

THE EFFECT OF MEDIA AND POLITICAL BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES ON TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS: A MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS ON DATA FROM 21 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT:

While trust in political institutions is a necessary condition for the working of democracy, its level is constantly in decline in Western democracies. Therefore, in this study, we examine factors that are associated with the perceived trust in political institutions. In this investigation, we centred on the role of media, specifically news consumption, internet usage, and cross-country differences concerning the relationship between media and politics. Using data from the 2016 *European Social Survey* (N = 37,159 respondents, 52% males, age M = 49.47), we tested a multilevel model predicting trust in political institutions by media factors, political beliefs and attitudes, and demographics. We also tested the moderation effects between news consumption and political beliefs and attitudes, as well as for the effect of the media system on a national level. The findings show that news consumption had no single direct effect on trust, but it moderated the effect of political interest. The effect of Internet usage on trust was only negligible and not significant after the inclusion of political beliefs and attitudes in the model. There were also differences between media models. Countries belonging to the Democratic Corporatist Model (but also Ireland and the United Kingdom) were characterised by overall higher trust than countries in the Polarized Pluralist Model and Central and Eastern European Model.

KEY WORDS:

European Social Survey, media effects, models of media systems, multilevel analysis, news consumption, political efficacy, political interest, trust in political institutions

Introduction

The essence of democratic governance lays in designating one's own power to other people and political institutions. For this reason, trust in political institutions is an important condition for the working of



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democratic governance and a key indicator of its legitimacy.¹ From the point of view of democratic governance, trust in political institutions is even more important than trust in a current political representation.² Moreover, it has a positive effect on voter turnout,³ while lower trust may result in rather non-normative political participation, such as participation in an illegal demonstration.⁴ In the long run, decrease in trust in political institutions may lead to growing authoritarian populist support.⁵

At the same time, since the second half of the 20th century, we have been witnessing an erosion of political trust, and more specifically trust in political institutions in Western liberal democracies.⁶ Unsurprisingly, much effort has already been paid to understand the reasons behind the diminishing levels of political trust in Western democracies. Previous studies recognise that the changing level of trust in political institutions may stem from subjective evaluations by citizens, as well as from objective (external) criteria of “*competence, commitment and reliability*”,⁷ and thus that factors influencing the level of trust may be found on the level of an individual as well as a country.⁸ However, existing studies often fall short in recognising that the process by which citizens evaluate performance of the institutions cannot happen directly, that is without intermediary role of the media. Most people’s impressions of current events or how institutions and political actors perform are generally, even though not necessarily directly, based on information received from the media, particularly from the news and programmes about politics and current affairs. For that reason, the current study examines the role that media play in this process, which is a necessary step toward better understanding it.

Prior research that has examined the impact of news consumption on trust in political institutions shows a rather weak⁹ or even absent link between news consumption and trust in political institutions.¹⁰ Prior research has also identified pitfalls that could yield such contradictory results. First, news consumption has often been examined as a direct single predictor of trust in political institutions.¹¹ Therefore, in this study, we examine the

moderating role of news consumption, especially with regard to existing socio-political attitudes and beliefs. Second, while the majority of research is concerned with single countries, cross-country comparative studies are still needed. Patterns of media use may differ depending on the overall media system, thus different systems may influence the impact of news consumption on citizens’ political behaviour and attitudes in different ways.¹² For that reason, this study examines specifically how the media influence trust in political institutions, both at an individual level by looking at the effect of patterns of individual media use (news consumption and Internet usage), and at a country level, by exploring the role of media systems in cross-country differences.

Trust in Political Institutions

Trust in political and civic institutions is considered an important determinant of political behaviour,¹³ and a necessary condition for the legitimacy of political order.¹⁴ As such it is an important factor in studies focusing on democracy or civic and political behaviour. Though the designation of the concept may vary across studies, it comprises the trust and confidence of citizens that institutions will serve their interests.¹⁵ These institutions may encompass government, politicians or the legal system.

Level of trust in political institutions is always contextual, that is, it may change over time and may be related to specific events or developments of public concern.¹⁶ In Europe, a decline in trust in political institutions took place during the 1960s and 1970s before levelling off in the 1990s and 2000s. Levels of trust have traditionally been highest in the Nordic countries, followed by the rest of North-Western Europe, and lowest in Southern Europe.¹⁷

The level of trust in political institutions has been previously linked with several factors on an individual level, such as sociodemographic characteristics (e.g. income and denomination) and shared attitudes (e.g. interpersonal trust, post-material values),¹⁸ but also factors on a country level, such as country specific institutional environment, economic performance, government performance and adopted policies, or the level of corruption.¹⁹ In line with prior research, factors at both levels are related and may influence each other. For example, government policy aimed at enhancing citizen participation in voluntary associations may result in

1 See: NEWTON, K.: Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy. In *International Political Science Review*, 2001, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 201-214; AARTS, K., FLADMOE, A., STRÖMBÄCK, J.: Media, Political Trust and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Perspective. In AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 98-118; EASTON, D.: *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley, 1965.

2 NORRIS, P., NEWTON, K.: Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture, or Performance. In PHARR, S. J., PUTNAM, R. D. (eds.): *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 52-73.

3 GRÖNLUND, K., SETÄLÄ, M.: Political Trust, Satisfaction and Voter Turnout. In *Comparative European Politics*, 2007, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 400-422.

4 SEREK, J., MACHÁČKOVÁ, H., MACEK, P.: Who Crosses the Norms? Predictors of the Readiness for Non-Normative Political Participation among Adolescents. In *Journal of Adolescence*, 2018, Vol. 62, p. 18-26.

5 Remark by authors: On the other hand, the erosion of trust in political institutions may also be the consequence of exposure to populist rhetoric, see: NORRIS, P., INGLEHART R.: *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 24-269.

6 See, e.g.: NORRIS, P., NEWTON, K.: Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture, or Performance. In PHARR, S. J., PUTNAM, R. D. (eds.): *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 52-73; PUTNAM, R. D. (ed.): *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; VAN DER MEER, T. W. G.: Political Trust and the “Crisis of Democracy”. In THOMPSON, W. R. (ed.): *Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-77>.

7 VAN DER MEER, T. W. G., DEKKER, P.: Trustworthy States, Trusting Citizens? A Multi-Level Study into Objective and Subjective Determinants of Political Trust. In ZMERLI, S., HOOGHE, M. (eds.): *Political Trust: Why Context Matters*. Colchester: ECPR Press, 2011, p. 99.

8 See: VAN DER MEER, T. W. G.: Political Trust and the “Crisis of Democracy”. In THOMPSON, W. R. (ed.): *Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-77>; MARAVALL, J. M.: *Regimes, Politics and Markets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

9 Compare to: AARTS, K., FLADMOE, A., STRÖMBÄCK, J.: Media, Political Trust and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Perspective. In AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 98-118; MOY, P., SCHEUFELE, D. A.: Media Effects on Political and Social Trust. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2000, Vol. 77, No. 4, p. 744-759; NORRIS, P.: *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies. Communication, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; ROBINSON, M. J.: Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of “The Selling of the Pentagon”. In *American Political Science Review*, 1976, Vol. 70, No. 2, p. 409-432; STRÖMBÄCK, J., DJERF-PIERRE, M., SHEHATA, A.: The Dynamics of Political Interest and News Media Consumption: A Longitudinal Perspective. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2013, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 414-435.

10 See: AARTS, K., FLADMOE, A., STRÖMBÄCK, J.: Media, Political Trust and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Perspective. In AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 98-118; MOY, P., SCHEUFELE, D. A.: Media Effects on Political and Social Trust. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2000, Vol. 77, No. 4, p. 744-759.

11 Compare to: AVERY, J. M.: Videomalaise or Virtuous Circle?: The Influence of the News Media on Political Trust. In

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12 See: AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

13 LEVI, M., STOKER, L.: Political Trust and Trustworthiness. In *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2000, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 475-507; ZMERLI, S., NEWTON, K., MONTERO, J. R.: Trust in People, Confidence in Political Institutions, and Satisfaction with Democracy. In VAN DETH, J. W., MONTERO, J. R., WESTHOLM, A. (eds.): *Citizenship and Involvement in European Democracies: A Comparative Analysis*. London, New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 35-65.

14 See: EASTON, D.: *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley, 1965.

15 For more see: AARTS, K., FLADMOE, A., STRÖMBÄCK, J.: Media, Political Trust and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Perspective. In AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 98; HALL, P. A.: The Role of Government and the Distribution of Social Capital. In PUTNAM, R. D. (ed.): *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 21-58; WUTHNOW, R.: Bridging the Privileged and the Marginalized? In PUTNAM, R. D. (ed.): *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 59-102.

16 NEWTON, K.: Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy. In *International Political Science Review*, 2001, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 201-214; STRÖMBÄCK, J., DJERF-PIERRE, M., SHEHATA, A.: The Dynamics of Political Interest and News Media Consumption: A Longitudinal Perspective. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2013, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 414-435.

17 VAN DER MEER, T. W. G.: Political Trust and the “Crisis of Democracy”. In THOMPSON, W. R. (ed.): *Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-77>.

18 Compare to: LÜHISTE, K.: Explaining Trust in Political Institutions: Some Illustrations from the Baltic States. In *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 2006, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 475-496; MISHLER, W. T., ROSE, R.: Trust, Distrust and Scepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies. In *Journal of Politics*, 1997, Vol. 59, No. 2, p. 418-451.

19 See: HAM VAN, C. et al.: *Myth and Reality of the Legitimacy Crisis: Explaining Trends and Cross-National Differences in Established Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017; VAN DER MEER, T. W. G.: Political Trust and the “Crisis of Democracy”. In THOMPSON, W. R. (ed.): *Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-77>; MARAVALL, J. M.: *Regimes, Politics and Markets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; VAN DER MEER, T. W. G., DEKKER, P.: Trustworthy States, Trusting Citizens? A Multilevel Study into Objective and Subjective Determinants of Political Trust. In ZMERLI, S., HOOGHE, M. (eds.): *Political Trust: Why Context Matters*. Colchester: ECPR Press, 2011, p. 95-116.

increased social capital at the individual level that enhances trust in institutions.²⁰ As one study observed, “objective system characteristics affect the various subjective perceptions of the system, which in turn influence political trust”.²¹ In other words, trust in political institutions reflects external or objective conditions as perceived by individuals.²²

Recognising the importance of social perceptions in the process of trust formation, this study specifically focuses on the role of media, and especially on news consumption, keeping in mind that news and current affairs programmes are the primary source for social perceptions regarding how political institutions perform. We presume that patterns of media use may affect trust in political institutions, both directly and in interaction with other individual characteristics. We also presume that these patterns may be undermined by individual and country level characteristics.

The Role of Media: News Consumption and Media Systems

Consumption of News and Programmes about Politics and Current Affairs

Existing research in political communication generates results that lead to rather contradictory conclusions concerning the impact of news consumption on political or institutional trust. According to one group of studies, news media consumption leads to the decline of political trust and growth of political alienation. In line with the video malaise thesis, the reason behind this is the negative image of politics in the media.²³ The spiral of cynicisms theory identifies domination of strategy framing as a factor that leads to political distrust.²⁴ Findings from several empirical studies have confirmed this theory.²⁵

However, other studies claim a positive effect of news consumption on trust in political institutions. The theory of cognitive mobilisation points to the fact that media consumption enhances political knowledge and indirectly trust in political institutions.²⁶ The virtuous circle hypothesis states that in the case of citizens who are interested in politics, attention to political news will further increase political trust and knowledge.²⁷ Results of some studies confirm these theoretical models. According to a study conducted by Moy, Pfau, and Kahlor, reading newspapers and viewing television news were associated with positive perceptions of some institutions.²⁸ Van Ham et al. found that media use had a consistent and significant positive effect on political support in all nine European democracies in their sample and that the strength of the effects differed

20 LÜHISTE, K.: Explaining Trust in Political Institutions: Some Illustrations from the Baltic States. In *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 2006, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 475-496.

21 VAN DER MEER, T. W. G., DEKKER, P.: Trustworthy States, Trusting Citizens? A Multilevel Study into Objective and Subjective Determinants of Political Trust. In ZMERLI, S., HOOGHE, M. (eds.): *Political Trust: Why Context Matters*. Colchester: ECPR Press, 2011, p. 95-116.

22 NEWTON, K.: Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy. In *International Political Science Review*, 2001, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 201-214.

23 ROBINSON, M. J.: Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of “The Selling of the Pentagon”. In *American Political Science Review*, 1976, Vol. 70, No. 2, p. 409-432.

24 CAPPELLA, J. N., JAMIESON, K. H.: News Frames, Political Cynicism, and Media Cynicism. In *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1996, Vol. 546, No. 1, p. 71-84.

25 See: VREESE, C. H.: The Effects of Strategic News on Political Cynicism, Issue Evaluations, and Policy Support: A Two-Wave Experiment. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2004, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 191-214; DE VREESE, C. H., SEMETKO, H. A.: Cynical and Engaged: Strategic Campaign Coverage, Public Opinion, and Mobilization in a Referendum. In *Communication Research*, 2002, Vol. 29, No. 6, p. 615-641.

26 DALTON, R.: Cognitive Mobilization and Partisan Dealignment in Advanced Industrial Democracies. In *The Journal of Politics*, 1984, Vol. 46, No. 1, p. 264-284.

27 Compare to: NORRIS, P.: A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies. In *Communication, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

28 MOY, P., PFAU, M., KAHLOR, L.: Media Use and Public Confidence in Democratic Institutions. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 1999, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 137-58.

considerably between countries.²⁹ Adriaansen, van Praag and de Vreese found that substantive news content can actually reduce political cynicism.³⁰

Nevertheless, when found, the effects on trust in political institutions reported by existing research were usually small. Some researchers even observed an apparent absence of news exposure effects on trust.³¹ Moy and Scheufele found that political trust is not at all a function of media use; rather, it stems from education and political ideology.³² According to them, one possible reason for contradictory results may be treating news media consumption as a single explanatory factor of trust in political institutions. Therefore, in this study, we intend to overcome this limitation by examining the moderating effect of news consumption on select political beliefs and attitudes.

Use of the Internet

The growing importance of digital media and the Internet as sources of political information renders the use of the Internet as a potentially relevant factor that could affect trust in political institutions. Some researchers found that Internet usage advances political knowledge, civic engagement and support for democratic values³³ and that civic engagement via social media resulted in increased trust towards institutions.³⁴ Wang discovered that political use of the Internet promotes political interest and feelings of trust and efficacy.³⁵ Curtice and Norris also observed that Internet use enhanced the political efficacy of citizens; on the other hand, according to results obtained by them, having access to the Internet and information had little or no impact on levels of trust in the political process.³⁶

Considering that Internet usage may be both directly and indirectly linked with exposure to news and information about current affairs, we will examine the effect of frequency of Internet usage. By including both Internet usage and news consumption, we expect to provide more precise disentanglement of the associations of both activities on trust in political institutions.

Cross-Country Differences: The Role of Media Systems

One reason why studies concerned with the relation between news consumption and trust in political institutions have generated contradictory results may be the contextual dependence of such relationships, which means that the impact may vary across different contexts, such as countries.³⁷ We presume that such cross-country variance is not random but related to the nature of relationships between the media and politics in the country. For instance, prior research has already found that differences in the national supply of news have an impact on what and how much citizens know.³⁸ This study specifically focuses on the role of the media

29 See: HAM VAN, C. et al.: *Myth and Reality of the Legitimacy Crisis: Explaining Trends and Cross-National Differences in Established Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

30 ADRIAANSEN, M. L., VAN PRAAG, P., DE VREESE, C. H.: Substance Matters: How News Content Can Reduce Political Cynicism. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2010, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 433-457.

31 AARTS, K., SEMETKO, H. A.: The Divided Electorate: Media Use and Political Involvement. In *The Journal of Politics*, 2003, Vol. 65, No. 3, p. 759-784.

32 MOY, P., SCHEUFELE, D. A.: Media Effects on Political and Social Trust. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2000, Vol. 77, No. 4, p. 744-759.

33 BOULIANNE, S.: Stimulating or Reinforcing Political Interest: Using Panel Data to Examine Reciprocal Effects between News Media and Political Interest. In *Political Communication*, 2011, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 147-162.

34 WARREN, A. M., SULAIMAN, A., JAAFAR, N. I.: Social Media Effects on Fostering Online Civic Engagement and Building Citizen Trust and Trust in Institutions. In *Government Information Quarterly*, 2014, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 291-301.

35 WANG, S.: Political Use of the Internet, Political Attitudes and Political Participation. In *Asian Journal of Communication*, 2007, Vol. 17, No. 4, p. 381-395.

36 CURTICE, J., NORRIS, P.: E-Politics? The Impact of the Internet on Political Trust and Participation. In PARK, A. et al. (eds.): *British Social Attitudes: The 21st Report*. London: SAGE, 2004, p. 99-118.

37 AVERY, J. M.: Videomalaise or Virtuous Circle?: The Influence of the News Media on Political Trust. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2009, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 424.

38 CURRAN, J. et al.: Media System, Public Knowledge and Democracy: A Comparative Study. In *European Journal of Communication*, 2009, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 5-26.

in relation to politics by examining the effect of models of media systems.³⁹ Our assumption is that differences between media systems result in different patterns of media use, which thus indirectly results in different effects on trust in political institutions.⁴⁰ In the following paragraphs, we offer more detailed explanations about factors that can be influential in terms of effects on trust in political institutions and which are captured under the conceptualisations of media systems.

One way to conceptualise differences in the national supply of news is to focus on the position of public service broadcasting within the media system.⁴¹ Researchers observed that in countries where public television has a stronger standing, the public is offered more prime-time news and current affairs programmes.⁴² Iyengar et al. provided evidence that public service-oriented media systems are characterised by a smaller knowledge gap in political knowledge.⁴³ Since trust in political institutions is based on knowledge,⁴⁴ the influence of news consumption on trust in political institutions may be stronger in public service-oriented media systems. Also, compared to commercial news broadcasters' coverage of politics which extensively uses conflict as news values in order to attract audiences, public service broadcasters are more committed to a consensual view of society. Thus, we can assume that countries where the position of public service broadcasting is strong have better informed citizens with more trust in their respective political systems.⁴⁵

Moy and Scheufele noticed that a reliance on television news leads to lower levels of trust in government, while newspaper reading results in higher levels of trust.⁴⁶ Thus, the effect of news consumption on trust in political institutions may be stronger in countries belonging to media systems with a higher level of newspaper circulation (Table 1).⁴⁷

Another feature of media systems, which may influence the impact of news consumption on trust in political institutions, is the distinction between partisan and neutral commercial press. The latter model of press market results in a situation where news content is extensively shaped by information, agendas and interpretive frameworks originating within the institutions of the state,⁴⁸ which should result in higher trust in institutions of the state. In the context of recent developments in Central and Eastern European press markets, business parallelism⁴⁹ and oligarchization of the media⁵⁰ should be understood as additional features of media systems that may affect the dynamic of trust formation. We assume that these trends add to the media malaise effect.

39 See: HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

40 AARTS, K., FLADMOE, A., STRÖMBÄCK, J.: Media, Political Trust and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Perspective. In AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 101.

41 Remark by authors: Four indicators are used to evaluate the status of public broadcasting within media system. These are a) funding revenues for public broadcasting systems *per capita*; b) as a percent of GDP; c) the percent of those revenues that come from commercial sources; and d) the percent of the television audience captured by public service broadcasting. See: HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 43.

42 AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J.: Conclusion. In AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 189.

43 IYENGAR, S. et al.: Cross National versus Individual Level Differences in Political Information: A Media Systems Perspective. In *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 2010, Vol. 20, No. 3, p. 291-309.

44 NEWTON, K.: Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy. In *International Political Science Review*, 2001, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 201-214.

45 See also: AARTS, K., FLADMOE, A., STRÖMBÄCK, J.: Media, Political Trust and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Perspective. In AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 98-118; NORRIS, P., NEWTON, K.: Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture, or Performance. In PHARR, S. J., PUTNAM, R. D. (eds.): *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 52-73.

46 MOY, P., SCHEUFELE, D. A.: Media Effects on Political and Social Trust. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2000, Vol. 77, No. 4, p. 744-759.

47 Remark by authors: Rates of newspapers circulation, which are supposed to indicate the development of mass press in a given media system, are measured as newspapers sales per 1,000 adult population, see: HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 22-23; MOY, P., SCHEUFELE, D. A.: Media Effects on Political and Social Trust. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2000, Vol. 77, No. 4, p. 744-759.

48 HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 234.

49 ZIELONKA, J.: Introduction: Fragile Democracy, Volatile Politics, and the Quest for a Free Media. In ZIELONKA, J. (ed.): *Media and Politics in New Democracies: Europe in a Comparative Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 18.

50 STĚTKA, V.: The Rise of Oligarchs as Media Owners. In ZIELONKA, J. (ed.): *Media and Politics in New Democracies: Europe in a Comparative Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 154-168.

Finally, early democratization and strong development of legal-rational authority typical for some media models identified by Hallin and Mancini and absent in others⁵¹ may be considered as factors influencing the formation of trust in political institutions. On the other hand, the variation between countries or media models may be bypassed by the existence of a "common global set of media practices" that leads to relatively homogenous media content and media use patterns.⁵² In summary, consideration of cross-national variations provides us with the opportunity to examine if and how individual-level factors are undermined by media system-related factors.

The analysed data originates from 21 European countries that may be assigned to four media models: Polarized Pluralist Model, Democratic Corporatist Model, Liberal Model and the Central and Eastern European (CEE) Model. However, for purposes of our study, we decided to merge countries belonging to the Liberal Model in the same category with countries included in the Democratic Corporatist Model. We acknowledge that there are significant differences concerning many aspects of media-politics relations between the two models that Hallin and Mancini demonstrated so convincingly. However, concerning the United Kingdom and Ireland – the only two countries belonging to the Liberal Model in our sample – the authors themselves claimed that both countries "share important characteristics in common with continental European systems – particularly those of the Democratic Corporatist countries – both in their political institutions and cultures and in their media systems".⁵³ More importantly, the observation holds true in respects that are especially relevant for our research. One of them is the dominance of public broadcasting,⁵⁴ and in the case of the United Kingdom also a higher share of prime-time news.⁵⁵ Moreover, the United Kingdom and Ireland resemble countries belonging to the Democratic Corporatist Model in high newspaper circulation⁵⁶ and existence of neutral commercial press. Finally, in the case of both models, we can observe early democratization and strong development of rational-legal authority, which we also understand as a factor enhancing trust in political institutions.

Analysed data include 11 CEE countries that are very diverse in terms of relation between media and politics. Peruško, Vozab and Čuvalo examined 10 CEE media systems and classified Lithuania, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria in the South and East European Model (with Greece and Italy); on the other hand, Poland, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Slovakia were included in the European Mainstream Model with Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom.⁵⁷ Likewise, Herrero et al. identified three different models among 11 CEE countries,⁵⁸ while Dobek-Ostrowska identified four different models within 21 CEE countries.⁵⁹ While these studies confirm diversity among CEE countries, our analysis generalises CEE countries in the general CEE Media Model for the sake of simplicity, as well as due to the similar 'socialist legacy' and the transitional character of CEE democracies.

51 HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 55-59.

52 HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 277.

53 HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 246.

54 HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 232-237.

55 AALBERG, T., AELST VAN, P., CURRAN, J.: Media Systems and the Political Information Environment: A Cross-National Comparison. In AALBERG, T., CURRAN, J. (eds.): *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 41.

56 ELVESTAD, E., BLEKESAUNE, A.: Newspaper Readers in Europe: A Multilevel Study of Individual and National Differences. In *European Journal of Communication*, 2008, Vol. 23, No. 4, p. 425-447.

57 PERUŠKO, Z., VOZAB, D., ČUVALO, A.: Audiences as a Source of Agency in Media Systems: Post-Socialist Europe in Comparative Perspective. In *Mediální Studia*, 2013, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 137-154.

58 HERRERO, L. C. et al.: Rethinking Hallin and Mancini Beyond the West: An Analysis of Media Systems in Central and Eastern Europe. In *International Journal of Communication*, 2017, Vol. 11, No. 27, p. 4797-4823.

59 DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, B.: 25 Years after Communism: Four Models of Media and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe. In DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, B., GŁOWACKI, M. (eds.): *Democracy and Media in Central and Eastern Europe 25 Years On*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015, p. 11-45.

Table 1: Expected effect of media model on trust in political institutions⁶⁰

	Effect on Trust in Political Institutions	Characteristics of Media Model Explaining the Effect
Polarized Pluralist Model	-	low newspaper circulation (-),
		partisan press (-),
		weak (politicized) public broadcast service (-),
		late democratization and weaker development of legal-rational authority (-)
Democratic Corporatist Model + UK and Ireland	+	higher newspaper circulation (+),
		neutral commercial press (+),
		strong public service (+),
		early democratization and strong development of legal-rational authority (+)
CEEModel	-	in the case of some countries low level of newspaper circulation (-),
		oligarchization of media (-),
		weak public-service broadcasting (-),
		late democratization and weaker development of legal-rational authority (-)

Note: Symbols “+” and “-” indicate expected direction of the relationship between features of a media model and level of trust in political institutions. The former means that a factor is expected to enhance trust in political institutions, the latter that the factor is expected to diminish the level of trust.

Source: Own processing

The Role of Political Beliefs and Attitudes

The main focus of this study is to capture the effect of media on trust in institutions. However, to provide a complex picture about the factors that may enhance or hinder trust in political institutions, we will also investigate the role of political beliefs and attitudes, specifically interest in politics, as well as internal and external political efficacy. These individual factors have been identified as potentially influential in the formation of trust in political institutions,⁶¹ and can also explain the inter-individual differences in the levels of trust or scepticism towards governments or the sphere of politics. In our investigation, we will examine the effect of these factors, but we will also focus on the interaction between these effects and the role of news consumption. Specifically, we will examine whether varying political beliefs and attitudes moderate the effect of news consumption.

Interest in Politics

Political trust is associated with an interest in politics. While some scholars understood political interest as a key motivational factor behind news consumption,⁶² others preferred to speak about the reciprocal

60 Remark by authors: Features of respective media models were derived from HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; RANTANEN, T.: A Critique of the Systems Approaches in Comparative Media Research: A Central and Eastern European Perspective. In *Global Media and Communication*, 2013, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 257-277; FÄRDIGH, M. A.: Comparing Media Systems in Europe: Identifying Comparable Country-Level Dimensions of Media Systems. In *QoG Working Paper Series*, 2010, No. 2, p. 1-50. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <https://mafardigh.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/2010_2_fardigh.pdf>.

61 See: CATTERBERG, G.: The Individual Bases of Political Trust: Trends in New and Established Democracies. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2006, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 31-48; NEWTON, K.: Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy. In *International Political Science Review*, 2001, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 201-214.

62 STRÖMBÄCK, J., DJERF-PIERRE, M., SHEHATA, A.: The Dynamics of Political Interest and News Media Consumption: A Longitudinal Perspective. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2013, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 414-435.

relationship between the two, including stimulating and reinforcing effects.⁶³ Boulianne observed that both concepts were entered as exogenous variables in many studies, yet, according to her, the use of simple causal models produced results that amount to questioning whether news media use has any significant impact on political engagement.⁶⁴ Therefore, we will study the single effect of political interest, but we will also focus on the interaction between these factors.

Internal and External Political Efficacy

In the literature, “political efficacy” is defined as the feeling that an individual is capable of influencing the political process by their own political action. In this sense, political efficacy is related to political effectiveness and system responsiveness.⁶⁵

Balch introduced the distinction between internal and external efficacy.⁶⁶ In the former case, the object of assessment is the political effectiveness of the individual, while in the latter it is the responsiveness and effectiveness of institutions and political authorities. Internal political efficacy can be defined as a “*personal belief regarding the ability to achieve desired results in the political domain through personal engagement and an efficient use of one’s own capacities and resources*”.⁶⁷ In this study, internal political efficacy is specifically captured as a confidence in one’s ability to participate in politics. While some researchers found a positive link between internal political self-efficacy and trust in political institutions,⁶⁸ or at least a small effect,⁶⁹ others reported no link between trust in leaders and institutions and internal efficacy.⁷⁰

External political efficacy refers to the belief that the government will respond to citizens’ needs. In this study, it is indicated by the belief that a country’s political system allows people to have an influence on politics. In his study, Craig found that external efficacy is more strongly related to trust in political institutions than internal efficacy.⁷¹ Catterberg found that in Western European and CEE countries, trust in political institutions was significantly and positively correlated with external efficacy.⁷² Other studies also reported a positive association between trust in leaders and institutions and external efficacy.⁷³ The reason why external efficacy and political trust may be related is that they have the same attitude object, which is the political system.

Considering that prior research has found both types of political efficacy linked to trust in political institutions, we re-examine their effect in our study. Moreover, it should be noted that if political efficacy affects trust in political institutions, it may itself be affected by news consumption.⁷⁴ Therefore, we will not

63 Remark by authors: The latter refers to the situation in which the media become a tool for those already interested in politics and current affairs, which is exactly what the virtuous circle hypothesis claims. See: NORRIS, P.: *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies. Communication, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

64 BOULIANNE, S.: Stimulating or Reinforcing Political Interest: Using Panel Data to Examine Reciprocal Effects between News Media and Political Interest. In *Political Communication*, 2011, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 147-162.

65 CRAIG, S. C.: Efficacy, Trust, and Political Behavior: An Attempt to Resolve a Lingering Conceptual Dilemma. In *American Politics Quarterly*, 1979, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 225-239.

66 BALCH, G. I.: Multiple Indicators in Survey Research: The Concept “Sense of Political Efficacy”. In *Political Methodology*, 1974, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 1-43.

67 CAPRARA, G. V. et al.: Perceived Political Self-Efficacy: Theory, Assessment, and Applications. In *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 2009, Vol. 39, No. 6, p. 1002.

68 PARENT, M., VANDEBEEK, C. A., GEMINO, A. C.: Building Citizen Trust through E-Government. In *Government Information Quarterly*, 2005, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 720-736.

69 CRAIG, S. C.: Efficacy, Trust, and Political Behavior: An Attempt to Resolve a Lingering Conceptual Dilemma. In *American Politics Quarterly*, 1979, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 225-239.

70 CRAIG, S. C., NIEMI, R. G., SILVER, G. E.: Political Efficacy and Trust: A Report on the NES Pilot Study Items. In *Political Behavior*, 1990, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 289-314.

71 CRAIG, S. C.: Efficacy, Trust, and Political Behavior: An Attempt to Resolve a Lingering Conceptual Dilemma. In *American Politics Quarterly*, 1979, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 225-239.

72 CATTERBERG, G.: The Individual Bases of Political Trust: Trends in New and Established Democracies. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2006, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 31-48.

73 CRAIG, S. C., NIEMI, R. G., SILVER, G. E.: Political Efficacy and Trust: A Report on the NES Pilot Study Items. In *Political Behavior*, 1990, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 289-314.

74 See: AARTS, K., SEMETKO, H. A.: The Divided Electorate: Media Use and Political Involvement. In *The Journal of Politics*, 2003, Vol. 65, No. 3, p. 759-784; ROBINSON, M. J.: Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of “The Selling of the Pentagon”. In *American Political Science Review*, 1976, Vol. 70, No. 2, p. 409-432.

only examine whether both internal and external political efficacies predict trust in political institutions, but also whether there is a moderating effect of media news consumption.

The Aim of the Study

This study focuses on trust in political institutions, which is an important factor in democratic societies and a key indicator in their perceived legitimacy. Specifically, we intend to identify factors which predict increased trust in political institutions. In our investigation, we will focus on the role of the media, specifically on news consumption, Internet usage and the country media system. In our examination, we will also focus on the role of political beliefs and attitudes that have been previously identified as potentially influential with regard to trust formation. Specifically, we will test the effect of political interest, internal political efficacy and external political efficacy. Acknowledging possible differences related to demographic characteristics,⁷⁵ we will also examine the roles of gender, age and education.

Methods

Procedure

We used publicly available survey data from the *European Social Survey* (ESS), an international project mapping attitudes and behaviour of citizens (15 years and older) in diverse European countries. Specifically, we analyse dataset from Round 8, which collected data from 21 countries in 2016. In this round, topics such as democracy, politics, media consumption, trust in political institutions and socio-demographics were covered. For this analysis, we excluded two states, Israel and the Russian Federation, since our intent was to focus on European countries. After the deletion of missing values on core variables, we used data from 37,159 respondents, 52% males, age $M = 49.47$, $SD = 18.442$.

Measures

Trust in Political Institutions

Respondents were asked a set of five questions concerning trust in their country's parliament, in the legal system, in the police, in politicians and in political parties. They assessed each item on a 11-point scale ranging from no trust at all (=0) to complete trust (=10); $M = 4.841$, $SD = 2.017$, $\alpha = .887$.

News Consumption

Respondents were asked: 'On a typical day, about how much time do you spend watching, reading, or listening to news about politics and current affairs?'. Respondents provided a number in hours and minutes. Due to non-normal distribution, the answers were capped at the value of 180 minutes (6.2% from the sample); $M = 65.744$, $SD = 51.732$.

75 NORRIS, P., NEWTON, K.: Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture, or Performance. In PHARR, S. J., PUTNAM, R. D. (eds.): *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 52-73.

Internet Usage

Respondents were asked, 'People can use the Internet on different devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones. How often do you use the Internet on these or any other devices, whether for work or personal use?'. The answer options ranged from never (=1), only occasionally (=2), a few times a week (=3), most days (=4), and every day (=5); $M = 3.920$, $SD = 1.562$.

Political Interest

Respondents were asked, 'How interested would you say you are in politics?'. Response options included: very interested (=1), quite interested (=2), hardly interested (=3), and not interested at all (=4). The scale was reversed so that a higher score indicated higher interest; $M = 2.442$, $SD = 0.909$.

External Political Efficacy

Respondents were asked, 'How much would you say that the political system in [country] allows people like you to have an influence on politics?'. Answer options included: not at all (=1), very little (=2), some (=3), a lot (=4), a great deal (=5); $M = 2.200$, $SD = 0.930$.

Internal Political Efficacy

Respondents were asked, 'How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?'. Answer options included: not confident at all (=1), a little confident (=2), quite confident (=3), very confident (=4), completely confident (=5); $M = 2.160$, $SD = 1.043$.

Demographics

Gender (0 = males), year of birth (recoded to age), and years of education completed ($M = 13.070$, $SD = 3.901$).

Model of Media System

Based on the literature,⁷⁶ countries were grouped into three different models of media system: Democratic Corporatist Model (including Ireland and the United Kingdom), Polarized Pluralist, and CEE model (see Table 1).

Table 2: Countries under examination grouped into three different models of media system

Model of media system	Democratic Corporatist Model (including Ireland and UK)	Polarized Pluralist	CEE Model
Countries	Belgium, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK	Austria, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal,	Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia

Source: Own processing

76 See: HALLIN, D. C., MANCINI, P.: *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; PERUŠKO, Z., VOZAB, D., ČUVALO, A.: Audiences as a Source of Agency in Media Systems: Post-Socialist Europe in Comparative Perspective. In *Mediální Studia*, 2013, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 137-154; DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, B.: 25 Years after Communism: Four Models of Media and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe. In DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, B., GLOWACKI, M. (eds.): *Democracy and Media in Central and Eastern Europe 25 Years On*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015, p. 11-45.

Plan of Analysis

The analysis procedure comprised the following steps. For explorative purposes we first examined the bivariate relations between the studied factors using Pearson correlations. Second, we conducted a multilevel regression analysis, with trust in political institutions as an outcome. The multilevel method was selected to account and test for the country differences in the outcome. In the first three steps of this model, we focused on the effect of individual-level variables, though the overall effect of country is accounted for.

In steps one and two, we identified and untangled separate single effects of demographics, news consumption, Internet usage and political attitudes and beliefs. In step three, we tested the moderation effects between news consumption and political attitudes and beliefs by including interaction terms. Finally, in the fourth step, we focused on the effect of the explanatory variables on the country level, specifically the media system of the country. To test this effect, we compared the countries belonging to the pluralistic and CEE Model versus countries of the Democratic Corporatist Model via the inclusion of dummy variables (with the Democratic Corporatist Model as the reference category).

Results

All analyses were conducted in Mplus 8. First, we conducted a bivariate analysis (Table 3). While news consumption had only a negligible association with trust in institutions ($r = .024$), Internet usage was associated weakly ($r = .143$). Higher trust in institutions was also associated with higher education, political interest and internal and external political efficacy.

Table 3: Correlations between studied factors

	Trust in institutions	Gender	Age	Education	News consumption	Internet usage	Political interest	Internal efficacy
Gender	-.009							
Age	-.044*	.03*						
Education	.152*	.002	-.236*					
News consumption	.024*	-.059*	.283*	-.025*				
Internet usage	.143*	-.043*	-.548*	.43*	-.145*			
Political interest	.246*	-.135*	.133*	.247*	.271*	.136*		
Internal efficacy	.204*	-.146*	-.112*	.286*	.084*	.265*	.456*	
External efficacy	.462*	-.055*	-.117*	.229*	.034*	.235*	.339*	.399*

Note: * $p < .001$, Pearson correlation coefficients

Source: Own processing

The main analysis (Table 4) examined the multilevel and moderating effect of selected predictors on trust in political institutions. All variables (except for gender) were centred before the analysis. Due to the large sample size, only effects with $p < .001$ were considered significant. In a base model without any predictors, 18% of the variance of trust in political institutions was explained on a country level. In the first tested model, only demographics, political news consumption, and Internet usage were included. The effect of two central variables, news consumption and Internet usage, was positive and significant but very small ($\beta = .06$ and $\beta = .03$, respectively). Thus, the association with trust in political institutions was only negligible, which would mean that consuming news and Internet usage does not directly increase or decrease trust in political institutions.

After the inclusion of political attitudes and beliefs in the second model, the effects of news consumption and Internet usage were not significant. The effect of political interest was only weak ($\beta = .099$), the effect of external political efficacy was moderate ($\beta = .38$), and the effect of internal political efficacy was not significant. This model therefore shows that higher external political efficacy is associated with higher trust in political institutions, while other links were again negligible or not significantly related. We also tested the moderation effects by inclusion of interaction terms in the model. Specifically, we included in the model interaction terms of news consumption with a) political interest, b) internal political efficacy, and c) external political efficacy. Only significant moderation effect was found between news consumption and interest in politics (Figure 1). Specifically, the lower the interest in politics, the more news consumption plays a role in increasing trust: the more people who are not interested in politics follow the news, the higher their trust in political institutions. In those with high political interest, the effect of news consumption is opposite.

Table 4: Multilevel hierarchical regression predicting trust in political institutions

	β	s.e.	p	β	s.e.	p	β	s.e.	p	β	s.e.	p
Gender (females)	.008	.005	.137	.029	.005	.000	.029	.005	.000	.029	.005	.000
Age	-.024	.006	.000	-.022	.006	.000	-.022	.006	.000	-.023	.006	.000
Education (years)	.098	.006	.000	.023	.006	.000	.023	.006	.000	.023	.006	.000
News consumption	.061	.005	.000	.005	.005	.310	.006	.005	.220	.007	.005	.214
Internet usage	.030	.007	.000	-.016	.006	.012	-.015	.006	.016	-.016	.006	.015
Political interest				.099	.006	.000	.100	.006	.000	.100	.006	.000
Internal political efficacy				-.019	.006	.002	-.018	.006	.002	-.018	.006	.002
External political efficacy				.380	.005	.000	.379	.005	.000	.379	.005	.000
Consumption *interest							-.027	.005	.000	-.027	.005	.000
Consumption *internal eff.							-.005	.006	.409	-.005	.006	.407
Consumption *external eff.							.009	.005	.073	.009	.005	.073
Polarized pluralist										-.655	.153	.000
CEE										-.573	.161	.000
$\sigma\epsilon$	3.334	.024		2.874	.021		2.871	.021		2.871	.021	
$\sigma\text{country}$.688	.213		.350	.109		.350	.109		.178	.055	

Source: Own processing

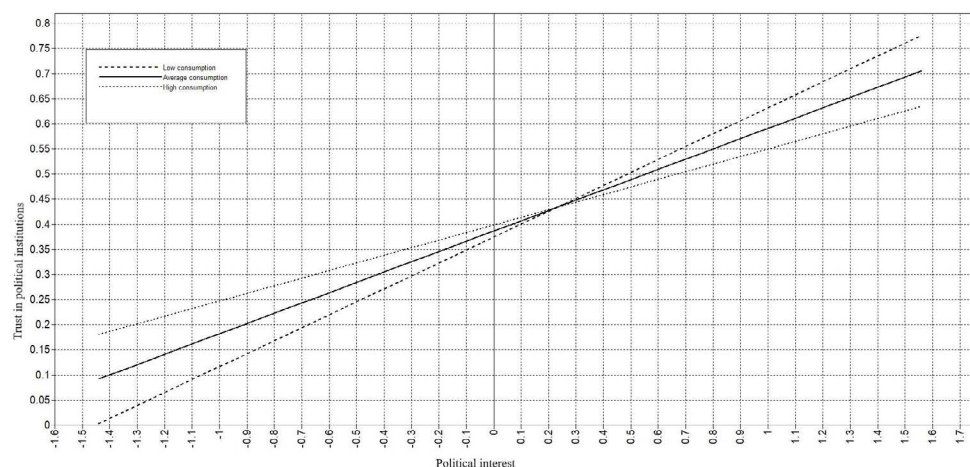


Figure 1: Moderating effect of news consumption and political interest on trust in political institutions

Source: Own processing

Finally, we tested whether the type of country media system could predict the levels of trust in political institutions. We tested this presumption on the full model, but without interaction terms. The inclusion of media system predictors helped to explain the variance at the national level ($\Delta ICC = 5\%$). In result, in comparison to countries defined by the Democratic Corporatist Model (including the UK and Ireland), countries with the CEE and Polarized Pluralist Models had lower trust in political institutions.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study focused on trust in political institutions. The aim was to understand factors that are associated with higher or lower trust, on the level of an individual and on the level of a country. In our examination, we specifically focused on the role of the media, in the form of the intensity of the news consumption, frequency of Internet usage and the media system of the country indicated by belonging to one of the three media models: the Polarized Pluralist Model, the Democratic Corporatist Model (including Ireland and the United Kingdom), and the CEE Model.

According to our findings, news consumption has no direct linear effect on trust in political institutions. Similarly, after we accounted for political attitudes, Internet usage has no link with trust. This finding corroborates the results of several prior studies that also reported an absent link between news consumption and trust.⁷⁷ Although this could be interpreted as an indication that news consumption does not have any direct link with trust in political institutions, our findings suggest that that the interpretation may be more complex.

According to the media malaise thesis,⁷⁸ media create a negative image of politics and higher news consumption therefore leads to scepticism regarding the functioning and trustworthiness of political institutions. On the other hand, the theory of cognitive mobilisation proposes that news consumption will lead to greater trust through gathering more information concerning actual political and societal issues, especially in people interested in politics.⁷⁹ Thus, it is probable that mere news consumption does not have a direct linear

effect, but has a different role depending on the individual characteristics and orientation of the citizens (as well as other factors, such as the characteristics of media content, which were not part of this study).

To examine these presumptions, we tested the moderating effect of news consumption on the relationship between political beliefs and attitudes and trust in political institutions, which is one of the contributions of our study to the existing scholarship on this topic. As a result, we did not find any moderating effect of news consumption on the link with political efficacy. However, we did find an interaction between news consumption and political interest. People with low interest in politics and who were intense news consumers were actually more trusting in political institutions than those with low interest and low consumption. In the case of people with high interest in politics, the effect was reversed.

The inclusion of the moderating effect may help to explain prior inconsistent findings related to the effect of news consumption on trust in political institutions. In this line of reasoning, we need to consider a citizen's interest in politics and a diversified effect for those who are more or less interested in political events. Previous findings showed that reading newspapers and viewing television news were associated with positive perceptions of some institutions,⁸⁰ that media use has a consistent and significant positive effect on political support,⁸¹ and that substantive news content can actually reduce political cynicism.⁸² Our results partially corroborate these findings, suggesting that news content may actually secure the institutional order rather than undermine it. However, such an effect might be especially salient in those who are not interested in politics. On the other hand, in those who pose a high interest in politics, the effect was in line with the media malaise thesis,⁸³ as well as the spiral of cynicisms theory,⁸⁴ showing that highly interested people who intensely consume news tend to trust less in political institutions.

We should also note that, in line with prior findings,⁸⁵ we found a direct link between political efficacy, interest in politics and institutional trust. In the final model, external political efficacy was also moderately associated with trust in political institutions. Although these factors were not core factors targeted by this study, they should be considered in the complex examinations focusing on the role of the media, since they also help to differentiate the diverse types of news consumers. Following our finding, these factors could also help our understanding of the role of media by differentiation of the segments of the public depending on their political attitudes and beliefs.

Nevertheless, as we suggested above, future research should also investigate the role of other factors that may further differentiate the effect of news consumption. If our findings suggest that news consumption has no direct linear effect with the trust in political institutions, it can be as a result of the fact that the ESS data do not allow us to take account of different kinds of news and current affairs content to which people are exposed. In recent years, we can witness the ongoing fragmentation of the media market and part of this process is the rise of so-called alternative media.⁸⁶ While mainstream news outlets, including public service broadcasting, are usually committed to centrist and consensual views on society, at least a considerable segment of alternative media outlets is involved in the harsh critique of the established political order

77 AARTS, K., SEMETKO, H. A.: The Divided Electorate: Media Use and Political Involvement. In *The Journal of Politics*, 2003, Vol. 65, No. 3, p. 759-784.

78 ROBINSON, M. J.: Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of "The Selling of the Pentagon". In *American Political Science Review*, 1976, Vol. 70, No. 2, p. 409-432

79 See: NORRIS, P.: *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies. Communication, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

80 See: NORRIS, P.: *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies. Communication, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; MOY, P., PFAU, M., KAHLOR, L.: Media Use and Public Confidence in Democratic Institutions. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 1999, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 137-158.

81 AELST VAN, P.: Media Malaise and the Decline of Legitimacy. Any Room for Good News? In HAM VAN, C. et al.: *Myth and Reality of the Legitimacy Crisis: Explaining Trends and Cross-National Differences in Established Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 102.

82 ADRIAANSEN, M. L., PRAAG VAN, P., VREESE DE, C. H.: Substance Matters: How News Content Can Reduce Political Cynicism. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2010, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 433-457.

83 ROBINSON, M. J.: Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of "The Selling of the Pentagon". In *American Political Science Review*, 1976, Vol. 70, No. 2, p. 409-432.

84 Compare to: CAPPELLA, J. N., JAMIESON, K. H.: *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

85 See: CATTERBERG, C.: The Individual Bases of Political Trust: Trends in New and Established Democracies. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2006, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 31-48; CRAIG, S. C.: Efficacy, Trust, and Political Behavior: An Attempt to Resolve a Lingering Conceptual Dilemma. In *American Politics Quarterly*, 1979, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 225-239; NEWTON, K.: Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy. In *International Political Science Review*, 2001, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 201-214.

86 See, e.g.: ATTON, C.: *Alternative Media*. London: Sage, 2002.

and elites and takes the stance of general mistrust and anti-systemness.⁸⁷ While consuming mainstream news, which usually reproduces consensual definitions of reality and dominant values, could enhance trust in political institutions, the opposite is the case for alternative media outlets. Thus, the impact of news consumption on trust can further vary depending on type of preferred news content and future research should take this variable into account.

Focusing on the role of media systems, we found differences in trust in political institutions between countries with the Democratic Corporatist Model (including the United Kingdom and Ireland) and those with the Polarized Pluralist Model and CEE Model. This finding is also in line with prior findings and the hypothesised direction of the effect on trust.⁸⁸ Although we did not find a direct link between news consumption on the individual level, based on our findings, we can propose that the overall media system and aspects such as high newspaper circulation or lower control over broadcasting are connected with overall higher institutional trust.

These findings should also be interpreted with regard to the limitations of this study. Although the advantage of this study is a large and robust sample from 21 European countries, this design goes hand in hand with limitations in the form of limited indicators, which mostly comprise one-item measures. Moreover, the study is cross-sectional, therefore allowing for discussion of the patterns in the populations, but unable to provide answers concerning causal effects. “Trust” as a concept can be grasped multidimensionally, and it would also be interesting to capture differences between low trust and active distrust, which were out of the scope of our current study.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to existing scholarship by providing insights into the role of media in the trust in political institutions among European citizens. To conclude our main findings, we showed that news consumption has an effect on trust in political institutions, though this effect is diversified by one’s level of political interest. Our findings provide evidence that future studies should more carefully study moderation effects with existing attitudes or beliefs since these can be determining factors for trust towards government and politics. Also, due to the unique nature of the *European Social Survey* data, we pointed out possible differences on the country-levels in terms of media systems and their effects on citizens’ trust in political institutions.

Acknowledgement: This work was supported by the Czech Science Foundation [grant number GA18-19883S].

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