interaction Processes (3.54) and Ideology and Values (3.41), all of which fall within the Intermediate range. By contrast, the Technology (3.17) and Aesthetics (3.18) dimensions show the lowest levels of performance, while Production and Dissemination Processes records an intermediate mean score (3.39), also within the Intermediate range. From an interpretative perspective, these findings suggest a stronger profile in capacities related to comprehension and interaction than in technical and aesthetic competencies.

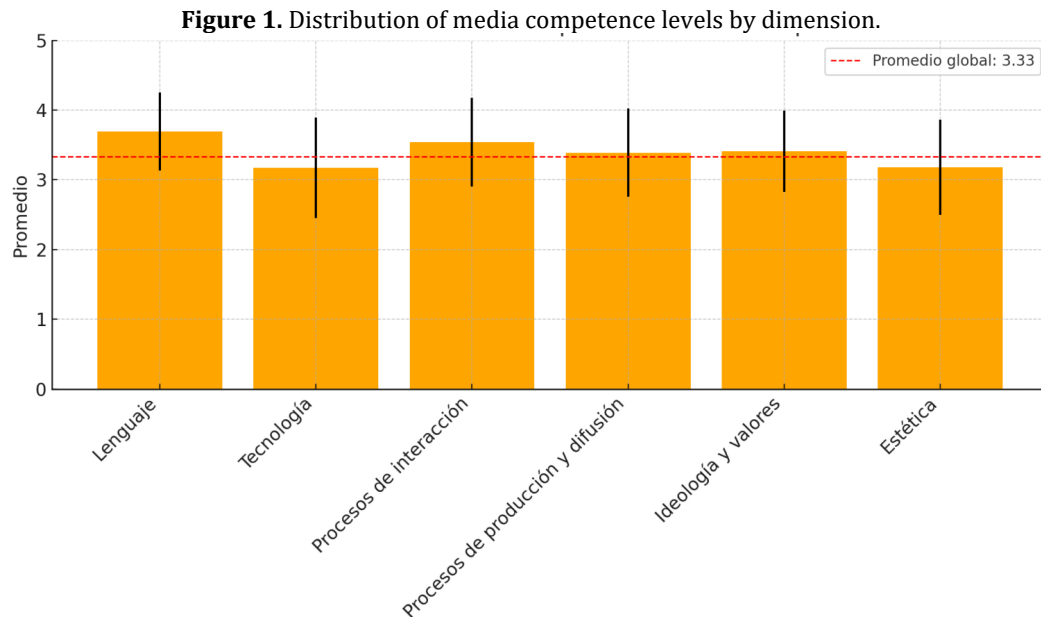
The overall mean score obtained by participants was 3.33, placing their overall level of media competence within the Intermediate category. This classification is consistent with previous studies conducted in Ibero-American contexts involving university students (Aguaded et al., 2021) and reinforces the hypothesis that, despite intensive exposure to digital media, journalism students do not always develop advanced critical or expressive competencies, particularly in technological and aesthetic domains. Consequently, the findings point to partial progress, but still fall short of a homogeneous and robust development of the construct across all dimensions.

**Table 1.** Level of media competence by dimension

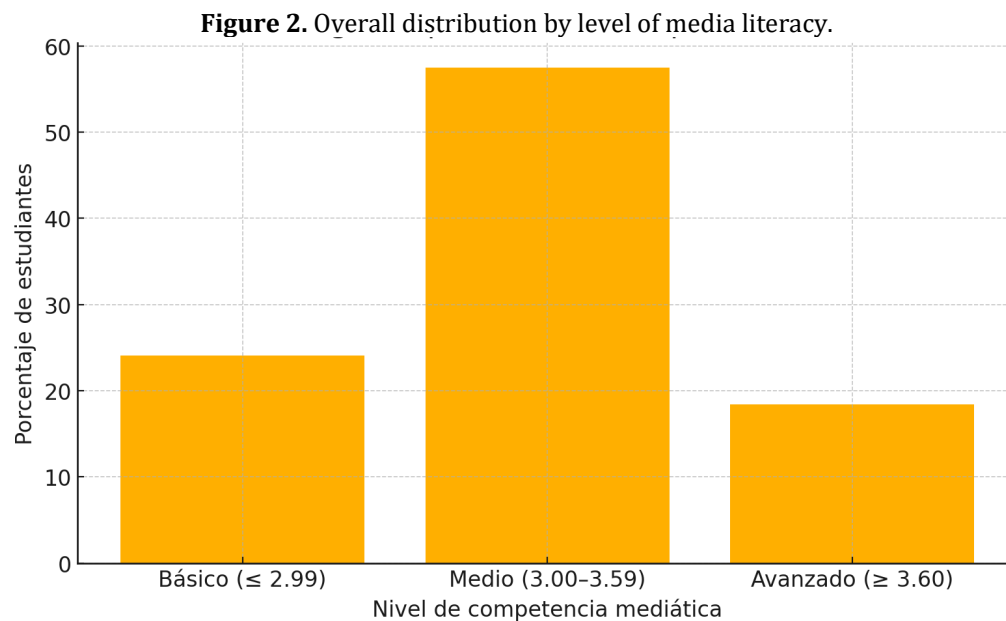
| <b>Dimension</b>                              | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Level</b> | <b>Standard deviation</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Language</b>                               | 3.69        | Intermediate | 0.56                      |
| <b>Technology</b>                             | 3.17        | Intermediate | 0.72                      |
| <b>Interaction Processes</b>                  | 3.54        | Intermediate | 0.64                      |
| <b>Production and Dissemination Processes</b> | 3.39        | Intermediate | 0.63                      |
| <b>Ideology and values</b>                    | 3.41        | Intermediate | 0.58                      |
| <b>Aesthetics</b>                             | 3.18        | Intermediate | 0.68                      |
| <b>Overall Media Competence</b>               | 3.33        | Intermediate | 0.44                      |

Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

Figure 1 presents the distribution of media competence levels across the different dimensions, highlighting the predominance of the Intermediate level in all categories assessed. Figure 2, in turn, illustrates the overall distribution of participants according to their observed level of media competence.



Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.



Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

**Table 2.** Distribution of students by overall level of media competence

| Level of competence | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Basic               | 10            | 11.5%          |
| Intermediate        | 64            | 73.6%          |
| Advanced            | 13            | 14.9%          |
| Total               | 87            | 100%           |

Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

As shown in Table 2, the majority of students (73.6%) fall within the Intermediate level of media competence, reflecting a partial and uneven development of the construct. Only 14.9% achieve an Advanced level, while 11.5% remain at the Basic level, suggesting the need to strengthen educational processes associated with the development of this competence. This distribution reinforces the value of interpreting the results in a detailed manner rather than relying solely on an overall classification.

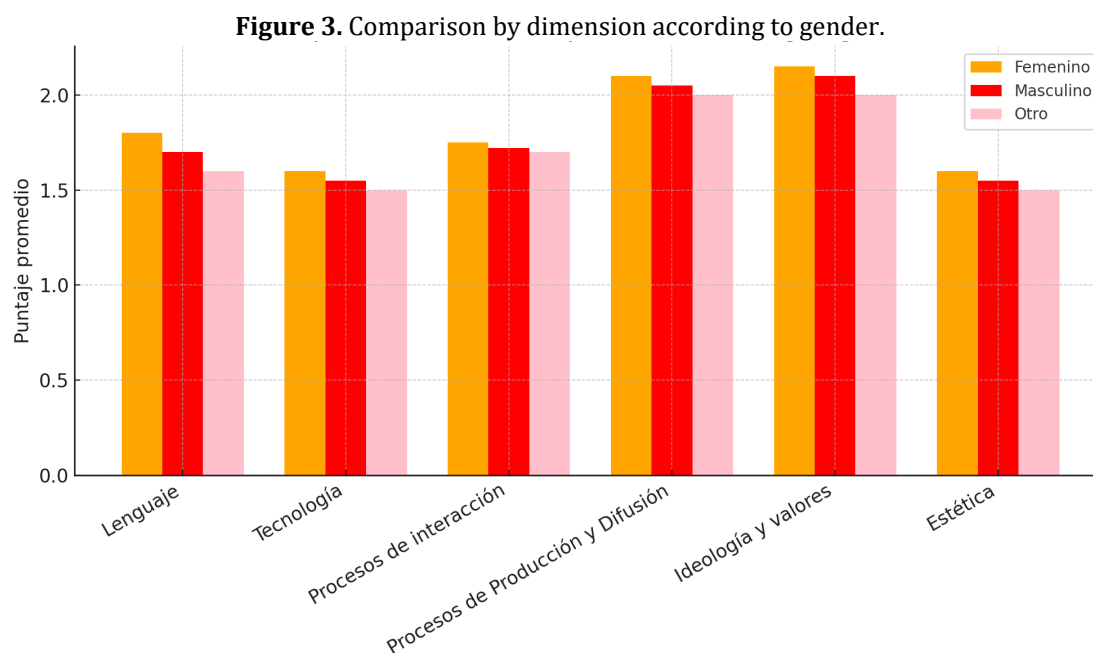
#### 4.1. Inferential Analysis

In order to identify possible significant differences in levels of media competence according to socio-demographic variables, non-parametric tests were conducted, taking into account the ordinal nature of the data and the non-normal distribution of the variables (Field, 2018). The variables analysed were gender, age and university affiliation. The selection of these tests ensured the methodological consistency of the study and the validity of the comparisons performed.

##### 4.1.1. Differences According to Gender

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was applied to compare scores by gender across each dimension. The results did not reveal any statistically significant differences ( $p > .05$ ), suggesting that, within this sample, levels of media competence do not vary according to gender. This indicates that, among the participants analysed, gender does not introduce systematic differences in the self-perception of the construct.

Previous studies have found that, although differences may be observed in specific skills, no significant gaps are detected in overall performance, at least in certain university samples (García-Ruiz et al., 2016). These findings support an approach to media literacy that incorporates a gender perspective without presupposing strict gender-based differences. In this respect, the results of the present study are consistent with trends previously identified in comparable research.

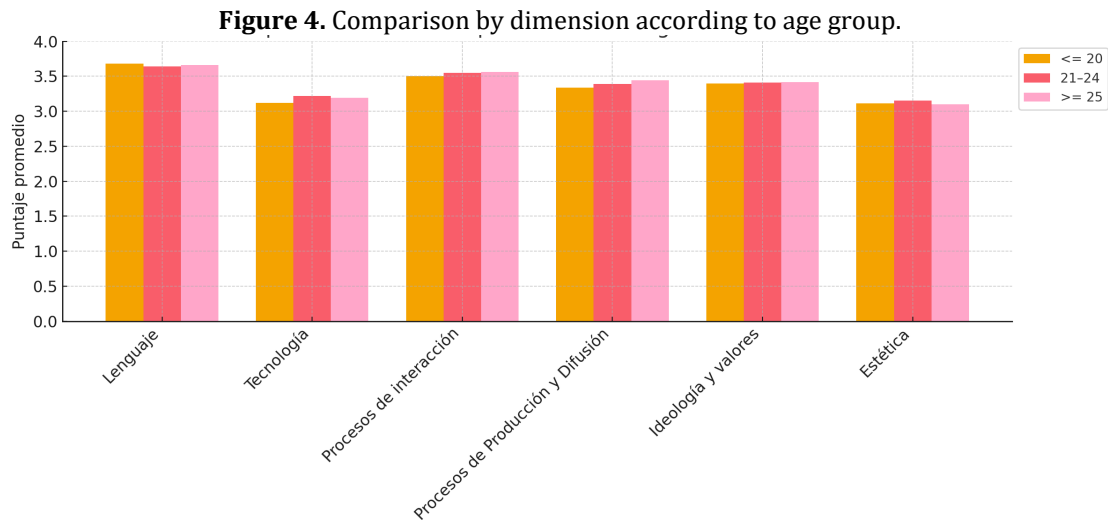


Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

##### 4.1.2. Differences According to Age

To explore possible differences associated with age group, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was applied using three age categories (under 20 years of age, between 20 and 24 years, and 25 years of age or older). No statistically significant differences were found in any of the six dimensions or in the overall score ( $p > .05$ ). This suggests that age is not a relevant differentiating factor within this sample, which may be explained by shared educational trajectories (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2020).

This finding is consistent with the academic literature on new literacies, which emphasises that media competence depends more on educational experiences than on generational membership (Area & Pessoa, 2012). Consequently, age does not emerge here as a consistent differentiating factor in self-reported media competence.

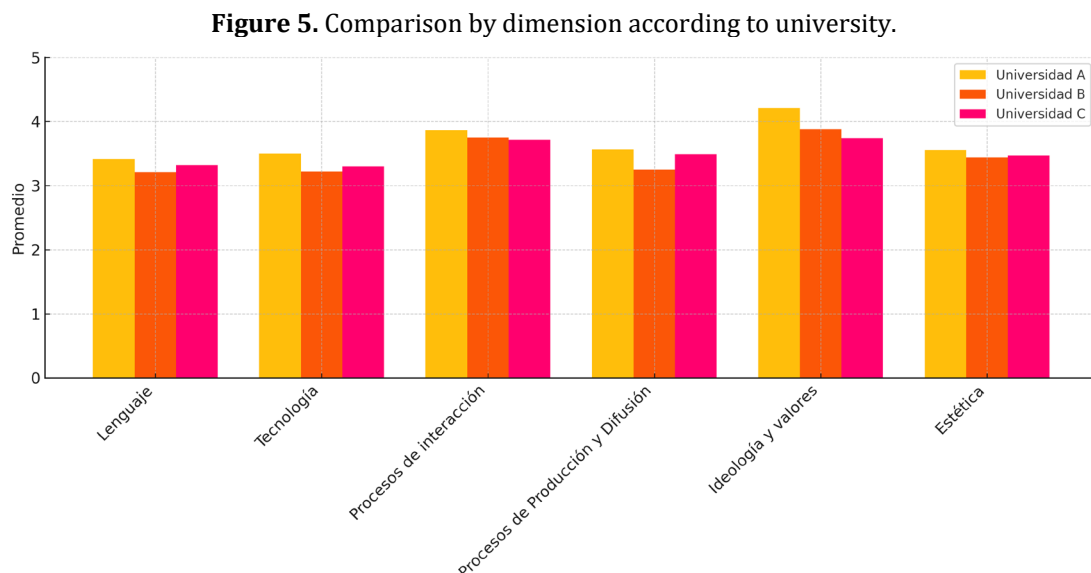


Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

#### 4.1.3. Differences According to University

The Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to analyse possible differences among the three participating universities (Institution A, B and C). No statistically significant differences were found in any of the dimensions or in the overall score ( $p > .05$ ). This finding suggests homogeneity in levels of media competence regardless of institutional context, which may reflect the limited integration of this competence as a curricular axis within journalism education programmes (Aguaded et al., 2021).

Comparative studies conducted in Ibero-America have highlighted that this lack of inter-institutional variation is often attributable to the limited presence of structured media literacy education within academic programmes (Marín-Gutiérrez et al., 2019). This pattern suggests the existence of shared educational or student-related characteristics that extend beyond immediate institutional affiliation.



Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

In summary, the inferential analyses indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in levels of media competence according to gender, age or the university at which students are enrolled in journalism programmes. This pattern of homogeneity may be interpreted as a structural expression of the educational deficit in this area, one that cuts across different institutional contexts. Taken together, these findings support the study's descriptive-comparative hypothesis and reinforce an interpretation of relative homogeneity across groups.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal an overall Intermediate level of media competence among the journalism students who participated in the research, a result that is consistent with previous findings in Ibero-American contexts (Aguaded et al., 2021). Both the overall results and the dimension-specific findings reinforce the notion that formal academic progression does not necessarily guarantee the development of the critical and technical skills associated with media literacy and, consequently, with media competence (Arenas-Fernández et al., 2022). To that extent, the data confirm that the development of this competence continues to display significant internal asymmetries that are relevant to university education.

Particularly concerning are the lower scores obtained in the technology and aesthetics dimensions. In the case of the former, this suggests a persistent gap in the strategic use of digital tools, beyond the superficial consumption of platforms and social media. This situation is especially challenging for journalism education, given that contemporary professional practice requires an understanding and mastery of multimedia languages, algorithmic dynamics and emerging formats for the circulation of information (Labio-Bernal et al., 2020). In other words, frequent use of media and platforms does not necessarily equate to the competent appropriation of their technical possibilities.

With regard to the aesthetics dimension, the lower scores may be related to the limited curricular incorporation of content associated with the analysis and critical production of symbolic, visual or expressive forms. Recent research has warned that the absence of an aesthetic perspective reduces individuals' interpretative capacity when engaging with complex audiovisual discourses (Rivera-Rogel et al., 2024). This suggests the need to strengthen educational experiences that connect expressive sensitivity, formal analysis and audiovisual production.

By contrast, the higher scores recorded in the language and interaction processes dimensions may reflect certain attitudinal and discursive strengths among the students. This finding may be linked to the nature of journalism education itself, which places particular emphasis on argumentative reflection, writing and source evaluation. Nevertheless, this type of competence must be integrated with a more robust ethical perspective in order to address the contemporary challenges posed by disinformation and its associated harms (Portugal & Aguaded, 2020). Even so, these relative strengths should not be interpreted as indicators of a fully consolidated mastery of the construct.

Furthermore, the absence of significant differences according to gender, age or the universities attended by future journalists suggests that the shortcomings identified are not associated with specific individual or institutional factors, but rather reflect a broader structural issue within the professional education model. This highlights the need to rethink curricula from a cross-curricular media literacy perspective, incorporating not only technical competencies but also critical, expressive and axiological dimensions (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012). The discussion therefore shifts towards broader educational factors that are less dependent on the particular characteristics of specific subgroups.

The homogeneity observed across gender, age and university should be interpreted in light of three considerations: (a) a sample restricted to three broadly comparable institutions; (b) self-perception as the source of data, which tends to concentrate responses within the intermediate range; and (c) the cross-sectional nature of the research design. These conditions may explain the absence of differences between subgroups without implying deficiencies either in the construct itself or in the instrument used. Indeed, the internal reliability of the questionnaire in this application supports its consistency and is in line with previous Ibero-American evidence (Marín-Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Romero Rodríguez et al., 2020). These considerations suggest that the absence of differences should be interpreted with caution and without overstating its explanatory significance.

The findings should also be interpreted in light of three characteristics of the study: (a) self-perception as the principal source of information, which reflects beliefs rather than observed performance; (b) a non-probability sample limited to three universities in the central-southern region of the country, which restricts generalisability; and (c) a cross-sectional design, which precludes inferences about change over time. These considerations open up several avenues for future research, including the triangulation of self-perception measures with performance-based tasks and product assessment rubrics; the expansion of the sample to other regions and types of institution; and longitudinal studies capable of evaluating progression and curricular effects over time. Consequently, no causal relationships are attributed to unmeasured factors (such as the availability of technological

resources). The conclusions should therefore be understood as a well-founded empirical basis for future inquiry rather than as definitive generalisations.

Finally, this study confirms the relevance of using internationally validated instruments such as the Alfamed questionnaire, adapted in this case to the Chilean context. Its empirical application has made it possible to identify specific gaps that, if left unaddressed, may be reproduced in future professional practice. In contexts characterised by the proliferation of digital media, bots, the expansion of filter bubbles (Pariser, 2017) and generative artificial intelligence, there is an urgent need to educate journalists who are capable of interpreting, creating and acting within the media ecosystem from an ethical perspective oriented towards the common good of society (UNESCO, 2021). In this respect, the methodological strategy adopted strengthens the diagnostic and comparative value of the findings obtained.

## 6. Conclusions

This study provides empirical evidence regarding the level of media competence among journalism students from three universities located in the central-southern macro-region of Chile (National Agency for Research and Development [ANID], n.d.), using an instrument validated by the Alfamed Network and adapted to the local context. The findings indicate that students demonstrate an overall Intermediate level of media competence. This finding is particularly significant when considering the communicative demands that students will face in their future professional practice.

The strengths observed in the language and interaction processes dimensions should be regarded as a foundation upon which more comprehensive educational initiatives can be built. However, the weaknesses identified in the technology and aesthetics dimensions point to structural shortcomings in the curricular treatment of competencies that are essential for the analysis, creation and distribution of content in emerging digital formats and should therefore be prioritised within journalism curricula. Nevertheless, these strengths must be accompanied by more substantial progress in those dimensions where the greatest weaknesses have been identified.

Accordingly, there is a clear need to strengthen media competence as a central component of journalism education by promoting a comprehensive approach that integrates theory, critical analysis and multimedia production skills. This challenge becomes particularly important in the face of growing disinformation and the ongoing transformation of the ways in which knowledge circulates. In this regard, it is essential to update curricula so that they incorporate not only the instrumental mastery of technologies but also a deeper understanding of symbolic languages and the ethical implications of communicative practice in an era of disinformation. From this perspective, strengthening media competence requires intervention not only in curricular content but also in teaching methodologies and assessment practices.

In higher education, and particularly within journalism programmes, it is essential to move towards innovative pedagogical models that foster not only communicative abilities but also critical thinking, ethical awareness and the capacity for applied digital innovation. Such models should also promote intellectual autonomy, reasoned judgement and reflection on the social impact of media messages. This is especially important in a context where traditional media organisations face increasing competition from new digital platforms, forcing them to migrate to digital environments in order to maintain engagement and loyalty among increasingly demanding and diverse audiences. Academic education must therefore adapt in order to equip future professionals with the tools and competencies required not only to understand, but also to lead processes of transformation and adaptation within a complex, rapidly changing and constantly evolving media environment. Within this framework, media competence should be understood as a cross-curricular axis rather than as a marginal or supplementary area of learning.

Based on the findings of this research, a renewed educational vision is proposed, one that moves beyond the mere transmission of isolated technical skills and instead promotes the holistic development of critical, ethical and creative media awareness among students. Such awareness should be oriented not only towards individual benefit but also towards the common good and the strengthening of contemporary society, which is deeply immersed in the rapid and transformative dynamics that characterise technological development in the fields of communication and media. This awareness should enable future professionals not only to adapt to change, but also to question it, interpret it and participate actively in its cultural and social reconfiguration. In this context, it is essential that education

prepares future generations of journalists to address emerging challenges and take advantage of the opportunities offered by a constantly evolving media environment, thereby promoting responsible, informed and democratically engaged citizenship. This requires a pedagogical intentionality capable of making each of the dimensions involved visible, teachable and assessable.

The study provides an empirical and comparable characterisation of media competence across six dimensions, offering useful evidence for identifying specific strengths and gaps. The findings may inform concrete curricular decisions, including the prioritisation of content, the sequencing of learning outcomes and the assessment of performance through communicative products. In this sense, the results may serve as a valuable resource for reviewing pedagogical approaches in journalism programmes and comparable university contexts.

The methodological contribution of the study—based on a validated instrument and on the reporting of results by dimension—facilitates comparisons across cohorts and institutions. Even in the absence of differences between subgroups, the dimension-based approach provides information of clear curricular relevance by identifying precisely where improvement efforts should be concentrated, particularly in the areas of technology and aesthetics. Despite the study's limitations (self-reported data, a limited sample and a cross-sectional design), the findings provide a solid foundation for targeted interventions and future triangulation with performance-based measures. They also offer a useful empirical framework for identifying educational priorities and informing subsequent improvement initiatives.

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