

# Grey Denialism's Use of Media in Spain: Blaming the Messenger

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## Abstract

*Although climate denialism in Spain is a minority view, there is an important core group that resists the idea of the need to act urgently against this phenomenon. This article presents the findings of an empirical study based on a mixed research strategy involving a standardised questionnaire survey and a specific group method that we have termed interpellative groups. The study examines the presence of climate denialism from three perspectives: a) formation of distant opinions on climate change; b) differential relationships with the media among those who exhibit some degree of distance; c) the role of the media as a reference in substantiating expressions of distance.*

## Keywords

*Denialism, information cascade, interpellative groups, media, climate change.*

## Resum

*El negacionisme climàtic a Espanya és minoritari, tot i que s'hi aprecia un nucli important que es resisteix a admetre, si més no, la urgència d'actuar davant el fenomen. L'article mostra els resultats d'un estudi empíric -a partir d'una estratègia de recerca mixta que fa servir enquesta amb qüestionari estandarditzat i un mètode grupal concret que hem denominat grups interpel·latius- de les empremtes del negacionisme climàtic des de tres aspectes: a) la fixació de les opinions distants amb el canvi climàtic; b) la relació diferencial amb els mitjans de comunicació entre els qui mostren algun grau de distància, i c) el paper dels mitjans de comunicació com a referència per fonamentar les expressions de distància.*

## Paraules clau

*Negacionisme, cascada informativa, grups interpel·latius, mitjans de comunicació, canvi climàtic.*

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## Introduction

If we start from the basis that denialism is the rejection of what is generally accepted, be it an event, a phenomenon or a process, then all denialism represents a minority perspective within public opinion. This original minority stance, which reveals what others naively believe (Francescutti, 2024), can nevertheless sparks doubts among those with less well-defined social positions on the subject (event, phenomenon, process). These doubts tend to differ from the original or ontological denialism, which is limited to denying the existence of the fact. Instead, they diffuse into a plurality of positions and expressions, especially focused on denying part of its essential characteristics. What was once limited to a few militant anti-consensus activists now spreads as paralysing doubt among the majority consensus. While the number of denialists in the strict or ontological sense may not increase, depending on the phenomenon, the group of partial denialists may grow.

In relation to climate change, which is the central focus of this paper, the doubt that is generated may strike us all, as Washington and Cook (2011:3) suggest. However, the fact that feelings of doubt are already present in the initial environmental conflicts, despite fairly consolidated affirmations by the scientific community, the multiplication of actors in the communication system—with social networks and specific blogs playing a particularly prominent role—and the demand for concrete measures to tackle the problem seem to perpetuate this state of doubt in the face of the empirical evidence.

As such, this article aims to analyse the relationship between the media and these positions that are becoming more distant with respect to climate change. Through findings based on empirical research<sup>1</sup> that combines quantitative and qualitative methods, we focus on this relationship between the two. Firstly, by trying to identify the differential use of media between denialist positions. Secondly, with a focus on those social positions that express doubt about climate change, by examining the role played by the reference to the media.

These empirical observations have revealed traces of the process of selective attention to and interpretation of media content in relation to climate change. It can thus be said that there is an echo taking place that serves to distance oneself from the phenomenon of climate change and the measures required to tackle it, without necessarily needing to identify oneself as a denialist or simply to be a denialist. Part of the sample surveyed echoes the doubt and lack of urgency in action on climate change, using the media as a reference point. However, rather than echoing the media content itself, it seems that it is the reference to the media that serves to echo these doubts. To partially draw on Sunstein's proposals (2003, 2009), especially the concept of cascade, this is how the echo chamber

works, as the process takes on the form of a cascade of doubt. Doubts regarding climate change have fostered polarisation in society regarding the phenomenon (Dunlap et al., 2016; Hochschild, 2018:33). In the United States, where the majority of research on the social basis of denialism has been conducted, opinion poll results estimate its prevalence at between 20–30% of the population.

In Spain, it is worth noting that although climate denialism constitutes a minority view, it is present among a not insignificant proportion of the population, and that it has not decreased over time. Results from FECYT (2023 and 2025) and CIS surveys show striking trends towards social distancing from this issue: the percentage of those least concerned about climate change exceeded 28% in October 2024 (CIS survey 3478) and averaged 24% that year.

There has been an increase in positions that can be considered critical of the way in which most experts present climate change and its consequences. Taking into account the degree of concern about climate change as a very indirect indication (Ramos and Callejo, 2022), it is observed that around a quarter of the Spanish population over 18 years of age exhibits distance from the phenomenon. This is a trend that does not seem to be transitional (García, 2024:332). This is why it is important to examine this section of Spanish public opinion from a sociological point of view, particularly in relation to the media, as is done in this paper.

## An expressive broadening of the climate change denialist strategy

The introduction of doubt about climate change has gradually broadened the scope of denialism. This takes the form of a variety of statements that do not identify with the original, or ontological, denialism, which simply rejects the existence of the phenomenon. By analysing the media and public policy proposals, Lamb et al. (2020) identify up to twelve types of discourse that constitute something more than denialism. They refer to this as obstructionism or, above all, *delayism*, underlining its connection to the aim of delaying policies to combat climate change. While these developments expand the original concept of denialism by highlighting certain defining characteristics, this paper will continue to refer to it as denialism and, for the sake of nuance, as grey denialism.

These different strands of climate denialism reinterpret the original denialism. They no longer deny its existence, the crux of denialism, but reinterpret or directly question some of its characteristics. Thus, instead of: (a) taking it as a devastating threat, it is reinterpreted as a potentially beneficial phenomenon, from which advantages can be derived (Washington and Cook, 2011); (b) or admitting that it is an effect of human action, it is reinterpreted as an autonomous or natural phenomenon (Rahmsfort, 2004); (c)

or perceiving it as a problem that societies urgently need to tackle, it is reinterpreted as a problem that is not urgent or cannot be tackled, and which, at most, we can only adapt to (Dryzek et al, 2013; Capstick and Pidgeon, 2014; Mann, 2021); or (d) placing it as the backbone of public policies and budgets, it is highlighted its high cost in terms of social welfare and economic growth.

Faced with the accumulation of evidence, both experiential and scientific, which makes denial of the existence of climate change unsustainable, denialism leads to other expressions that fuel doubt and, above all, the potential public resistance to action. Expressive variations of denialism tend to be attributed to the action of interested parties (energy corporations, *think tanks*, etc. (Dunlap and Jacques, 2013)) or political positions (Lamb et al., 2020), which use the media as an instrument for their own gain.

This paper draws on research that examines how denialism enters the public agenda, breaking the previous consensus (Skocpol, 2013; Antonio and Brulle, 2011; De Pryck and Germaine, 2017). The media's role in the dissemination of climate denialism primarily involves supporting the claims of non-experts in the field, who portray themselves as real scientists (Klein, 2015; Lahsen, 2008 and 2013; Oreskes and Conway, 2018; Young and Fitz, 2020), which includes: publishers who publish their books and journals (Dunlap and Jacques 2013); mainstream media that echo their proposals and give them a stamp of respectability (Boykoff, 2013; Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004; Elsasser and Dunlap, 2013; Mayer 2012) and social networks (Jacques and Knox, 2016) where active denialist blogs are gaining prominence (Coan et al, 2021; Sharman, 2014).

This research is of great interest because it addresses the forms of denialism through the discourses or content of the media. In Spain, where the issue of climate change is gaining greater prominence in the media (Rodrigo-Cano and Fernández-Muerza, 2024), few publications have addressed the relationship between denialism and the media itself (Martín-Sosa and Jiménez Gómez, 2021). Consequently, the focus shifts from the media to the positions that can be defined as denialist, or at least skeptical, about climate change. These positions are manifested in what we have termed the expressive economy of climate change denialism.

The aim of this research is to establish the relationship between the different denialist positions, going beyond the initial denial of the phenomenon, by ascertaining which media outlets are used by those who hold any of these denialist positions, or who express doubt or uncertainty about some of the current features surrounding the phenomenon of climate change which are accepted by the vast majority of the scientific community, such as: anthropogenesis, the negative effects of which are considered to be of high and serious importance, and

the urgent need for measures to combat its advance, regardless of the cost.

## Methodology

The empirical material is drawn from a study combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Here, the qualitative perspective takes the form of nine group experiences that we have called *interpellative groups*, which are characterised by the following:<sup>2</sup>

1: Employed men/women (40-50 years old), middle-middle class, living in the metropolitan area of Madrid and with children between 8 and 15 years old.

2: Male/female university students (19-23 years old), in non-environmental-related disciplines and living in Madrid (city).

3: Men/women working in large or medium-sized companies (30-40 years old), who have been looking to move for at least 2 months. Half of them live in the city of Madrid, while the other half live in the metropolitan area.

4: Unemployed working-class women (35-45 years old) living in the city of Madrid.

5: Retired men/women from the urban middle classes (68-75 years old) and residents of Madrid (city).

6: Male/female undergraduate science and engineering students (19-22 years old) and residents of Valencia.

7: Men, medium-sized businessmen (30-40 years old) and residents of Valencia.

8: Women, housewives, middle class (40-50 years old) and residents of Valencia.

9: Men/women representing business people, active members of the environmental movement and residents of Valencia.

10: Teenage girls who have taken part in Extinction Rebellion demonstrations, Fridays for Future or climate strikes (15-17 years old) and who live in Valencia.

All the group meetings took place in rooms set up for this purpose. In the case of Madrid, we rented a room at the Centro de Reuniones Institute. In Valencia, a room designed for this type of experience was set up at the University of Valencia. The fact that all the meetings were held in these two cities was, in part, due to budgetary reasons, as the team was made up of professors from different universities in Madrid and the University of Valencia, and in part to cover the polar criteria of climate (continental/Mediterranean), proximity to the sea (far away/close by) or experiences of climatic disasters. The verbal material produced during the meetings was transcribed by professional transcribers, with the research team reviewing the verbatim transcripts and cross-checking them with the audio recordings.

In terms of the design of the dynamics proposed to these groups, they exhibited characteristics that differed significantly from the better-known group methods of

social research, such as discussion groups and focus groups. The dynamics were designed as experiences in which manifestations regarding climate change, the future, and doubts about climate change were expected to arise from direct questioning among the participants. After an initial open phase, the participants were questioned directly by the moderator about their level of involvement in their statements and potential measures or public policies to tackle climate change. Once the dynamics had entered into the logic of interpellations, each participant was invited to question the other participants. This change in dynamics entailed, on the one hand, a certain shift in the focus of the group's work from the object –in this case, climate change– to the involvement of participants' actions with respect to the object, with questions such as: To what extent would you do what you said you would? Would any of you do what they said? As they said this, what would you ask them? etc. To speed up this interpellative dynamic, instead of the consensual (discussion groups) or objectual (focus groups) dynamic, the number of participants was reduced to four or five. These participants had relatively homogeneous social positions, and some had opposing characteristics that could potentially cause divergence within the groups, such as residence in a city versus residence in a metropolitan area; small businesspeople and ecologists; vegetarians and omnivores. It should be borne in mind that the main objectives of the exercises were the differential nuances in the representation of climate change, the doubts or uncertainties regarding the characteristics of climate change, and the approximation of the degree of involvement or debate surrounding different types of measures to combat climate change.

Assuming that grey denialism has less social legitimacy to manifest itself publicly than mainstream science's recognition of all the characteristics of climate change, abstract identification with concern about the phenomenon, and the need for action to address it, the interactive dynamics generate an appropriate situational context for it to emerge. This gives rise to arguments that justify a lesser degree of identification with the phenomenon, its different characteristics, and potential measures.

The group experiences were developed before the standardised questionnaire survey, as one of the purposes of the methodological articulation was that the analysis of the verbal material produced by the groups, and even part of this material (phrases, expressions) could be used to prepare the questionnaire. The fieldwork took place between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020.

A sample of 2,005 Spanish adults was surveyed by telephone using proportional stratification by province. Assuming simple random sampling, the sampling error is  $\pm 2.19\%$  for the sample as a whole at a 95% confidence level. Sample members were randomly selected according to age, gender and activity quotas. Table 1 below shows the final distribution of the sample.

The questionnaire consisted of 24 questions, with an average length of 29.5 minutes. The fieldwork took place between May and June 2020. The results of the questionnaire have mainly helped us to establish relatively distant positions with regard to climate change and their use of media, through which the subjects obtain information on climate change.

Question 16 serves as a *proxy* to appraise distance to climate change: *"Countries have responded with states of alarm or emergency to the coronavirus. Do you think the same should be done with regard to climate change?"* This question aims to present necessity as a virtue and is set in the context of the current Coronavirus crisis. However, 15.6% said no, and 5.1% said that climate change did not require urgent action. Together, this represents 20.7% of the total sample, which is reflected in the distribution of responses to other questions in the questionnaire. In fact, in the first approach to the issue of climate change made in question 8, which asks respondents, after being questioned about different attitudes towards the future, to state their: *"degree of concern (between 10, very concerned, and 0, not at all concerned or have no idea about this), with respect to the following aspects"*<sup>3</sup>. Among the 20.7% who express distance from the urgency of climate change measures, the proportion of those who show a level of concern above 7 with regard to climate change is 68.3%, compared to 85.3% of those who consider action on climate change to be urgent. Considering the distribution of the sample's responses to these two questions, 6.6% are relatively unconcerned about climate change and do not consider action to be urgent. This percentage is, of course, in the minority. According to the CIS, it ranges from 2.4%, who maintain that climate change is not a consequence of human action (survey No. 3398, March 2023), to 8.2%, who believe that climate change does not exist (survey No. 3362, April 2022).

**Table 1. Distribution of the sample by socio-demographic variables** (percentages within each variable)

|                         |                                                                                                                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| SEX                     | Man                                                                                                                     | 47.1% |
|                         | Woman                                                                                                                   | 52.9% |
| AGE                     | 18-24 years old                                                                                                         | 11.0% |
|                         | 25-34 years old                                                                                                         | 13.9% |
|                         | 35-44 years old                                                                                                         | 19.4% |
|                         | 45-54 years old                                                                                                         | 19.1% |
|                         | 55-70 years old                                                                                                         | 19.2% |
|                         | More than 70 years old                                                                                                  | 17.6% |
| HABITAT                 | Less than 50,000 inhab.                                                                                                 | 44.7% |
|                         | Between 50,001 and 100,000 inhab.                                                                                       | 14.0% |
|                         | Between 100,001 and 500,000 inhab.                                                                                      | 24.2% |
|                         | More than 500,000 inhab.                                                                                                | 17.0% |
| ACADEMIC FORMATION      | No education (Unfinished primary education)                                                                             | 6.2%  |
|                         | First level (School certificate, EGB 1st stage, approx. 10 years)                                                       | 15.2% |
|                         | Second level 1st cycle (Elementary Baccalaureate (16 years), 1st and 2nd ESO, VET 1)                                    | 14.6% |
|                         | Second level 2nd cycle (VET 2nd cycle, Baccalaureate, BUP, 3rd and 4th ESO, COU, 1st and 2nd Baccalaureate)             | 30.1% |
|                         | Third level 1st cycle (technical engineer, university schools, technical architects, surveyors, teachers, nurses, etc.) | 11.6% |
|                         | Third level 2nd cycle (university students, advanced degree, faculties, technical colleges, doctorates, etc.)           | 22.1% |
| ACTIVITY                | Employed                                                                                                                | 53.0% |
|                         | Unemployed, having previously been employed                                                                             | 14.5% |
|                         | Unemployed, looking for a first job                                                                                     | 0.2%  |
|                         | Studying                                                                                                                | 2.7%  |
|                         | Domestic work                                                                                                           | 3.4%  |
|                         | Pensioner/retired                                                                                                       | 26.2% |
| SUBJECTIVE SOCIAL CLASS | Upper Class                                                                                                             | 1.1%  |
|                         | Upper-middle class                                                                                                      | 12.3% |
|                         | Middle-middle class                                                                                                     | 40.6% |
|                         | Lower-middle class                                                                                                      | 20.0% |
|                         | Lower Class                                                                                                             | 25.9% |

Source: INCERCLIMA Project.

## Findings

### 1. The difference in the use of media

After switching up the categories in the variables of the questionnaire used, two profiles were obtained that can be considered opposing. On the one hand, those who perceive climate change with a certain lack of concern and do not consider it an issue on which urgent action is needed: 6.6% of the total sample. On the other hand, those who perceive climate change with concern and as a matter of urgency: 51.3% of the population. The relationship these two new categories have with the media is observed from two perspectives: the channels referred to for receiving information on climate change and the trust in different media as transmitters of this same type of information.

The first approach assumes as a hypothesis that the

sources of information used may be at the basis of the construction of the respective positions. It is based on the analysis of the response to question 10 of the questionnaire, which asks each respondent: *"Have you received information about climate change and its consequences through..."* (different media are presented in rotation)". The results are shown in Table 2.

In most of the potential sources of information mentioned, those who perceive climate change with concern and urgency tend to use them more. Those unconcerned and expressing little urgency for action report less use of sources for receiving information on climate change. The difference is particularly striking for documentaries in cinemas or on television, with more than 16 percentage points, and for more common sources, such as television news and newspapers, with 8 percentage points.

**Table 2. Channels through which information on climate change and its consequences has been received, according to position on climate change (percentage who received information through that channel)**

|                                                                                         | Unconcerned and without urgency | Concerned and urgent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| News on TV                                                                              | 81.8%                           | 89.8%                |
| Newspapers (print or online)                                                            | 68.2%                           | 76.2%                |
| Radio                                                                                   | 59.1%                           | 66.5%                |
| Facebook                                                                                | 45.5%                           | 49.1%                |
| Twitter                                                                                 | 27.3%                           | 28.4%                |
| Telegram                                                                                | 24.2%                           | 17.0%                |
| WhatsApp                                                                                | 34.1%                           | 38.9%                |
| YouTube                                                                                 | 40.9%                           | 46.0%                |
| Other social networks (other than the above)                                            | 31.1%                           | 31.6%                |
| Documentaries (on film or television)                                                   | 64.4%                           | 80.6%                |
| Popular science magazines ( <i>Muy Interesante, Investigación y Ciencia, Quo, ...</i> ) | 43.2%                           | 51.2%                |
| Scientific journals/Scientific books                                                    | 45.5%                           | 49.6%                |
| Lectures, public talks by experts                                                       | 34.1%                           | 40.0%                |

Source: INCERCLIMA Project.

**Table 3. Degree of trust in different channels for receiving climate change information, according to position on climate change (mean, between 0 and 10)**

|                                                                                         | Unconcerned and without urgency | Concerned and urgent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| News on TV                                                                              | 5.11                            | 6.51                 |
| Newspapers (print or online)                                                            | 5.48                            | 6.50                 |
| Radio                                                                                   | 5.79                            | 6.56                 |
| Facebook                                                                                | 3.66                            | 3.94                 |
| Twitter                                                                                 | 3.47                            | 3.62                 |
| Telegram                                                                                | 3.10                            | 3.16                 |
| WhatsApp                                                                                | 3.67                            | 3.72                 |
| YouTube                                                                                 | 3.91                            | 4.40                 |
| Other social networks (other than the above)                                            | 3.49                            | 3.78                 |
| Documentaries (in cinemas or television)                                                | 6.00                            | 7.26                 |
| Popular science magazines ( <i>Muy Interesante, Investigación y Ciencia, Quo, ...</i> ) | 6.02                            | 7.02                 |
| Scientific journals/Scientific books                                                    | 6.63                            | 7.20                 |
| Lectures, public talks by experts                                                       | 6.40                            | 7.26                 |

Source: INCERCLIMA Project.

In view of the above, the inverse differences become relevant: the sources referred to in greater proportion by those distant from climate change. This is the case of the social network Telegram, with a difference of more than 7 percentage points. Used as a source of information on climate change by 17% of those concerned, it amounts to 24.2% of those expressing distance from climate change. From this observation, it could be said that it is not so much the use of online social networks in general that can be connected to distance positions on climate change, but specific online social networks, such as Telegram.

That said, Telegram is also the online social network from which, among those named in the questionnaire, the least amount of information on climate change is received. However, it should be borne in mind that the reference to other media (television, newspapers, radio) is made without branding (channel or headline), so that the analysis is only a rough approximation of the difference in the reception of information of two different profiles with regard to climate change.

The degree of trust in the different channels through which information on climate change is received also



makes a difference between the two profiles. As Table 3 shows, those distant from climate change report lower trust in these channels. Even with regard to Telegram. Despite having a higher proportion of users among those who are distant, trust in this online social network has a similar average to that reported by those most concerned about climate change, with only 6 hundredths of a point separating them.

For the distant and involved, the most trusted channel is public lectures or talks by experts. However, those who are most concerned place the most trust in documentaries (in cinemas or on television). A source that had already proven to be relevant in the qualitative part of the research, having been spontaneously referred to by the group of retirees in Madrid.

Online social networks have the lowest levels of trust between the two profiles. YouTube has the highest average trust between the two profiles. Telegram is the least trusted. It should be noted that the entire sample was asked whether they trust these sources of information on climate change, regardless of whether they use them. When only taking into account the respective users of these sources of information, the average trust score rises to 4.81 among those expressing distance to climate change and 5.05 among those who are actively involved in tackling it. However, it should be noted here that, among the former –unconcerned, with no urgency for action and users of Telegram to learn about climate change– this score is higher than that given to TV news (4.75), Facebook (4.69), Twitter (4.69), WhatsApp (4.56), YouTube (4.59) or other social networks (4.56).

Generally speaking, both profiles present a similar relationship with the various media sources: a) sources with low usage but high levels of trust, such as expert conferences, popular magazines and scientific journals; b) sources with low usage –below 40%– and relatively low overall trust, such as Telegram, Twitter and WhatsApp; c) sources with somewhat more usage and trust, such as YouTube and Facebook; and d) more widely used sources, albeit with equal or lower trust than type a, such as TV news, newspapers, radio and documentaries, with the latter category presenting the biggest difference between the distant and the concerned profiles, with documentaries being more prevalent and more trusted among the second group.

## 2. The reception of climate change news

The reference to sources of information on climate change has been very present in the group dynamics carried out. Particularly in the more open and less directive phase, which is especially relevant. It should be noted that this analysis highlights the common perceptions among the distant – and not so distant– positions present in the groups, rather

than the differences between some positions and social categories and others.

At first glance, the different groups' evaluation of the available information on climate change may seem somewhat paradoxical, since even the groups who are most informed and closest to the issue, such as the Valencian adolescents, feel that they lack information on climate change: *"I am not sufficiently informed either"* (group 10). It seems that there can never be enough information, as demonstrated by this group, who, despite considering themselves fairly well-informed, begin their statement by warning the listener that *"nor am I sufficiently informed"*.

There is an ample supply of information on climate change and, conversely, a lack of information on climate change, according to the participants in the meetings. A lack of information that, according to the less distant positions with regard to climate change, is a state that the more distant positions willfully choose to be in. The information is out there. It is another matter whether one wants to receive it: *"...but nowadays, if you don't know something, despite it happening in front of you... Then it's more a question of not wanting to... We have all the tools at our disposal to know and be informed about what is happening"* (group 6)

The link with climate change information is complex, for while its availability is acknowledged, even characterised as substantial, it is portrayed as information that is difficult to internalise. As stated in the following excerpt, this information does not reach us. Does it not reach us? It does not reach our inner awareness. A lack of reach for which both the media and the recipients are held responsible: *"There is a lot of information, but people don't really internalise it. I mean, no... because, sometimes, you start to analyse it but only very superficially. They don't delve deeper"* (group 8). It doesn't seem to reach our conscience. It is information that fails to raise awareness, a term used by group participants themselves. They show themselves to be lacking in this awareness, for which they hold information and education at least partly responsible, thus justifying their distance from climate change. However, as information is generally accessible, most responsibility is attributed to the education received, differentiating between young people/children, who receive awareness-education:

On the other hand, in my case, I see that young people, in my circle of friends and so on, we are a little more aware, yet despite this, we still lack awareness, and will continue to live our lives in a way that... Will continue to harm the planet. I think one of the most important measures is education, especially for children, who are now the next generation, and who can and are the ones who will really see the change, because as she says, hey, we are here, but we are not going to see the change in the short term, but rather in the long term, although

we are already seeing some things, for example...  
The images we saw now on Instagram of the polar bears that no longer have ice, but... (group 2)

The above discursive fragment is striking not only because of the reference to the status and sources of awareness of the climate change problem, but also because it expresses another of the arguments that, as we shall see, is used to a greater extent with regard to climate change information, namely that of the timing of the climate change event. This is a long-term perspective and, therefore, reduces the urgency of the issue. What is most striking about the statement of group 2 is that its members are between 19 and 23 years old. This is a dominant argument shared by the groups: a) it is an event that has not yet happened; b) it will happen in the long-term future, and c) what the media show us now –Instagram, in the fragment– is something out of its time, as the adversative conjunction “but...” reveals.

While there is a certain conflictive stance between the younger and more educated (and informed) groups, the information is there and, at the same time, does not seem to be there, the tension tends to disappear as the age increases and the educational capital of the participants decreases, as the following statement from the oldest group attests to, which attributes all the responsibility to the media:

There is a lack of information; people lack information. We are not... I am going to jump in too...  
We are not sufficiently informed about all these things. Why? Because it is not in the interest of the others to inform the people (group 5)

If the seemingly paradoxical relationship with climate change information can be considered widespread, one argument is especially prevalent among those with more distant positions at the meetings. This argument also presents contradictions and mixes the perception of climate change, as an event outside the present and set in the distant future, with the representation of media information linked to the present. The groups that hold this view strongly argue that media reporting does not point to the urgency of climate change, leading to it being conceived more as an event fixed to a specific time, to a date, than as a process. A distant date, of course. As can be derived from the following statement, if there is no urgency, there is no move towards action:

I don't know, if there really was a global movement, I'd be the first to sign up. And saying things like “Look, if it means that my children can, I don't know, live in a happy world fifty years from now”, if that were really the case, I would be the first one to sign up, seriously. But since it's all... It's all reports that are posted on the internet, which nobody places any importance on, I mean, I don't know, I haven't seen any news programmes starting the show with: “urgent”, “urgent” climate change. In ten years, everything's

going to go to shit, in fifty years, I mean... Really, how many news programmes open like this? None, it is news in passing (group 1)

It is clear from the media's portrayal of this information content that references to climate change in the media are far removed from the present, from current affairs, from the forms of urgency:

Woman 1: Because it's not something... I think, I don't know.

Man 2: Because we are not aware.

Woman 1: But it's not something that will take place in fifty years, or a hundred years, it's something...

Woman 2: More long-term.

Man 1: And on the TV news, they put it there at the end, before the sports, they put “a report by scientists from I don't know where they say that in a hundred years I don't know what”. People don't even see it...

Woman 1: You listen to it, but you don't register what they're saying. (group 1)

Climate change is represented as something removed from the urgency of present-day events. It lacks the urgency of current affairs, which is why it is particularly absent from those media most closely linked to the urgency of current affairs, from where current affairs have to emerge, such as social networks:

Man 2: Well, on Twitter I haven't seen people making use of the hashtag “Climate change will kill us”

Woman 1: In ten years...

Man 2: I'm serious, and Twitter, although I don't really like social networks. The news you see on Twitter comes out after three seconds, it keeps you informed. (group 1)

The distance from the issue of climate change is multiplied by the distance from the channels and media. On the one hand, social networks, which often report on the very latest news (“comes out after three seconds”), are viewed with suspicion since they tend to exaggerate to attract an audience. Other media, such as television, do not appear to be better placed to provide confidence on the subject and to inform:

I don't know, the extent, for example, to which the hole in the ozone layer is growing, but what is real, not what one person is interested in saying and another in denying. Because they are not clear, some say it is closing and others say it is opening up more. They should tell us the truth about it, for example. About the ice caps melting, as she said, because there are things that are not true. They have carried out studies that have shown that it isn't melting as quickly as they say, while others defend that it is, making it hard to know what to believe. Because in truth, I think most things on television are a lie. (group 3)



Information in the media, especially in general-interest media, is expected to perform a function that it cannot fulfil: to become news. When they turn it into a news story, they are suspected of going beyond what counts as newsworthy material. Considered by those distant from climate change as falling outside the category of newsworthy content, traces can be found of the practical difficulty for its potential inscription as debatable material for media discussion to achieve social reception. This is because audience practices are recognised as being poorly disposed to the reception of arguments that run counter to their own positions. References are made to the duty to cross-check and compare news...

and then there's the sources of information in newspapers, people specialised in x subject... But it's still important to compare news, to contrast them and so on... but whenever it has something to do with the environment, politics or whatever, certain tweets always go viral and often these are people saying something crazy, but often they are experts... So, since a lot of people are interacting with these tweets, I've also discovered new people, because I can go into their profiles and see their bio, see the tweets they publish, and if they are of interest to me, then I'll start following them. And that's a... that's like adding a source of information on that subject. I follow a lot of people from politics, also related to climate change... And then there's feminism as well... So... by following these types of people, I've discovered so many more. And all this makes up an information network. But of course, you have to be *careful* and always cross-check things. (group 6)

Nevertheless, it seems to remain an ideal –with the distance between the practice and the warning already established: “...be careful and always cross-check things”, which ends up having little practical implications. For, in the end, as the following statement declares, “*Well, people just mind their own business*”:

because people look out for themselves. And, in the end, well: “Who am I? A white woman with... Feminism and Climate Change. It doesn't worry me. I'll worry about my own stuff” [...] Well, people just mind their own business (group 6)

## Discussion

The respective selections of those most and least concerned about climate change and the urgency to intervene, as shown in the standardised questionnaire survey, mark some differences between the two groups in terms of the channels through which they have been informed about climate change and its consequences. However, these differences can be interpreted independently of the specificity of climate change information. That is, they

point to the distinctive ways in which the media system is used to access different kinds of information. The structure of the information channels should be taken into account. Of course, this includes information on climate change.

Expressions of distance from climate change take on greater significance in an experimental context that can be perceived as unfavourable to them. In the observational context of climate change research, participants are inclined to express concern about a phenomenon that concerns the scientific community to such an extent that researchers are required to work on it. However, they still express distance and acknowledge a lack of awareness (Ramos and Callejo, 2023), as well as relatively little concern (Ramos and Callejo, 2022) regarding the phenomenon. This acknowledgement, especially when used as a form of justification, highlights the media as a key argument. The media are accused of not emphasising the urgency of climate change, and when they do, they are deemed to have little credibility.

The participants doubt the urgency of climate change, which makes them doubt the presence of climate change in information content. There is an absence of perceived urgency as they perceive themselves as removed from this change. Change, including climate change, is seen as something which will affect future generations.

Ideally, the relationship with the media should be informative and diverse. However, this practice appears to be filter-driven (Sunstein, 2003:19), both in terms of the selection of sources and in the selection of what is considered information, as has been observed here. This information is constantly perceived as deficient by the various groups: those who feel they have plenty of information consider it insufficient, while those who are less involved point to its lack of appeal and the fact that it is broadcast at the end of the news reports. When the news reports talk about climate change, it is not seen as “proper news”, but as “news in passing”. It is considered second-order information content, largely because it is not relevant in the present.

Some also argue that climate change is not a news event: it is not newsworthy because it is not urgent. This puts the media in a kind of double bind (Bateson, 2000). When the media reports on climate change, they do not present it as urgent. However, if it is presented as urgent, as noted in the previous reference to Instagram and pointed out in the following statement, it is perceived as false, leading to a lack of trust in the media. Based on the participants' statements in the meetings, especially those who are most distant from climate change, the cascade of doubt appears to take on a different meaning than the one Sunstein attributes to his cascade concept. What seems to cascade are doubts. Doubts about climate change circulate through the media.

Sunstein's informational cascades of rumours range from

a small number of people shaping the rumour to a larger number accepting the rumour because they lack grounds to believe it is false (Sunstein, 2009:21). In our observation, it can be said that recipients have doubts about climate change, which they justify by alluding to doubts about the media. As Sunstein notes, they rationalise this doubt, as the cascade is embedded in a process of rationalising one's own belief (Sunstein, 2009:18). With the cascade underway, it is very difficult to stop among those who believe it. Even attempts to stop it can backfire, such as the media's attempts to portray action on climate change as urgent, when the distance to the issue is not perceived as urgent.

To draw very succinctly on Sunstein, receivers take on board ideas from transmitters they recognise and trust, not listening to other transmitters who may have different ideas, thereby polarising debates and entrenching positions. However, among those who are distant from climate change, it was found that they are more distrustful of all sources of information. On the other hand, the media consumption patterns of those concerned and involved with climate change and those less concerned and distant cannot be considered radically different.

The echo produced among the distant participants does not appear to be based on the repetition or reinforcement of concepts or assumptions. Rather, it seems to be more in keeping with what can be considered the crux of denialism. More diffuse and less expert denialism is expressed in a sparse and short-range manner, targeting some of the characteristics of climate change recognised by mainstream science. This takes the form of a denial of its anthropogenic nature and an emphasis on the lack of scientific consensus. There is little mention of any positive aspects of climate change or its advantageous qualities, nor of the economic or social ineptitude of societies to cope with it, in the qualitative materials collected. In practice, grey denialism manifests as arguments that are projected onto the messengers, the media. The media emerge as an instrument that helps manifest distance from climate change.

Ultimately, those distant from climate change may be perceived as passive, unwitting victims of the confusion created by self-interested outlets (Brulle, 2013; Bonds, 2016; Oreskes and Conway, 2018). However, their statements tend to expose them as regressive subjects who refuse to acknowledge the basis of their privileged lives (Norgaard, 2011), justifying themselves by referring to the role of the media: they do not inform us enough, they do not draw our attention to climate change, they treat it as second-rate information, they exaggerate, and so on.

## Conclusions

Over time, as scientific evidence mounts and freak weather events become more frequent, climate change denialism is being expressed in a more diverse range of ways. Greyer denialist positions can be explained by differential exposure to the media system. The materials presented here suggest that the relationship with the media is somewhat more complex, seemingly due not so much to the relationship with different sources of information, although this has been documented, but rather to how recipients interpret such sources, particularly when information is conveyed through non-specialised media such as television news programmes and so on. Regarding trust in different media sources for climate change information, a greater difference in trust is observed among those who are more distant from climate change, particularly in relation to traditional media, than in relation to social networks.

The groups' reference to the media seems to reinforce their practical position on climate change, which is doubtful. However, the media form the basis of their arguments. They refer to them as a source of doubt regarding climate change, particularly about the urgency of public measures or policies to address climate change and its effects. These doubts are attributed to how potential action to tackle climate change and the role of the media are portrayed. Thus, reference to media reporting on climate change is part of the argument used by those who are most distant from climate change, particularly with regard to the need for urgent action.

By attributing an unalarming or unrealistic character to media reports on climate change, they seem to justify their lack of concern for the phenomenon. This is also seen as a justification for not paying attention to such information and even ignoring it. However, the threat of climate change seems difficult to ignore. It is out there, as are other relevant threats. As such, *"one cannot ignore the transformations generated by modernity concerning the consequences of at least some of the mechanisms of disengagement, like the global risks of nuclear war or ecological catastrophe"* (Giddens, 1995:35). These risks are very present, and it seems that referencing the media can be used to present oneself as both concerned and attentive to the phenomenon, as well as unconcerned and inattentive, as if the media were the source of this indifference.

## Endnotes

- 1 INCERCLIMA project, funded by the *State Programme for Research, Development and Innovation Oriented to the Challenges of Society* 2017 (CSO2017-84007-R). Developed by the team formed by: Yolanda Agudo (UNED), Javier Callejo (UNED, IP), Pablo Francescutti (U. Rey Juan Carlos), Emilio Luque (UNED), Ernest García (U. Valencia), Ramón Ramos (U. Complutense), Marina Requena (U. Valencia) and Manuel Rodríguez (U. Valencia).
- 2 The numbering of the groups will be used later to identify the group statements.
- 3 In addition to climate change, other issues include: 'the economy', 'employment', 'poverty', 'democratic participation', 'international terrorism', 'nuclear weapons proliferation', 'the environment', 'crime and delinquency', 'pensions', 'new diseases' and 'housing'. The order in which these questions are asked is rotated.

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