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Trust in Media and Journalism

Empirical Perspectives
on Ethics, Norms, Impacts
and Populism in Europe

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Introduction

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Abstract

Across Europe and the world, communication scientists are reflecting upon the issue of trust in journalism and the media. A significant body of analysis and research provides new perspectives on the reasons, impacts and consequences of trust or mistrust in the media and journalism. The present anthology aims to provide an overview of the empirical research on trust in media and journalism, the new perspectives, methodological approaches and current findings discussed among communication scientists at European and international scientific conferences. The anthology presents studies and findings on ethics and norms, influences on trust and the effects of populism.

1 Dimensions of the debate on trust in the media

Both public news coverage and in the academic discipline of communication studies have focused increasingly upon human beings' trust in the media over the past three years. The "crisis of trust in the media" has been part of public discourse since the conflict in Ukraine (Reinemann & Fawzi, 2016). The media's credibility and the trust placed in them also became a topic of discussion following the debate on fake news, including in the 2015/16 U.S. presidential election campaign. Trust

in the media and in journalists has recently been the subject of heated debate, with terms such as the "lying media", "the media that are part of the system", and "state-controlled broadcasting" being used. The topic was taken up by the press, broadcasting and the internet, and the media subjected both themselves and their recipients to intense scrutiny. Three main dimensions emerged from the debate, the problems inherent in which were thematised in connection with people's loss of trust in the media. These dimensions are ethics and norms, factors of influence and populism:

- *Journalistic ethics and normative guidelines* constitute a key area of research on journalism. Among other things, media ethics investigates the normative standards to which professional journalists are held and how concrete journalistic actions implement these standards; on the level of media politics, it analyses the influence exerted by the media system and media corporations; and on an (overlapping) personal level, it studies journalists' scope for shaping the media as well as the participation of media recipients (Thomaß, 2016). Recently, the media's credibility has been the focus of debates on journalistic misconduct and the possibly overly great influence of the state and politics on media content and the implementation of journalistic norms. A disregard for ethics and norms was cited as a reason for the loss of trust in the media. In a representative study carried out in Germany by the Bayerische Rundfunk (Bavarian State Radio) in 2016, 48 percent of participants stated that they saw public service television as not independent or not really independent; 47 percent said the same of daily newspapers, and 57 percent judged private broadcasting to be not or not really independent (BR, 2016, p. 27). 24 percent were not convinced that the media give an accurate picture of reality, citing exaggeration, incompleteness and false reports as reasons among others (BR, 2016, p. 36). Accordingly, the debate on trust in the media is conducted within the dimension of journalistic ethics and norms.
- *Factors of influence on trust in the media* have also been discussed frequently in recent years. Here, the key question is: why do human beings (not) trust the media? What reasons are there for this that lie beyond journalistic performance? When possible influences on trust in the media are enumerated, recipients' frustration with the media is cited as the cause of their dissatisfaction, and the media's complexity and the fact that they overtax their audiences also play a role. In addition, the intensity with which journalists are now attacked in the internet is seen as one of the main reasons for the perception of a crisis in trust (Reinemann & Fawzi, 2016). This apparently is leading journalists to take their recipients' criticism much more seriously than before. Public debate on

recipients' trust in the media examines these possible factors of influence and enquires into the reasons for a loss of trust in the media on this level.

- Last but not least, the European debate on trust in the media is closely linked to the revival of political *populism*. It is primarily right-wing populist parties and politicians that criticise journalists with the express aim of contributing to the media's loss of credibility and trustworthiness. In a survey of "Pegida" participants, over a third (34.5 percent) of those surveyed (n=397) cited the desire to criticise "the media" and the structure of public discourse as motivating their participation in demonstrations organised by the right-wing populist movement. In this survey, journalists' work was often massively criticised and generalised – in line with the defamatory slogan of the "lying press" or *Lügenpresse*. Right-wing populist movements' media criticism – often voiced aggressively – is nothing new and can be seen as part of a more general development (Vorländer et al., 2016, p. 114).

These dimensions and problems of the public debate on trust in the media and journalists will not be reproduced in the present volume, although they will be touched upon. Current studies produced by scholars from a range of European countries provide new empirical insights into problems of the abovementioned dimensions, helping to bring current research on trust in the media and journalism up to date.

The introduction to this volume will first describe the concept of trust in the media and mention the most important points of reference. Subsequently the key areas of research and relevant studies in these fields that the research findings in this volume follow on from will be mentioned. Finally, the individual essays will be introduced and placed within the context of these research fields and dimensions.

This volume aims to present new insights into the topic of trust in the media and thus open up new perspectives both in the abovementioned dimensions of public discourse and in scholarship's key areas of research on trust in the media.

2   The concept of trust and points of reference

In everyday language, "trust" is a very broad term. Often it is linked to a belief in something or someone, but involves expectations directed at the future to a greater extent than the concept of credibility. When we trust, we do not simply hope or expect that an event will occur – we rely on it. The plethora of terms such as trust,

credibility, hope, expectation, and reliability shows that trust is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to differentiate (Dernbach & Meyer, 2005, p. 15–16).

There is a lack of clear definitions in the scholarship, too, where the term "trust" is used in an unsystematic and vague manner (Barber, 1983, 3f.). Critics point out that many definitions replace "trust" with confidence, belief and similar terms (Kohring 2004, p. 128). The two constructs of "credibility" and "trust" are scarcely differentiated, used side by side and even used synonymously in the majority of cases (Seidenglanz, 2008). While some groups of researchers have explicitly used the term "media trust" in their works in the last 15 years (e.g. Kiousis, 2001; Lucassen & Schraagen, 2012; Tsfati 2010), they mainly draw upon studies on media credibility, rather than media trust, when discussing the state of research (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

Kohring defines trust by its purpose. Trust is needed to reduce the complexity of the vast range of existing communicative processes and thus enable actions that follow on from said processes. These actions are only possible on the basis of selection, and thus we trust in other actors' anticipated selection. An act of trust simulates the occurrence of a certain future, reacting to a selection expected to take place in the future. This selection is made by other social actors. Accordingly, trust expresses the expectation that other actors will behave in a certain way. Trust is thus first and foremost a trust in selectivity. The need to adopt selections made by others is the result of modern societies' differentiation and specification. Selecting information is such a complex task that it is passed on to others. Instead of selecting ourselves, we select the selections made by others; selection is delegated. Trust is an act that compensates for risk and thus preserves options for action (Kohring, 2004). Trust reduces complexity through this enabling of follow-up actions: "[trust] overdraws the information gained in the past and risks defining the future. The complexity of the future world is reduced by the act of trust" (Luhmann, 1989, p. 20).[1]

Credibility is understood as "a trait ascribed to human beings, institutions or their communicative products by someone in regard to something" (Bentele, 2008, p. 168). Accordingly, credibility is not an "inherent" or objective characteristic of communicative products, but a trait that is perceived by recipients and is thus relational. As an ascribed trait, credibility forms part of the phenomenon of trust. By contrast, trust describes a "relational dimension" between the subjects and objects of trust and is procedural in nature (Bentele, 1994, p. 141). Trust is a relationship

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1   Orig. „Vertrauen] überzieht die Informationen, die es aus der Vergangenheit besitzt und riskiert eine Bestimmung der Zukunft. Im Akt des Vertrauens wird die Komplexität der zukünftigen Welt reduziert."

between actors that is known and accepted not only by the subject of trust (the trustor) but also by the object of trust (the trustee). This means the expectations held by the subject of trust in the object of trust need to be known to the latter. Deficits in communication and information can be the cause of problems or failure in this relation (Kohring, 2004, p. 133).

The subjects of trust – media recipients – place trust in the selectivity of the object of trust – journalism. Journalism's correct functioning forms the basis of trust and is expressed in the audience's expectations of journalism's actions and performance (Kohring, 2004, p. 141). Accordingly, trust in journalism is always trust in journalistic selectivity. Kohring (2002, p. 105) lists four factors resulting from the performance of the system of journalism:

- Trust in thematic selectivity
- Trust in factual selectivity
- Trust in factual correctness
- Trust in explicit evaluations

Accordingly, trust in journalism is defined by how trust is assessed in regard to these factors. The model thus lists the key criteria of evaluation. These can be applied to different points of reference within the performance system of journalism. They focus upon

- the message or media content in itself,
- the content's source or communicator,
- and the channel or the medium used to disseminate the message.

These points of reference can be seen as layers of trust in the media (Lucassen & Schraagen, 2012). The individual layers constitute specific aspects of media trust, with trust in the message at their core. The layers interact, influencing one another both from the inner to the outer and from the outer to the inner layers (cf. Figure 1).
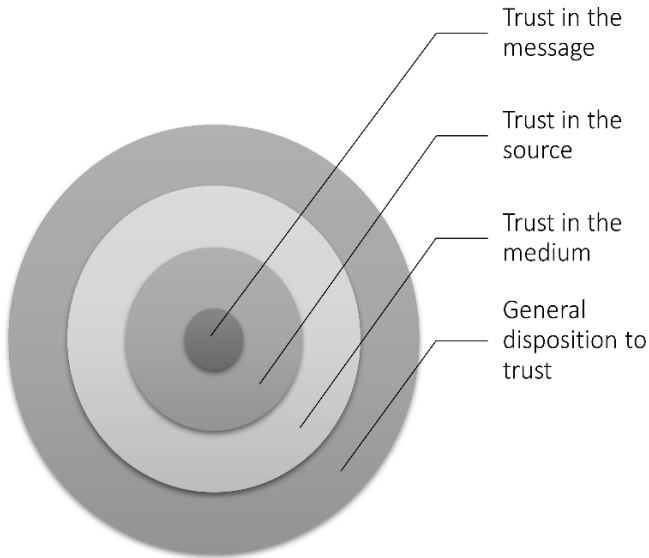
Figure 1   *The reference points of trust*
(image based upon Lucassen & Schraagen, 2012, p. 569)

This means that there can be no trust in the message if there is no trust in the medium itself. The channel of mediation is thus crucial. The next step, the source or communicator, is likewise significant. Here, the communicator's or source's coherence and expertise are at the fore. Trust in the message constitutes the core and is dependent upon the preceding points. Thus the individual layers either influence one another directly or mediate between the individual layers as an interlink (Lucassen & Schraagen, 2012; Vogel, 2015, p. 313).

3   Fields of research

The complex field of trust in the media and journalism and the research on it can be structured systematically based upon the differentiated points of reference mentioned in the model. Much research has been produced on the specified dimensions of medium, source, and content. In the following, we will attempt to give an overview of the key studies to show which dimensions of existing research the empirical studies included in this volume relate to.

3.1   Trust in the media

Media organisations such as publishers and broadcasting companies create journalistic products such as newspapers, television programmes and radio shows. Most studies examining trust in the media as mediating channels compare the different channels (such as television, the press, radio and internet), examining the levels of trust in the respective channel. Furthermore, trust in the media is often compared with trust in other institutions.

The comparison of different media in regard to their credibility is based on the Roper survey (1985). Roper was the first to investigate differences between the respective credibility of TV, radio and the press, showing that between 1959 and 1988, trust in television was markedly higher in the USA than trust in the press and radio. This was attributed to the medium's visual nature. The Roper question was incorporated into the long-term study on mass communication in Germany (Krupp & Bräunig 2016). In Germany, too, TV's credibility was higher than that of radio and the press between 1970 and 2015. Conversely, however, the results of the Eurobarometer show that trust in radio has been higher than trust in television since 2002. In 2016, 67.8 percent of people trusted the radio, 60.5 percent trusted television and 55.7 percent trusted the press (Otto & Köhler, 2017).

The internet has frequently been included in these comparisons since its rise to the status of a mass medium. Recent findings show that this medium is hardly trusted at all. Thus the internet – probably due to the vast heterogeneity of its content – has comparatively low credibility ratings (Ridder & Engel, 2005, p. 432, 2010, p. 548). In the long-term study *Massenkommunikation 2015* (Mass Communication 2015), the internet came last behind television, radio and daily newspapers in regard to its credibility (ARD/ZDF, 2015).

A number of recent studies have likewise investigated trust in the different channels of communication. In contrast to public debate, these studies show that trust in the press, radio and television remained mostly stable over the past years and recently has even risen. The studies were able to identify different ascriptions of trust using sociodemographic traits, such as recipients' position on the political spectrum or their age. Ascriptions of credibility and trust always depend on the recipients (Otto & Köhler, 2016; Otto & Köhler, 2017).

Furthermore, assessments of the credibility of the news depend on the political views of those surveyed. Survey participants with liberal political views felt news coverage was fair, while conservative participants accused news coverage of bias (Lee, 2010).

Other studies see the recipients' sociocultural characteristics as a relevant factor (Schenk, 1987; Jäckel, 1999; Norris, 2000). These studies show that recipients'

trust in individual media depends on their sociocultural and sociostructural context. Elsewhere, external influences are examined (Köhler & Otto, 2016).

Studies such as the Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (GfK) *Global Trust Report* (2017) ask somewhat undifferentiated questions concerning trust in the media, but then compare it with trust in other institutions such as administration, offices and authorities, political parties, the police, the government and currency. This analysis of media trust is overly generalised. Trust is too complex a structure to be measured directly. Questions on trust in journalistic performance or about a concrete journalistic offer possess higher validity (Kohring, 2004, p. 137).

3.2   Trust in the source

For traditional media, various studies have shown that sources are experienced as credible if they possess expertise – that is, if they have the ability to make correct and valid statements – and if they are trustworthy – that is, if media users are able to trust that the information the source regards as correct and valid is actually passed on (Bentele, 2008, p. 173). For this, recipients need to see the communicators as competent: recipients' evaluation is based among other factors upon the communicators' age, associated experience, position and level of education. Such ascriptions are evident in TV coverage, where the focus on individuals as communicators is much stronger than in the print media. Communicators' key competencies can be transferred to other sources, too: expertise, problem-solving competence, communicative adequacy, open communication, social responsibility and responsible ethics (Bentele, 2008, p. 173).

The seminal studies carried out by the Hovland (1954) group laid the foundations for the communicator perspective in trust research. The American researchers carried out studies of recipients in the 1940s and 1950s, identifying and naming a number of factors on the basis of which trust is placed in communicators. Communicators are ascribed *expertness* and *trustworthiness*; *dynamics* was added later as an additional factor. In stimulus-response experiments, the same statements were ascribed to different sources and presented to recipients who attributed the statements' credibility to characteristics of the sources.

However, later studies show that there are no objective credibility criteria that can be applied to communicators; rather, credibility is constructed dependently of communication processes. Furthermore, variable traits of the recipients, such as their political stance or their views on different topics, also play a role (Görke, 1993).

Other studies investigate the links between political knowledge and the trust that media users place in professionally trained journalists on the one hand and in amateur or citizen journalists on the other. Interestingly, the studies show that high levels of trust in professional journalism correlate negatively with political knowledge. The authors conclude that lower levels of trust leads to a more careful and varied selection of information sources and to a more critical questioning and more elaborate processing of the information received. Therefore, studies dealing with trust in communicators cannot ignore recipients' starting positions (Kaufhold, Valenzuela & De Zúñiga, 2010).

3.3   Trust in the content

Journalism science's model of mass communication advocates differentiating between the communication and the mediation process (Nawratil, 1990). The mediation process takes place via the media. Assessments of the credibility of the media and of the communicators are based on their mediation performance. On the level of content – the communication level – the competencies the mediators require become evident. In the main, this involves aspects of objectivity, a requirement for descriptive texts. The key aspects listed are truth, completeness, structuring, transparency in regard to sources and personal evaluations as well as the separation of news and opinion. Communication scientists show that media content is able to influence trust through its manner of depiction and evaluation. Thus journalistic quality standards are linked with the trust placed in journalism (Bentele, 1994, p. 307). The criteria mentioned correspond with many media quality criteria lists, including for television, which are derived from legal requirements (Schatz & Schulz, 1992), for newspapers, derived from democratic, theoretical journalistic requirements (Rager, 1994; Arnold, 2009), or derived from general requirements of communication processes (Bucher, 2003).

When analysing content, some studies refer to objects of coverage, differentiating between first- and second-order trusting acts. The first-order trusting act is the choice of medium, the second-order trusting act the acceptance of the medium's message. Empirical tests confirmed this theoretical classification: trust in messages has an effect on media usage (Matthes, 2007). Further studies discovered that trust in news coverage and the acceptance of content has an effect on political trust (Matthes, 2010).

4   Structure of the volume

This volume aims to provide new perspectives and insights on two levels. On the first level, these insights relate to the abovementioned dimensions of norms and ethics, influences on media trust, and populism; on the second level, they refer to the research fields of content, sources and media. New perspectives are revealed through new insights and new methodological approaches in the present volume's essays, which correspond to these two levels.

These essays by scholars from Sweden, Australia, Switzerland and Germany show that the topic of trust in the media and journalism has developed significance for and is addressed by communication science research across Europe and beyond.

As an introduction, *Caroline Fisher* of the University of Canberra, Australia, provides an overview of concepts of trust in the media, using selected interdisciplinary literature to give an account of the concept's evolution over the last 80 years. She identifies a growing separation between the normative ideal of informed citizens, the complex demands made of media products and the citizens' ideal of being able to trust the media on the one hand and their own necessary skills of reflection and control on the other. Furthermore, Fisher's contribution shows different ways of measuring media trust. This essay thus covers the many different approaches to the topic of trust in the media, providing insights into the dimension of values and norms and specifically addressing recipients' perception of content on the level of the research areas.

The essay by *Gunnar Nygren and Andreas Widholm* of Södertörn University and Stockholm University, Sweden, deals with verification as a formal journalistic norm found in many guidelines and codices. Trust in factual correctness is a basic building block of trust in a medium. The media are able to increase this trust through verification. The authors enquire into journalists' stances towards this norm of verification. Specifically, they ask whether the understanding of verification differs between online journalists and journalists of other platforms, and whether there are differences in the way different cultures and media systems deal with verification. They compare the results of surveys of Swedish, Polish and Russian journalists and come to the conclusion that generally there are high levels of approval for the verification of facts. However, online journalists believe that their audience has lower expectations in regard to verification. This allows fascinating conclusions to be drawn concerning trust in factual correctness in online journalism. Where our dimensions are concerned, this essay thus provides highly interesting insights into the way journalists deal with ethics and norms; on the level of the research fields, it offers insights into communicators' work methods.

Together with *Stefan Stieglitz and Milad Mirbabaie* of the University of Duisburg-Essen, *Sanja Kapidzic and Christoph Neuberger* of the Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität Munich, Germany, analysed whether tweets posted upon Twitter measure up to journalistic standards. More specifically, they investigated impartiality, the gatekeeper role and the tweets' reliability. Only few tweets made use of the option to provide links, rendering their sources visible – even though transparency is able to increase trust in the journalistic selection of topics and facts. In their essay, the authors highlight the problems that occur when traditional journalistic norms are transferred to new channels and media. Potential consequences for the trust in these channels can be deduced from these problems. The essay provides important insights into the area of ethics and norms and the research fields of content and sources.

Mario Schranz, Jörg Schneider and Mark Eisenegger of the Forschungsinstitut Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft (Research Institute for the Public Sphere and Society) in Zurich, Switzerland, investigate and compare the aspects on which recipients' trust in the media depends. They observe that media consumption is significant in this regard. Individuals who regularly use traditional information media develop greater levels of trust in the media system. Conversely, trust is lost if the ritualised consumption of news breaks down and individual media brands lose significance due to the unbundled consumption of news on social media. This finding is confirmed both for Switzerland and in international comparison. At the same time, positive trust in the media system increases users' willingness to pay for news and to accept advertising (e.g. in online media). Thus the study provides new insights into influences on media trust, falling within the research field of trust in the media as organisations and thus adopting a macro perspective.

Andreas Köhler and Kim Otto of the University of Würzburg, Germany, analyse the influence of economic developments on trust in the press, radio and television in Spain and Greece. The aim of this essay is to show the influence of external events – in this case the European sovereign debt crisis – on trust in the media. Köhler and Otto are able to show that the levels of trust in the press, radio and television correlate with the gross domestic product and that this effect was increased in the crisis year 2009. Using the example of the sovereign debt crisis, the essay is able to show that trust in the media also depends upon external influences. Thus it contributes to knowledge in the research field of media and in the dimension of factors of influence.

Lukas Otto, Fabian Thomas and Michaela Maier of the University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany, engage with the concepts of media credibility and media scepticism. Their essay investigates whether media credibility and media scepticism are stable positions learned in childhood that media performance is unable

to alter. The authors observe that media credibility is not completely dependent on media reception but behaves dynamically. Furthermore, they show that media scepticism and the rejection of individual media are related. Their essay provides relevant insights on factors of influence on media trust and touches upon the research fields of trust in the media and trust in sources.

Benjamin Krämer of the Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität Munich, Germany, analyses journalism's reactions to right-wing populist criticism of the media. He describes the ideological foundations of this criticism and the challenges of dealing with populism. Why do right-wing populist actors obviously not trust the media and journalism? And how do journalists in turn deal with this openly displayed lack of trust? The author delineates strategies for dealing with right-wing populist criticism using examples and calls for a differentiated debate on media performance. Krämer's essay casts light on the dimension of populism in the context of the research fields of trust in the media and in sources.

Markus Beiler and Johanna Kiesler of the University of Leipzig, Germany, study the "lying press" or *Lügenpresse* accusation, a key expression of the loss of trust in journalism in Germany. Using a content analysis of four national daily newspapers, they investigate how the media accused of lying report on those raising this accusation, the right-wing Pegida movement. This essay provides findings relevant to the dimension of populism and the research field of content.

The editors would like to thank the authors, who wrote such diverse and fascinating essays in such a short time period and for the most part delivered on time as well as agreeing to our suggestions for corrections and changes. We would like to thank the team at Springer Fachmedien for their trust in and instant enthusiasm for this project.

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Part I
Ethics and Norms

What Is Meant By 'Trust' In News Media?

Caroline Fisher

Abstract

Questions surrounding trust in news media have preoccupied scholars for almost a century. Based on a review of interdisciplinary literature, this paper maps the changing nature of news 'trust' over the past 80 years. In doing so, it highlights key issues. Firstly, there is no agreed definition of trust in news media. Secondly, there is a growing disconnection between the normative ideal of an informed citizen and the complex influences on perception of news credibility in the digital era. Thirdly, there is a tension between ideal of trust and the push for greater consumer scepticism in the age of 'fake news'. In conclusion this chapter asks whether general questions about public 'trust' in news media continue to be relevant.

1   Introduction

The issue of trust in news media is growing in urgency. Public opinion surveys tell us that trust in the news media is at historically low levels. High profile examples of unethical journalism, such as the phone hacking scandal by tabloid newspapers in the UK, increasing partisanship, and attacks on journalism organisations by world leaders as producers of 'fake news', all point to a sense of crisis in public trust in the fourth estate.

But what is meant by 'trust' in news media? And how should it be measured?

These questions have preoccupied communication scholars for decades. Over the past 80 years those questions have been answered in different ways as conceptions of trust in news media have evolved in step with changes in technology. This chapter provides a brief historical overview of interdisciplinary research into media trust. Rather than produce a coherent picture of trust in news media, this outline presents a complex picture of trust in relation to different media platforms, roles and motivations for use. In doing so, it raises questions about the traditional conception of trust in news media and its ongoing relevance in the digital age.

This chapter[1] begins by sketching the historic importance of trust in the news media. Via an overview of relevant interdisciplinary scholarship it then addresses the definitional problems with trust in news media, and looks at motivations for consuming media. Based on the variations identified in the literature, the chapter concludes with a discussion of questions about the ongoing value of the 'trust' ideal in a 'post fact' digital media landscape.

2   The importance of trust

Issues of trust are central to all human social activity. Trust is necessary at both an interpersonal level and at a societal one (Delhey & Newton, 2003). Without trust, a person cannot rely on another for support, nor can he or she be confident that the information they receive from the other is credible. As a result, Coleman (2012, p. 36) explained, trust is "the foundation of the social relationship that we call citizenship" and an informed citizenry is central to a well-functioning democracy.

In order for the public to engage effectively in civic life, people need access to reliable shared information about the activities of their public institutions and events in their communities. Traditionally, that communal information has been made available via the mass media. In the age of 'hybrid media' (Chadwick, 2013) the public now access that information from a growing range of digital sources, some of which are more reliable than others. As Coleman (2012, p.36) explained it: "Unless we can trust the news media to deliver common knowledge, the idea of the public – a collective entity possessing shared concerns – starts to fall apart". It is in this democratic context that the conception of trust in news media has been deemed to be so important. Therefore, concern about declining levels of trust in

news media, is concern about the negative impact that an unreliable media and uninformed public can have on democracy (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Coleman, 2012; Dahlgren, 2005; Lewis et al., 2008; Lloyd, 2004).

However, concerns about falling levels of trust in news media have not occurred in isolation. Issues of trust in society have been increasing over the past 25 years in response to the destabilizing impacts of globalization and digitization and a growing focus on the individual over the community in the information age (Putnam, 1995). This has led to an emerging sense of a 'crisis' of trust in public institutions, politics and the media (O'Neill, 2002; Bogaerts & Carpentier, 2013; Coleman, 2012). This period of uncertainty has been variously described as 'risk society' (Beck, 1992), 'Liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) and 'cultural chaos' (McNair, 2006).

In relation to the news media specifically, the impact of digitization has led to a collapse of the traditional financial model with advertising revenues shifting away from traditional news media, such as newspapers, towards online platforms. As Picard (2014, p. 273) explained this has led to "lower returns and resulted in redundancies and restructuring as it stripped wealth from the established enterprises of the news industry".

Beyond the economic uncertainty that this technological change has wreaked upon the news media industry, it has also led to an 'existential crisis' (McNair, 2013) for traditionally trained journalists. The ability of anyone with access to the internet now able to be a publisher, has resulted in a blurring of professional boundaries between reporters and bloggers, citizen journalists and other communications roles (Deuze, 2007; McNair, 2006; Carlson & Lewis, 2015).

This growth in information online has also made it harder for the public to determine the veracity of the stories they are accessing. "Amid the info-smog" (Coleman, 2012, p. 36) it can be difficult for citizens to find the information they need and trust its authority. This was clearly demonstrated during the 2016 US Presidential campaign with the spread of 'fake news' on social media. Analysis conducted by Silverman (2016) found "fake election news stories generated more total engagement on Facebook than top election stories from 19 major news outlets combined". Research by PEW (Barthel, Mitchell, & Holcomb, 2016) has concluded that "about two-in-three U.S. adults (64 %) say fabricated news stories cause a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues and events".

The recent outcry about 'fake news' builds on a long history of hoaxes, high-profile cases of plagiarism, and daily inaccuracies and distortion, which have all served to undermine the credibility and reliability of journalism in the eyes of the public (Broersma, 2013; Davies, 2008; Porlezza & Ross-Mohl, 2013; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Most notably, the News International phone hacking scandal

in the UK, which revealed journalists at the now defunct *News of the World* and other Murdoch tabloids had illegally accessed the phone messages of citizens and celebrities in the pursuit of headlines (Davies, 2014; Leveson, 2012).

Against this backdrop of technological, economic and social change questions about trust in news media continue to grow. However, as the following review of key literature shows, there is neither an agreed definition of what constitutes 'trust' in news media, nor an agreed way to measure it.

3   Research on media trust

On the face of it, the concept of trust appears to be straight forward. The online Oxford dictionary defines it as: *Firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something;*

However, as the following review of literature shows, in relation to news media, this common- usage conception of trust has shifted over time beyond perceptions of 'reliability' and 'truth' to encompass a much wider range of potential characteristics. Given the wealth of interdisciplinary scholarship written on this topic it is not possible to adequately examine all of it here. Instead, this chapter attempts to cut an arc across the fields of journalism, communication, psychology and computing literature to map the changing conceptions of media trust over a period of more than 80 years.

Research into trust in news media belongs to a long history of research into media credibility, in which the terms 'trust' and 'credibility' are virtually interchangeable. In this rich field of inquiry findings in relation to *news media* specifically and *media* generally are also often entwined (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Kiousis, 2001) which helps to further muddy the picture.

This combined literature can be roughly divided into three areas:

- Media credibility, which is also called medium, or channel credibility, refers to trust in the medium through which the news information is relayed;
- Source credibility, which relates to trust in the provider of the information; and,
- Message credibility, which deals with trust in the information content.

These three general categories were originally applied in scholarship on the credibility of the mass media, but as Metzger et al. (2003) observed they are still useful in relation to digital media though there is significant overlap between the three categories. However, for organizational purposes, those three headings have been used here to help structure the following brief over view of the interdisciplinary literature.

3.1 Media (or medium) credibility

As mentioned earlier, research on media (or medium) credibility generally refers to conceptions of public trust in a particular news medium, such as newspapers, television, radio, social media etc. In the US, concern with media credibility came to the fore in the 1930s when newspapers feared losing their audience to radio, and again in the 1950s to television.

In the 1960s the Roper Organisation (1969; 1975) began conducting comparative credibility research using audience opinion surveys on behalf of the US Television Information Office. In these surveys Americans were asked which source of media (newspapers, radio or television) a person was more likely to *believe* if they contained conflicting reports. Until 1960, the surveys found audiences were more likely to believe print media than electronic media. However this changed with the rise of television (Roper, 1969; Roper Organization, 1975).

In an attempt to find out why television had overtaken newspapers as the most credible news source in the US, Westley and Severin (1964) examined the demographic influences on media credibility from a sample of 927 Wisconsin residents. The participants were asked: "As between television, radio and the newspapers, which one do you feel gives the most *accurate* and *truthful* news?" (Italics added). While the researchers were unable to identify a definitive type of person who clearly trusted one medium more than another, Westley and Severin did find some differences in trust perception based on gender, education, geographic location, and partisanship, but not consistently.

Using a similar question to the Roper surveys, Abel and Wirth (1977) asked 681 Detroit adult residents in a cross-sectional telephone survey: 'If you got conflicting reports on a local news story from (their local newspaper) and from Channel (their local TV station), which one would you *believe* the newspaper story or the television story?' (Italics added). The participants were also asked to rank the truthfulness and importance of their local news on a scale of 0–100 percent. Abel and Wirth (1977) found that television was considered more *believable* and more *truthful* than newspapers in the presentation of local news, but as equally *important* as newspapers.

Further characteristics were identified by Gaziano and McGrath (1986) as possible indicators of news media credibility. Research participants were asked to rate 16 characteristics in relation to news media from 1–5 on a five point scale. A factor analysis resulted in 12 of them being treated as indicators of news media credibility. They included a wide range of characteristics from fairness; bias; accuracy; factuality; completeness of the story; trust; the separation of fact from opinion; and whether the reporter was well trained, through to respect for people's privacy;

whether the story was concerned with people's interests; the public interest; and, community well-being (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986, p. 454).

In more recent attempts to measure media credibility, Tsfati and Ariely (2013) conducted a secondary analysis of data collected from 44 countries for the World Values Survey to identify correlates of trust in media. They found levels of political interest, interpersonal trust, and exposure to television news and newspapers were positively correlated with trust in media. They also found that education levels and exposure to news on the internet were negatively correlated with trust. However, while the paper by Tsfati and Ariely (2013) was titled 'individual and contextual correlates of trust in Media in 44 countries', the question asked of participants was not about 'trust' but about their level of *confidence* in a range of civic and commercial organisations including the press and television. It is not clear whether it is confidence in the press and television generally, or in the news provided by those two media platforms.

Similar definitional problems are present in other contemporary surveys of trust in media generally and news media specifically. Jones (2004) research into Americans' trust in the media to report the news did not provide a definition of trust to participants. This is common in opinion research surveys such as the regular Essential Report in Australia (2017), Edelman's Global Trust Barometer (2017), The Pew Research Centre survey on the modern news consumer (PEW, 2016), and the Digital News Report – Australia 2017 (Watkins et al. , 2017) which ask participants to rank their trust in news media along a multi-point scale. Though there are differences in methodology, the surveys do not provide participants with a definition of trust. Instead what is relied upon is a normative assumption of 'trust', that being a belief in the 'reliability' and 'truth' of someone or something.

However, as the above over view has shown, there are several characteristics that have been identified as possible indicators and descriptors of trust. This lack of an agreed definition was highlighted more than a decade ago by Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, and McCann (2003, pp. 308–309). In their comprehensive review of the literature they found a range of other adjectives used to describe and measure the credibility of news media. They included: believability; accuracy; fairness; bias; trustworthiness; ease of use; completeness; reliability; and attractiveness of the coverage and presenters. In conclusion, they argued that perhaps the "intense focus on measurement has perhaps come at the cost of developing clear conceptual definitions of media credibility that could be used to form consistent operationalisations of the concept" (Metzger et al.2003, p. 309).

3.2   Message credibility

Message credibility is concerned with the content of the message. Metzger et al. (2003, p. 302) explained it focusses on "how message characteristics impact perceptions of believability, either of the source or of the source's message". In their over view of early research into message credibility, Metzger et al. (2003) described three key dimensions that appear in the literature. The first is *message structure*, which means the way in which information is organised and presented. They pointed to research that showed unorganised information can be seen as less credible than well-organised information. The second dimension is *message content*, which includes the writing style and topic, as well as research, accuracy and completeness of the information. The intensity of language used can also influence credibility perceptions along with the line of argument and whether it aligns with the consumer's world view. Thirdly, *message delivery* or *presentation* also has an impact. Communicators who speak either too fast or too slow can attract lower perceptions of credibility, whereas people who adopt a moderate pace are likely to rate more highly. Metzger et al. (2003) explained that this interdependency between the message and source credibility means the two are "overlapping concepts". Because of this, less attention has been paid to this as a distinct area of credibility research. Instead it appears in the discussion of both media and source credibility.

3.3   Source credibility

Generally speaking, the literature on source credibility is concerned with trust in relation to the information provider. However, in the context of the 21st century and digital online media, the literature reveals a shift in conceptions of trust in media with a conflation of the traditional distinctions between source, message and media (Metzger et al., 2003). As a result, identification of the source of news was a much easier task in the age of mass media than it is in the digital era. Sundar (2015, p. 74) says this is "because of the multiplicity of sources embedded in the numerous layers of online dissemination of content".

However, early research into source credibility was conducted by the Yale Communication Research Program (Hovland et al., 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Kiousis (2001) explained Yale's research centred on perceptions of credibility in relation to individual communicators, such as a public speaker. To find out what qualities would change a participant's attitudes toward a communicator, the researchers first recorded the views of the participants and then exposed them to

'manipulated messages' to see what influence, if any, those messages had. The Yale research revealed the attributes of *expertise* and *trustworthiness* to be key determinants of the participants' credibility perceptions of those who communicated the information (Kiousis, 2001, p. 383). However, Kohring and Matthes (2007) argued it was unclear whether these two characteristics of *expertness* and *trustworthiness* were dimensions of credibility, or predictors of credibility, and while influential, the findings were not validated and lacked a strong theoretical base.

In an attempt to address this perceived gap in the Yale research, Kohring and Matthes (2007) published a validated multidimensional scale of trust in news media. In contrast to other models the two researchers brought together journalism theory and trust in news media. This model was based around the hypothesis that when a person is asked if they trust news media, he or she is really being asked if they trust the selective process of journalism. They described that selective process as having four dimensions: trust in the selectivity of topics; trust in the selectivity of facts; trust in the accuracy of depictions; and trust in journalistic assessment (analysis), research selectivity and presentation of relevant information. The theory was tested on two representative samples using confirmatory factor analysis, which found that perceptions of trust in news media were based on perceptions of trust in the journalistic process.

This emphasis on trust in the processes of creating journalism was also echoed in the work of Blöbaum (2014). In his thorough examination of issues impacting on trust in journalism, he argued that trust is made up of three parts: trust in the journalism system as a whole; trust in journalists as individual actors; and trust in the journalistic method. In a time of economic uncertainty and unlimited competition, Blöbaum (2014, p. 51) argued it was important to lift public trust in each of these areas because trust in media organisations is based on the "accumulation of journalistic reputation and media credibility" and is "anchored in the brand name". Therefore improving and maintaining trust in those news brands is central to the financial future of the news media.

Beyond the credibility perceptions of the journalist, the news organisation and the content of the information, is a range of other technical capabilities that can influence user perceptions of credibility in relation to online information sources. Based on a decade's worth of effects research into digital media, Sundar (2015) developed the M.A.I.N. model to illustrate the way in which technical affordances of digital media can influence a user's credibility assessment of digital media. The model is based on four key technical capabilities of digital media – Modality; Agency; Interactivity; and, Navigability. Each of these key affordances is underpinned by a web of cues and heuristics that feed into judgements of credibility. For instance, the modality of the website or whether it offers multimedia or text only,

will influence the credibility perceptions of the users. Agency refers to determining who or what is the actual source of the information, whether it be the website, the computer itself, the author, the user or the news organisation, will also impact on credibility perception. Lastly, how interactive the site or device is, and how easy it is to navigate will also influence the user's perception of credibility.

Similarly, Metzger et al. (2003), Flanagin and Metzger (2007), and Dochterman and Stamp (2010) have found that young people in particular can be strongly influenced in their credibility judgments based on surface features such design appeal, ease of interaction, download speed and navigability. Flanagin and Metzger (2007) found the user assessments of credibility were mainly based on design and other website features rather than who the site was sponsored by. Dochterman and Stamp (2010) found twelve factors with varying levels of impact on the credibility judgement of online users. They included authority, page layout, site motive, URL, cross-check ability, user motive, content, date, professionalism, site familiarity, process and personal beliefs of the user.

Moving beyond the technical capabilities influencing perceptions of trust in digital news media, personal relationships with other users also play a significant role in determining the credibility of information they consume. For many people accessing news is becoming "a shared social experience as people swap links in emails, post news stories…highlight news stories in their Tweets, and haggle over the meaning of events in discussion threads" (Purcell et al., 2010). This occurs "as a significant proportion of news consumers turn to family, friends, and acquaintances to alert them to items of interest" (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012, p. 821). Endorsements given by friends have also been found to boost credibility perceptions. Sundar (2015, p. 83) labelled this the 'bandwagon heuristic', which means that items deemed popular by others increased their status in the eyes of friends: "If others think it is a good story, then I should think so too". This is supported by the Media Insight Project (MIP, 2017) which survey's Americans' trust in news on social media, found that "people who see an article from a trusted sharer but written by an unknown media source have much more trust in the information than people who see the same article from a reputable media source shared by a non-trusted person".

Choi (2016) has identified four components of news sharing all of which have an impact on credibility perception. The first is 'news browsing' of posts and links received from friends and family; 'news personalizing' which describes receiving news from sources the user subscribes to or from journalists the user follows; the third and fourth are 'news recontextualizing' and 'news endorsing' whereby the users repost items with comments or press the like or favourite icons.

Instead of friends recommending content, algorithms and recommender systems have emerged as key influences on trust in media (Golbeck & Hendler, 2006). Trust algorithms and reputation systems have been devised to predict and measure trust and distrust in online social networks to identify networks of shared interest and social connection (DuBois, Golbeck & Srinivasan, 2011; Kim & Ahmad, 2013). In doing so they replace human to human 'word of mouth' spread via genuine relationship connections (Shardanand & Maes, 1995). The results of these equations can then be applied to recommender systems to emulate choices about sharing material that individuals might themselves make. Guy et al. (2010) argued that recommender systems based on relationships between people and tags created a more accurate way of identifying user interests, than a system based on relational information alone. However, being able to 'personalize' a user's news feed has raised concerns about limiting an individual's curiosity and exposure to alternative perspectives (Pariser, 2011 in Thurman & Schifferes, 2012, p.787). This was an issue identified by participants in the DNR-Australia 2016 survey which found that although online news users were concerned about lack of exposure, they did prefer their news to be personalized and tailored to their interests based on their previous consumption. Whether it is preferred or not, Thurman and Schifferes (2012) argued that the ability of online news providers to personalize content to consumer preferences might be part of the solution to stabilizing the economic foundations of news journalism.

Expanding the application of 'source' credibility even further, what if the story was not written by a human but was written by a robot instead? Research by Graefe, Haim, Haarmann and Brosius (2016) attempted to address this question. In a study involving 986 German participants they found that "computer written news tended to be rated higher than human-written news in terms of credibility" (Graefe et al., 2016, p. 10). Stories written by humans, but falsely declared as computer written "were perceived as less favorable than the same articles correctly declared as written by a journalist…Although differences in effect sizes were small, the results might tempt publishers to assign human names to computer-written articles" (Graefe et al., 2016, p. 11). With the inevitable increase in computer generated news, the findings led the authors to call for the development of ethics guidelines in relation to robot or computer-written news. Because of all the complexities of the online environment, Grosser, Hase and Blöbaum (2016, p. 67) posit "it does seem more difficult for recipients to develop trust in online journalism than in offline journalism".

4   Motivations for news consumption

In addition to the definitional problems surrounding trust, research has also identified that motivations for consuming news media can also impact on trust perceptions in relation to the source, medium and message. A study of college students by Rieh and Hilligoss (2015) found the students goal – or need – for the information sought played an important role in determining the credibility of the information they looked for Depending on whether they were seeking information for an essay or for entertainment, the need to access credible information was either higher or lower. Depending on the amount of time they had, quick and accessible resources trumped credibility of the content.

Uses and Gratifications research has identified a wide range of motivations other than the desire to be informed. This field of research has sought to understand 'why' people use media and for what purpose (Huang, 2009, p. 108). Although the Uses and Gratifications approach has been criticised for a lack of theoretical rigor and conceptual inconsistency, Ruggerio (2000, p. 14) argued Uses and Gratification theory is experiencing a revival in the age of hybrid media: "As new technologies present people with more and more choices, motivation and satisfaction become even more crucial components of audience analysis". He explained it is a useful framework for considering the new range of factors influencing peoples' uses of digital media, such as interactivity, hyper textuality, interpersonal aspects, and the gratifications they receive from it. It emerged from audience 'media effects' research in the age of mass media and sought to "interpret people's motives for content choice and the satisfactions looked for and derived from media in terms of everyday social circumstances and needs" (McQuail, 1994, p. 318). A range of typologies have been developed to reflect the diversity of motivations for media use, which show that trust, or the need to access reliable information, is only one driver for people to consume news media (Katz et al., 1973; Levy, 1977; Ruggiero, 2000; Wenner, 1985). For instance, Katz et al. (1973) found that media formed a range of psychological functions for people including 'matching their wits against others' and 'providing a framework for one's day' (in Ruggerio, 2000, p. 4). Levy (1977) identified five factors motivating people's television viewing, with 'cognitive orientation' – or staying informed – and 'diversion' – or light relief – emerging as the top two motivators. McQuail, Blumer and Brown (1972) found people watched television to not only know what was happening but also for personal identification, diversion and connection with others. In their exploration of why people use media they do not necessarily trust, Tsfati and Cappella (2005, p. 253) argued that people access media for a range of reasons other than the desire to be informed: "It is not just the referential function of news (i.e., the need to learn

accurate information about the impersonal world) that drives news consumption". Instead, Tsfati and Cappella found people were motivated by a need to understand the world around them, or a 'need for cognition', in consuming media. Alternative motivations for news consumption were also identified in the DNR- Australia report (Watkins et al. 2015). It revealed that those who predominantly used online media were not necessarily motivated by a specific intention to become informed via the news media they trusted. Instead their use of online news media was a consequence or by-product, rather than a purposeful goal, of their daily online use.

5   Discussion

As the above brief over view of the literature has shown, the evolution of research concerned with media credibility has been a journey from individual assessments of a communicator's trustworthiness based on face-to-face unmediated communication, through to the impact of technical features, and algorithms dictating which news stories will be shared via social media by predicting trust relationships between online users. Though not exhaustive, the above selection of literature highlights the complexity of the conception of 'trust' in news media.

Firstly, it is clear that there is no agreed definition or measure of trust or credibility. Despite ongoing attempts to develop reliable measures, no single model that spans all news media – traditional and digital – has been adopted. Instead what is found is a diversity of conceptions of trust that have evolved alongside changes in media technology and will yield different responses depending on which aspect of trust is being measured: the message, the medium or the source, or all three at once. The problem is exacerbated by the fluidity of definitions around terms such as 'source'. As the above literature shows, this can refer to an individual reporter; a robot; a media organisation; a particular newspaper, website, App or TV programme; a friend who shares a story; or, an algorithm that selected it.

As a result, simple questions about whether consumers 'trust' the news media they access belie the complexity of the issue. Is the news consumer being asked if they trust the processes of journalism to produce a reliable, accurate interpretation of events as suggested by Blöbaum (2015)? Or are they being asked if they trust an online news website based on its technical features, interactivity, navigability and aesthetic appeal (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007; Dochterman & Stamp, 2010)? Or are they being asked if they trust the friend or family member who sent it to them (Choi, 2016; Hermida et al., 2012)? Or indeed, if they trust the algorithm that determined what they should read based on previous preferences and online connections (Thurman & Schifferes, 2012; Shardanand & Maes, 1995)? Or are

they being asked if they trust the robot that produced it, or the human reporter who wrote it? (Graefe et al., 2016).

The second problem stems from the traditional normative concerns about the importance of a reliable free press and informed citizenry in order for democracy to function effectively. Given the large number of emerging factors identified in the literature that can impact on user perceptions of trust in online and social media, it cannot be assumed that media users will be motivated by the normative ideal of being a well-informed citizen in their consumption of news media. In fact Uses and Gratifications research shows that people often consume media they do not trust. While that might not seem 'rational', studies by Tsfati and Cappella (2005, p. 254) reported that: "When other motivations are present, trust in the media becomes less relevant".

In an online environment, research also shows the distinction is blurring between news and other forms of information. Online and mobile users don't necessarily seek news, they simply bump into it or encounter and interact with news as they wander through their media-saturated lives (Deuze, 2012; Hermida, 2010). Relying on the assumption that the news consumer will interpret 'trust' based on traditional conceptions of reliability and accuracy bound up in the ideal of the informed citizen, does not adequately accommodate how and why people are accessing news media.

A third problem is a disconnection between the ideal of being able to 'trust' the news media, and the need for greater media literacy in a 'post fact' society. In response to the 'fake news' scandal erupting during the 2016 US presidential campaign, there has been a wealth of resources emerging to help citizens detect fake news on line and better interrogate digital information sources (NLP, 2016; PDL, 2017). Prior to the public alarm around 'fake news', there was recognition of a growing need for journalists and consumers to verify online information (Silverman, 2013; Brandtzaeg et al., 2015). In response to the tsunami of online information, consumers have been encouraged to be more media literate, sceptical and not simply trust what they read. Potter (2015) describes media literacy as being multidimensional and made up of specific skills, including analysis and evaluation of information. In relation to news stories specifically Potter (2015, p 329) suggests consumers should ask questions about the accuracy of facts in a story; the completeness of a story; the credibility and suitability of sources; and whether the journalist has an agenda.

In their book 'Blur', Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010) described the desired disposition of the contemporary news consumer as the 'way of sceptical knowing'. The authors encouraged the public to ask a range of questions to test the quality of a source and its information, such as: What kind of content am I encountering?; Is

the information complete? What is missing?; What evidence is presented and how was it tested or vetted?; and What might be an alternative understanding or explanation? Similarly, Gillmor (2010) urged consumers to be sceptical, exercise their judgement, open his or her mind, and to keep asking questions.

In journalism education students are being taught the importance of verification, especially in relation to online and social media (Silverman, 2013). The distinction between verified pieces of journalism and information that has not been through the journalistic process of fact checking, is seen as central to defining the boundaries of a profession that is under threat from other communications roles. In response, there is increasing emphasis on media literacy in journalism schools. Students are being encouraged to engage critically with the media and information they are consuming and not to simply 'blindly accept the curriculum that media are already teaching students outside of classrooms' (Fleming, 2014, p. 3).

In other words media consumers are being discouraged from accepting what they read, watch and hear at face value. They are being encouraged to be more media literate, to be sceptical and not blindly trust what they find online. As a result, asking younger online users whether they trust the news media might seem counter-intuitive. Given the emphasis on critical analysis of information in a 'post-fact' society when 'facts no longer matter' (Manjoo, 2011) is 'trust' in news media even desirable?

6   Conclusion

Based on an over view of selected interdisciplinary literature, this chapter has attempted to map the evolution of conceptions of news trust over the past 80 years. In doing so, it has highlighted key problems with the question of trust in relation to news media. Firstly, despite the volume of research on this topic there is no agreed definition or measure of 'trust' in news media. What is clear is that the common usage definition of 'reliability' and 'truth' no longer capture the multiple characteristics that can influence a consumer's perception of trust in news media. Secondly, there is a growing disconnection between the normative ideal of an informed citizenry and the complex range of motivations that can also have an impact on perceptions of news credibility in the digital era. Thirdly, there is a growing tension between the ideal of citizens being able to trust the information provided by the news media, and the urgent need for the public become more media literate and questioning of the information they access. In an age of uncertainty about the veracity of online information and the push for greater media literacy, is

trust in news the desired goal? Or, should the 'art of sceptical knowing' (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010) be the new ideal?

Each of these questions point to a need for a deeper and more nuanced approach to assessing consumer perceptions of news information rather than simply asking someone to rate their level of trust in the news on a scale of 1 to 9. Surveys of news consumers need to better accommodate the range of influences, motivations and technological characteristics that might impact on their judgement. In an online environment where hard news and selfies all blend on the one feed it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern what is 'news' and who or what is the source of information. Accordingly, researchers need to be clear about what element of news media is being asked about, whether it is the content, the brand, an individual reporter, a friend who shared it or an algorithm that sent it. In light of concerns about 'fake news', the unreliability of online information, and the push for consumers to develop a 'way of sceptical knowing', perhaps simple questions of 'trust' in news media need to be reconsidered in order to embrace the complexity of changing conceptions of 'trust' in the digital era.

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Changing Norms Concerning Verification

Towards a Relative Truth in Online News?

Gunnar Nygren & Andreas Widholm

Abstract

Over the past decade, journalism has undergone dramatic changes as a result of digitalization and multi-platform news production. Online, news is no longer a static product, but a flow of liquid news packages under constant alteration. This chapter discusses how the digital news environment has influenced attitudes towards verification among journalists in Poland, Russia and Sweden. The analysis builds on a survey to 1500 journalists in these countries. Results show a strong support for verification in general, but the new liquid news environment has also created softer attitudes towards verification. Between 30–40 per cent of the journalists believe that the audience has lower demands on news published online. As many hold the view that verification of facts can be done during rather than before publication. The analysis also reveals important differences between organizational cultures and between countries. Broadcast journalists keep their old values of verification to a larger extent, and newspaper journalists seem to accept a higher amount of inaccuracy in online news. Journalists in Poland and Russia have softer attitudes towards verification than journalists in Sweden, reflecting a journalistic culture oriented towards opinions, in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon fact-oriented tradition that characterizes Swedish journalism.

1   Introduction

In their seminal book *The Elements of journalism,* Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) seek to define the core features of a healthy and functioning journalism. Among keywords such as democracy, ethics, transparency and responsibility, two terms stand out as particularly central to the practice of journalism, namely 'truth' and 'verification'. Journalists can neither serve the democratic society nor provide its citizens with useful and relevant news if they are not doing so in terms of true and accurate accounts of reality. Journalism, they argue further, ought to be seen as a 'discipline of verification' and it is facts – not fiction – that uphold its foundation and democratic status. Although news reporting in general and the notion of 'newness' in particular, often draws on uncertainty about current events, a central journalistic value is to get the facts straight and thereby come as close as possible to a fact-based truth. Verification is thus a central professional practice of journalism which separates it from other informational products such as entertainment, propaganda, art or pure fiction (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001, p. 71).

In order to be properly applicable in the daily work, the value of verification has been codified into formal ethical principles in many countries. In Sweden, for example, 'accurate news' is the title of the first paragraph in the professional ethical rules guiding almost all professional journalists. The rules state among several things that: 1) 'The role played by the mass media in society and the confidence of the general public in these media call for accurate and objective news reports', and 2) 'Be critical of news sources. Check facts as carefully as possible in the light of the circumstances even if they have been previously published'.[1]

The professional commitment to verification and accuracy expressed in such ethical guidelines has a long tradition, but it is now challenged by external as well as internal factors. There are increased *external* pressures on journalism from professional sources, not least political ones, which have developed gradually more sophisticated methods for news management (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011; Macnamara, 2014). Terms such as 'post-truth politics' (Gilbert, 2014) and 'truthiness' (Schudson, 2009) also bear witness of a time marked by an epistemological crisis of journalism including severe difficulties when it comes to the ability to uphold traditional professional values. Likewise, there are *internal* pressures within journalism as an institution. Structural changes on the market have led to a situation where fewer journalists are producing more content on multiple platforms. In this process, journalism has been more deskbound, giving less attention to fact-checking and critical investigation (Lewis, Williams & Franklin, 2008; Moloney, Jack-

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1   The full code of ethics are available at: http://www.po.se/english/code-of-ethics

son & McQueen, 2013). In addition, ideals of accuracy are challenged by the development of 24-hour rolling news practices and so-called 'liquid' news where new speedy publications appear almost constantly and where fact checking is performed as a constitutive part of the publication process rather than as something that precedes it (cf. Karlsson, 2012; Widholm, 2016b).

Against this background, this chapter discusses current professional challenges within journalism: how norms and values concerning verification in the news are influenced by the current developments outlined above. The study is based on five questions in a survey to journalists in Sweden, Poland and Russia, which was carried out 2012 in the project 'Journalism in change'. The project analysed journalistic cultures in the three countries and how these are influenced by media development (Nygren & Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015). In this chapter we analyse attitudes towards verification on the basis of the following research questions:

- RQ1: How strong is the commitment to verification among journalists and how are journalists evaluating verification in the daily work?
- RQ2: Are there any perceived differences concerning verification among journalists working for different channels/platforms or between journalists of different age?
- RQ3: Are there any differences between journalists in different journalistic cultures and media systems concerning attitudes towards verification?

The chapter is structured as follows. We start with the theoretical framework focusing on verification and the concept of liquid news. A method section, where we provide the outline for a survey to journalists working in Sweden, Poland and Russia, follows. In the subsequent section we present the results, and the chapter ends with a concluding discussion.

2   Verification in the journalistic process

Even if verification is considered to be a crucial part of the journalistic process, there is not much research on it. Previous research has emphasized journalism as a social construction, while journalists' struggles to relate their product to some kind of reality have received less attention among scholars (Tuchman, 1978; Zelizer, 2004). As for researchers, journalists' strive for verification start in epistemology. An Israeli study (Godler & Reich, 2013) identified three epistemological viewpoints among journalist: realism, social constructivism and in-between them of pragmatism that seems to be the most common among journalists. This pragma-

tism starts from the assumption that there is a reality outside journalism, and that the most central task for a journalist is to search for this 'practical truth' (Kovac & Rosenstiehl, 2001, p. 44). The same epistemology has also been observed among Swedish journalists in newsroom studies where 'ethics in action' makes compromises between need for facts and verification on the one hand, and time limits before deadline on the other (Ekström & Nohrstedt, 1996).

Cross-verification is the most established journalistic practice in the search for facts and truth. According to previous research, however, only a small part of the journalistic work undergoes cross-verification. In a British study, less than half of the news stories had any visible indications of cross-verification (Lewis et al., 2008). A common strategy among journalists is to put the responsibility for the fact at the sources quoted. A study of practices in journalistic research found that sources that are often used and well known for the journalist are much less verified. The social position and status of a source also play a significant role for how it is dealt with by journalists (Godler & Reich, 2015). A Canadian study emphasizes verification not only as a final check of facts, but as something basic in the whole working process (Shapiro et al., 2013). The need for verification depends on how sensitive the facts are, availability of alternative sources and the credibility of the original source.

Researchers have also described different strategies of verification. In Sweden, principles of historical source-criticism have been used in journalism education as a way of evaluating all sorts of sources. That involves determining authenticity, closeness in time, and the independence and partiality of the source (Thurén, 2013). In US-journalism, verification has been a standard procedure at least since Lippman in the 1920's. Based on interviews with US journalists, Kovac and Rosenstiehl (2001, p. 78) formulate five principles as the foundation of verification – never add anything that was not there, never deceive, be transparent, rely on your own original reporting and exercise humility. Today journalists find many new sources in social media, but according to interviews with online journalists in Europe they still use old practices to evaluate these sources (Brandtzaeg et al., 2016). Digital tools to verify information are seldom used due to lack of knowledge which is one of the main reasons as to why journalists commonly stick with traditional methods such as turning to previously trusted sources or contacting them directly to check their credibility. But also new practices are developed to handle user-generated content (UGC) and social media, especially in situations of breaking news. One example is the *Verification Handbook* from the European Journalism Center[2].

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2   http://ejc.net/projects/news/article/the-ejc-releases-the-verification-handbook

3   Post-truths and liquid news

The professional commitment to verification and accuracy has a long history in journalism, but although this value to a great extent constitutes an international professional standard, it is now challenged by a long row of external as well as internal factors. There is an increased *external* pressure on journalism from professional sources, which have developed gradually more sophisticated methods for news management, not least in new digital environments (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011; Macnamara, 2014). News management is hardly a new phenomenon, but the resources and efforts to influence media have grown extensively over the latest decades. In a critical comment to this development within the context of journalistic depictions of the US war in Iraq, Michael Schudson (2009) referred to the notion of 'truthiness' as opposed to fact-based truth. Truthiness can be described as a 'truth' based on gut feelings rather than evidence, logic and facts, and it was a central strategy used by George W. Bush's administration in its attempts legitimize the invasion of Iraq by referring to 'evidence' of existing weapons of mass destruction. Another example is the information operations of modern 'hybrid' warfare that have occurred in connection with the current conflict in Ukraine. Russia has devoted significant resources in attempts to undermine and de-legitimize journalistic credibility in the west (Nygren et al., 2016; Widholm, 2016a). Within Russia, a post-modern relativism seems to have reduced the question of truth to a matter of *perspective* where opinions rather than facts serve as the basis for discussions in the public sphere. The title of journalist and documentary film maker Peter Pomerantsev's (2014) recent book summarizes it as a situation where 'nothing is true and everything is possible'. A parallel development can be seen in the US context, where 'post-truth politics' now have become mainstream through the communicative strategies of the Trump administration. In the post-truth condition, journalism institutions are constantly attacked for being 'corrupt' and part of the 'elite' due to their reluctance to disseminating or reproducing accounts of reality that are based purely on emotions and ideological conviction rather than on facts (Muller, 2016; Carlsson, 2016). It should be mentioned that this happens – yet to a varying degree – in most democratic countries where journalism's discursive centrality is diminishing due to competition from the politicians' own media use and a stronger 'alternative' media (Ekman & Widholm, 2015). Yet the truth question should also be seen in the broader context of a 'post-modern turn' in journalism where boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity, news and opinion and information and entertainment, relativize the grand narrative of journalism as truth-teller, watchdog and primary safeguard of democracy (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, p. 97).

Internally, ideals of accuracy and verification are challenged by the development of 24-hour news production and the advent of so-called 'liquid' news without strict deadlines (Karlsson, 2012). There has always been a conflict between speed in reporting and the need for verification, but previous research has shown that online news services tend to prioritise speed on behalf of accuracy when news takes the form of a 'flow' rather than as static texts (Widholm, 2016b). The threatened status of accuracy in news reporting has been identified as a specific consequence of this transformation of news as a product. In sharp contrast to traditional forms of newspaper journalism, online journalists often publish their texts in the form of drafts that are under constant alteration. This liquidity has transformed the previously closed process of news production into an increasingly open process where readers are invited to consume and participate in the news even during phases of the process marked by uncertainty and lack of verified information (Karlsson, 2012). Thus, liquid news, as opposed to traditional print news, is erratic rather than predictable, continuous rather than periodic, and interactive rather than one-way communicated. For many online news outlets, rapid 'breaking news' reporting constitutes its actual core, marking a convergence in formats and editorial practices between traditional newspaper organizations and 24-hour television news broadcasting (cf. Saltzis, 2012). In order to fill every single minute with news content in a media culture which is 'always on' (Usher, 2014), journalists have borrowed many of the conventions associated with 24-hour breaking news including a strong focus on ongoing events, 'liveness', drama and the factual ambiguity that fast news entails. The growth of breaking news or the 'perfect example of a victory of style over substance' (Lewis & Cushion, 2009, p. 316) thus involve a number of critical implications for the credibility and truthfulness of journalism as a democratic key institution in society.

A further internal aspect worth mentioning here is the consequence of the current economic crisis of journalism where a decreasing number of journalists now are facing a pressure to produce an increasing number of news stories on multiple platforms. Thus, with less time spent on each news item comes a risk that critical scrutiny and fact checking of materials 'pushed' into the newsroom decrease significantly (Lewis, Williams & Franklin, 2008; Moloney, Jackson & McQueen, 2013). In addition, specialized reporters with expert knowledge and considerable experience are more and more scarce, as most journalism institutions prefer generalists with technical skills that can operate across departments and platforms. As Reich and Godler (2016) notes, the crisis of western media is indeed also a crisis of journalistic expertise, and with less experts in the newsrooms, there is a greater risk that inaccurate information passes the gates of journalism. This 'decline in epistemic authority' (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016) is also connected to differences

between platforms and the tendency among journalists to express more personal and subjective views in social media, challenging old normative foundations of distance and objectivity in the approach to events reported.

Previous research on public attitudes towards journalism ethics in Sweden has shown that 'providing correct news' is regarded as the most important rule by as many as 80 percent of the citizens. The same amount of people, 80 percent, also believed that journalism in Sweden provide the members of the public with news that are correct (Petersson et al., 2005). There are reasons to believe, however, that these figures have changed after the more intense stages of journalism's migration from offline to online platforms. Journalist themselves have also indicated that new standards are needed if journalism should be able to cope with the expectations held by digital consumers. That is, in more concrete terms, to accept a certain amount of inaccuracy and falseness in the news as long as the journalistic end-goal is to provide a true and complete account of reality. Two editors at one of Sweden's largest quality newspapers, *Svenska Dagbladet*, recently argued that journalists should 'dare to redefining the concept of quality journalism so it also involves the modern way of producing news. In today's media world, speed and availability is as important as analysis and depth'[3] (Von Krogh, 2016, p. 170).

Arguments in favour of such a development often centre the attention on the public's right to fast and relevant information during extraordinary situations. Journalism cannot take the risk of providing too slow information, as a large number of digital consumers will turn their eyes and ears to other sources than journalism in their search for the latest news. After all, that could undermine journalism's central position in the public sphere. Critics on the other hand, often underline that rumours and false information are spread with a tremendous speed and on a global scale, independently of news journalists. Journalism should therefore work as a counter-weight to the spread of rumours, and serve as a slightly slower but more reliable source of information, even during times when such values are set under hard pressure. A recently established method to find a middle-way in online news has been to increase the journalistic transparency by distinguishing more clearly between *verified* and *unverified* information, and between what we *know* and what we *don't know* about a certain issue at a given point in time (Von Krogh, 2016). A report comparing standards in legacy and digital native media conclude that both transparency and strive for accuracy are needed to establish credibility in digital outlets; relevant editorial standards from legacy media can be combined with new affordances of digital media (Riordan, 2014).

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3   Citation translated from Swedish by the authors

4   Standards in different journalistic cultures

Comparative journalism research has found a general cultural understanding of the profession shared by most journalist around the world, which can be seen for example in the commitment to values such as objectivity, credibility and fairness (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Deuze, 2007). A survey to journalists in all three countries included in the present study also showed that neutrality, objectivity and standing free from special interests were regarded as important among journalists (Anikina, 2015). However, there are also examples of research that has found clear differences in journalistic cultures in different kind of societies. These differences concern dimensions like the degree of activism or detachment among journalists and the degree of separation of facts and opinions (Chalaby, 1996; Schudson, 2003). In a global study of journalistic cultures, a clear difference was found between a cluster of western countries with more neutral anglo-saxon ideals in journalism in contrast to developing countries and partly non-democratic countries with ideals more strongly related to social change and promotion of values (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Hanitzsch, 2011). If this also means there are differences concerning attitudes towards verification is not clear, but these countries also often report higher degrees of external political pressure on journalism. This can influence also verification. Another question is the relation between attitudes/values and the actual journalistic practice. It is not a given that professional values translate directly into journalistic practice, since the possibilities to follow the values differ greatly between media organizations and media systems (Nygren & Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015).

5   Methodology

The chapter is based on a survey tied to the research project *Journalism in Change*. In the project, researchers from three universities, Södertörn University in Stockholm, Moscow State University in Russia and the University of Wroclaw in Poland, have cooperated to study how the professional journalistic culture in the three countries has been influenced by media developments (cf. Nygren & Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015). The survey was conducted during the spring and summer of 2012.

The questionnaire was constructed jointly by the researches to achieve the highest possible validity, so that each question would be interpreted in the same way in the three languages. The survey was organized and carried out by teams in each of the three countries. There are no registers of journalists in the three countries, except in Sweden where previous research has been based on the members of the Union of Journalists (Asp, 2012; Strömbäck et al., 2012). In the other two

countries, the unions only include a small part of the journalist population, and it was not possible to use the unions to obtain a representative sample. To use the same methods in the three countries, the project instead employed quota sampling to select survey participants with the aim of creating a sample that was as representative as possible of journalists in each country (Lavrakas, 2013).

Table 1 *Journalism in change 2012: Survey sample (%)*

	Poland	Russia	Sweden	Total
Male	58	38	47	48
Female	42	62	53	52
≤35 years	42	69	27	47
36–50 years	39	23	36	33
≥51 years	18	7	38	21
Printed paid newspapers	26	35	42	34
Magazines	25	29	13	22
Public service/state radio and TV	22	10	16	16
Commercial-free media*	25	21	12	19
Subcontractors**	3	6	17	8
Total number of surveys	497	500	500	
* Commercial TV and radio, free newspapers and online only ** News agencies, production companies and freelancers				

Drawing on previous knowledge about the media structure and work places for journalists, a quota of journalists was determined for each media type; the goal was to collect 500 surveys in each country. Surveys were sent to a wide range of newsrooms in different parts of the country and to different types of media, in the form of both written surveys (in Sweden) and e-mails with links to a web-based survey (in Poland and Russia). The survey was not sent to specific, named journalists, but with the instruction to distribute the questionnaire to all journalists in the newsroom. The journalists returned the questionnaires themselves or filled in a web survey anonymously. When the quota for each media type was filled, the survey stopped.

In the survey, five statements on verification in relation to online publishing were included. The respondents were asked to agree or not agree to the statements on a five-degree Likert-scale:

- In my news organization, the news is equally verified in all channels (print, online, radio, television).
- Incorrect facts are often published due to lack of editorial control.
- It is better to publish unverified information than to be slower than our competitors
- The audience has lower demands on verification in online news than in our main channel (paper, TV and radio).
- Online journalism is more of a process, and the verification can be done during the process and not before publishing.

The results (and correlations) have been analysed in relation to age, type of media organisation, opinions on quality in journalism, to professional ideals and the country where the respondent works. It is important to remember that the survey measures only attitudes and not actual practices. In surveys concerning values and attitudes there is always a tendency to be 'better' than in actual practice and the results should therefore be interpreted carefully.

6   Diverging attitudes to verification

In the following, we present the results of the survey to Swedish, Russian and Polish journalists. We start with a general characterization of attitudes towards verification, after which we discuss correlations between different types of attitudes and differences between type of media organizations and between different countries.

The results from the survey show a strong support for verification as a basic value in journalism. 82 percent of the journalists disagree with the quite provocative statement that it is better to publish unverified information than to be slower than the competitors, whereas only 5 percent agree with the same statement (see table 2). However, when it comes to softer statements on the journalistic practice in their own news organisations, the figures are less clear. Only 59 percent says that news is equally verified in all channels, meaning that verification tends to work differently on traditional platforms (newspapers, radio, television) compared to online news platforms. Two statements relate directly to online publishing, and the answers show that 30–40 percent of all surveyed journalists have different standards for verification online compared to offline. change to: 32 percent agree with the statement that verification can be done during publication process (in contrast to the more traditional way, eg. to verify first and publish later). Verification is thus an enduring value in the profession and something that journalists believe

is important, while they at the same time say that verification works differently in online publishing.

Table 2 *Attitudes to verification among journalists (per cent on a scale 1–5)*

	Disagree (1–2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4–5)	Mean	N=
In my news organization, news are equally verified in all channels (print, online, radio, tv).	22	17	59	3,6	1348
Incorrect facts are often published due to lack of editorial control	52	20	28	2,6	1414
It is better to publish unverified information than to be more slowly that our competitors.	82	11	5	1,7	1426
The audience has lower demands on verification in online news than in our main channel	40	18	42	3,0	1373
Online journalism is more of a process, and the verification can be done during the process and not before publishing.	50	18	32	2,7	1369

A possible explanation to this ethical inconsistency seems to be connected to perceptions of changes outside journalism, namely among the consumers. 42 percent of the journalists believe for example that the audience have lower expectations on online news compared to journalism produced for offline platforms. A lower professional standard regarding verification can in that sense be justified on the basis of changing attitudes within the audience (or in fact that people get used to or accept a certain amount of inaccuracy in online news). Another, yet weaker explanatory factor is that relatively many journalists feel that they have less control online. 28 percent agrees with the statement that incorrect facts are published due to lack of control. In another question in the survey, the journalists were asked about their evaluation of qual ity in journalism in their country, if it is increasing or decreasing. As displayed in table 3, there is a correlation between the two opinions that quality in journalism is decreasing and the statement that incorrect facts are often published due to lack of editorial control (-0,137 Pearson, sig at 0,01-level).

Hence, the answers show that about one third of the journalists in the three countries have attitudes that differ from the classical ideal, eg. to always verify information before publication. In addition, one third is critical towards less control of facts, and many journalists in that group think that quality is decreasing in journalism. Looking more closely at the patterns in the answers, there are clear cor-

relations between attitudes related to online journalism. Journalists that agree with the statement that verification can be done during the actual publication process, also tend to agree that the audience has lower expectations on online news, as well as with the statement that it is better to publish unverified information than being slower than the competitors (table 3). It seems to be a cluster of attitudes that relate closely to each other in online publishing. There is also a correlation between the opinion about many incorrect facts being published and the evaluation of how verification in the different channels relate. Journalists who agree that incorrect facts are published often also disagree with the contention that verification is equal in all channels. This shows a critical attitude towards different standards, probably mostly traditional channels in relation to online publishing.

Table 3 Correlations between attitudes on verification

		Verification is equal in all platforms	Incorrect facts are often published due to lack of editorial control	It is better to publish unverified information than to be slower than the competitors	Audience has lower demands on verification in online journalism than in traditional channels	Online journalism is a process, verification can be done during the process
Verification is equal in all platforms	Pearson	1	-,327**	-,150**	-,068*	-,037
	Sign.		,000	,000	,016	,186
	N	1348	1309	1312	1268	1273
Incorrect facts are often published because due to lack of editorial control	Pearson	-,327**	1	,194**	,085**	,089**
	Sign.	,000		,000	,002	,001
	N	1309	1414	1383	1326	1324
It is better to publish unverified information than to be slower than the competitors	Pearson	-,150**	,194**	1	,185**	,375**
	Sign.	,000	,000		,000	,000
	N	1312	1383	1426	1341	1340
Audience has lower demands on verification in online journalism than in traditional channels	Pearson	-,068*	,085**	,185**	1	,373**
	Sign.	,016	,002	,000		,000
	N	1268	1326	1341	1373	1319
Online journalism is a process and verification can be done during the process	Pearson	-,037	,089**	,375**	,373**	1
	Sign.	,186	,001	,000	,000	
	N	1273	1324	1340	1319	1369

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The difference is quite small between generations of journalists. Only when it comes to the last statement about online journalism as a process, there is a significant difference between journalists under 35 years and the rest. Among the young group, 39 per cent agree, compared to 28 per cent among journalists over 35 years old. Yet the attitudes are not primarily related to age, but rather to type of media organisation (see table 4). Newspaper journalists' attitudes towards verification seem to differ from those working with public service or state owned radio and television. Journalists at newspapers are more likely to recognize differences between platforms with regard to verification. They also agree to a larger extent with the statement that incorrect facts are published online, and that verification can be done after or as part of the publication process. TV and radio journalists are more traditional when it comes to verification, and they are therefore less likely to recognize differences between offline and online platforms. There are several likely explanations to these differences. Radio and Television are mediums with a longer tradition of multiple deadlines and stretched publication routines and many of these news organisations have ethical guidelines concerning news updates that date back to pre-online times. After all, providing news updates during the whole day has been a central trademark and a strong competitive feature of radio journalism for decades. Television comes with similar possibilities, although consumption of television is more concentrated to evenings. Another possible explanation is that newspaper organizations have undergone more dramatic changes as many of them have been transformed from print organisations to convergent multimedia corporations with a clearer emphasis on online news.

Table 4 *Attitudes to verification in different kinds of media organizations (per cent agree, 4–5 on a scale 1–5)*

	Printed newspaper	Magazine	TV and radio*	Commercial TV/radio and freesheets	Subcontractors*
In my news organization, news are equally verified in all channels (print, online, radio, tv).	51	61	69	61	70
Incorrect facts are often published due to lack of editorial control.	31	31	20	28	28
It is better to publish unverified information than to be slower than our competitors.	8	6	6	8	7
The audience has lower demands on verification in online news than in our main channel	43	43	41	44	40
Online journalism is more of a process, and the verification can be done during the process and not before publishing.	36	32	25	34	27
N=	491	323	227	274	109

*TV and radio= public service and state radio/tv
Subcontractors= freelancers, production companies, news agencies

The survey was conducted in three countries, characterized by different media systems. When it comes to verification, there are clear differences in attitudes in the three countries, but no obvious pattern (table 5). In Sweden, the share saying verification is equal in all platforms is lower than in Poland and Russia. This can be a result of a more critical attitude (or more realistic attitude) towards a lack of verification among Swedish journalists. But it can also be a result of a longer experience of online publishing in Sweden and more different routines in working for various platforms.

In Poland and Russia there seems to be a softer attitude towards verification in online news – journalists believe that the audience has lower demands and that verification is not needed before publishing in online news. This soft attitude towards verification is also seen in answers on the statement that it is better to publish un-

verified information than to be slower than competitors – even if the share is small, the share is still nearly four times larger in Russia than in Sweden.

There are also large differences in Sweden between different media. In newspapers, only 29 percent of the journalists say verification is equal in all channels, compared with 67 percent in public service radio and TV. 35 percent of newspaper journalists say incorrect facts are often published, compared with 12 percent among journalists in public service radio and TV. This shows Swedish journalists in public service keep strict to old standards, and their colleagues in newspapers seems to embrace new digital standards with the result that three times more journalists say that incorrect facts are often published. In Poland and Russia the differences between media are much smaller.

Table 5 *Attitudes to verification in different countries (percent that agree on the statement, 4 and 5 on a scale 1–5)*

	Sweden	Poland	Russia	Total
In my news organization, news are equally verified in all channels (print, online, radio, TV).	46	62	68	59
Incorrect facts are often published due to lack of editorial control	28	31	26	29
It is better to publish unverified information than to be more slowly that our competitors.	3	7	11	7
The audience has lower demands on verification in online news than in our main channel	30	58	40	43
Online journalism is more of a process, and the verification can be done during the process and not before publishing.	20	37	40	32
N=	472	480	493	1426

7 Concluding discussion

Online news services involve publication opportunities and practices that differ greatly from traditional forms of news making. Online news is not a static product, but a flow of multi-modal and interactive news packages under constant alteration. As journalism becomes more open-ended, the selling-point of the news changes from verified facts to uncertainty and click-friendly dramatizations. These changes, as well as broader structural transformations of the news industry, are relatively well documented in previous international research but few studies have addressed their implications in terms of systematic empirical investigations of changes in

professional values. In addition, there has been a research gap concerning differences between type of media companies and between various countries including their specific media cultures and media systems.

In this chapter, we have related current academic discourses on liquid news and the post-truth condition to attitudes towards fact-checking and verification among Swedish, Polish and Russian journalists. The results show a strong support in general for verification of facts, over 80 percent disagree with the statement that it is better to publish unverified information than to be slower than competitors. But the results also show softer attitudes in relation to verification in online journalism. Between 30–40 percent of the journalists believe the audience has lower demands on online journalism, and that verification can be done as a constitutive part of the publication process. This confirms previous research on changing standards in relation to accuracy in online journalism, and the question is what this means for traditional values inherited from legacy media (Riordan, 2014). The type of content that is published online often differs greatly from that of offline platforms, especially when it comes to newspapers. Live news coverage generates high activity on the news sites, both among journalists and the audience. In a US context, Usher (2017) has recently noted that journalists tend to see breaking news journalism as a way of pleasing the audience and attract readers. After all, the size of the audience is an important corner stone of journalistic credibility since it creates necessary bonds between journalism institutions and the community they work for. However, justifying increased inaccuracy (which tends to come with a larger proportion of breaking news) with reference to changed expectations involves a great risk. As Grosser, Hase and Blöbaum (2016) have noted, journalism suffers from a trust problem across the western world especially when it comes to online news which often is perceived less trustworthy compared to its traditional equivalents. This is a growing challenge for journalism, given that online news no longer is a 'new' or additional type of journalism but the default choice for gradually more people on a daily basis (Rackaway, 2014; Schrøder, 2014). In addition, this is connected to the decline in epistemic authority of journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016), due to the different modalities, modes of address and audience relations of journalism practices on social platforms. Our study shows clear differences between journalists in various media outlets. Broadcast journalists keep their old values to a larger extent than journalists working for newspapers, and they have a sense that there is a strong editorial control in their newsrooms that prevent false information to be published. Newspaper journalists on the other hand, seem to accept a higher amount of inaccuracy on online compared to traditional platforms. This shows that differences in organizational culture is important when it comes to professional standards. Last but not least, the survey has identified cultural differ-

ences, not only between types of media but between the three countries. Swedish journalist may be more influenced by Anglo-Saxon fact-oriented journalism with stronger demands on verification (Strömbäck et al., 2012). This can explain both a critical attitude towards different levels of verification and towards lower standards in online journalism. In Poland and Russia journalism is by tradition more oriented towards opinions (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Vartanova, 2012), and verification might be more 'liberal', both online and offline. Journalists in Poland and Russia also differ from Swedish journalists in that they believe audiences to have increasingly lower demands on verification online. Likewise, nearly half of the Polish and Russian journalists see verification as a constitutive part of the publication process, meaning that publishing unverified or false information may be acceptable as long as the final product is correct. This indicates that media development does not automatically create homogenization of values and standards among journalists. On the contrary, old values are transferred into new media platforms, and formats and differences between journalistic cultures remain. This parallels results from previous research that underscores journalism culture as fairly stable where values are changing slowly (Weaver & Willnats, 2012). This raises questions further questions regarding how journalistic values and standards are influenced in the long run – in both east and west – by more relativistic and liquid approaches to questions on verification and truth.

The limitation of the results presented in this chapter is the method. Surveys only capture self-images among journalists, and further research has to go deeper into actual behaviours through ethnographic case studies, including analyses of routines and internal rules for fact-checking on different platforms. In addition, there are political and media systematic aspects that need to be addressed in more detail. According to *Reporters Without Borders'* latest press freedom index, Sweden is ranked 8, Poland 47 and Russia as low as 148.[4] This underscores that values and attitudes concerning verification and truth-telling not necessarily correspond to the structural conditions that are necessary to uphold such values.

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4   The entire 2016 ranking is available online on the following URL: https://rsf.org/en/ ranking

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The Quality of Tweets and the Adoption of Journalistic Norms

Results of a Large-Scale Content Analysis

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Abstract

The article explores how German news organizations and journalists use Twitter in comparison to non-journalistic users. We conducted a content analysis of the communication on the topic of government surveillance. All tweets were analyzed to explore three journalistic norms: (1) impartiality, (2) the gatekeeping role of journalistic outlets, and (3) accountability. The results showed that tweets from journalistic sources differed in aspects of all three analyzed journalistic norms from those of non-journalistic sources, who only in some cases adopted journalistic norms. Media accounts did not greatly diverge from their gatekeeping role, mostly retweeting other media accounts, while spokespersons retweeted citizens, media, and other spokespersons equally. Non-journalistic sources, on the other hand, seem to adhere to aspects of the norm of accountability significantly more than journalists on Twitter.

1   Introduction

Social media offer news organizations an additional channel to distribute content from their news-websites or to interact with readers. However, social media also pose a challenge to the traditional gatekeeping role of journalism, as ordinary users can bypass news organizations as primary information sources and produce and shape information flows. In addition, the practices of sociality and interaction inherent in social media might pose a challenge to the adherence to traditional journalistic norms of truthfulness, impartiality, and accountability (Braun & Gillespie, 2011). Journalists, for example, tend to use the microblogging platform Twitter as an extension of their traditional repertoire by adapting it to fit traditional practices and at least partially transferring their existing norms to the new outlet (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012, p. 30). While the transferal of journalistic norms to journalists' Twitter use has been examined, the question of whether non-journalistic users also adopt journalistic norms in information sharing on Twitter remains largely unexplored. The present study explores how German news organizations and journalists use Twitter in comparison to non-journalistic users. More specifically, it aims to uncover how traditional journalistic norms are transferred to the microblogging platform and in which way they are adopted by both journalists and non-journalists, such as citizens and spokespersons.

2   Theoretical framework

Traditionally, in the public sphere, mass media dominated information flow and opinion formation. They functioned as gatekeepers between spokespersons and citizens. Information passed from spokespersons to the media who in turn passed it on to citizens. Citizens for the most part were passive receivers, instead of active producers of content. The Internet has led to changes in the public sphere as it allows for easier participation of a broader population in public discourse. It also facilitates interaction and creates more transparency. The internet and in particular social media have changed the structure of the public sphere and challenged the traditional gatekeeping role of mass media. They allow users from the general public or spokespersons of companies, political parties and non-profits, for example, to bypass journalism as a gatekeeper and primary information source and not only passively receive but also produce information and shape information flows (Neuberger, 2009).

The introduction of new communication platforms has also altered the ways in which journalists conduct their daily work. Social media in general (Gulyas, 2013;

Neuberger, Langenohl & Nuernbergk, 2014) and the microblogging site Twitter in particular (Artwick, 2013; Kim et al., 2015) introduced novel possibilities for reporting (Reis Mourão, 2015; Vis, 2013), research, sourcing, fact-checking (Coddington, Molyneux, & Lawrence, 2014), user interaction, and audience monitoring. Journalists have voiced concerns about the unchecked use of information provided by social media users, as they find the uptake of information from unverified sources difficult to reconcile with processes of information gathering and verification in traditional journalistic work (Hermida, 2010, p. 300). However, while providing journalists with these new possibilities, the practices of sociality and interaction inherent in social media also pose a possible challenge to traditional journalistic conduct and the adherence to traditional journalistic norms such as truthfulness, impartiality, or accountability (Hermida, 2013, pp. 301–304).

Studies of the use of social media sites, specifically the microblogging platform Twitter, have found that journalists tend to use them as an extension of their traditional repertoire by adopting the platform but adapting it to fit their traditional practices. Rather than allowing social media to alter news production, journalists tend to transfer their existing norms to the new outlet (Lasorsa et al., 2012, p. 21). Lasorsa and colleagues, for example, found that when using Twitter, journalists diverged from their traditional role of impartial information provider by voicing personal opinions, but only on few occasions were willing to share their gatekeeping role by retweeting or linking to non-journalistic sources.

3 Research questions

The present study[1] builds on this work to explore how German news organizations and journalists use Twitter and extends it by exploring whether other users, such as spokespersons and citizens, also adopt journalistic practices in their communication on Twitter. In order to do so, we explored the Twitter communication of media, spokespersons, and citizens in order to see how German news organizations and journalists use Twitter in comparison to non-journalistic users. Specifically, we were interested in how journalists transfer traditional journalistic norms to Twitter and how non-journalists, such as citizens and spokespersons, adopt these traditional journalistic norms in their use of the microblogging site Twitter. Finally, we also wanted to know whether journalistic sources share their gatekeeping role on Twitter.

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1   This study was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, NE811/3–2).

- RQ1: Do journalists transfer traditional journalistic norms of impartiality and accountability to Twitter?
- RQ2: Do non-journalists, such as citizens and spokespersons, adopt journalistic norms in their use of Twitter?
- RQ3: Do journalistic sources share their gatekeeping role on Twitter?

4   Data collection and method

In order to answer our research questions, we conducted a large-scale monitoring of Twitter in which all German-language tweets containing one of our predefined 52 search terms related to the topic "data protection" were collected for the month of September 2014 by using Twitter's Search API. Using a list of search terms is a more reliable form of data collection on Twitter than just using hashtags. For data collection, we used the self-developed Java program SMART (Social Media Analytics Reporting Tool). This tool has proven its ability for reliable data tracking in many other studies (e.g. Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Stieglitz et al., 2017). The initial dataset contained 107,196 messages. We used word-analysis to extract more specific topics within the datasets and chose the one with the highest number of tweets for analysis, which we defined as communication concerning events and opinions about government surveillance. The analysis was conducted using Word-stat, a content analysis and text mining program that supports automatic topic extraction and hierarchical clustering. We extracted 27,171 tweets on government surveillance, using word analysis in Wordstat.

To gain a deeper understanding of journalistic norms in social media communication, we coded the material manually. This detailed content analysis focused on a short time-period consisting of all tweets, which were published in the second week of September 2014 (8th –14th September 2014). The initial dataset contained 9,226 tweets. However, almost one third of these tweets (28 percent) were excluded because the messages were generated by automated accounts or were not relevant to the topic. The final dataset for analysis consisted of 6,624 tweets.

All tweets were coded for user type of the account and the accounts mentioned or retweeted (media, spokesperson, or citizen). This allowed us to situate the Twitter use of news-organizations and journalists in a broader context. Furthermore, all tweets were analyzed to explore three journalistic norms: (1) impartiality, (2) the gatekeeping role of journalistic outlets, and (3) accountability. *Impartiality* was explored through the use of formal message tone (formal / informal), sharing the *gatekeeping role* was defined as retweeting users other than media (citizens, spokespersons) (Lasorsa et al., 2012; Singer, 2005), and *accountability* was

explored through the inclusion of source mentions and links to non-journalistic sources (Lasorsa et al., 2012; Singer, 2005). The data was coded by six coders, whose intercoder reliability was tested on a subset of 100 tweets and was satisfactory (Krippendorff's alpha ≥ .70) for all relevant variables except for message tone (alpha = .60). Therefore, the results for message tone indicating impartiality need to be interpreted with some precaution.

5   Results

By far the most tweets in our sample (n=6,624) came from citizens, whose tweets made up 86 percent (5,694 tweets) of the total number of messages. Spokespersons contributed 9 percent (617 tweets) and media accounts 5 percent (313 tweets) of the total messages.

In RQ1, we asked how journalists transfer traditional journalistic norms of impartiality and accountability to Twitter and in RQ2 we asked how non-journalists, such as citizens and spokespersons, adopt journalistic norms in their use of Twitter. We looked at the use of a formal or informal message tone to indicate the *impartiality* of the message in the original tweets of the three actor types. Retweets were excluded in this analysis. 2,327 original tweets from citizens, 374 original tweets from spokespersons, and 245 original tweets from media accounts were analyzed.[2] An informal tone was characterized by the use of irony, sarcasm, or the inclusion of attacks on people or making fun of people. In addition, words indicating strong emotions, normally not found in journalistic texts, indicated an informal tone. We used chi-square tests to compare the three groups and found significant differences between user types ($\chi2(2$, n= 2,946) = 136,573, p < .001). Unsurprisingly, media accounts used a formal tone in 93 percent of their tweets. Spokespersons were similar, using an informal tone in only 11 percent of their original messages. One third of the messages of citizens (33 percent), however, displayed an informal tone.

In order to determine adherence to the journalistic norm of *accountability*, we looked at the inclusion of *source mentions* in the original tweets of journalistic and non-journalistic users. Interestingly, significant differences were evident ($\chi2(2$, n= 2,946) = 45.08, p < .001). An explicit reference to an information source was included in only 9 percent of media tweets in comparison to almost a quarter (24 percent) of spokespersons original messages. Citizens, on the other hand, included sources in only 12 percent of their tweets. This is interesting as non-journalistic

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2   One media tweet and one spokesperson tweet were not included in the analysis due to missing codes.

sources, such as non-profits or political parties, seem to adhere to this indicator of the norm of accountability significantly more often than journalistic sources on Twitter. A possible explanation could be the credibility inherently attributed to journalistic sources, which non-journalistic users might be lacking. These users might possibly adhere more strongly to journalistic norms such as accountability through source inclusion to raise the credibility of the information they present.

Following Singer (2005) and Lasorsa et al. (2012), we looked at the inclusion of *links to non-journalistic sources* as an indicator of accountability. The inclusion of such links, which may, for example, lead to the websites of e.g. non-profit organizations or political parties, could indicate that the information presented did not need to be taken at face value but that it could be verified by clicking on the link. In total, 95 percent of original tweets from media accounts included links (n=246). Similarly, 91 percent of spokespersons tweets (n=375) included links, whereas only two thirds (66 percent, n=2,327) of tweets from the general public included links to other websites. The following results relate only to those tweets which included links. Again, significant differences were evident between user types ($\chi2(12, n= 2,122) = 106,73, p < .001$). Interestingly, media accounts included links to sources other than media only in 5 percent (n=232) of their original tweets that contained links. This is far less than the 25 percent that Lasorsa et al. (2012) found in their study. 95 percent of media tweets linked to a media website. Citizens (n=1,545) included links to citizen websites such as blogs (9 percent), spokespersons (7 percent) or sharing sites such as Twitter or Facebook (7 percent). Spokespersons (n=345) linked to spokesperson accounts in 13 percent of their tweets containing links, but did not include links to citizens (2 percent) or sharing sites (2 percent) often. Thus, all user types included links to media sources in the majority of their tweets. This may indicate that media still hold the highest source credibility and although other sources can be linked to, the majority of users choose to link to media websites to corroborate the information they post. Furthermore, 69 percent of the links included by media accounts lead back to their own website, indicating that media do not use Twitter as an additional novel communication channel, but rather as an advertising channel with which to distribute and draw attention to their own content. The results again diverge from Lasorsa et al. (2012), who found that half of the media links led back to their own website, with an additional quarter leading to other media sites (p. 28). Contrary to media accounts, the links from citizens (3 percent) and spokespersons (6 percent) rarely linked back to their own websites.

Finally, similar to Lasorsa et al. (2012) we looked at whether journalists and media outlets were willing to *share their gatekeeping role* with non-journalist users by retweeting them (RQ3). A chi-square test showed significant differences in retweeting practices between the three groups ($\chi2(8, n= 3,674) = 40,09, p < .001$).

Interestingly, retweets constituted only one fifths (21 percent, n=313) of the total messages of media accounts, whereas almost two fifths (39 percent, n=617) of spokespersons' messages and close to three fifth (59 percent, n=5,694) of citizens messages were retweets. The results indicate a greater willingness of journalistic sources to share their gatekeeping role with non-journalists than found by Lasorsa et al. (2012), who found that 15 percent of the messages they analyzed were retweets of non-journalists (p. 29). In our analysis, about one third of the retweets from journalistic accounts (n=67) were of citizens (18 percent) or spokespersons (16 percent). 61 percent were from other media outlets. Nuernbergk (2016) found in a network analysis that 74 percent of retweets, which political journalists in Germany tweeted, contained messages from media (p. 875).

Interestingly, while spokespersons (n=240) have fairly balanced retweeting practices, retweeting citizens (30 percent), spokespersons (33 percent), and media (35 percent) in equal amounts, citizens (n=3,367) tend to retweet media accounts (41 percent) more often than other user types (spokespersons: 20 percent, citizens: 37 percent), possibly indicating the media's role as credible information source even in the new communication environment.

6 Discussion

In this study, we wanted to find out how German news organizations and journalists use Twitter in comparison to non-journalistic users. We were interested in how journalists transfer traditional journalistic norms of impartiality and accountability to Twitter and whether and how non-journalists, such as citizens and spokespersons, adopt journalistic norms in their use of Twitter. Furthermore, we were interested in whether journalistic sources share their gatekeeping role on Twitter by retweeting non-journalistic users.

Chi-square tests conducted for the topic of government surveillance showed that tweets from journalistic sources differed in aspects of all three analyzed journalistic norms from those of non-journalistic sources, who only in some cases adopt journalistic norms. Media accounts did not greatly diverge from their gatekeeping role, mostly retweeting other media accounts, while spokespersons retweeted citizens, media, and other spokespersons equally. Non-journalistic sources, on the other hand, seem to adhere to aspects of the norm of accountability significantly more than journalists on Twitter. An explicit reference to an information source was included in only 9 percent of media tweets (n=245) in comparison to 24 percent of spokespersons (n=374).

Our results indicate that in general journalists and media accounts keep to their traditional role and use Twitter more as an extension of their traditional websites rather than to embrace the sociability practices of social media. When it comes to journalistic norms, media accounts in most cases use a formal message tone, which can be interpreted as an indicator of impartiality. However, the inclusion of source mentions or links to non-journalistic websites is rare. Interestingly other user types, most notably spokespersons include sources and links to non-journalistic sources in their tweets. This could possibly indicate that the users are attempting to emulate journalistic norms in order to heighten the credibility of their messages. Finally, we did find that media accounts were willing to share their gatekeeping role by retweeting other users, which can be seen as an indicator of embracing to some extent the sociality practices of social media.

The present study has several limitations. We only studied a single issue, which may have specific characteristics. And we explored only one social media platform. In further analyses, detailed analyses of the users retweeted by media accounts might provide further insights into the sharing of their gatekeeper role and show whether they give equal opportunity to all types of users or possibly prefer verified elite users such as politicians or celebrities.

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Part II

Impacts on Trust

Media Trust and Media Use

Mario Schranz, Jörg Schneider & Mark Eisenegger

Abstract

This article uses survey data on media usage and media trust in 2016 for 13 selected countries to apply a regression analysis to examine how strongly media use affects trust in the media. In a second step we analyzed the effects from trust / distrust for important parameters of the media industry (e.g willingness to pay, advertising acceptance). It is shown that news consumption generally promotes trust in the media systems. Further it became clearly apparent that consumption of public broadcasting as well as of conventional quality services such as the subscription press significantly strengthens trust in the media system. Therefore, it must be a key concern of the industry to strengthen trust in the media, because intact media trust promotes not only a willingness to pay for news but also the acceptance of advertising.

1 Introduction

In a democratic society, it is important that people can trust the media. After all, the media form part of the indispensable information and communications infrastructure of a society. The media in general, and the information media in particular, are central to our idea of how a society is constituted, what its major problems are, and what diverse agents and opinions are available to address these problems. If we no longer trust the media and turn away from them, we lose our bearings to a

significant degree. And if we no longer trust the media, our trust in reasoned political decision-making is also lost and our willingness to accept political decisions declines (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). Finally, the question of trust is also of outstanding importance for the media industry itself. A product that is not trusted does not sell well. An industry that is regarded with distrust is not an attractive employer. At present, however, the public debate is characterized by a climate of distrust. The discussions about the "lying press" ("Lügenpresse"), "mainstream media" and "fake news" are merely the most recent expression of this trend. But is this conclusion really true? And what factors can be used to explain these differences in media trust? In this article, we will use survey data on media usage and media trust in 2016 carried out annually by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in Oxford to apply a regression analysis for 13 selected countries to examine how strongly various factors affect trust in the media. The focus will initially be on media use. What influence does media consumption have on whether someone trusts the media or not? In the first section, we will show how media trust is constituted in various countries and will discuss which factors are used in research literature designed to explain media trust. In the second section, the structure of the empirical study will be presented. In the third section, the results will be discussed. It will be shown which factors affect media trust, and how strongly they do so. Moreover, the discussion will also cover the consequences of media trust for the media industry. In the concluding section, the results will be briefly summarized and their implications formulated.

2   Media trust

The research aspects relating to media trust will initially be briefly explained. It will be shown which factors in research are seen as central predictors for media trust. In a second step, more recent empirical studies are used to describe the media-trust situation in various countries. This will show just how marked trust in the Swiss media is in comparison with other countries. Finally, a central aspect in the research on media trust will be further taken up and treated in depth, namely media utilization. The intensity of utilization of the information media will be presented as a key parameter for media-system trust and it will be shown how the countries examined in this study differ in this respect.

2.1   Media trust in an international comparison

What is the current situation as regards trust in the media? Is the skeptical attitude which suggests that trust is increasingly declining really justified? Estimates vary. Thus the periodically recorded Eurobarometer for the European countries records varying levels of media trust. In Germany, the number of people who tend to distrust the media rose by four percentage points to 49 % (2015) as against the previous year (Otto & Köhler, 2016). This study showed that distrust of radio (37 %) and TV (43 %) is lower in Germany than distrust of the press. Despite this negative development, however, the figures also show that trust in the media used to be even lower at one time. The 2015 study makes a further differentiation: a high degree of distrust is particularly apparent among the younger population aged between 25 and 34 years. The study also confirms that distrust in politics and the media go hand in hand. The study by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU 2016) entitled "Trust in media 2016", which is also based on the Eurobarometer data, additionally stresses the difference in media trust with respect to various media categories. Its analysis shows that the lowest level of distrust refers to radio (only 36 % tend not to trust this medium), followed by TV (47 %) and the press (50 %). The highest level of distrust, at 55 %, refers to the social networks. The study shows that the highest level of trust (especially in TV and radio) is found in the Nordic countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The annual Reuters Digital News Report, which measures key aspects of information-media utilization in 38 countries, also has something to say about media trust. The analysis stresses the large differences between countries as well as the differences between the various media categories. Thus the level of trust in the news media is constantly high in the north European and Scandinavian countries. For example, 62 % of people in Finland trust the media. In contrast, the level of trust is lower in central, southern and eastern European countries. No more than 23 % of people in Greece trust the media. The trust values in Germany (50 %), Switzerland (46 %) and Austria (45 %) are still relatively high. The study sees political polarization as an important explanatory factor for these differences. Hence trust in the media tends to be lower in strongly polarized countries such as the USA, Italy and Hungary. An increase in media trust in Switzerland is also shown by the security study carried out annually by the Military Academy of ETH Zurich. Even though the trust values for other institutions such as the police, justice and government may be higher, the trust shown by Swiss citizens in the media was never as high in the last ten years as in 2017 (Szvirscev Tresch et al., 2017). However, the most recent edition of the Edelman Trust Barometer (Edelman, 2017), which measures trust in various institutions worldwide, shows a significant dip in media trust as against the previous year, recording a sig-

nificant drop in the relevant levels. After having risen last year, the level of trust in the media reached an all-time low in 2017. Over the longer term, a declining level of trust in the traditional media has been recorded since 2012.

2.2   Factors affecting media trust

Even if these usually highly descriptive studies yield important insights into the development of trust in key social institutions in the course of history, they permit only limited comparability in view of the differences in questionnaire design. Research in this field is also confronted by fundamental difficulties because respondents associate very different aspects with media trust. Thus a more recent study shows that a higher level of media trust is recorded if the questions address trust in quite specific media titles. However, trust values decline when questions are asked quite generally about "the media" (Daniller et al., 2017). In addition, respondents have greater trust in those media that they actually consume and which support their own world. In view of the diverging results of media-trust studies, the research must more effectively differentiate the relevant dimensions of media trust (Kohring, 2004; Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Nevertheless, it is important to find those explanatory factors which can better explain the fluctuations in media trust. Probably the most systematic and comprehensive study of the conceptualization of media trust was presented by (Tsfati & Ariely, 2013). They used the World Value Survey of 44 countries to determine the predictors of media trust at different levels of abstraction. They also introduced micro and macro-level effects to explain the different expressions of trust in the media.

The term micro-level effects covers socio-demographic factors (gender, age, education and income), specific attitudes (such as political views, basic social values) and media utilization behavior (such as the intensity of media use, preferences for various media categories) of the individual respondents. However, the findings relating to the socio-demographic factors in particular are often not unequivocal. Thus some studies show a lower level of media trust among women (Livio & Cohen, 2016). Others record just the opposite (Jones, 2004). The effect of age cannot be unequivocally answered either. Thus data for Germany show that younger age cohorts currently have a more critical attitude to the media, whereas in the past this distrust tended to be more pronounced among older age groups. Various studies have stressed the ways in which political views impact trust in the media: they indicate that trust in politics and government are closely associated with trust in the media. People who tend to trust the key institutions of a democratic society also tend to trust the (information) media, so citizens who trust politics also tend

to trust the media and vice-versa (Lee, 2010). Research operating principally with U.S. data has also shown a relationship between the political views of individuals and media trust. It indicates that citizens with conservative views tend rather to distrust the media. Or in general, people with strong ideological attitudes at the political margins of society tend to trust the media less (Yamamoto, Lee & Ran, 2014). This agrees with the current criticism of the media system by right-wing populist parties and movements in many European countries (catch word: "lying press"/ "Lügenpresse"). However, citizens with clearly left-wing to radical left views also tend to have less trust in the media system.

Media use is another important aspect that allows us to explain trust in the media. It appears that people who regularly consume news media trust the media more than those who do not do so (Kiousis, 2001; Tsfati & Capella, 2003). Habitual, ritualized news consumption in particular has a positive effect on media trust. In particular, sociological trust research has emphasized the fact that trust in social relations and social situations is established. And that is why everyday routines play an important role in building trust (Frederiksen, 2014; Misztal, 1996). Whatever we do repeatedly, for instance daily, has a positive impact on our views regarding the media and promotes media trust. The more that people watch TV, click onto news websites or read newspapers, the more strongly do they trust the media (Tsfati & Ariely, 2013). Mainstream news exposure, i.e. contact with professional news offerings, in particular, promotes media trust. In contrast to this, it can be assumed that the consumption of alternative media (in contradistinction to the mainstream media) tends to have a negative impact on media trust. This pattern reveals strong parallels to a respondent's ideological orientation. Those who position themselves to the right or left of the political spectrum also tend to consume alternatives to mainstream journalism more frequently or else generally have less trust in the conventional media. However, current research still shows little inclination to differentiate this parameter. It would be important to know what effect diverse media categories (such as public broadcasting, the tabloid media, the commuter press) have on media trust. This will be the focus of our study, whose aim is to supply added value in this respect.

In connection with the advance of digitalization, above all the influence of the new media on media trust has recently been examined. Many studies show that trust in the conventional media is greater than in the new media (Latzer, Büchi & Just, 2014; Zhou et al., 2014; Tsfati, 2010; Tsfati & Capella, 2003). Scientific studies have shown that trust in the online media, but also in the social networks, is mostly not as high. Thus Tsfati & Ariely (2013) concluded in their country-comparative study that the consumption of online media shows a negative correlation with media trust. And Kiousis (2001) concludes in a widely quoted study that trust

in newspapers is higher than in TV and online news. However, more recent studies also show opposite effects.

Primary experience and interpersonal communications represent important intervening variables in media consumption. The effects resulting from media utilization can be completely disrupted by this aspect. Our direct experience of an event has a strong impact on our trust in journalists. If the reporting about an event diverges from our own experience of it, divergent attitudes to the media can quickly arise. Interpersonal exchanges can also impact our attitude to the media. The decisive factors here are the network in which a user operates and what media image circulates in them. In this connection, the role played by image and reputation is also of crucial significance. We often judge not only the media, but also other organizations on the basis of hearsay, are influenced by the judgments of friends and acquaintances or by the reporting of other media (e.g. Schweiger, 2000).

Macro-level effects are usually understood to be systemic factors impacting media trust at the aggregate level of states or specific country clusters. This aspect fundamentally concerns cultural and institutional factors that affect media trust in a specific country. Economic data such as business trends, unemployment rates and inflation are then considered in the analysis just as much as the general value patterns of a society (e.g. the significance of postmodern attitudes). The specific features of the media system, such as the dominant media-mix of the population, the conditions imposed by media regulation and the degree of mutual dependence between the political and media systems represent an important aspect in this context. For instance, do media systems providing a strong public broadcasting service, such as we see in the central European and Nordic countries, promote media trust or not? And what about media systems in which newspaper consumption or TV continue to play an important role? These factors refer to the key structures and contents of various media systems, to ownership relationships and media diversity, and can explain media trust in a specific country in addition to the micro-aspects. In the following treatment, the micro- and macro-effects which are discussed in the research programs will be modeled for this study.

3   An empirical angle: causes and impacts of media-system trust

In the following treatment, the empirical study of selected countries will be discussed. The data basis and key study categories will initially be examined. The key values of the regression analysis applied here will then be discussed and the empirical findings presented.

3.1   Media use as a key explanatory parameter for media trust

The survey data of the Digital News Report of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism for 2016 were used to analyze media trust at the micro-level of media users and at the macro-level of country-specific media systems. The report is based on representative online surveys of media utilization in 26 countries. Respondents were asked to report their utilization of the information media in detail for both conventional and online media. In addition, they were asked about specific topics such as media trust and their willingness to pay for media services. For this analysis, the data from 13 countries with 20'811 respondents was evaluated. The aim of the country selection was to be able to compare media systems that were as different from each other as possible. We were guided in this procedure by recent insights from comparative research into media systems (Brüggemann et al. 2014; Blum 2014). In each case, four media system categories in three or four countries respectively were examined.

- *Central* media system type: Switzerland, Austria, UK and Germany. These countries are characterized particularly by the strong position of public broadcasting, marked regulation of media ownership and the subordinate role of press promotion.
- *Northern* media system type: Norway, Sweden and Denmark represent the Nordic countries combined in the *northern* type: In addition to the strong position of public broadcasting, they typically exhibit a stronger promotion of the press.
- *Southern* media system type: Italy, Spain and France represent the *southern* type in which both public broadcasting and the press generally play a less important role, but exhibit a marked political parallelism of the media.
- *Western* media system type: This type refers to countries with a decidedly liberal media system: they are represented here by the USA, Ireland and Belgium.

Media utilization represents another key explanatory factor for media trust in this study. We examined the significance of various media categories (conventional channels vs. the new media) and types (significance of public broadcasting and the free media widespread in parts of Europe) in news-media utilization. The utilization data are based on subjective estimates by the respondents ("I have used this service in the last week"). The outreach values of the various media categories are aggregated from this data. One way of determining the relative importance of public broadcasting in each country was to categorize the news channels of the key providers (e.g. *SRG SSR* for Switzerland, *ARD* and *ZDF* for Germany). Studies of public broadcasting in Europe were used as a basis for assigning individual

news titles to the category of "public broadcasting" (Puppis & Schweitzer, 2015; Grossenbacher, Glaab-Seuken & Baumgärtner, 2015; Künzler et al., 2015). The effects of inward broadcasting originating from abroad were also included, i.e. the outreach of public broadcasting involves the utilization of both national and foreign broadcasters. For Switzerland for example, the utilization of public German broadcasters such as *ARD* and *ZDF* was also recorded. This same assignment logic was applied to the category of the free and commuter media. In addition to these explanatory variables, control variables were used in the model (age, gender and political persuasion). The dependent variable of "media system trust" was formed as the index from five trust items included in the survey: general trust in the news, trust in media organizations and in journalists, an assessment of the political and economic independence of the media. The trust index covers a scale from 1 (minimal trust) to 5 (maximal trust).

3.2   News media use and media-system trust

Before examining the various effects of media-system trust in a statistical model in parallel in the next section, we will look at two key aspects of information-media utilization in the various countries. In the following treatment, the significance of public broadcasting and the press – with special consideration of the free media – will be described for the selected countries and media systems.

Public broadcasting has a particularly high importance in the central European and Nordic countries in terms of utilization intensity (cf. Figure 1). In the southern and western media systems, the utilization level is significantly lower. In the group of countries assigned to the central media system, Switzerland and Austria are leaders in this respect: in Switzerland, these channels reach almost 80 % of the respondents via conventional broadcasting, and almost 50 % of them via the online route. Only in Austria are these values higher: here over 80 % of the respondents stated that they obtained their information from *ORF* channels in the conventional way. These two countries are followed by the UK (strong position of the *BBC,* especially in the online sector) and Germany (*ARD/ZDF*), where online utilization of public broadcasting in particular is significantly lower. The Nordic media systems also show similarly high reception figures as the first group. Especially in Denmark *(Danmark Radio, TV2)* and Sweden *(Sveriges Television, Sveriges Radio),* the public broadcasting channels also reach high reception figures. They are also of great importance in Norway *(NR – Norsk Rikskringkasting),* where they have a similarly strong position to the UK. Public broadcasting reaches significantly fewer people in the southern and western media systems, with the liberal

group showing relatively large differences between the various countries. In the southern European countries, its importance is greatest in Italy *(Rai)*, followed by Spain *(RTVE – Radiotelevision Espanola: TVE and RNE)* and France *(France Télévisions, Radio France)*. Above all in Spain and France, the online outreach is, compared to Germany, significantly lower than for conventional utilization. The countries of the liberal system differ quite strongly in this respect. Whereas the public service in Ireland *(RTE, TG4, BBC)* plays a relatively major role, and is also strongly affected by diffusion effects from the *BBC*, and Belgium *(VRT, RTBF)* with its bilingual broadcasters holds a middle position, the public broadcasting service in the USA *(PBS, NPR)* has by far the least outreach.

	Use of Public Service Broacaster (Traditional)	Use of Public Service Broacaster (Online)
Media System "Central"	*43.2*	*45.6*
Austria	84.6	58.1
Switzerland	77	47.4
UK	66.5	51.9
Germany	64.8	25
Media System "Northern"	*71.8*	*46.1*
Denmark	85.5	53.6
Sweden	67.5	36.3
Norway	62.3	48.3
Media System "Southern"	*50.8*	*24.8*
Italy	60	34.4
Spain	48.7	22.9
France	43.9	17.2
Media System "Western"	*43.8*	*32.6*
Ireland	67.2	51.7
Belgium	54.2	36.2
US	10	9.9

Figure 1   *Usage of public broadcasting compared across countries.*

The figure shows the comparative proportion of respondents from 13 countries who state having used a Public Service broadcaster in the last week. The use of tradtional channels (TV and radio) is shown separately from the online channels. (data basis: Reuters Digital News Report 2016; n = 20 811). Example: In Denmark, the TV and radio offerings of the public broadcasting service are used most: 86 % tune regularly into a conventional channel.

As regards the utilization of daily and weekly newspapers, both conventional and online, there are few differences between the various media systems (cf. Fig-

ure 2). However, relatively large differences are apparent between the different countries. Austria and Switzerland are at the very top as regards the utilization of printed newspapers: daily and weekly newspapers attain absolute outreach values of above 80 % there. The online consumption of daily and weekly newspapers is also very pronounced. In contrast, the press has significantly lesser importance in countries such as France, the USA or Germany, where the consumption of TV news is much more marked.

	Use of Newspapers (Dailies / Weeklies)	Use of Newssites (Dailies / Weeklies)	Use of free media / commuter media (On- and Offline)
Media System "Central"	*69.4*	*64*	*28.6*
Austria	81.7	73.5	31.4
Switzerland	82.1	84	71.5
UK	58.3	45.8	11.6
Germany	55.6	52.9	0
Media System "Northern"	*67.3*	*82*	*21*
Denmark	61.5	76.4	41.4
Sweden	61.1	84.2	21.5
Norway	79.3	85.5	0
Media System "Southern"	*67*	*63.2*	*23.2*
Italy	72	57.9	10.7
Spain	73.4	75.1	28.7
France	55.5	56.5	30.4
Media System "Western"	*57.1*	*66.3*	*8.7*
Ireland	67.6	66.6	0
Belgium	58.9	84.1	15.6
US	44.8	48.2	10.4

Figure 2   *Press usage compared across countries.*

The figure shows the comparative proportion of respondents from 13 countries who state having used daily and weekly newspapers in the last week for information purposes (differentiated into press and online). (data basis: Reuters Digital News Report 2016; n = 20 811). Example: In Norway, the largest number of people regularly use the online offerings of the daily and weekly newspapers (86 %).

However, differences can be seen with respect to the position of the free and commuter media in the various countries. With an outreach of significantly above 60 % (utilization in the last week), the position of the commuter media such as *20 Minuten* or *Blick am Abend* in Switzerland is extremely dominant. The commuter media in online and offline mode in Denmark *(MetroXPress)*, Austria *(Österreich* and *Heute)*, France *(20 minutes)* and Spain *(20 minutos)* are less popular than in Switzerland – but still significant in an international comparison. They have an outreach of approximately 30 %.

3.3   Empirical findings of the driver model

With the aid of the driver model, the effects of various factors on media-system trust will now be examined. This model is based on an OLS regression for modeling multiple linear effects on the dependent variable of media-system trust. This variable is formed as an index from five questionnaire items on the topic of media trust. These enquire about trust in the news, in the media organization and in the journalists themselves. In addition, two questions are included on the political and economic independence of the media. The potential drivers of media-system trust applied here may be assigned to different explanatory dimensions. They are grouped in blocks and entered sequentially into the model. The first block covers the contextual variables of the macro-level and differentiates between four different media-system types. At the micro-level, the socio-demographic variables of age and gender, the political self-assignment of the respondents and different media utilization variables are examined. The effects of selected media utilization patterns as well as the utilization of specific media types are distinguished here for information purposes. The figure portraying the final driver model with the integration of all explanatory dimensions (cf. Figure 3) shows the B-coefficient as a positive or negative driver of media trust depending on the effect direction. Significant drivers ($p < 0.05$) are shown in the figure with an asterisk. The explanatory power of the model is 0.06 (adjusted R-squared). The reference categories for categorical driver variables are marked: the effects of the other variable categories must be interpreted with respect to this comparison category.

		Model	
		B	SE
Media Systems	Central	Reference	
	Western	0.004	0.015
	Northern	0.012	0.015
	Southern	-0.154 ***	0.015
Gender	Male	Reference	
	Female	0.079 ***	0.011
Age	"Older - 50 and above"	Reference	
	"Middle-aged" - 30 to 49	0.064 ***	0.012
	"Young" - 15 to 29	-0.350 *	0.015
Political Persuasion	No political persuasion	Reference	
	In the middle	0.025	0.016
	To the left	-0.125 ***	0.018
	To the right	-0.232 ***	0.019
Media Usage	Use of Public Service Broadcaster (traditional / Online)	0.118 ***	0.014
	Use of free commuter media (traditional / Online)	0.042 **	0.014
	Online: use of free media only	0.013	0.014
	Traditional: use of free media only	-0.100 ***	0.016
	Use of social media	-0.100 ***	0.011
Traditional Main Source	Other media type	Reference	
	Public Service Broadcaster	0.031 **	0.013
	Free commuter media	-0.059	0.034
	No traditional main source - not a relevant news channel	-0.303 ***	0.019
Online Main Source	Other media typen	Reference	
	Public Service Broadcaster	0.079 ***	0.019
	Digital brand - Pure player	-0.016	0.017
	Free commuter media	0.057	0.037
	No main source - online is not a relevant news channel	-0.057 ***	0.015
	Constant	2.932	0.028
	R²	0.057	
	Adjusted R²	0.056	

Dependent variable: Media trust

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

Figure 3 *Driver model of media-system trust*

Clearly definable drivers can be seen across all 13 comparison countries at the macro-level (level of the media systems and countries) and at the micro-level (level of the individual users: socio-demographics, political self-assignment as well as

media utilization), which have a significant effect on a user's trust in the media system. The different media systems and countries constitute an important explanatory factor. Clearly significant negative effects are shown for the countries of the southern media type. In countries such as Spain, Italy and France, distrust of the media is accordingly greater than elsewhere. In contrast to this, the media enjoy a higher degree of trust in the northern European countries such as Norway and Denmark. However, this effect is not significant either.

At the level of single individuals, we see the following effects: women express trust in the media system more strongly than men. The younger the respondents, the greater the level of distrust. However, increasing age shows no linear effect on the level of trust. Middle-aged people (between 30 and 49 years of age) have a significantly higher level of trust in the media system, whereas trust declines again among the oldest age group (above the age of 50). The different effects we have seen at the macro-level with reference to the media systems and the country-specific framework conditions correspond at the micro-level to the political self-assignment of the respondents. So just as political polarization at system level has a negative impact on media-system trust, we see a similar effect for political polarization at the individual level. After all, trust in the media system depends strongly on where the respondents position themselves along the political spectrum. The more strongly they see themselves positioned at the political margins and sympathize with the corresponding parties on the wings, the higher is their level of distrust. Right-wingers distrust the news and news producers as well as the political and economic independence of the media even more strongly than left-wingers. However, individual media utilization is the really decisive indicator of media-system trust. This already becomes apparent when we ask which media a respondent has used "last week". The utilization of public broadcasting (combining online and online utilization) has a significantly positive effect on trust in the media system across all countries. Free and commuter newspapers also contribute to a small extent to this trust, but only as long as they are not used in isolation, but in combination with other information media (e.g. subscriber newspapers, public broadcasting). In contrast, when free and commuter newspapers are the sole information source, this has a negative effect on media-system trust. The utilization of social media as a news source also has a clearly negative effect on media-system trust. We may assume that this is because the normative and regulatory specifications as to what can and should be broadcast on the social media websites are less stringent than for the professional information media. The picture of the effect of media utilization on media-system trust becomes complete when we look not only at the media that respondents have used "last week", but examine which media type is their main source of news, looking separately at the conventional media and

the online sector. This finding is equally clear: when public broadcasting chan-
nels are the main source of news, media-system trust is significantly increased. In
contrast, a negative effect on media-system trust can be observed when users can
or will no longer mention any main source of news. If ritualized news utilization
is discontinued and specific identifiable news offerings lose in significance in fa-
vor of "embedded" news streams, then trust is lost. Distrust of the media system
grows particularly strongly when conventional media are no longer relevant as a
news source for the respondents. Conversely, this indicates the continuing great
importance of the conventional media for trust in the media system. In addition
to the promoting effect of public broadcasting, the subscription press has a very
clear stabilizing effect on media-system trust (in the model, the subscription press
is contained in the reference category "other media type" and constitutes its major
part). It can be seen that this stabilizing effect of the conventional press cannot be
transferred to the commuter newspapers. If these become the main source of news,
the result is a lower level of media-system trust. The more strongly that low-quality
free offerings become established as the sole central news source without being
embedded in a broad repertoire of diverse information media, the more negative
are the effects on the media-system trust of the users.

3.4 Effects of media-system trust on news interest and willingness to pay

After asking in the above discussion which drivers can best explain trust in the
media, in a second step we analyzed the consequences of intact media-system
trust for target parameters of financial relevance to the media. For this purpose,
the relationships of media-system trust with various target variables such as news
interest, willingness to pay and advertising acceptance were analyzed by means
of correlations. Significant relationships ($p < 0.05$) are shown on the basis of the
Pearson correlation coefficient (cf. Figure 4). The results show a clear picture: trust
in the media system promotes a fundamental interest in news. There is greater
demand for journalistic services and in particular for contextualized information
when users trust the media system. It may be supposed that in a complementary
way, low media-system trust leads to greater interest in entertainment, i.e. in of-
ferings which cannot be definitely assigned to information journalism. However,
trust in the media system increases not only interest in news, but also the linkage
to professional news journalism. This is because the higher the media-system trust,
the greater is the willingness to follow the media organization and journalists on
the social media (e.g. via the "likes" of *Facebook* groups) in preference to parties

and politicians, for instance. As already became apparent in the driver model, the utilization of social media as such does not promote media-system trust. But if the social media are used, then media-system trust is an important factor for the decision to obtain information principally from professional news producers there too. Or in other words: the stronger the trust in the media system, the less are users inclined to dispense with journalistic contextualization and critical commentary.

In addition to this fundamental demand for news, media-system trust in particular promotes the awareness that journalism costs something: it must be financed by way of payment or advertising. Respondents with a higher level of trust in the media system generally show a higher willingness to pay for news, i.e. they have tended in the last year to pay for print titles as well as for news content on online platforms. In addition, users with a high level of media-system trust are more willing to accept advertising. This is shown firstly in the fact that these respondents generally express a stronger openness to advertising. They feel less annoyed by advertising inserts and accept advertising in exchange for news. Secondly, people with a higher level of trust in the media system use ad-blockers, i.e. software that can block online advertising, much less frequently.

	Trust index (Scale 1-5)
Interest in news	0.107 ***
Payment for print titles in the last year	0.152 ***
Payment for online content in the last year	0.073 ***
Advertising acceptance	0.158 ***
Active use of ad blockers	-0.106 ***
Willingness to follow media / journalist on Social Networks	0.109 ***

Figure 4 *The effects of media-system trust on financially relevant targets.*

Significant Pearson correlation coefficients (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$) are shown as a measure of the effects of media-system trust (Source: Reuters Digital News Report 2016; the data of all 13 comparison countries were included n = 20 811). Example: Media-system trust correlates with a highly significant value of .158 with openness to advertising, i.e. the higher the media-system trust of the media users, the more receptive they are to advertising.

So trust in the media system is important for the willingness to pay; at the same time, it is clear that even a high level of this trust, as can be observed in Switzerland, cannot ease the difficult financing situation of information journalism. The freebie culture cannot be so easily overcome: over a half of Swiss media consum-

ers already no longer pay anything for their newspapers. The willingness to pay for online news is even lower. No more than 10 % of the respondents stated to have paid for digital news in the past year.

On the whole, the results of the country comparison refute the assertion that can sometimes be heard that the low willingness to pay for these services is due to the fact that public broadcasting funded by subscription, with its extensive online offerings, competes with the news websites of the private press providers. In fact, we see that a media system in which public broadcasting is widely used increases the level of trust in the media system, and this in turn promotes the willingness to pay from which the private media providers also benefit. In such media systems, the basic demand for news journalism increases, and beyond this, both the willingness to pay and to accept advertising in the media are positively impacted.

4   Implications

Our analysis has revealed which factors are decisive for whether people trust the media or not, and what the consequences of this trust are. It was shown that news consumption generally promotes trust in the media systems. At a first level therefore, in order to promote trust in the media, it is important that people consume news regularly and on a broad basis. This conclusion agrees with other studies which have highlighted the importance of mainstream-media consumption for trust in the media. It is consequently in the interest of society and the media industry itself for incentive effects to ensure that the younger age cohorts in particular increase their utilization of professional news offerings. In the first place it is not so critical as to which media formats are used by individual consumers, but rather that a broad range of information media is regularly used at all. And the opposite is equally true: the greater the distance between users and the professional offerings of information journalism, the less frequently are the media used, and these tend to be more one-sided sources of lesser quality (e.g. commuter newspapers), the greater is the distrust of the media. As a result, the willingness to pay suffers particularly.

However, we were able to take this analysis a step further, and above all to examine the effects of media categories and types on media trust. Thus we did not merely examine in a general way what effects the utilization of various media types such as TV, press or online media may have on trust in the media system, but could also show to what extent the consumption of specific media types (public against private media, free media against subscription media) impacts trust in the media. It became clearly apparent that consumption of public broadcasting as

well as of conventional quality services such as the subscription press significantly strengthens trust in the media system. It must consequently be a core concern of the entire media system to maintain the public-rights model as an important factor, especially as private media providers also benefit from it, specifically in the form of a positive influence on willingness to pay for the service. And in contrast it may be said that a more strongly politicized and ideologically charged media landscape has a negative effect on trust in the media. It may be supposed that distrust of the media system also leads to greater distrust of political institutions, as the fundamentals of a rational discourse about political processes and structures are eroded. Not least, however, the consequential effects of media trust specifically on the media industry also show the importance of this topic. It must be a key concern of the industry to strengthen trust in the media, because intact media trust promotes not only a willingness to pay for news but also the acceptance of advertising.

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The Impact of the European Debt Crisis on Trust in the Media

Andreas Köhler & Kim Otto

Abstract

A comparative analysis of Eurobarometer ratings of trust in the media in European states, particularly Greece and Spain, between 2001 and 2016 shows that trust in the press, radio and television is closely linked with trust in the democratic institutions of the government and political parties in the respective countries. The present analysis furthermore investigates whether trust in the abovementioned media also depends on the development of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the states in question. However, evidence of such a link is only present in some countries, namely in those European states most strongly affected by the sovereign debt crisis, especially Greece and Spain. Here, the connection between the GDP development and the trust in press, radio and television is very strong, and particularly so after the onset of the sovereign debt crisis in 2009. In these states, a marked difference in trust in the press, radio and TV before and after the outbreak of the 2009 European debt crisis can be observed. Since the debt crisis, trust in these media has dropped significantly.

1   Introduction and research interest

European citizens' trust in the press, radio and television has fluctuated considerably over the past years, with frequent mention of a 'loss of trust'.
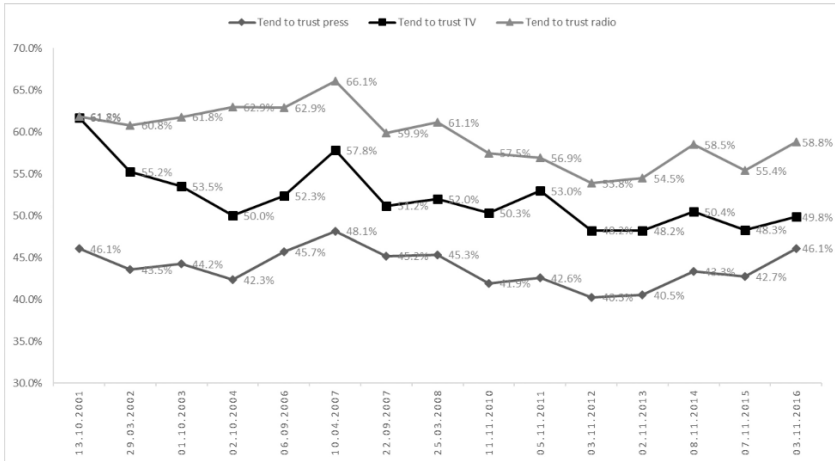
Figure 1   *Trust in the press, radio and TV in the European Union*
Source: Own representation

Looking at the data over a longer period of time, we can see that trust in the press, radio and TV dropped markedly in 2007 and 2009 and has only recovered gradually since 2016. In 2007, 48.1 percent of people in Europe trusted the press; in 2008, 45.3 percent did so, and by 2010 this number had dropped to 41.9 percent.[1] Trust in television has also fallen in the European Union, initially dropping from a high score of 61.8 percent in 2001 to 50 percent in 2004 and rising to reach 57.8 percent in 2007. After this, it fell once more, reaching its lowest rating of 48.2 percent in 2013 and subsequently recovering slightly by 2016. Over this entire period, trust in television is higher than trust in the press. Radio achieves the highest trust ratings. Up until 2007 it consistently scored over 60 percent, falling from its highest rating of 66.1 percent in 2007 to scores below 60 percent from 2010 onwards and reaching its lowest point in 2012 with 53.8 percent. After this, it rose once more, achieving 58.8 percent in 2016.

The survey reveals considerable differences in trust in the press, TV and radio between the individual European countries. Looking at the development of trust in

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1   The results depicted in figure 1 and sketched in the following are based on the Eurobarometer survey that has been carried out on behalf of the European Commission in every EU member state since 2001. The survey asks whether people tend to trust or not trust various institutions, such as the press, radio, TV and political institutions such as government and parliament. In each EU member state, at least 1000 individuals are surveyed in telephone interviews (cf. EU Commission, 2016).

the press, radio and television in the individual states from 2001 onwards, we can see that some display a greater range than others.
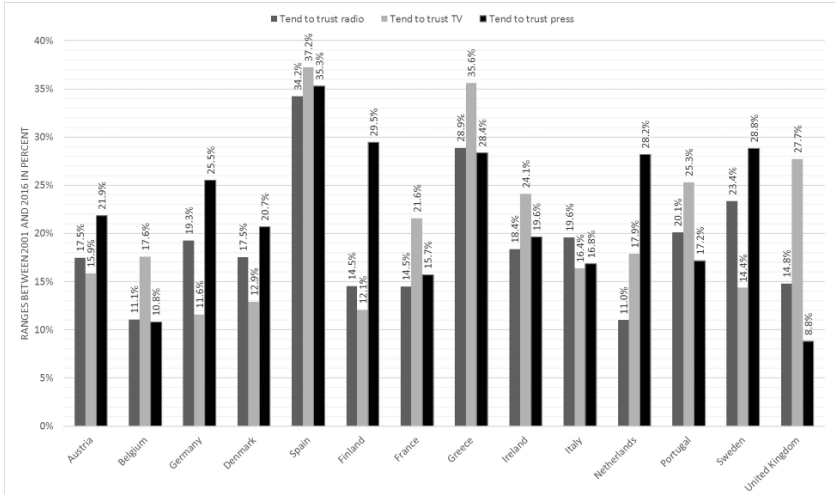

Figure 2   *Ranges of ratings of trust in the press, TV and radio between 2001 and 2016*
Source: Own representation

The difference between the lowest trust in the press, radio and television in the period between 2001 and 2016 and the greatest trust in these media during this period is particularly pronounced in Greece and Spain. For trust in the press, this difference measures 28.4 percentage points in Greece and 35.3 percentage points in Spain. For trust in television, the difference is 35.6 percentage points in Greece and 37.2 percentage points in Spain, and for trust in radio the difference between the highest and lowest score is 28.9 percentage points in Greece and 34.2 percentage points in Spain. In the other EU15 countries, differences are nowhere near as great across all media genres (cf. Figure 2). Accordingly, in Spain and Greece trust in the press, television and radio fluctuates strongly, which is evident in the large range of ratings. This brings us to the question of the cause of these significant fluctuations between 2001 and 2016. Why do these variations occur so strongly in Spain and Greece, while in other countries they scarcely happen all?

The present article will focus on the global financial crisis and the post-2009 European sovereign debt crisis as possible reasons. The European sovereign debt crisis was a direct consequence of the global economic and financial crisis of 2008/2009. To prevent their national economies from collapsing, most EU states in the monetary union implemented debt-financed stimulus programmes to stabilise

their economic development. At the same time, the states were forced to spend billions on bailing out their financially struggling banks. National debt thus increased at a staggering pace in the Eurozone from 2008 onwards. The cost of refinancing both the old and new national debt rose as interest rates increased. Individual Eurozone states came under increasing pressure as their economies stagnated, income from taxation dropped, national budgets became more and more strained and interest rates rose, making the cost of refinancing their state debt ever greater. State investment was reduced and the economies of Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Greece slumped. In the following, survey data will be used to show that these events also had an effect on the trust in the press, radio and television.

2   State of research

This article will first present how trust in the media and political institutions is linked to economic development as a basis for its investigation of the influence of external events – such as the European sovereign debt crisis and its effects on economic growth – on trust in the press, radio and television. To this end, an overview of research to date on media trust and the factors influencing trust in the press, radio and television will be provided.

Communication studies does not often focus upon trust; most research is concerned with the media's credibility. Research in this field originated in the USA and has its roots in social psychology and the persuasion research that reached its apex in the 1950s with Hovland et al.'s (1954) works on source credibility. Here, credibility is understood as a multidimensional construct dependent on several factors, with trustworthiness considered the most important of these factors (also cf. Markham, 1968).

Berlo, Lemert und Mertz (1969) developed scales of source credibility for the dimensions of safety, qualification and dynamism, which have been developed further by various scholars. Following a survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), Gaziano and McGrath (1986) developed scales for the dimensions of credibility and social concerns with 12 and three items respectively, such as distinguishing between fact and opinion, respect for private life and focus on facts. This study shows that the media face a credibility problem and noted that credibility was dropping. Meyer (1988) used a factor analysis of ASNE data to show that two dimensions suffice to measure trust in the media: believability and community orientation.

The comparison of different media in regard to their credibility is based on the Roper survey (1985). Roper was the first to investigate differences between the

respective credibility of TV, radio and the press, showing that between 1959 and 1988, trust in television was markedly higher in the USA than trust in the press and radio. This was attributed to the medium's visual nature. The Roper question was also incorporated into the long-term study on mass communication in Germany (Krupp & Bräunig, 2016). In Germany, too, TV's credibility was higher than that of radio and the press between 1970 and 1995.

Research in the USA focused on the media's credibility from the angle of communication science. In Germany, by contrast, Bentele (1994) and Kohring (2002) employed the concept of trust commonly used in sociology. Here, trust is seen as an important dimension of relationships between the population and political or economic institutions or persons and is based upon credibility. Journalism's working methods are seen as key to trust in journalism. Bentele (1994) regards the media's communicative behaviour as the reason for high or low trust ratings, focusing particularly on their objectivity. Kohring (2002) attributes trust in journalism mainly to trust in its selection of themes, selection of facts, factual correctness and explicit evaluations. A number of further studies focus on how journalists can gain or lose trust through selection and presentation (cf. Vogel et al., 2015; Fast, Müller & Scherr, 2014; Grosser, Wintterlin & Blöbaum, 2016).

The studies produced thus far all take internal factors as their starting points. They identify and describe the influence of journalism's performance on its credibility. However, this does not sufficiently explain the link that the present article assumes exists between trust in the press, radio and TV and external factors.

Other studies see recipients' sociocultural characteristics as a relevant factor (Schenk, 1987; Jäckel, 1999; Norris, 2000). These studies show that recipients' trust in individual media depends on their sociocultural and sociostructural context.

However, these factors are likewise unable to provide a satisfying explanation of the considerable discontinuities observed: social structures do not change so strongly within a single year that over ten percentage points' difference in trust would ensue. And even though journalistic working methods change, this, too, does not happen suddenly and erratically. The influence of individual events, such as crises or, more specifically, economic crises, have not been examined. Besides the influence of media recipients' sociostructural characteristics on the trust they put in the press, radio and television, further studies prove that there are links between this trust and their trust in other institutions.

Tsfati and Ariely (2013, pp. 12–13) show that trust in democracy and politics is a factor influencing trust in the media. They analyse correlations between political interest, media owned or directly controlled by the state, media usage and trust in media in 44 states, using data from the World Value Survey gathered between

2005 and 2008. According to their findings, the extent to which individual media are used has an effect on media trust – indeed, there is a significant connection. There is also a significant connection between a population's attitude to democracy and its trust in media. If the state owns (part of) the radio, trust in the radio falls.

Wolling (2003) proves a connection between the media's credibility and the credibility of political institutions. In a face-to-face survey carried out in June and July 1996, he captured respondents' attitudes towards the credibility of the media and political institutions in Dresden in a representative sample of 426 interviews. He was able to prove the credibility transfer hypothesis as well as a number of other hypotheses. The credibility hypothesis states that a media's credibility 'rubs off' upon the objects that it reports on (cf. Bentele 1993). Trust in political institutions and the evaluation of a governmental system's legitimacy are higher among respondents who also have a greater belief in the media's credibility; there is a connection between the two. The credibility of the media reporting about politics can influence whether political institutions are trusted to a greater or lesser extent.

However, trust in political institutions does not depend only on the performance of actors in the political system. Further studies provide institutional explanations for trust in political institutions, focusing on economic variables.

Thus Alesina and Waciarg (2000) establish that economic indicators, such as the development of GDP, are linked to trust in political institutions. They compare the development of trust in political institutions in 14 OECD states with their economic development following the 1974 oil crisis. They note that the population is less satisfied with the government following an economic crisis and attribute this to political measures reacting to the crisis such as tax hikes or increased spending on the social security.

Zmerli, Newton and Montero (2006) show that the population's general level of satisfaction influences trust in political institutions and their competence in solving problems. The authors analyse a range of sociodemographic factors and individual satisfaction, investigating their influence on satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions in 13 European countries on the basis of the CID (Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy) survey. Individual satisfaction, which in turn is dependent on evaluations of one's own economic situation, impacts upon satisfaction with political institutions and democracy.

Norris (2000) analyses Eurobarometer data from 1970, 1980 and 1999 in the EU5 states, showing that the level of household income significantly affects the use of daily newspapers and television news. The use of daily papers and TV news in turn depends on the trust in these media. Household income is dependent on wage development, inflation and unemployment.

Research to date shows that the trust placed in the media depends on the media's journalistic performance, such as its selection of themes and facts and its truthfulness. External influences have been examined too, such as the transfer of trust from and to political institutions. The link between trust in political institutions and the economic context has also been recognised. However, hitherto research has not considered the economic situation, especially developments in economic growth following a crisis, as a factor influencing trust in the media – even though here, too, research findings suggest that there could be a transfer of trust. The present article aims to close this gap in the research.

3   Theoretical background

The systems theory of Niklas Luhmann is able to provide an explanation of the link between economic conditions and the media that illuminates how trust in the media system is impacted by changes in the economy. Luhmann writes that as a function system (*Funktionssystem*), the public sphere fulfils a function both for society as a whole and for each individual subsystem. Public communication is of great significance for all of these systems; in fact, it is what makes reactions possible in the first place, as it simplifies the complex systems surrounding us through external observation and selection. Within the function system of the public sphere, the performance system (*Leistungssystem*) of journalism takes on this public communication role. For some systems, journalism is of great importance, as it performs key functions, leading to strong interdependency. The political system is one example of this. Democracy cannot work without journalism's critical and monitoring functions. Journalism has the task of observing the political system from both an internal and external perspective. The systems become structurally interlinked, creating a structural coupling (*strukturelle Kopplung*). We speak of 'structural coupling' when the recursive interactions between systems have achieved stability and fit. Once this has occurred, any structural changes will lead in the same, shared direction, giving rise (in the case of longer-term couplings) to co-evolution. Accordingly, in this sense structural coupling refers to interrelatedness. Expectation structures between systems and their environment emerge, rendering the systems more sensitive to certain irritations. This leads to structural drifts, that is, various systems become differentiated as they develop, creating the impression that mutual interventions have occurred. This means that two or indeed several systems can relate to one another without being forced to give up their independence and autopoiesis (Luhmann, 1991).

Close connections – coupling – between systems can also affect the trust in these systems. Then trust in the political system impacts not just its own performance systems (government, opposition, parliament) but also journalism and journalistic media. Seen from an external perspective, coupled systems can be seen as connected with one another. This is what leads to transfers in credibility.
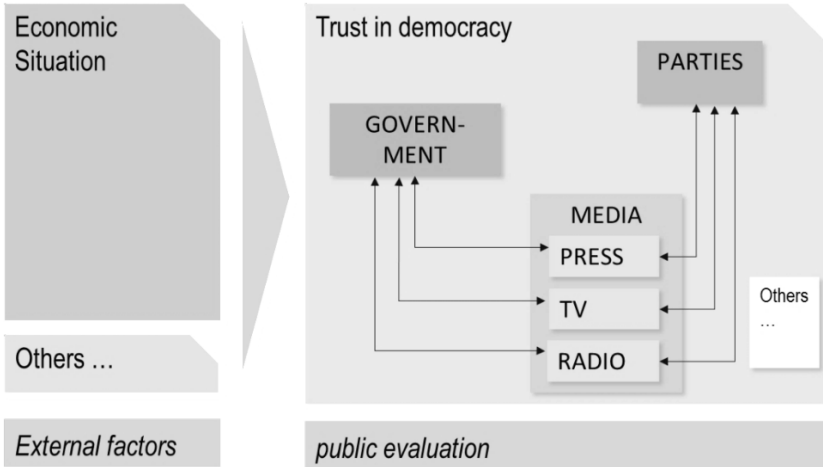

Figure 3   *Model of the influence of the economic situation on individual trust*
Source: Own representation

As already explained in the review of the research above, external factors – such as the economic situation, which affects employment, wages and inflation – play a role in the evaluation of democratic institutions, including parties, parliaments, governments and the media (cf. Figure 3). We can assume that the trust placed in the press, radio and television is linked to trust in political institutions, and that this is influenced in turn by perceptions of the economic situation, which depend on perceptions of growing unemployment, falling wages and rising inflation.

In this case, a marked change for the worse in economic conditions, with growing unemployment, falling wages and rising inflation, as seen in Spain and Greece, for example – caused by the financial crisis and the European sovereign debt crisis – would also lead to lower trust in political institutions and, as a result, the media. However, if the level of trust in the media were (also) dependent on their links to another system, then depending on the strength of those links actual journalistic performance would play a less significant role. Accordingly, trust in journalism

would depend less on journalism itself and more on the media system's systemic links with the political system and consequently on external factors.

4   Research questions and hypothesis

The aim of the present article is to investigate what connections exist between the development of GDP, trust in political systems and trust in the press, radio and television. The countries of Spain and Greece will form the particular focus of our attention. These two states were selected as they exhibited the greatest range between ratings of trust in the press, television and radio during the study period (cf. Figure 2) and were – and to a certain extent still are – particularly strongly affected by the economic effects of the European sovereign debt crisis.

The assumption is that trust in the press, TV and radio has changed as a result of the economic slump following the sovereign debt crisis in Spain and Greece. Our aim is to test the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in levels of trust in the press, radio and television between the time preceding and the time after the European sovereign debt crisis.

5   Methodology

Journalism steers our perception of political institutions and accordingly also impacts upon their credibility, hence there is an associated endogeneity problem. Accordingly, our concern is not primarily whether trust in political institutions is transferred to the media system and vice versa. Our initial focus will be on their mutual interdependence. Thus it does not appear expedient to compare the ratings of trust in the media and politics and contrast differences between individual states that have different media systems. Instead, it makes more sense to examine the dependencies within each social system. A meaningful picture of dependencies emerges by analysing change rather than static contexts. Do changed economic indicators go hand in hand with changes to the level of trust in political institutions and changed ratings of trust in the media system? Eurobarometer data were used to answer this question and compare the results from different countries. The data derive from a survey on trust in various institutions that has been carried out since 2001 on behalf of the European Commission at least once a year in all member states. At least 1000 individuals in each country are surveyed by telephone by opinion research institutes (in most states, by TNS Infratest). The survey includes questions concerning trust in the parliament, government, parties and trust in the

press, radio and television. Respondents can choose whether they tend to trust or tend not to trust.[2]

Greece and Spain were selected as case studies as the greatest fluctuations in trust in the press, TV and radio during the study period were observed in these countries (cf. Figure 2) and both states were affected by the sovereign debt crisis. The Eurobarometer trust ratings are contrasted with data on the economic situation, namely the OECD GDP growth rates as indicators of the severity of the economic crisis following the European sovereign debt crisis. GDP is a measure of a national economy's performance during a certain time period. Real GDP's rate of change serves as a measurement parameter for national economies and is thus the most important variable in overall national economic calculations. Wage development and unemployment are the result of changes in economic growth, and this change can impact upon inflation, which in turn has a noticeable impact upon citizens' income. Connections are defined by Pearson correlation coefficients, as all value series are normally distributed; differences are defined using statistical significance tests and cross classification. The influence of the economic crisis is ascertained by comparing the connections prior to and after the beginning of the economic crisis in Spain and Greece.

6   Results

The results will be outlined by reference to the research questions. The connections between trust in the press, radio, television, parties and the government and economic growth form our first point of focus. These connections are given first on the level of the EU, then separately for Spain and Greece. Building on this, the development of the economy and trust in these two countries is investigated more specifically, analysing the influence of the European sovereign debt crisis.

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2   The question of trust in *the* media is very imprecise. Questions on trust in journalistic performance or about a concrete journalistic offer possess higher validity. Thus the Special Eurobarometer Survey of October 2016 asked much more specific questions, but these specific results are not available for other years and thus cannot be compared. Many other longitudinal studies investigating trust in the media, such as the Global Trust Report of the GfK (GfK, 2017), only contain imprecise queries about the media. This includes the press, radio, TV and internet. The standard Eurobarometer survey at least distinguishes between the media genres of the press, radio, TV and internet; however, the concept of the internet is so broad and the internet itself contains such a vast amount of non-journalistic offer that we have excluded it from our study.
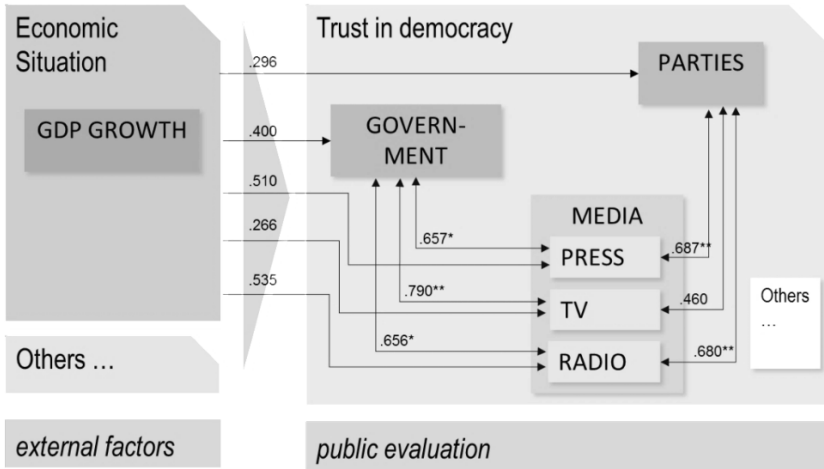
Figure 4   *Connection between trust and economic situation in the EU*
                Source: Own representation

Significant connections between the trust in government, parties and the media can be observed in the entire European Union across the study period 2001–2016. There is a significant connection between trust in political parties and trust in the press, with a value of r=0.687, and between trust in political parties and trust in radio, with a value of r=0.680. Trust in the national government is also significantly related to trust in radio (r=0.656), trust in television (r=0.790) and trust in the press (r=0.657). This confirms the connection between trust in democratic institutions and trust in the media already noted in other studies and discussed above. The economic situation, measured by GDP growth, has no significant influence on the population's evaluations of trust if all EU states are included (cf. Figure 4).

However, this missing link between external economic indicators and the population's trust in the press, radio and television is not in fact missing in every country. Looking at the development of trust in the media, trust in political institutions and economic growth in the states analysed by studying the Eurobarometer data in detail, considerable differences can be observed: differences between the individual countries on the one hand and between the different media genres on the other. In Spain and Greece in particular, highly significant connections are revealed.

Figure 5 *Connection between the population's trust in the media and in political institutions and economic growth in Spain*
Source: Own representation

In Spain, there are very strong connections between the population's trust in the political institutions of government and parties and its trust in the press, radio and television. There is a highly significant, very strong connection between trust in parties and trust in the press (r=0.845), in television (r=0.844) and radio (r=0.805). Trust in the national government is also highly significantly related to trust in the press (r=0.932), trust in television (r=0.894) and trust in radio (r=0.903). We can also see that a significant connection exists to the external factor of influence 'economic situation', expressed in changes in GDP. Changes in real GDP correlate significantly with the population's trust in the press (r=0.572) and the population's trust in radio (r=0.611) (cf. Figure 5).
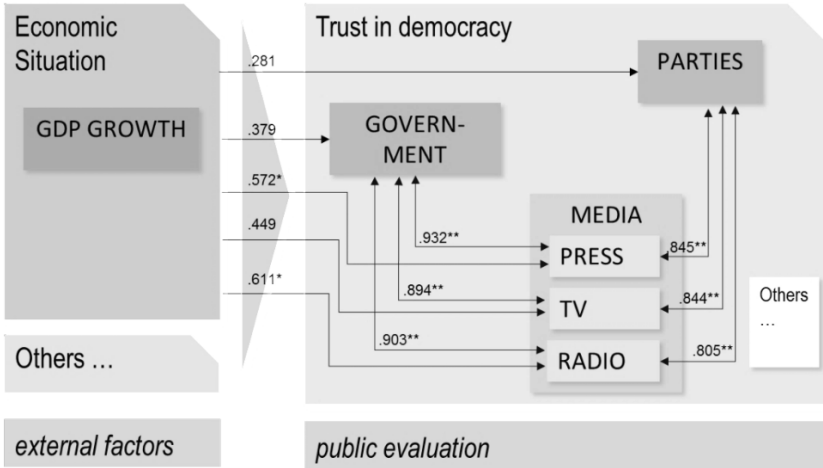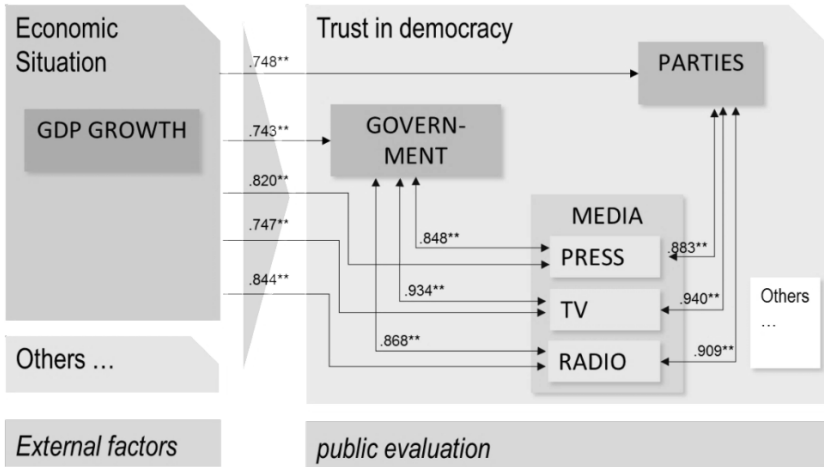
Figure 6   *Connection between the population's trust in the media and in political institutions and economic growth in Greece*
Source: Own representation

In Greece, these connections are stronger yet. There is a highly significant, very strong connection between the population's trust in parties and its trust in the press (r=0.883), in television (r=0.949) and radio (r=0.909). Trust in the government is also highly significantly and very strongly related to trust in the press (r=0.848), trust in television (r=0.934) and trust in radio (r=0.868).

Furthermore, we also have highly significant connections between GDP growth and the population's trust in parties (r=0.748), trust in the national government (r=0.743), trust in the press (r=0.820), trust in television (r=0.747) and trust in radio (r=0.844). The population's trust in the government and parties is also significantly related to real GDP growth (r=0.743 and r=0.748).

The connection between economic development, expressed in real GDP growth, and the population's trust in politics and the media does not exist everywhere, as our glance at the EU in its entirety showed. However, in some countries this connection is particularly pronounced. Greece and Spain are clearly among these states. Here, the development of the population's trust in the press, radio and TV is closely linked to the development of GDP.

This renders an inquiry into the impact of the European sovereign debt crisis and its economic consequences in these countries all the more relevant. In order to do this, the population's average trust in the press, radio and TV prior to and after the crisis year 2009 was calculated.
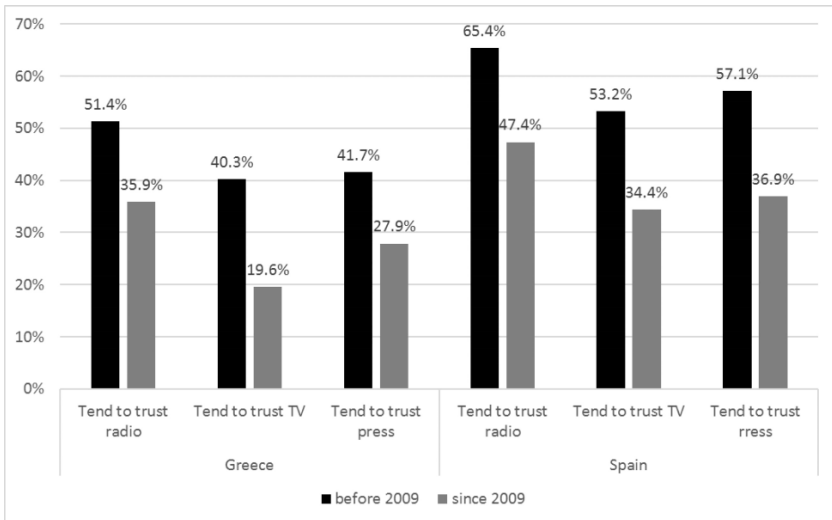
Figure 7 *Average trust in the press, radio and TV before and since the 2009 national*
          debt crisis in Greece and Spain
          Source: Own representation

A comparison of the population's average trust in the press, radio and TV before
the beginning of the 2009 European sovereign debt crisis with the trust ratings
since 2009 shows that the population's trust in all media mentioned fell consid-
erably in Greece and Spain following the onset of the economic crisis, dropping
by an average of 20 percentage points. In both countries and for all three media
genres analysed, the difference is highly significant (Mann-Whitney U test, sig-
nificance: 0.000). Accordingly, the European sovereign debt crisis resulted in a
highly significant difference in the Spanish and Greek population's trust in the
press, radio and television.

    However, the influence of the economic crisis on the population's trust in the
press, radio and TV goes even further: significant connections between trust in
the media mentioned and economic growth only actually occur after the onset of
the economic crisis. If the years 2009–2016 are excluded from the study, there are
no significant connections. Only when the state debt crisis occurs do the strong
connections observed in Spain and Greece between economic growth and the pop-
ulation's trust in the press, radio and TV emerge.

    Accordingly, we can note that the European sovereign debt crisis had an influ-
ence on trust in the media in Spain and Greece: the population's trust in the press,
TV and radio dropped significantly following the onset of the European sovereign

debt crisis and the resulting economic crisis in Greece and Spain; and since the beginning of the European sovereign debt crisis and the resulting economic crisis this trust has been more strongly connected to economic growth.

The sovereign debt crisis thus has had an effect on the population's trust in the press, television and radio: it led to a stronger link between trust in the press, radio and television and economic growth, expressed in real GDP growth, and it caused a highly significant drop in trust in the press, radio and television.

There is no difference between the media genres analysed in regard to the impact of the sovereign debt crisis. The population's trust in radio is generally higher than its trust in the press and TV. In Spain, the connection between economic growth and the population's trust in television is not significant, while in Greece it is.

7   Conclusion

The European population's trust in the media is related to its trust in democratic institutions. However, a correlation with economic factors exists only in a few countries. These countries are the European crisis states, the states that were severely affected by the European sovereign debt crisis and the resulting economic crisis, which led to high unemployment rates and sinking household incomes. Here, the link between economic development, expressed in changes in real GDP, and the population's trust in TV, the press and radio is very strong indeed. In these states, there is a significant difference between trust in the media before and after the outbreak of the 2009 European debt crisis. Since the onset of the debt crisis, the population's trust in these media has dropped significantly. Thus the sovereign debt crisis and the resulting economic crisis contributed significantly to the fact that the population's trust in the press, radio and television has fallen in Greece and Spain.

When the population's trust in the media rises or falls as strongly as it did in Greece and Spain following the outbreak of the European sovereign debt crisis, this change can also be attributed to the crisis, showing that the it has led to a loss of trust in democratic institutions such as parties, government and the media among the population. This shows that the media system's own performance, especially journalism, is an important, but perhaps not always the deciding factor of influence on the population's trust in the media system. The causes may lie outside the system completely, in economic developments.

Research to date has not included these aspects to a sufficient extent. It has focused on journalism's performance as the cause of the population's trust in TV, ra-

dio and the press. The possibility that trust can be transferred between politics and media has been recognised, and connections between trust in political institutions and the economic situation have been identified. However, the connection between economic developments and trust in the media has gone unnoticed. Adopting a macro perspective in research on trust in the media and journalism leads to findings that broaden the current state of research. Here, systems theory is able to provide an explanation, namely that the structural coupling between journalism's performance system and the political system means that external events influencing the trust in political institutions may, as a result, influence the trust in journalism and the media. An economic crisis can be a defining event, leading to insecurity and distrust that is transferred both to the political system and to the media. These findings show how important it is to have a differentiated debate with varied perspectives to explain why the population's trust in the media rises and falls.

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Everyday Dynamics of Media Skepticism and Credibility

An Ambulatory Assessment Study

Lukas Otto, Fabian Thomas & Michaela Maier

Abstract

Within this chapter we attempt to clarify (1) whether media skepticism and information credibility are rather stable or transient variables and (2) the causal relationship between generalized attitudes towards the media (media skepticism) and more specific evaluations of news items (credibility). We conducted an ambulatory assessment study to measure everyday media consumption and investigate short-term dynamics as well as the relationship between credibility and media skepticism. Results indicate that information credibility is a rather transient variable, depending on the situation, while media skepticism is more stable across different measurement occasions. Moreover, our findings show that credibility judgments are generalized to attitudes towards the media as a whole and, vice versa, media skepticism determines specific trust judgments in a mutual relationship.

1   Introduction

Media trust, trust in journalism, and media skepticism are variables of high relevance in democratic systems. Most democracy theories claim that citizens have to be well-informed to participate in a democratic society, and news has to be trustworthy in order for democratic systems to function (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). Low media trust is associated with processes that might be harmful to a healthy democracy and has been associated with growing polarization (Ladd, 2011) and political alienation (Tsfati, 2007). At the same time, it has almost become a truism in research and in the societal discussion that media trust is dwindling in most Western societies (Ariely, 2015; Daniller et. al., 2017; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Against this backdrop, the "liar press" (Lügenpresse) has become a buzzword for the European right-wing movement in recent years, reflecting a deep distrust of (political) mainstream media by some parts of the electorate, but also of politics in general (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Otto & Maier, 2016; Tsfati, 2010; Tsfati & Peri, 2006).

Due to this societal relevance, media trust variables are included in most large scale surveys. Nevertheless and despite scholarly interest and the importance given to it in the democratic process, we know little about the principles of trust in media (Daniller et al., 2017; Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Matthes & Kohring, 2003). In other words: What do people think about when answering the question: "In how far do you trust the media"?

Within this chapter, we attempt to answer two questions concerning the, dynamics and conceptualization of media trust or skepticism and the related concept of credibility. First, do trust in the news media and information credibility rather reflect stable, trait-like constructs or is trust open to situation-specific influences? This question is crucial for the investigation of trust in the news media: If trust and credibility perceptions are acquired in childhood or adolescence and then stay perfectly stable, there would be little space for (media) effects on media trust in general, and it would be useless to study the dynamics of media trust. If, on the other hand, media trust is a more transient, state-like variable, then scholars would be able to observe the dynamics of and effects on that form of trust.

Second, we attempt to investigate the relationship between credibility of a specific media item and more general attitudes towards the media (media skepticism). More precisely, we seek to investigate whether recipients generalize credibility judgments to media trust or if media skepticism rather serves as a "proxy" or a generalized expectancy for the evaluation of specific media items or if both processes – generalization and inferring from media skepticism to credibility – take place concurrently.

In the following, we will (1) briefly conceptualize the main variables of interest within this study – information credibility and media skepticism. After this, we will describe assumptions on (2) the stability of the constructs and (3) the causal relationship between credibility and media skepticism. Finally, we will (4) report results from an ambulatory assessment study to test our assumptions on the stability, dynamics, and causal relationship between these two variables.

2 Trust, credibility, and media skepticism – definitions and measurement

Despite the scholarly interest in communication research, constructs like credibility and media skepticism lack an agreed definition and measurement (Kohring, 2004; Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Matthes & Kohring, 2003). We will therefore briefly discuss how we conceptualize and operationalize these two variables before making assumptions about stability and causal relationships.

In research about (social) trust, scholars distinguish specific forms of trust, i.e. trust in a specific person or interaction partner ("interactional interpersonal trust"), from more generalized forms of trust, referring to collective trust objects (Daniller et al., 2017; Williams, 2012). Within this paper we refer to the more specific form of trust as (information) *credibility*. Following this, credibility (or trust in news content) refers to the degree to which the recipient *believes* that a specific news item is true/correct (Williams, 2012). Thus, credibility has a specific reference object, namely the particular media item. Following the approach by Kohring and Matthes (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Matthes & Kohring, 2003), we conceptualize credibility as the degree to which the recipient evaluates the media content as *correct* and *complete*.

In contrast, media skepticism refers to the degree citizens trust *the media in general* (Williams, 2012). It remains unclear what exactly participants refer to when answering questions about vague collective referents (Daniller et al., 2017; Williams, 2012). The fact that media skepticism does not refer to a specific object might lead to certain biases and usage of heuristics, e.g., citizens tend to evaluate collective referents more negatively than specific trust objects (Daniller et al., 2017; Fenno, 1975), and base their judgments on objects that come to mind first using accessibility heuristics (Iyengar, 1990). On the one hand, when asked about general media trust, recipients might base their answer on the last media item they perceived; on the other hand, they might apply general perceptions of media trust to specific credibility judgments, especially when they do not process the media information systematically.

Similar to the definition of media skepticism and media trust, the measurement of this variable is a subject for discussion among scholars. In most large-scale surveys, a single question about trust in "the press" or "the media" is included in a scale consisting of items about "trust in institutions". This operationalization leads to several problems. First of all, citizens might compare the media or the press with other institutions. Secondly, single-item measures suffer from many conceptual and methodological problems, which lead to poor reliability and validity of these measures (Bühner, 2011; Otto & Bacherle, 2011). Considering this, we operationalize media skepticism as a multifaceted construct, reflecting the degree to which (a) recipients trust the media in general and (b) perceive journalists and the media as (in-)competent to report about political issues. This conceptualization and measurement is broader more encompassing than the single media trust item, as it also refers to skeptical attitudes of citizens towards the role and functioning of the media within a democratic system; therefore, we refer to this variable as media skepticism (see, e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Tsfati, 2003; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; 2005 for similar operationalizations of media skepticism).

After a brief discussion of definitions and measurement of credibility and media skepticism, we will now turn to the assumptions about the stability or transience of these variables and why the investigation of stability is crucial for the understanding of media trust related constructs.

3 Media skepticism and credibility – trait or state?

Distinguishing traits from states or stable from more transient constructs is as old as the investigation of human behavior (Schneider et al., 2014; Steyer, Schmitt, & Eid, 1999). Some variables are – by definition – enduring constructs that do not change much across time and situations (e.g., personality characteristics, see Steyer et al., 1999), while other variables show high variability across different situations, e.g., moods and emotions (Eid & Langeheine, 1999; Eid, Schneider, & Schwenkmezger, 1999). Most constructs in social sciences, however, can be located on a continuum between perfect stability and occasion specificity. We assume that credibility and media skepticism both reflect a certain share of stability (trait variance) and fluidity (state-variance).

Considering this, why is it important to know whether media skepticism and credibility are stable or not? There are several reasons why the investigation of the state- and trait-proportions of these variables are crucial. First, if, for example, media skepticism were perfectly stable, there would be little need to investigate (media) effects or intraindividual dynamics of this variable. If media skepticism

happens to be perfectly stable, investigating influences on that variable would be as useless as investigating (media) effects on the body height of a person. If, however, media skepticism were not stable at all, it would *only* depend on the situation whether or not somebody holds skeptical attitudes towards mainstream media or not, which would be equally surprising and would disagree with most attitude and trust theories (Uslaner, 2002; 2008a; 2008b). The question therefore is: How much the situation (e.g., media consumption) determine media skepticism and credibility?

This leads us to our first research question:

RQ1:   **Do media skepticism and credibility rather reflect stable or transient variables across different situations?**

Regarding this question, we assume media skepticism to be more stable than credibility. As mentioned above, credibility has a specific referent, i.e. the news item a recipient has just received. Consequently, there should be a considerable amount of situation-specific influences on the credibility evaluations of a certain newspaper article or news show, otherwise the validity of the credibility measure must be questioned. We also expect media skepticism to be open to situational influences. However, as it reflects a general judgment about the trustworthiness of the media and the functioning of political journalism, we expect the trait influences to be much higher. In other words, one could evaluate a certain news item as completely untrue, biased, and untrustworthy and the next item as the complete opposite. It would, however, be very surprising if someone were completely skeptical about media trustworthiness one day and completely trustful the next day.

We will investigate the question of stability using latent-state-trait (LST) analyses. *Latent state-trait theory* is a way to theoretically and methodologically investigate the question whether a particular variable rather reflects a stable trait or a transient state; complete stability and complete transience are seen as two ends of a continuum (Steyer & Schmitt, 1990; Steyer et al., 1999, 2015). Thus, the major aim of analyses based on LST-theory is to examine whether the variance of a specific variable – in our case media skepticism and credibility – is determined more by temporary situational influence (a latent state) or more by a stable trait.

As mentioned above, we apply LST theory to the question whether or not media skepticism and credibility reflect trait- or state-like variables. Against this backdrop, Figure 1 shows the *latent trait model* illustrating that media skepticism is influenced by one stable trait at four times of measurement. Changes between these times of measurement are attributed to measurement error, i.e. a lack of reliability. On the other hand, *the latent state model* assumes that media skepticism or cred-

ibility (only) reflect current experiences and not a stable propensity to trust the media (Figure 2). The LST model (Figure 3) combines both models and breaks down the latent state (the current score of credibility/media skepticism) into a latent trait (stable component) and a latent state residual (LSR – situation-specific variance). In applying these models to generalized media skepticism and credibility judgments, we are able to distinguish stable and transient influences on the variables from measurement error and also determine the amount of stable and situation-specific influences of specific and generalized media trust.[1]

Figure 1　*The latent trait model for four measurement occasions and four items. I=Item, k=measurement occasion; i=item number*

Figure 2　*The latent state model for four measurement occasions and four items. I=Item, k=measurement occasion; i=item number*

1　Providing an introduction to LST theory would go far beyond the scope of this chapter. We therefore refer to Kelava and Schermelleh-Engel (2007) for a general introduction as well as Schneider et al. (2014, 2017) for an introduction of LST theory for communication research.
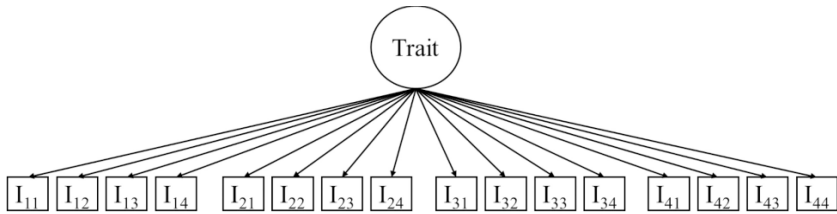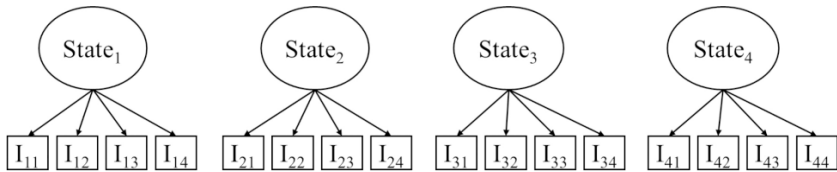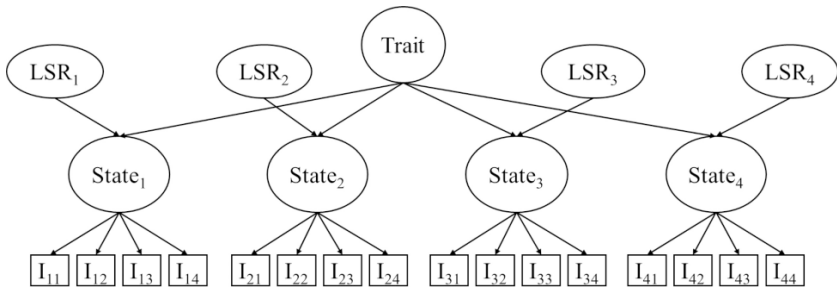
Figure 3   *The latent state trait (LST) model for four measurement occasions and four items. I=Item, k=measurement occasion; i=item number; LSR=Latent state residual*

4   General or specific trust – which comes first?

The second aim of this study is to investigate the causal relationship between information credibility and media skepticism as well as to answer the question whether there is a reciprocal relationship between information credibility and media skepticism on a daily basis. In other words, this means our study is not restricted to the investigation of causal relationships in an experimental setting, but also attempts to assess the dynamics in real-world everyday media consumption. Most scholars who have focused on causal relationships among different types of media trust – like information credibility, trust in the source, or trust in the medium – suggest that information credibility seems to depend on more generalized types of trust (Flanagin & Metzger, 2011; Li & Suh, 2015; Lucassen & Schraagen, 2011, 2012; Sundar, Knobloch-Westerwick, & Hastall, 2007). Therefore, credibility develops from more generalized types of (dis-)trust, like media skepticism, to case-specific trust in a particular news item; thus, information credibility reflects the inner core of (dis-)trust (Lucassen & Schraagen, 2012). This provides a clear statement about the causal relationship between information credibility and media skepticism, namely that information credibility is influenced by media skepticism.

The underlying mechanism determining the causal direction is the use of cognitive heuristics in credibility evaluations (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010). People have limited capacity to process information due to insufficient cognitive resources for encoding, storage, and retrieval of news messages (Lang, 2000). As a consequence, people tend to reduce "the perceived costs of information search and overload by using strategies that minimize their cognitive effort and time, through the use of cognitive heuristics" (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013, p. 214). Therefore,

people rely on subsets of information to make credibility evaluations instead of using all given information about the message itself to make well-considered trust judgments (Wise & McLaughlin, 2016).

Given that people have limited resources to process information and that more generalized types of trust influence specific trust judgments, media skepticism may work as such a heuristic for evaluating credibility of the given information. Particularly when media skepticism is high, the subtext basically says that "the mainstream media are neither credible, nor reliable" (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, p. 506). Hence, during the process of evaluation, media skepticism works as a peripheral cue which "de-emphasizes detailed information processing and focuses on the role of simple rules or cognitive heuristics in mediating persuasion" (Chaiken, 1980, p. 752) and thus becomes an important determinant in predicting information credibility. Recent empirical evidence shows that generalized types of media (dis-)trust affect more specific types of trust, such as information credibility (Flanagin & Metzger, 2011; Li & Suh, 2015; Lucassen & Schraagen, 2011, 2012; Sundar, Knobloch-Westerwick, & Hastall, 2007). Although most of the research focuses on news items mediated by the Internet, especially traditional media make it quite easy for users to apply heuristics and to connect them to the message (Sundar, 2008). Therefore, we assume that high levels of media skepticism affect information credibility in a negative way over all types of media.

H1:   **General media skepticism negatively affects information credibility.**

Interestingly, research has rarely focused on the reverse causal relationship. Hence, the question is, does information credibility also affect media skepticism? Regarding research on other types of trust (e.g., social trust), scholars have assumed that specific, individualized trust judgments may influence generalized trust evaluations (Sønderskov & Dinesen, 2016). According to this experiential approach, experiences which people have with individuals throughout life shape trust judgments about other people in general (Mishler & Rose, 2001). Applying this mechanism to the variables media skepticism and credibility could lead to the assumption that when people evaluate the information they just received from a particular news message as not very credible, this might lead to higher levels of generalized distrust. Hence, an iterative reception of news messages with a perceived lack of credibility could reinforce skepticism about the media in general. Following this assumption, media skepticism can be conceptualized as an aggregation or generalization of credibility evaluations over a specific period of time.

Research has shown that the perception of media content as incomplete and biased increases political cynicism (Austin & Pinkleton, 1999). Given that political cynicism and media skepticism are highly correlated (Cappella & Jamieson,

1997), this may be a first hint for an influence of specific credibility evaluations on generalized (dis-)trust. Closer to the framework of institutional and informational trust, research on media skepticism and information credibility has shown that information from a media source which conflicts with contrary, non-mediated information heightens the level of media skepticism (Cozzens & Contractor, 1987). According to this research, information from single news messages certainly has the potential to affect more generalized types of media (dis-)trust, such as media skepticism. We therefore assume:

H2: **Credibility judgments about specific media items affect general media skepticism.**

If H1 and H2 are correct, there could be a reciprocal relationship between information credibility and media skepticism. That means both processes – from general media skepticism to credibility and vice versa – could take place at the same time. As there is reason to believe that media skepticism serves as a general proxy for credibility judgments and that credibility, in turn, might affect the general assessment of media trust, this might lead to a reciprocal, maybe even a reinforcing relationship between these two variables. Thus, causality might run both ways (Slater, 2007, 2015).

RQ2: **Is there a reciprocal relationship between information credibility and media skepticism on a daily basis?**

The ambulatory assessment study we will describe in the following allows a particularly fine-grained measurement of both variables on a daily basis. As far as we know, there is no other study that has focused on the reciprocal relationship between credibility and media skepticism with a comparable design or a similarly detailed measurement of both constructs.

In the following section, we will precisely explain the used methods, namely the LST approach and mediation analysis. Further, we briefly describe how the ambulatory assessment study was conducted as well as the measurement of the respective variables.

5   Method

In order to analyze the causal relationship between information credibility and media skepticism as well as the stability of the two mentioned variables, panel data is needed. We conducted an ambulatory assessment study to measure both constructs. The data assessment took place in March 2016.

Procedure

Ninety-six people were invited to participate in a smartphone study about "Media Trust". The subjects used the smartphone application MovisensXS to participate in our study. This allowed us to directly upload questionnaires to the participants' smartphones. They received the instruction to fill out two types of questionnaires: The first one was a questionnaire about general trust in the media which appeared every evening for eight days in a row. A second questionnaire should be filled out immediately after a participant received a media item with political content. The latter one should be filled out up to five times each day. The second questionnaire contained items which measured information credibility for each article, TV show, or online content a participant received. Thereby, we were able to connect information credibility to media skepticism on a daily basis.

Sample

The participants were rather young (M=30.33, SD=13.74), highly educated (63.5 % high school degree or higher), and predominantly female (68.8 %). Almost half of the participants were students (44.8 %), but we also included non-students. A professional market research institute recruited non-student participants for our study. Both groups received incentives (credits for students and money for non-students); they were obliged to fill out at least the evening questionnaire in order to get incentives.

Measures

Media skepticism includes items which refer to the trustworthiness and expertise of the media that participants used in general (e.g., "I personally do not trust this media", "Often media coverage is wrong"). It was measured each day with four items on a six-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) totally agree. Cronbach's Alpha for these four items ranged from .74 (t2) to .87 (t5) over the whole week ($Mrange$=2.84–3.12, $SDrange$=.73-.92). This measure was based on the operationalization for media skepticism by Tsfati and Cappella (2003).

Information credibility was also measured with four items on a six-point scale. All questions were directly connected to the media item that the participant just received and focused on correctness as well as completeness of the information (e.g., "I can rely on this information", "This information presents the whole truth"). The items were adopted from Matthes and Kohring (2003; 2007). We calculated an average score for each item for each day since participants had the opportunity to fill out the second questionnaire up to five times each day. Cronbach's Alpha for these four items ranged from .91 (t3) to .95 (t6) over the whole week (M_{range}=4.27–4.54, SD_{range}=.63-.85).

Control variables. We included sex, age, and education as controls in our analysis. All variables were measured using straightforward questions ("Are you male or female?", "How old are you?", "What is your highest educational degree?"). These variables were also measured via smartphone application in a questionnaire presented one day before the participants were given the questions about media skepticism and information credibility.

Data analysis

LST-analyses provide us with coefficients measuring the stability and specificity of a variable. *The common consistency* (Con) coefficient represents stable, trait variance and is calculated by dividing the variance of the latent trait by the variance of the specific item at a specific time of measurement (X_{it}). It thus represents stable, trait-like, situation-independent variance: $\text{Con}(X_{it})=\text{Var}(T)/\text{Var}(X_{it})$

Occasion specificity (Spe), on the other hand, is defined as the amount of variance in X_{it} explained by state variance (Sk): $\text{Spe}(X_{it})=\text{Var}(S_k)/\text{Var}(X_{it})$

Finally, there is a third systematic source of variance called method specificity (MSpe) representing stable trait variance that is unique to an item (T_{it}), but not to the other items: $\text{MSpe}(X_{it})=\text{Var}(T_{it})/\text{Var}(X_{it})$

Following these considerations, the reliability (Rel) of an item is defined as: $\text{Rel}(X_{it})=\text{Con}(X_{it})+\text{Spe}(X_{it})+\text{mSpe}(X_{it})$

The LST models presented here were estimated using IBM SPSS Amos Version 23.

Mediation analysis – analyzing the reciprocal relationship

In order to investigate the reciprocal relationship between information credibility and media skepticism, we rely on regression based mediation analysis (e.g., Hayes, 2009). Based on other studies that focused on reciprocal relationships over time (Slater, 2007, 2015; see also Hutchens et al., 2016; Kruikemeier & Shehata, 2016; Schemer, 2012), we assume that information credibility mediates the effect of media skepticism on media skepticism at a later point in time and vice versa. We used the SPSS macro PROCESS which allowed us to model a mediation analysis with multiple mediators (Hayes, 2012). The mediation models were separated because the PROCESS macro is limited to four mediators. Thus, two separated mediation models were calculated (t1-t4, see Figure 4). According to this principle, we calculated two more mediation models to capture the second half of the week (t5-t8).
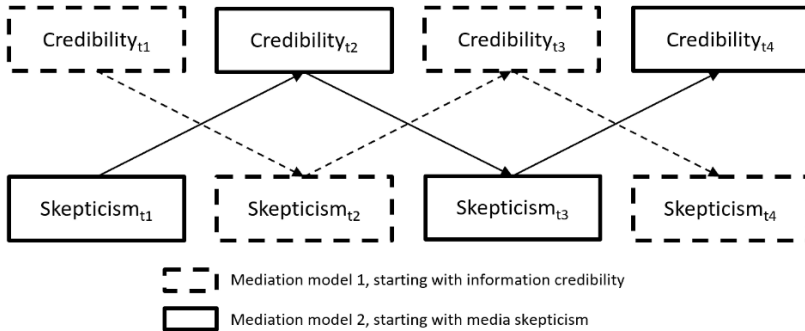
Figure 4   *Structural relationship between information credibility and media skepticism. Autoregressive terms, direct effects from t1 on t4 etc. are not shown but were included in the analyses*

6   Results

Stability of media skepticism and credibility

To test whether credibility and media skepticism reflect stable or transient constructs, we will test each model – the latent trait model, the latent state model, and the LST model – and report which of the models fits our data best. Thereafter, we report the stability (common consistency) and occasion specificity coefficients for each variable to show *how high* the stable and situation-specific influences on credibility and media skepticism are.

Information Credibility. Since we conceptualized credibility as correctness and completeness of a *specific* news item, there should be a high proportion of state variance and less stable influence than for the more generalized media skepticism variable. The latent trait model, which assumes perfect stability and does not account for situational influences, as expected does not fit the data at all (χ^2/df=6.52, p<.001; *CFI*=.343; *RMSEA*=.241).[2] Including the first measurement for the first four days already shows that information credibility, according to our expectations, does not seem to be a stable variable, but shows high occasion-specific influences[3]. The latent state model, assuming that there is no stability at all and

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that credibility scores are only determined by situational influences, shows a better fit to the data (χ^2/df=1.82, p<.001; *CFI*=.899; *RMSEA*=.093). The LST model, including both trait and state variance in the model, however, fits the data best (χ^2/df=1.57, p<.001; *CFI*=.934; *RMSEA*=.077), indicating that credibility is not only influenced by situational or stable factors but contains both a stable and a transient component. Figure 4 shows the amount of stability and situation specificity for information credibility. In accordance with our expectations, credibility shows a high amount of situation-specific variance, however, there is still a substantial amount of trait variance. The situation specificity should be due to the news items that were evaluated, while the stable factor might reflect a more general media trust component that also influences credibility judgments.

Media skepticism. Similar to information credibility, the LST model for media skepticism fits the data best (χ^2/df=1.19, p=.097; *CFI*=.977; *RMSEA*=.045). Both other models, namely the latent trait model, assuming perfect stability (χ^2/df=2.66, p<.001; *CFI*=.778; *RMSEA*=.132), and the latent state model (χ^2/df=3.1, p<.001; *CFI*=.720; *RMSEA*=.149) do not fit the data. When taking a closer look at the coefficients, we find support for the assumption that general media skepticism is more stable across different measurement occasions than credibility; however, there is still a substantial and significant amount of situation specificity (between 10 and 16 % of the reliability, see Figure 5) allowing situational factors, like media usage, to influence the media skepticism score.

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similar to those presented here and are available from the authors upon request.
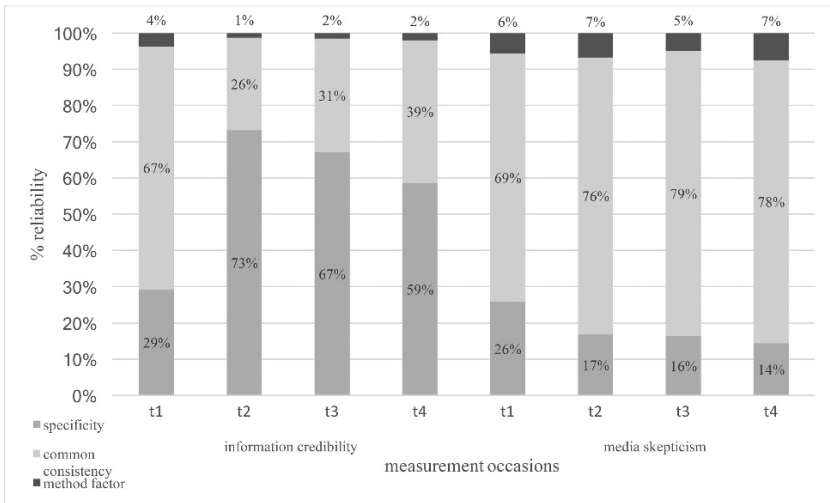
Figure 5 *Share of reliability of common consistency, occasion specificity, and method specificity for four measurement occasions.*
Causal and reciprocal relationship between media skepticism and credibility

In order to capture the reciprocal effects between information credibility and media skepticism, we calculated four mediation models presented in Table 1. The sample size for all models was rather small with N ranging from 29 to 45. The main reason for this are missing values because naturally the participants did not report media usage at all possible points of measurement. As a consequence, for the mediation models we only included the participants that always answered the questionnaire in the evening (media skepticism) and at least one questionnaire immediately after media reception (information credibility) regarding each model separately.

Looking at t1 to t4 (the first four days of measurement), the results indicate that credibility judgments affect media skepticism more than vice versa. On the first three days, information credibility shows negative and significant effects on media skepticism (e.g., IC_{t2} on MS_{t3}, $b=-.51$, $p<.001$) indicating that people who trust the information they just received, showed lower levels of general skepticism on the following day. In contrast, media skepticism showed no significant effect on information credibility for the first three days. Additionally, no significant estimate ($b=.10$, $p=.379$) was found for the direct effect from information credibility$_{t1}$ on media skepticism$_{t4}$ nor for the effect from media skepticism$_{t1}$ on information credibility$_{t4}$ ($b=-.23$, $p=.178$).

Table 1 *Reciprocal effects on information credibility and media skepticism*

t1-t4

Mediation Model 1 (N=45)		R^2	Mediation Model 2 (N=38)		R^2
Credibility$_{t1}$ → Skepticism$_{t2}$	-.28 (.14)†	.15	Skepticism$_{t1}$ → Credibility$_{t2}$	-.21 (.18)	.09
Skepticism$_{t2}$ → Credibility$_{t3}$	-.20 (.17)	.19	Credibility$_{t2}$ → Skepticism$_{t3}$	-.51 (.12)***	.65
Credibility$_{t3}$ → Skepticism$_{t4}$	-.36 (.11)**	.63	Skepticism$_{t3}$ → Credibility$_{t4}$	.03 (.17)	.57

t5-t8

Mediation Model 3 (N=35)		R^2	Mediation Model 4 (N=29)		R^2
Credibility$_{t5}$ → Skepticism$_{t6}$	-.35 (.19)†	.21	Skepticism$_{t5}$ → Credibility$_{t6}$	-.26 (.17)	.14
Skepticism$_{t6}$ → Credibility$_{t7}$	-.31 (.15)*	.22	Credibility$_{t6}$ → Skepticism$_{t7}$	-.19 (.12)	.67
Credibility$_{t7}$ → Skepticism$_{t8}$	.18 (.16)	.56	Skepticism$_{t7}$ → Credibility$_{t8}$	-.45 (.18)*	.72

Note. Unstandardized effects. Values in brackets are standard errors. Age, sex, and education were added as control variables as well as previous lags of credibility and skepticism according to the Process template. ***$p<.001$ **$p<.01$ *$p<.05$ †$p<.10$

However, we did not find the same pattern from t5 to t8 (the last four days of the study). Although there was a significant and negative effect of information credibility$_{t5}$ on media skepticism$_{t6}$ (b=-.35, $p<.10$), we found the reverse effect on the following days. Consequently, media skepticism on t6 negatively affects credibility on t7 (b=-.31, $p<.05$), and media skepticism on t7 negatively affects information credibility on t8 (b=-.45, $p<.05$). Furthermore, no significant estimates (IC$_{t5}$ on MS$_{t8}$, b=.14, p=.350, MS$_{t5}$ on IC$_{t8}$, b=-.05, p=.731) were found for the two direct effects.

Taken together, the findings indicate that there seems to be a reciprocal relationship between information credibility and media skepticism but not on an everyday basis. The results indicate a more complex pattern, in which either media skepticism affects information credibility or vice versa, but there was no point in time at which both constructs simultaneously affected the respective outcome on the following day.

7   Conclusion and discussion

Media trust, media skepticism, and credibility are among the most important and most intensively investigated constructs in communication research (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Matthes & Kohring, 2003; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Nevertheless, little is known about (1) the conceptual foundations of media skepticism and credibility, particularly about the stability or fluidity of the concepts and (2) the relationship between more generalized attitudes towards the media and specific judgments of credibility. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this chapter is twofold: First, we wanted to test, by means of LST analyses, whether media skepticism and information credibility rather reflect stable, trait-like variables or situation-specific, state-like constructs. Second, we attempt to investigate the relationship between general media skepticism and the more specific variable of information credibility. More precisely, the study seeks to find out whether credibility judgments about specific news items influence general media skepticism or whether media skepticism serves as a proxy for the specific evaluation of a news item as trustworthy or if both processes – generalization of specific judgments and inference from general media skepticism to specific news items – occur at the same time.

These research questions were investigated in a study with an innovative design. An ambulatory assessment study via smartphone was conducted; participants in the study rated the perceived credibility of a news item directly after reading a newspaper article, watching news on television, and following political news online. This design allows us to investigate everyday dynamics of media consumption within a real-world environment.

Concerning the question whether media skepticism and information credibility are rather stable or not, we found that both variables have a substantial amount of stable, trait variance and a significant amount of situation-specific variation. However, the variables differ, in accordance with our expectations, in their proportions of trait- and state-variance. The more transient variable credibility shows up to 60 % situation-specific variation, which should be due to the specific media item the recipients evaluated, since there are arguably as many situations as there are news items to be evaluated. However, there is also a crucial amount of stable trait-like variance. In other words, credibility judgments are not completely determined by the specific situation or the received news item. Thus, credibility judgments are influenced both by the specific news item and by more stable attitudes towards the source of the news item (e.g., the particular newspaper or journalist) and – most important for this chapter – more generalized attitudes towards the media as a whole. This leads us to the results concerning media skepticism. As expected, media skepticism shows a higher percentage of stable influences when compared

to information credibility; only about 15 % of the variance is due to occasion-specific influences. Thus, the core of attitudes seems to be rather stable and cannot be influenced very easily by, e.g., media effects or other factors. However, media skepticism is also not perfectly stable – not even within the very short time period of one week – which makes it open for situational influences like specific credibility judgments. This finding, in turn, provides the basis for the second question of this chapter: whether or not specific credibility judgments might be generalized to skeptical attitudes towards the media in general.

Regarding this issue, we found support for our assumptions stating that media skepticism (as a generalized negative attitude towards the media) negatively affects information credibility. This finding is in line with recent research suggesting that generalized types of trust (e.g., trust in the source or medium) could be interpreted as cost-reducing heuristics which might lead to resource-efficient evaluations of trust in information (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013; Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010). On the other hand, we also found support for the second hypothesis, which assumed the reverse causal mechanism, a negative effect from information credibility on media skepticism. This effect might be an outcome of media usage during specific periods of time. If people evaluate the information given by news media positively, this might decrease skepticism about the media in general.

However, both causal directions did not occur in a consistent pattern. There was either an effect from information credibility on media skepticism or vice versa, but there was no simultaneous reciprocal connection. Hence, the results indicate a lagged reciprocal relationship between both constructs. We can only speculate why this is the case: One reason might be the way how recipients process information. People have to decide whether to choose a systematic evaluation strategy which demands the use of full range of resources to make a sophisticated decision, or to choose cognitive heuristics to reduce mental effort (Chaiken, 1980; Sundar, 2008). Considering the fact that we measured skepticism and credibility on a daily basis, the inconsistent, heuristic-based patterns could be an indicator of the information processing strategy that people used to evaluate news messages day by day. If people rely on systematic credibility evaluations, the effect from media skepticism on information credibility disappears.

Furthermore, the media *content* could be the reason for inconsistent information credibility effects on media skepticism. Cozzens and Contractor (1987) argued that conflicting information heightens the levels of media skepticism. Accordingly, it is possible that media content which conflicts with pre-existing information elicits negative effects from information credibility on media skepticism. This might also be the explanation for the lagged reciprocal effects. If people receive conflicting information, they might be more attentive and aware of the informa-

tion they received on this day and thus rely on systematic credibility evaluation instead of cognitive heuristics. On the other hand, in situations without conflicting information, people might be motivated to minimize mental effort and therefore use cognitive heuristics to evaluate news messages. Hence, different kinds of media content might trigger the usage of systematic information processing instead of cost-efficient cognitive heuristics and thus determine the relationship of media skepticism and credibility.

Limitations of the study as well as the analyses provided here should not remain unmentioned as they point to future research strands. Firstly, it is quite appropriate to assume an effect from media skepticism on information credibility. However, the process might be more complex: Lucassen and Schraagen (2012) suggested that the effect is rather an indirect effect than a direct one. They showed that media trust consists of several trust layers, namely a propensity to trust, trust in the source, trust in the medium, and information credibility. Furthermore, the most generalized trust layer (propensity to trust) had no direct effect on information credibility but influenced the next lower trust layer which, in turn, influenced the following trust layer right down to information credibility. Accordingly, the effect from media skepticism to information credibility might be mediated by other generalized trust layers that we did not take into account.

Secondly, the number of participants included in our models was rather small; furthermore, we did not include the same participants in each mediation model due to a lack of available data. Imputation might be a solution to this problem in some cases (see, e.g., Slater & Hayes, 2010); however, for our study there were too many missing cases to deal with. This leads us to a more general limitation of the ambulatory assessment design. While it provides a very detailed and fine-grained measure of everyday news consumption and enables us to investigate day-to-day dynamics, the sample size for such an intensive study design is limited due to economic reasons; also, the commitment of the participants must be high in order to receive high quality data.

Finally, the specific design of this study does not allow us to investigate long-term changes in media trust and related constructs. Hence, we can only speculate whether media skepticism might be more or less stable or information credibility could still influence skeptical attitudes towards the press when changing the time frame of the study to weeks, months, or even years taking long-term developments into account (see e.g. Moeller & de Vreese, 2015). In other words, ambulatory assessment studies are appropriate when trying to capture short-term processes and more transient variables like credibility, but also emotional or attentional processes (Otto, Maier, & Thomas, 2017). However, they fall short when trying to investigate long-term changes as well as research questions that call for large sample sizes.

Despite these limitations, the design of this study as well as the analyses provided here contribute to our understanding of media skepticism and credibility judgments of media users. There is hardly any other design that is able to capture the dynamics of media trust and media usage in general on such a fine-grained level. In combination with large scale surveys, experimental approaches, and theoretical work as provided within this anthology, we are able to come to a sound description of and scientific judgment about the foundations, dynamics, influences, and effects of trust in the news media and journalism. The combination of different methods, designs, and theoretical approaches makes it possible to achieve scientific progress in examining these important variables in communication research.

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Part III
Populism

How Journalism Responds to Right-Wing Populist Criticism

The "Lying Press" Attack and the "No Censorship" or "No Ammunition" Defence

Benjamin Krämer

Abstract

Right-wing populists often criticise the established media for being untruthful or censoring what critics consider to be important information—for instance, the ethnic background of perpetrators—and for being biased against right-wing populist actors. That hostility towards journalism can be understood as a consequence of the right-wing populist worldview. Because such criticism uses professional norms of journalism against it and due to particular aspects of how journalism functions, it remains difficult for journalists to respond to such criticism. Certain responses risk confirming and even normalising the right-wing populist worldview.

1   Introduction

Despite the diversity of possible critical perspectives on media and journalism, one strand of criticism seems to currently dominate public discussion: right-wing populist attacks that accuse the press of being untruthful, at times expressed in labels such as either "lying press"– or, as particularly prevalent in Germany, "Lügenpresse"– or "fake news", a term used by Donald Trump, among others. In the present analysis, based primarily on observations of European and US journalism and right-wing populism, I aim to reconstruct the ideological basis of such criticism and to suggest a theoretical explanation of why journalism struggles to respond to that type of attack. I suggest that the logic of journalism as typically practiced in those regions cannot easily be defended if media are accused of reporting untruthfully or incompletely on issues that right-wing populists consider to be important. The structure of the ideology of right-wing populism also explains why that line of criticism often addresses coverage or insufficient coverage of two phenomena in particular: elite misconduct—that is, the alleged neglect of misconduct of established elites and an overemphasis on the misconduct of right-wing populist leaders—and crime or terrorism by migrants and strangers (in a broad sense, including native-born citizens, especially members of ethnic or religious minorities, whom right-wing populists refuse to count among the real people of a country).

2   Right-wing populism as a conservative ideology

Although it may be fruitful in other contexts to define right-wing populism as a discursive strategy or frame (Aslanidis, 2015), I depart from the recently common interpretation among scholars of right-wing populism as a thin ideology (e.g. Abts & Rummens, 2007; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2014; Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). According to the morphological approach to understanding ideology (Freeden, 1996), full-fledged instances of ideology confer meaning to all of the most relevant contested political concepts. Although their emphasis may vary, they imply a particular understanding of freedom, justice, equality, etc., by linking them to other concepts. By contrast, thin ideologies focus on a few core concepts without necessarily decontesting others or providing criteria to develop positions on every political issue (Freeden, 1998). Furthermore, many varieties of populism have not reached the same level of theoretical elaboration that traditional ideologies have (although there are leaders who theorise their political positions and strategies in terms of theories of populism, see Iglesias, 2015). The term right-wing populist is rarely used as a label to identify oneself. Theoretical texts that elaborate on elements of

that ideology would often be categorized as belonging to related worldviews and movements (e.g. the New Right). Right-wing populist actors rarely produce texts that come close to works of political theory proper. However, right-wing populism has increasingly become a full-blown worldview with its own vision of society and utopian aspects that classical conceptualisations of ideology also require (Mannheim, 1929). Regardless of labels, various movements, parties, and non-organised individuals have defined their political identity and practice in terms of the worldview of right-wing populism.

Populism is often defined by referring to two major ideological elements: anti-elitism and "the people" (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). However, as I have argued elsewhere (Krämer, 2017b), for the definition to be fruitful, those elements have to be better specified. Otherwise, a range of ideologies and political statements could be labelled as populist, and the concept would lose its distinctive value. Although populists often communicate in strategically ambiguous ways, researchers should define elements of the ideology more precisely in order to distinguish it from other worldviews and general conceptions of the political as such.

References to "the people" can have starkly different meanings and justifications. Today, nearly all political ideologies legitimise their demands by pointing to the interests and welfare of "the people" in some sense. The specific populist understanding of "the people" ultimately considers it to be homogeneous and conceives the will of "the people" as the sole legitimate source of political demands and measures. Since that will should be implemented without long deliberation or unnecessary obstacles, populists typically criticize political procedures that divide the people into camps, longer chains of legitimation, and both rights and checks and balances, that prevent the most direct, forceful implementation of the popular will.

Similarly, criticism of elites takes many forms. In the specifically populist type, elites fail to represent the will of "the people". That failure is not necessarily restricted to political elites only, but can also extend to economic and cultural elites accused of betraying "the people".

Furthermore, if a variety of populism is to count as right-wing populism, then it must define its elements in a specifically right-wing manner by relating them to certain other concepts. Accordingly, right-wing populism is populism that is right-wing, given the definition of its core concepts in relation to specific other concepts, not populism complemented by some right-wing elements independent of core concepts with self-contained definitions.

Traditional conservatism, often sceptical of the unchecked rule of "the people", has favoured representative democracy, aristocracy, or technocracy. By contrast, right-wing populism demands the unconditional implementation of the popular

will. However, the conceptualisation of "the people" in the ideal type of right-wing populism is traditionalist, and its representatives favour conservative social policy. In such thinking, "the people" refers to a culturally or ethnically homogeneous ingroup with common historical roots whose interests should be favoured over those who do not belong to the national community. That nativist and traditionalist definition of "the people" excludes migrants and minorities, whom it alleges are unproductive and parasitic segments of the population, as well as political opponents, whom it accuses of threatening the unity and seemingly natural solidarity of "the people", as well its unique values and traditions.

That conservative core of right-wing populism, which conceives "the people" in relation to culture or ethnicity and tradition, can be complemented by other concepts or concrete policies usually considered to be right-wing. However, right-wing populist movements are more diverse or ambivalent in their beliefs about, among other things, economic policy. Whereas many of them generally favour economic liberalism over state interventionism, some also demand protectionist measures and increased social security for the native population.

Traditional conservatism emphasises stability or gradual change, as well as trust in authorities and established institutions, and is opposed to protest. If, however, social groups with traditionalist attitudes feel that elites can no longer be trusted and that a cultural community and its values system are in acute danger, then conservatism, in a somewhat paradoxical development, becomes rebellious (cf. Siri, 2015).

Right-wing populism is not opposed to representation. Although right-wing populism often demands referenda, their role is not so much to allow the population to make decisions about minor issues as to forcefully demonstrate the popular will, to free "the people" from the rule of corrupt elites, and to save the nation from imminent threats once and for all (on this redemptive understanding, see Canovan, 1999). The populist conception of democracy, both plebiscitarian and Bonapartist, can therefore be interpreted as a search for the right representatives who can restore the lost heartland. Among such representatives, authoritarian leaders may act as if they have popular support every time (Müller, 2014) and organise referenda on vital issues.

3   Right-wing populist criticism of the media

Right-wing populism also differs from traditional conservatism in terms of its criticism of the media. Historically, conservatives have opposed media content that they have considered to be indecent and subversive—among other things, strong

language, nudity and sexuality, blasphemy, and propaganda that undermines authority and social order. Although some right-wing populists continue to demand the media to stop publicising what they conceive to subvert the traditional family, gender roles, and values, the focus of their criticism, as well as its primary justifications, have shifted.

In the populist worldview, journalism can appear on both sides of the divide between "the people" and elites. Right-wing populists typically count most established media outlets among the latter and conceive them as overly liberal and intimate with the political establishment. Some right-wing populists even assume that a conspiracy exists between political and media actors or else direct but mostly secret political control over the media.

However, media organisations may also position themselves as populist or right-wing populist, either by supporting populist actors and movements or by substituting for or even competing with them, in what can be called media populism (Krämer, 2014). However, in the present analysis, I focus on media that do not identify with a right-wing populist worldview and are therefore criticised by advocates of that worldview.

Right-wing populist visions of the media often have to be inferred ex negativo in light of their criticism of the media. However, if such an implicit theory of the press is reconstructed, then it probably demands ideal journalism to be representative and representational. It would represent the assumed perspective of the people—that is, its allegedly unitary, common-sense view—and reflect its values and traditions and thus represent the world as it is according to the right-wing populist understanding.

Unlike traditional conservatives, right-wing anti-media populists (Krämer, 2017a) usually do not focus on censorship of indecent or subversive content. By contrast, if media outlets fail to meet the populist standards of representation, then right-wing populists respond by appealing to liberal values and journalistic professionalism in their criticism of the press. Their criticism primarily concerns the truthfulness and completeness of reporting and, indirectly, the separation of facts and evaluations in pursuit of ideologically unbiased reporting. In the case of crime and terrorism, for example, right-wing anti-media populists accuse the media of downplaying acts committed by migrants and minorities, as well as of withholding information about perpetrators and their motives. In particular, they demand that the media mention the cultural or ethnic background of perpetrators of criminal and terrorist acts and explain the acts in terms of that background. Right-wing anti-media populists insist that the media attribute criminal acts committed by ingroup members to individual motives, yet to frame acts committed by out-group members as being inspired or even dictated by their culture or ideology.

Furthermore, right-wing populists question whether the media give sufficient attention to the failures and wrongdoings of established elites. They allege that journalists use double standards when judging those elites compared to representatives of populist movements and parties. For example, Donald Trump (on the right-wing populist elements in his campaign, see Oliver & Rahn, 2016) and his supporters have claimed that the media were biased against him during the 2016 election campaign and did not sufficiently cover scandals involving Hillary Clinton.

Both lines of criticism correspond with the chief elements of the right-wing populist worldview: on the one hand, the distinction between an ingroup and outgroups, and on the other, populist anti-elitism. The latter element also explains their usual argument that journalists fail to represent and judge reality correctly due to their ideological biases, either because they, as part of the overall ruling elite, conspire with other elite actors or because they are controlled by them.

However, such appeals to liberal norms of journalistic professionalism are ultimately paradoxical; the right-wing populist ideology is anti-pluralist because it assumes a unitary will of the people. In that view, ideas such as truth and completeness cannot be based on a diversity of perspectives, but only supposedly common-sense views and feelings of ordinary native-born people. Although others may see the world differently, their view can result only from an ideological bias or culture incompatible with one's own ideology or culture and therefore must be kept at a distance. Right-wing populists tend to deny that other ideologically based groups can represent the common interest. Strictly speaking, freedom of expression, as they conceive it, is the freedom of ingroup members to express the will of "the people" without being censored in the name of political correctness and to claim the preferential treatment which they believe that it deserves. Therefore, although right-wing populists sometimes demand balanced reporting, it is more consistent with their ideology to call for unbiased coverage in another sense—namely, that the only relevant bias is that exhibited by elites and outgroups against right-wing populist actors and "the people" that they have discursively constructed.

4   Journalism's difficulty to respond to right-wing populist criticism

Due to asymmetries in the logic of journalism, the press is insufficiently equipped to respond to the sort of criticism levelled by right-wing populists. Without reviewing the details of the academic discussion on the functions of journalism, it should be safe to assume that one of journalism's principal activities is to gather factual information and to decide whether that information is relevant to a broader

public and whether to publish that information, in either a partisan or nonpartisan perspective, according to the prevalent understanding of the role of journalism. Although its function of defining public relevance has been partly supplanted by networks of actors that redistribute and sometimes escalate content online (e.g. by endorsing and sharing content on social media), journalism still needs to be selective and to evaluate whether events are of general interest and whether reports are true. In what follows, I discuss the two chief elements of the mentioned functions of journalism—facticity and the relevance of information selected—and the problems that journalists may face when they have to respond to criticism that refers to those elements.

Truthfulness

If a report is published, then it cannot easily establish its own truthfulness, due to the paradox of communicative authenticity and the functions of journalism.

If communicators claim that they believe that what they say is true, then their claim is either redundant or suspicious (Luhmann, 1998, p. 311) and cannot establish the truthfulness of what is being said without additional evidence. Although untruthfulness can reveal itself only if communicators contradict themselves or act contrary to their alleged conviction, that contradiction can be explained away. Journalists can point to external evidence to assure the truth of such claims. However, their role is to report exactly what cannot be experienced or verified directly by the largest part of their audiences. Referring to sources or other types of evidence is therefore often a means to shift responsibility or of "relocating facticity" (Tuchman, 1978, pp. 90f.). Although that evidence may support the claim in principle, the correctness of the evidence can remain questionable. Arguably, that dynamic is the price of the benefits that the mass media provide to modern society, even though they can provide more or less evidence and be more transparent and participatory in terms of journalistic structures and practices and thereby increase or lower the price or risk inherent in the public's dependency on journalism. Because the regress of providing sources and establishing their truthfulness cannot continue indefinitely, continuing to be efficient requires journalism to remain a black box to a certain extent.

If we define conspiracy theory not in terms of its own truthfulness but by the type of explanation that it proposes (referring to secretly conspiring powerful actors) and its tendency to not be testable and to escape falsification (e.g. Barkun, 2003), then conspiracy theories about journalism are easy to maintain. If a media report points to sources or other forms of evidence, then the mentioned regress allows conspiracy theorists to question that evidence and, in turn, count its use as evidence that journalism and its conspirators are even more evil. In that line

of thinking, journalists not only make false claims, but also falsify evidence in order to make their claims appear to be more credible and, in the process, possibly conspire with other additional actors. For instance, right-wing populists may claim that journalists protect the ruling elite by misinforming the public about crimes committed by migrants—for example, by referring to crime statistics that have been manipulated by law enforcement or government agencies.

Therefore, whether one relies on the truthfulness of journalistic reports is partly a matter of trust. The professionalisation of journalism has been characterised as a strategy to close journalism off to external influences while maintaining unity among members and control in journalistic organisations (Deuze, 2005; Schudson, 2001; Schudson & Anderson, 2008). Unlike other professionals, journalists cannot easily claim a unique expertise—they remain laypeople and generalists who report on fields with more specialised actors—yet set themselves apart by means of professional ethics and privileged access to information. That unique position allows them to reject demands by right-wing populists in the name of professional autonomy, which becomes highly problematic when their field faces criticism and, moreover, mistrust in the truthfulness of their reportage.

The asymmetry in competence and information that professionalisation creates between providers and consumers renders the process of providing the professional service non-transparent. Although the results of such services may speak for themselves, professionals are usually entrusted with tasks in which success is not guaranteed—for instance, an attorney may lose a lawsuit or a doctor's patient may not entirely recover from an illness. Likewise, the mentioned problem for journalists of establishing veracity persists, and in response, journalists must generally admit that they can never reveal the complete truth with complete objectivity, but only approach that ideal (on this aspect of journalistic professional ideology, see Hearns-Branaman, 2014). Therefore, for journalists and other professionals, clients have to trust that the professional function is fulfilled in a way that respects the interest of the clientele, typically signalled by the existence of and adherence to professional norms, which are often codified. In response to journalists as professionals, right-wing populists not only claim that journalists compromise their professional norms, but even use them against journalists themselves. Furthermore, such norms alone cannot guide everyday practice, which is based on a vast set of implicit rules. Professional norms are not specific enough to solve all of the dilemmas raised by right-wing populist criticism—for instance, how extensively a media outlet has to cover right-wing populism in order to be deemed balanced, whether a report can be called "true" and "complete" if the cultural background of an offender goes unmentioned, and whether a report based on one official source will be trusted if critics allege that journalists are insufficiently critical of or collude with established politicians.

In practice, journalists adapt their routines of newsgathering to accommodate the structures of the fields that they cover, and the resulting construction of reality can validate itself if the selection and presentation of news confirms the relevance and trustworthiness of official sources already underlying its production (Tuchman, 1978). However, it is exactly this pre-established harmony that right-wing populists criticize, sometimes interpreting it as a conspiracy.

In turn, the view of a person who completely trusts journalism is the mirror image of the view of the anti-media conspiracy theorist, for from that person's perspective, the construction of reality presented in journalism effortlessly and continuously validates itself. Such thinking is likely consistent with a worldview that the person has formed throughout his or her life, based on both early media use and independent experiences with some immediate and broader social milieu. Even if such a person criticises the media at various levels, the general reliability of journalism seems unproblematic to him or her; in the ideal case, the idea that journalists could systematically lie or distort reality never occurs to that person, and using established media has no real alternative. He or she might have been socialised in a context in which it seems more or less self-evident that journalists act in good faith. That implicit assumption does not have to be based on intimate knowledge about how journalists work, but simply on the perceived social proximity and similarity of one's personal milieu with the social and professional milieux to which journalists belong. Therefore, even when faced with right-wing populists' criticism of the media, it seems self-evident that journalists do not conspire or tolerate constant manipulation to the disadvantage of the common population, at least in the way that right-wing populists suggest. Given a person's familiarity with how organisations and social fields usually function, the type of conspiracy or far-reaching established harmony between journalists and elites that right-wing populists assume seems implausible, even if he or she accepts, for example, that vested interests exist, that elites form networks, that actors from different fields seek to influence and co-opt each other, and that the media insufficiently represent some interests, grievances, and problems.

By contrast, as Hofstadter (1996, p. 39f.) has explained, a "paranoid style" of conspiratorial thinking can develop from a lack of insight into how a field of power functions:

> Feeling that they [persons with a paranoid style of thinking] have no access to political bargaining or the making of decisions, they find their original conception that the world of power as omnipotent, sinister, and malicious fully confirmed. They see only the consequences of power—and this through distorting lenses—and have little chance to observe its actual machinery.

Albeit with some exceptions, particularly among leading figures, people who sub-
scribe to the right-wing populist criticism of the media may be similarly unfamiliar
with how the media function. Such people confront a mediated output of news that
seems to be hostile to the values and way of living that right-wing populists cher-
ish, and mainstream journalists and similar elites and milieus seem to promote
the cultural change that they fear and combat. Furthermore, when confronting that
type of criticism, the media have been rather unresponsive (Krämer, 2017a).

Sympathisers of this criticism range from sceptics who continue to use the es-
tablished media to people who have more or less completely broken with them (on
this process, see Kemmers, van der Waal, & Aupers, 2016). Moreover, because
media content cannot alone validate itself, it presumably cannot alone alter that
stance, which would require, on the contrary, perceived proximity to the journal-
istic milieu, perspective on the world, and at least a vague idea of how journalism
functions. Meanwhile, trust could grow only based on a feeling of familiarity (to
people who understand German, that relationship might be particularly evident,
since trust translates as 'Vertrauen' and familiarity as 'Vertrautheit').

The decision of whether to publish

Although a function of journalism is to decide whether to publish a report, pub-
lic perception and self-legitimation emphasize one of the two possible outcomes,
because publishing news, not omitting it, seems to be the "real" or "ultimate"
function of journalism. Observers can disentangle that asymmetry by exploring its
implications when the distinction between being worthy and unworthy of publica-
tion is applied at several levels or on itself.

For one, when a media outlet publishes a report and an observer agrees that it
is worthy of publication, then the situation is unproblematic, and the contingency
of the decision usually goes unnoticed. In fact, the decision attracts attention only
when a third party considers the reported information to be irrelevant or casts
doubt on the legitimacy of that decision, which is common when investigative
journalism reveals secrets. Whereas not covering events and phenomena that the
observer deems irrelevant will present an even less noteworthy and problematic
situation and those covered but deemed unworthy can be annoying, decisions to
publish what an observer deems unworthy of publication are scandalous only if
interpreted to deliberately distract attention away from important information. If
a media outlet fails to report information that an observer thinks should be pub-
lished, then the situation is considered highly problematic. Although failure to
report important information can stem from incompetence, if observers believe
that the omission reflects the interests of powerful actors, then they will strongly
condemn the failure. The different typical evaluations of these combinations lead

to a focus of criticism on unreported but seemingly relevant information. Even if an observer does not attribute decisions about whether to publish to external interests, neglecting to publish something important seems to be the most noteworthy type of lapse in journalism.

Another way of applying the distinction is to apply it to itself—that is, by asking whether a discussion about whether a report is worth publishing is itself worthy of publication. Typically, the relevance of what journalists cover is taken to be self-evident, and at best, contributions emphasise the aspects that account for that importance. Media outlets rarely publicly justify their decisions to publish or not, meta-communication about more general criteria is even rarer, and journalists resist explicit self-reference. Furthermore, we are again faced with an asymmetry that leads to a paradox: While it can be possible to justify why something has been covered, the omission of some information cannot be justified without referring to that information (or at least alleging to it).

Having outlined the general problems that journalists face in establishing the truthfulness and relevance of information, I now shift to discuss more specific reasons pertaining to the objects of the type of coverage that is typically criticized by right-wing populists. My aim is to show that in such confrontations, the blind spots and self-referentiality of journalistic practices and coverage make it even more difficult to reject right-wing populist criticism. At that point, journalists have to resort to what I call the "no censorship" or "no ammunition" defences.

5   The essentialisation of outgroups

In journalism itself, it sometimes seems self-evident that a perpetrator's ethnic, cultural or religious background is relevant and underlying hypotheses do not have to be specified (typically, that his or her background or the context of the perpetrated act can better explain the act). However, in the present analysis, I assume that at least part of the established media does not always report the background of offenders or at least does not emphasise it as much as right-wing populists require. Nevertheless, journalists do not feel obliged to specify the criteria of relevance in each case, but instead often seem unable to justify an omission of what is, after all, a fact—if the perpetrator's background is certain—in which the public may be interested, because professional norms are seldom sufficiently specific, consensual, and grounded to provide clear guidance and compelling arguments. That shift from substantial criteria to the argument of public interest amounts to a self-referential justification and self-fulfilling prophecy. As soon as one or more influential media outlets have concluded that public interest exists and revealed the perpetra-

tor's background, or as soon as some influential actors begin to discuss his or her possible background, then such action can constitute evidence of public interest, and other outlets will follow suit. Furthermore, it seems futile to omit information already published elsewhere. The original blind spot—that is, the rather unspecified criteria of relevance for such information—becomes even less visible as soon as the first media outlets or actors, for whatever reason, address the background and as soon as the justification shifts towards public interest.

Across a larger number of cases, the more or less routine coverage of perpetrators' background tends to essentialise underlying social categories or reproduce already essentialised categories such as ethnicity, cultural background, nationality, and race. The audience already or increasingly considers such classifications to be self-evident and relevant, particularly in the case of criminal and terrorist acts. Journalists cannot omit such classifications, which seem to belong to a person's essence, without leaving the impression that the person's description is incomplete or somehow misleading.

Given such tendencies, journalists are even less able to justify omissions of facts that are not obviously private, offensive, or untrue, including the background of offenders. Accordingly, their responses to right-wing populist criticism may sometimes involve defending the omission on the basis that the information is irrelevant to the public's understanding of a crime. However, more often, their responses involve mentioning the background and denying that they would ever engage in self-censorship or accept censorship by others. Consequently, such responses confirm existing expectations about the outgroup by providing anecdotal evidence of its character and further increase the salience of the issue, which makes it even more difficult to not cover the background in subsequent cases.

Sometimes, journalists add another justification—namely, that the absence of coverage would provide ammunition for right-wing populists. It is argued that when crimes committed by outgroup members do not receive media coverage or if coverage does not mention the perpetrators' background, then either act confirms right-wing populist criticism of the media. However, such reactions indirectly confirm that criticism, or at least its underlying standards and views. The media seem to accept that a perpetrator's background is relevant to understand such acts and provide a steady flow of apparent evidence for the right-wing populist construction of outgroups.

6   The spiral of normalisation

Journalists' resistance to meta-communication about journalism also poses difficulties for the treatment of populists compared to that of non-populist political forces and leaders. Journalists seldom expressly specify the criteria for such decisions, the standards of how they evaluate possible misconduct, and how much coverage such misconduct should receive. It is therefore unclear whether, for example, media outlets and journalists should invite right-wing populists to their talk shows or televised debates or whether they should cover a possibly racist comment by such a politician more extensively than, say, a centrist deputy who employs his or her partner as a parliamentary assistant.

Instead of simply representing the political field, journalism contributes to constituting it: What are the political cleavages and camps, the parties and politicians that are sufficiently important and not too radical to belong to the ordinary political spectrum, etc.? What should be allowed in politics, what counts as a scandal, and who should resign or be voted out of office, etc.?

Faced with criticism that right-wing populists are not represented adequately in the media (not covered and invited sufficiently often, portrayed too negatively, etc.), journalists are liable to react by responding that they do not censor right-wing populists, by more frequently providing them a platform, and by emphasising negative news about their opponents, all in an effort to appear balanced. Media outlets might fear that opportunities for attacks on the press may strengthen right-wing populists. Furthermore, it is probably more difficult to explicitly justify the exclusion of political actors from the media and the constant negative coverage of one side and not another.

The effect of any of those actions can be a spiral of normalisation of right-wing populist actors. In such cases, it become increasingly difficult to restrict coverage of them to a moderate amount and to offer frameworks of interpretation other than the conflict between populists and the rest of the political spectrum—for instance, by focusing on different degrees of openness towards immigration and the policy proposals of non-populist parties in response instead of presenting right-wing populist criticism of, or hostility towards, immigration as the radical and only alternative to policies of established parties. Such normalisation not only implies that right-wing populist actors and their policies and utterances are acceptable, but also confirms their vision of politics, for it consistently stresses the division between them and the "old" elite.

7 Conclusion

The above argument can suggest that journalism is neither equipped to adequately respond to right-wing populist criticism nor able to identify a strategy that does not indirectly confirm that criticism and the corresponding worldview. If the media work and react as described above, then they contribute to spreading and perpetuating essentialised social categories and to normalising exclusive anti-pluralist right-wing populist politics. It is important to recognise, however, that the above argument has described an ideal type of the logic of journalism and that numerous media outlets, by contrast, have begun to reflect on their coverage of minorities and right-wing populist actors and have considered or even implemented measures to regain and strengthen trust in the media.

Nevertheless, given the relative lack of meta-discourse in journalism, the media do not contribute to an awareness of the contingency and selectivity of the journalistic construction of reality. Journalists rarely explicate their criteria of selection and evaluation, and concepts often cited as foundations of journalistic professionalism in liberal democratic systems (e.g. truthfulness, impartiality, balance) are insufficiently specific to allow definite answers to right-wing populist criticism. In response, I suggest identifying what those principles are good for in the first place. What does being professional, truthful, or balanced mean, and why should journalists strive to achieve those ideals? Thus, the problem becomes what kind of discourse journalism should contribute to and enable.

For one, the concept of balanced coverage does not allow journalists to decide whether or how often they should cover, interview, or host right-wing populists or how to deal with them. Although the following principles are still insufficiently specific, a desirable discourse should be pluralistic and based on the effort to take others' perspectives instead of merely speaking about them. Therefore, journalists should reject attempts to exclude certain actors from political discourse (for example, to delegitimize other political actors or to consider migrants as objects instead of as subjects of politics), but work to actively include them. If political camps have nothing to contribute to the understanding of an issue other than exclusive rhetoric and scapegoating, then discourse should work to allow the identification of this strategy of exclusion and focus on actors who accept its premises and contribute substantial demands and proposals.

Journalists should always be aware that "news does not mirror society", but "helps to constitute it as a shared social phenomenon" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 184), including the political landscape. Therefore, they should acknowledge contingency and uncertainty resulting from that understanding of their work and, in turn, avoid producing and reproducing divisions that merely conform with the view of one

ideological camp and following the existing associations of certain parties with certain issues. Instead, journalistic constructions of social reality should be based on methods of information gathering, social categories, and hypotheses that seem most fruitful to elucidating that reality or to asking relevant questions.

Adequate descriptions of social reality are inherently pluralistic. However, this does not imply that there is an infinite number of politically convenient "alternative truths," but that egocentric, ethnocentric, or otherwise mono-contextual descriptions are usually insufficient. If society is differentiated into social fields, social systems, social groups, or social milieux, then journalism should not simply reproduce or even essentialise a particular perspective, but instead contribute to a discourse whereby different standpoints and claims can enter into dialogue and be challenged, accepted, or transformed.

Right-wing populists also criticise the media for insufficiently separating facts and commentary and for interpreting what they cover from certain ideological perspectives. Although an obvious response is that journalism strives to be objective, observers can always contest the concepts and categories that journalists use to describe social reality—for example, journalists could describe people as "illegal immigrants", "the undocumented", or "illegalised immigrants". Certain journalistic genres should certainly refrain from explicit evaluations, not least because such value-free descriptions can sometimes have more critical potential and cause more irritation than a critical evaluation from a familiar perspective. However, a more appropriate response to that populist criticism is that the seemingly common-sense right-wing populist description of society is not neutral, well founded, or without alternatives, but rests upon an essentialisation of oversimplified historically contingent categories. Conversely, journalists need to confront their constitutive, performative function that they have to acknowledge and reflect in order to be able to justify their vision of reality.

Further conclusions are possible regarding media criticism and trust in journalism in general. The chief goal of media literacy education should not be that people somehow have to be sceptical about the media or mistrust them (boyd, 2017), which would resonate with a diffuse socialisation, for example by popular culture, into a similar mistrust in experts and established news outlets, or even into a conspiracy culture (Aupers, 2012). Critical scholars and media literacy educators cannot simply defend the media against right-wing populist attacks, although they should, and then teach everyone to have faith in the media. Right-wing populists should not be able to monopolise media criticism and distract attention from all other forms of criticism. Accordingly, audiences have to become familiar with other elaborate lines of criticism in order to assess their soundness.

A differentiated evaluation of the media's performance cannot be based solely on their output, because the description of reality cannot validate itself. Therefore, media users have to acquire strategies to deal with the situation that contemporary journalism is inevitably trust-based, and the media have to provide additional insight into how they work by becoming more transparent and participatory. Only then will it be possible to point to the formal appearance and content of media products as a sign of their trustworthiness. Stringent arguments, transparency, and self-reflection within, or in addition to, coverage could then signal a type of journalism that does not, even unwillingly, confirm the anti-pluralist, essentialist, and ethnocentric right-wing populist worldview.

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"Lügenpresse! Lying press!" Is the Press Lying?

A Content Analysis Study of the Bias of Journalistic Coverage about 'Pegida', the Movement Behind this Accusation

Markus Beiler & Johanna Kiesler

Abstract

The accusation "Lügenpresse!" [lying press] is a core feature of the right-wing populist protest movement, Pegida. The allegation has been heard at demonstrations in Germany since autumn 2014. It reflects dwindling confidence in journalism. This content analysis explores how those who are accused of lying report about those behind the accusation. In the four (German) national daily newspapers examined, the coverage of the infancy of the Pegida movement is distinctly negative (N = 360 articles). Even fact-focused formats contain comment. There are few complex frames setting out the root causes of the formation of Pegida. The *Lügenpresse* accusation is barely addressed at all.

1   Introduction

"Lügenpresse! Lügenpresse!" – Cries of "lying press!" have been heard at the Monday evening demonstrations in large cities in Germany since autumn 2014. The most significant city has been Dresden, the state capital of Saxony, where the Pegida movement came into being. Pegida stands for 'Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (Occident)'. This faction is not only united by its concern about the ostensible 'Islamisation of the West' but also by a general anger about politics. It is also particularly united by a deep mistrust of the mass media (Patzelt & Klose, 2016, p. 110). What came about due to the impression of one-sided, biased coverage about important political issues is expressed in the aggressively worded slogans of Pegida supporters at the rallies. A clear accusation is chanted: the press is lying.

Mistrust of the press – the 'press' representing all mass media outlets – is a core feature of the Pegida movement. Dwindling confidence in the media is discussed publicly time and again and the accusation of one-sided or distorted coverage is nothing new – in fact, it is something of a constant in journalism research. Nevertheless, with Pegida, the accusations have mounted higher than ever before. The allegation of falsehood is a serious one. The accusation goes far beyond a mere loss of trust and it must therefore be examined.

After all, the allegation of lying is not just directed at anyone. It is directed at the mass media outlets, which are a vital part of the way that a democratic society functions. They are tasked with informing, checking and critiquing and with contributing to shaping opinions and decision-making. It is now precisely these entities, the mass media outlets, who are no longer trusted by Pegida demonstrators and against whom their serious allegations are directed – the very same outlets whose primary task is to ensure that societal problems are the subject of public. This means that to some extent, those who are sitting in the dock as the accused are also faced with the somewhat masochistic task of creating media coverage about the serious allegations against them.

The press is expected to provide balanced, objective coverage. Nevertheless, is it actually possible for mass media outlets to meet this requirement in their coverage if they themselves are the ones being accused of lying? Or should they be all the more rigorous in their pursuit of neutral coverage? It is doubtful whether these conflicting aims can be resolved, that is, whether it is possible to provide objective and balanced coverage about accusations that are being made about oneself. This problem is intensified by the general nature of the *Lügenpresse* accusation. Instead of being directed against individual media outlets, it addresses the media in gener-

al – the whole system. This means it is not possible for the sector's internal checks and balances to take effect.

It is against this background that this study addresses the question of how those accused of being the lying press report about their accusers. This study does not aim to fundamentally clarify the extent to which the accusations of distorted or one-sided mass media coverage are justifiable. That question will continue to occupy communication science researchers and can never be fully answered. The specific endeavour of this study is to analyse the contradictory situation as described above: how the accused mass media outlets report about Pegida and how they handle Pegida's accusations.

2 Theoretical background and state of research

The Pegida movement and the term Lügenpresse

The Pegida movement is one of the most visible signs of a return to increasing political polarisation in Germany and Europe (cf. Maurer & Beiler, 2017). Pegida is a right-wing populist protest movement, which "mobilises xenophobic and Islam-critical sentiments and expresses fundamental reservations about political and media elites" [translated from German] (Vorländer, Herold & Schäller, 2016, p. 137). Since 20 October 2014, it has been organising regular demonstrations called 'Abendspaziergänge' [evening strolls], which are generally on Mondays. The demonstrations are directed against the ostensible process of Islamisation and Germany's immigration and asylum policies. They also express general dissatisfaction with establishment politics and the media (Patzelt & Klose, 2016, p. 110).

The movement has its origins in a Facebook group, which was created by Lutz Bachmann. The group was used to organise the first demonstration, which was attended by around 350 people. Thereafter, there was steady growth in the number of participants. The Pegida rallies reached their peak size on 12 January 2015 with around 25,000 demonstrators (Forschungsgruppe 'Durchgezählt', 2017; Berger, Poppe & Schuh, 2016). Pegida was registered as an association (e.V.) on 19 December 2014. Similar groups developed in other cities across Germany. By 27 January 2015, shortly after Dresden's department of public prosecution began investigating Bachmann regarding suspected hate speech offences, the organisation's leadership had disbanded. Following this, the number of people attending the Monday evening demonstrations has fallen significantly.

It seems that the Pegida movement made the *Lügenpresse* accusation so publicly visible in the final quarter of 2014 that the jury of a linguistic initiative chose it as 'Unwort des Jahres' [non-word of the year]. The jury's reasoning was as follows:

"The fact that the charged linguistic history of the expression may not to be known to the majority of the 'concerned citizens' who have been chanting it and writing it on placards since last year makes the expression a particularly perfidious tool in the hands of those who are purposefully using it."

[Translated from German] (Sprachkritische Aktion, 2015)

The expression does indeed have a turbulent history and it has been used in a range of contexts in Germany since the mid-19th century. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's German dictionary contains a related term: 'Lügenblatt' [lying newspaper]. The meaning is cited from a newspaper article from 1871: "a newspaper that deliberately circulates falsehoods: it will be good if […] it is not possible to distribute any blatantly lying newspapers on the street" [translated from German] (Kompetenzzentrum, 2017). In this case, the term refers to an individual medium rather than the press as a whole. In the Duden online dictionary, the pejorative meaning of the compound noun *Lügenpresse* is emphasised with the following definition:

"a catchword (originating in the 19th century) for media outlets, particularly newspapers and magazines, that are accused of being influenced by politics, ideology or economics, of concealing or falsifying information and by so doing, of manipulating public opinion"

[translated from German] (Duden, 2017)

As early as 1695, Kaspar von Stieler associated the terms 'Lüge' [lie] and 'Presse' [press] in the first comprehensive account of the press as a whole (Stieler, 1969, p. 56f.). This shows that this topic has been occupying journalism scholars from the very beginning. Stieler mentions the accusation made against newspapers, namely that they are 'lügenhaft' [fraudulent] (ibid., p. 56), but he comes to their defence.

Following the lifting of press censorship in Germany during the failed March Revolution in 1848–49, Catholic-conservative circles used the word *Lügenpresse* as a way of polemicising the now strengthened press, which was influenced by liberal and democratic thinking (cf. Weber, 1848, pp. 794–811). At that time, the word was also used anti-Semitically, as a term for stirring up agitation against Jewish newspapers (see Schmolke, 1971).

During the First World War, *Lügenpresse* was used widely in German propaganda as a defamatory word to describe press coverage from neutral and enemy countries. The term was used by newspapers and intellectuals alike. Its use began as the result of reports published by foreign media about the German violation of Belgian neutrality and war atrocities committed against Belgian civilians (Heine, 2015). In 1914, the Protestant theologian and Church historian Adolf von Harnack

wrote the following: "A fourth major power has risen up against Germany: the international *Lügenpresse,* which is showering the world with lies against our glorious and highly moral army and is slandering everything that is German." [Translated from German] (cited in Nowak, 1996, p. 1444). Additional important texts include five volumes entitled 'Our enemies' campaign of lies' by Reinhold Anton, the first of which is called 'The lying press: German, English, French and Russian news in comparison' [titles translated from German] (Anton, 1914).

During the Weimar Republic after the First World War, the National Socialists used the term *Lügenpresse*. In 'Mein Kampf', Hitler accused the social democratic press of being a "concentrated solution of lies" [all quotations from this source are translated from German] (Hitler, 1943, p. 43). He accused it of being a "brutal daily press, shunning no villainy, employing every means of slander, lying with a virtuosity that would bend iron beams, […] in the name of this gospel of a new humanity!" (ibid.). Hitler also wrote about "Marxist lying newspapers" (ibid., p. 265), stating that "lying is just as much of a necessity [to them] as catching mice is for cats" (ibid.). Last but not least, during the rise of National Socialism, campaigning took place against the Jewish 'Journaille' [pejorative term for newspapers] (Schmitz-Berning, 1998, p. 326f.). While the domestic press was brought into line once Hitler was in power, Third Reich propaganda continued to use the term to describe the foreign press (e.g., in speeches by Goebbels, 1941; Hagemann, 1948).

During the Cold War, the GDR state propaganda used the word *Lügenpresse* to defame western and West German media (e.g., Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, 1959, p. 56). The term was used in the official Socialist Unity Party (SED) newspaper *Neues Deutschland* until the early 1970s, often in conjunction with the words 'capitalist', 'bourgeois' or 'Bonn', which was the capital city of West Germany (Amendt, 2015). In turn, *Neues Deutschland* was described as *Lügenpresse* during the period of German reunification (Richter, 2010, p. 293). In the past, the term *Lügenpresse* has been used by more people and in more contexts than this short overview is able to convey. Since the early 2000s, the term has been in vogue again in Germany, particularly in neo-Nazi and radical right-wing scenes.

Dwindling confidence in journalism and distortions in media coverage

The *Lügenpresse* accusation, which has been made by Pegida since 2014, is the most extreme expression of the dwindling levels of trust in journalism – a lack of trust that is also evident among large swathes of the population (Dernbach, 2005, p. 150). Yet for journalism, trust plays a constitutive role. Journalism relies on the trust of its recipients for its very existence. After all, media products are credence goods, which, unlike search goods, cannot be evaluated prior to receipt (Altmeppen, 2003, p. 19). Although the trust of the recipients is a decisive success

factor in economic and journalistic terms, it also affects the entire 'institution' of journalism, which is an important pillar of democracy.

Trust in journalism, however, is precisely what is in short supply. Trust is more of a marginal factor in journalism research (e.g., Kohring, 2014; overview in Pürer, 2012). Donsbach, Rentsch, Schielicke and Degen (2009) produced the first and, so far, only comprehensive study about levels of trust in journalism in Germany. The study was based on the results of a representative poll of the German population. Although 61 % indicated that they 'somewhat value' journalists, this figure is low compared to the responses for other professions. On the topic of trust, only 35 % of respondents gave a positive response for journalists. "There is no other profession with such a large gap between reputation and trust" (ibid., p. 66). Overall, in the eyes of citizens, journalism "is not sufficiently fulfilling its societal role and is substantially failing to meet the expectations of the population" (ibid.).

The Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach [Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research] has been conducting regular representative studies about the prestige of various professions since 1966. Journalists are near the bottom of the ranking. Respondents are asked to name the five professions that they value most or for which they have the most respect. In 2013, the approval rating for journalists was just 13 % (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2013, p. 2). Although the figures have varied from survey to survey, journalists have never exceeded a rating of 18 % (Pürer, 2012, p. 264).

One reason for the low levels of trust in journalism may be the perception among its recipients that the mass media produces a consistent and cumulative simplification of complex realities, which does not reflect the recipients' individual experiences. The resulting assumption is that the media coverage is distorted. The fact that dissatisfaction with the mass media was an element of the Pegida ideology from the beginning – and that the movement also reached wider swathes of the population with its demonstrations – may in part be due to the German media coverage of the events in Ukraine in spring 2014, which was perceived as being unbalanced (Krüger, 2016, p. 7ff.).

The accusation of distorted coverage, which has culminated again through Pegida, is a key issue in journalism research. It is a particularly important issue in research into news selection (overview in Beiler, 2013, pp. 121–136). When choosing news items, journalists are faced with the task of "simplifying an excessively complex selection and selecting relevant information to convey to their audience" [translated from German] (Eilders, 1999, p. 15). Targeted empirical research in this area has been taking place since the 1950s (Schulz, 1976, p. 11). According to Kepplingers' classification (1989b), the issue of distorted media reality is to be investigated using the news bias approach. This approach is one of three streams

in news selection research, alongside the gatekeeper approach and the news values theory. This classification, however, is prototypical and the de facto demarcation is unclear.

News bias research has traditionally been very heterogeneous, both in terms of content and methodology. "With the exception of a common focus on one-sidedness, objectivity and independence of coverage, to a large extent, news bias research is lacking a common theoretical concept" [translated from German] (Eilders, 1999, p. 18). There is also no date for its genesis (overview in Staab, 1990, pp. 27–40). It often focuses on the political characteristics of journalists and media companies and on the resulting bias of the coverage. An early example that epitomises this approach can be seen in the study by Klein und Maccoby (1954). For the US presidential election campaign of 1952, the study was able to show that newspapers whose publishers affiliated themselves with the Republican Party published more and more prominently-placed articles about the Republican candidate, Eisenhower. These articles also contained more opinion statements.

Kepplinger (1989b) defines three methodical approaches within news bias research. The first approach relies on experimental studies. These studies showed that journalists write news and comment pieces that are in line with the paper's editorial policy or their own political views (e.g., Kerrick, Anderson & Swales, 1964). The second approach, which combines questionnaires and content analysis, can show the links between the view of the journalist and the bias of the article (e.g., Flegel & Chaffee, 1971). The third relates content analysis to external reality indicators (e.g., Lang & Lang, 1953; Funkhouser, 1973).

Journalism research in Germany focuses on content analysis studies. Schönbach (1977) identified that, for some media outlets, the selection of news items followed the bias of the comment pieces. In 'The Opportune Witnesses' [translated from German], Hagen (1992) showed that selection of sources quoted in the articles reflected the editorial policies of the newspapers. In his theory of instrumental actualisation, Kepplinger (1984; 1989a) assumes that journalists make intentional selection decisions in order to ensure that the public is exposed to certain perspectives. Following on from this, the 'final or functional model' of news value theory proposed by Staab (1990) views news factors as being both the cause and the consequence of journalistic selection. According to these conceptualisations, reporting does not appear to correspond to the ideal of objectivity – and thus appears to violate the generally-agreed rules of the profession and the image that most journalists have of their role (Weischenberg, Malik & Scholl, 2006b, pp. 355f.).

The problem of objectivity (Donsbach, 1990; Bentele, 1988) is also a crucial aspect in research into journalistic quality (Beiler, 2013, p. 40ff.). Based on a model by Westerståhl (1983), Schatz und Schulz (1992) categorised objectivity into

two dimensions. The first of their dimensions is factuality or appropriateness. The focus here is on whether the media content and events correspond with the sub-aspects of accuracy and relevance (ibid., p. 703). The second of these dimensions is impartiality. The first aspect of this is fairness or balance (ibid., p. 703f.). Consideration should be given to every argument, position and stakeholder, particularly if the topic is controversial. The second sub-aspect here is neutrality, whereby the critical features include the distinction between news and opinion.

Research questions
The issue of objective journalistic coverage is particularly potent due to the situation at hand: a movement is directing an existential accusation at the mass media and the mass media is tasked with reporting about its own accuser. The following research questions are used to investigate the allegation:

1. What can be said about the type of content, the source selection and the bias of the coverage about Pegida?
2. How are the root causes of the formation of Pegida framed?
3. How is the *Lügenpresse* accusation handled?

The aim is to answer these research questions by comparing fact-focused coverage and opinion-focused coverage in order to give consideration to the main form of objectivity, i.e., the distinction between news and comment.

3   Method

In order to answer the research questions, a quantitative, standardised analysis of the content of (German) national daily newspapers was undertaken. This empirical data collection method is particularly well-suited because it serves to "describe the textual and formal features of the messages in a systematic way that is intersubjectively plausible" [translated from German] (Früh, 2011, p. 27). It can also be built on to provide the option of "an interpretive inference for situations not mentioned in the messages" (ibid.). In addition to the method's system, intersubjective plausibility is also important. The aim of intersubjective plausibility is for events to be largely understood and questioned in the same way across the board, thus creating common ground for the discussion of these events.

   Daily newspapers were selected as research subjects because the most relevant issue is the coverage provided by those at whom the *Lügenpresse* accusation is most specifically and literally directed: the printed press. Due to the financial con-

siderations of this research, it was not possible to examine all of Germany's daily newspapers. The newspapers investigated were the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (*SZ*), the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*), the *tageszeitung* (*taz*) and *Bild*.

These important national daily newspapers are leading journalistic media outlets (Weischenberg, Malik & Scholl, 2006a, p. 134f.) Furthermore, *SZ* and *FAZ* can be considered as being quality newspapers (Jandura & Brosius, 2011, p. 195f.). As the most widely-read newspaper in Germany, the tabloid newspaper *Bild* plays a particularly important role. Thus the four selected daily newspapers span a broad political and journalistic spectrum (Pürer & Raabe, 2007, p. 413). This means that collectively, these newspapers can be said to be in a position of particular responsibility for public opinion.

The time period being examined corresponds with the infancy of Pegida and spans from 20 October 2014 to 27 January 2015. The first day of this period marks the day of the first demonstration in Dresden and the last day marks the disbanding of Pegida's original leadership group. After that date, the numbers at the rallies also fell significantly. During the investigation period, each Monday to Saturday edition of the relevant newspapers was examined.

The analysis units are editorial articles of all kinds from all sections of the newspaper. Letters to the editor, advertisements and press reviews were not included. Nor were images or caricatures with no text. For the sake of comparability, only the national editions were included – regional sections or editions were not analysed. The criteria for selecting the articles were certain terms used in connection with the movement, including 'Pegida', 'Lügenpresse', 'Abendland' [West/Occident], 'Patriotische Europäer' [patriotic Europeans] and 'Bachmann'. The kickers, headlines, subheads and first paragraphs of the articles were checked for these terms.

The codebook for the investigation was developed on the basis of numerous sections of test code. The following formal attributes were defined: medium, publication date, section, article title, article length and number of images in the article. The textual categories relate to characteristics including the type of article, the main reason for the article, the main content of the images, the main topic of the article, the bias of the article regarding Pegida, the roots of the Pegida movement and the handling of the *Lügenpresse* accusation. According to Holsti's method, the reliability of the variables used in this paper is at least 0.8.

4   Results

During the investigation period, there were 360 articles about Pegida in the four national daily papers. The results mapped over time show that the newspapers were late to begin reporting about the movement (Figure 1). Although the demonstrations were held on a weekly basis from 20 October 2014, no reference is made to them for over a month. It was not until 26 November 2014 that the first two articles were published. Regular coverage only began from 11 December 2014, by which point there were already around 10,000 people attending the rallies in Dresden. There was a high concentration of articles in January 2015. In some cases, there were up to nine articles mentioning Pegida in one edition.
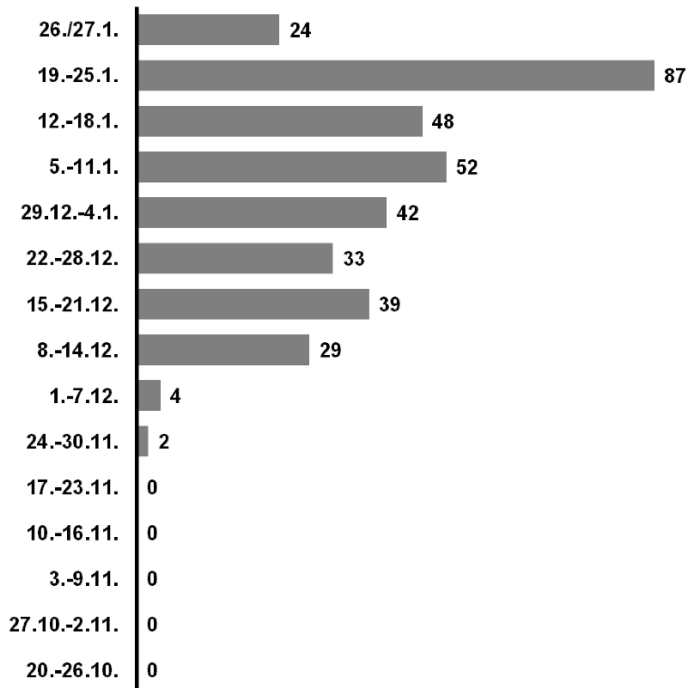

Figure 1   *Distribution of articles in SZ, FAZ, taz and Bild during the infancy of the Pegida movement,* N = 360 articles
Source: Own representation

Of the four daily newspapers, *taz* and *FAZ* wrote about the Pegida movement the most, with 125 and 121 articles respectively. In both cases, this equates to just over one third of the whole sample (35 % and 34 % respectively). There were 79 articles in *SZ* and 35 in *Bild* (22 % and 10 % respectively). Just under two thirds of the articles are featured in the politics section (65 %), more than one fifth are on the front page (22 %) and one tenth are in the feuilleton (11 %). *FAZ* is the newspaper that featured Pegida on its front page most frequently (31 % of the articles). For *Bild*, this figure is 23 % and for *SZ* and *taz* it is 22 % and 15 % respectively. In almost all the articles (86 %), Pegida is the main topic. In 7 %, Pegida is given roughly the same amount of coverage as another topic and in 8 %, Pegida is only a marginal topic.

At 100 lines, the average length of the articles was relatively long. The articles in *Bild* were significantly shorter than those in the other newspapers (80 lines compared to 99 in *SZ* and *FAZ* and 108 in *taz*). Around half of the articles (47 %) featured at least one image. As was to be expected, *Bild* featured the most (91 %). The newspaper with the fewest articles featuring at least one image was *FAZ* (28 %). In *SZ* and *taz*, the figures were 41 % and 58 % respectively. On average, there were three images per article in *Bild*, which is more than triple the overall average (0.8 images). This tabloid media outlet used visual language extensively.

Almost half of the images show demonstrations or activists (45 %): 34 % show Pegida rallies and supporters; 12 % show counter-demonstrations. 14 % of the images show politicians who are not affiliated with Pegida and 8 % feature other representatives from civil society institutions such as churches or universities. 9 % are caricatures and 16 % are pictures of the author. This means that the proportion of photos showing Pegida demonstrations and supporters is roughly equal to the proportion showing Pegida opponents, 'neutral' representatives of civil society and politicians from other parties.

It is apparent that a large proportion of the articles have an opinion-focused format. In total, they made up more than one third of the articles examined (37 %). In both *taz* and *FAZ*, the figure was more than four tenths (46 % and 44 % respectively). In *SZ* and *Bild* it was around three tenths (33 % and 29 % respectively). Thus at this general level, the four daily newspapers are thoroughly fulfilling their role of contributing to shaping public opinion. Overall, half of the articles (51 %) are news announcements and reports. In both *SZ* and *Bild*, they constitute around sixth tenths (61 % and 57 % respectively). The figure is 49 % in *FAZ* and 44 % in *taz*. 3 % of all the articles are reportages or features and 4 % are interviews.

The below analysis categorises the articles into fact-focused and opinion-focused formats. The news announcement/report and reportage/feature categories were merged together and classed as fact-focused formats to be compared with the opinion-focused formats (59 % to 41 %, N = 326). In *SZ*, the ratio of fact-focused

formats to opinion-focused formats was 71 % to 29 %. The ratio in *Bild* was 67 % to 33 %, in *FAZ* it was 56 % to 44 % and in *taz* it was 54 % to 46 %.

What can be said about the type of content, the source selection and the bias of the coverage about Pegida?

Table 1 shows which *type of content* is predominant in coverage about Pegida, i.e., whether it is factual events or comment that constitutes more than half of the volume. The proportion of comment articles is 46 % and thus somewhat higher than the proportion of opinion-focused formats (41 %). In keeping with this, the proportion of articles that focus on factual events is 54 %, which is somewhat lower than the proportion of fact-focused formats (59 %). Additional insight can be gained by inspecting the results more closely. Comment is the focus of 15 % of the opinion-focused articles, whereas 85 % of the fact-focused formats concentrated on facts and events. 91 % of fact-focused formats concentrated on comment, whereas 9 % focused on factual events. In *FAZ*, hardly any of the fact-focused articles contained any significant level of comment (5 %). For *SZ*, this figure is as high as 12 % and for both *taz* and *Bild*, the figure is one quarter.

Table 1 *Content of the general coverage about Pegida, categorised into fact-focused and opinion-focused formats, by newspaper (proportions in percent)*

Predominant content (more than 50 % of the volume)	SZ			FAZ			taz			Bild			Total		
	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total
Facts and events	88	0	63	95	20	62	75	2	41	75	10	53	85	9	54
Commentary	12	100	37	5	80	38	25	98	59	25	90	47	15	91	46
N	50	20	70	64	50	114	60	52	112	20	10	30	194	132	326

Source: Own representation

The selection of the *sources* (Table 2)[1] quoted or mentioned in an article can be considered as balanced in less than half of the articles (46 %). 53 % of the sources express a somewhat negative view of Pegida; 1 % express a somewhat positive view. With opinion-focused formats, there is in principle nothing to criticise about one-sided source selection. The proportion of negative sources in such formats

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1   The source selection was described using one of ten categories, which were re-assigned into three levels for the purposes of this evaluation.

is nearly as high as two thirds (63 %), with 36 % of the sources being somewhat balanced. With fact-focused formats, however, there is a demand for objectivity. It is noteworthy that only 52 % of the fact-focused articles have a somewhat balanced selection of sources, whereas 47 % of such articles predominantly feature sources whose views of Pegida are negative. Among the four newspapers, *FAZ* has by far the largest proportion of articles with a balanced selection of sources, both overall (61 %) and for the fact-focused and opinion-focused formats (65 % and 55 % respectively). *Bild* has the lowest proportion (24 % overall, 33 % for opinion-focused and 19 % for fact-focused articles). *SZ* and *taz* both feature a balanced selection of sources in half of the fact-focused articles (52 % and 50 % respectively).

Table 2   *Bias of the source selection and the general coverage about Pegida, categorised into fact-focused and opinion-focused formats, by newspaper (proportions in percent)*

	SZ			FAZ			taz			Bild			Total		
	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total
Source selection															
broadly balanced	48	32	43	65	55	61	50	22	37	19	33	24	52	36	46
predominantly negative	52	68	57	33	43	37	50	77	62	75	67	72	47	63	53
predominantly positive	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	2	1	6	0	4	1	2	1
Bias															
fairly neutral	42	0	30	64	32	51	33	12	23	13	0	8	44	16	33
somewhat negative	58	100	70	35	75	44	67	86	76	81	100	88	55	79	65
somewhat positive	0	0	0	2	11	6	0	2	1	6	0	4	1	5	3
N	48	19	67	63	44	107	58	51	109	16	9	25	185	123	308

Source: Own representation

Table 2 also shows the *general bias* of the stance regarding Pegida, as communicated in the article.[2] All in all, one third of the articles have a neutral stance. 65 % have a somewhat negative overall bias and 3 % have a somewhat positive overall bias. The bias is somewhat negative in as many as 79 % of the opinion-focused formats; it is somewhat positive in 5 % and neutral in 16 %. Only 44 % of the fact-focused formats can be described as neutral; 55 % are somewhat negative and 1 % are somewhat positive.

FAZ had by far the highest proportion of articles with a fairly neutral overall bias. The overall proportion was 51 % and for fact-focused formats, this figure was nearly two thirds (64 %). Furthermore, one third of the opinion-focused articles in *FAZ* were fairly neutral. *Bild* had the largest proportion of articles with a negative bias (88 % overall). In fact, all of its opinion-focused articles were somewhat negative, as were 81 % of the fact-focused articles. Three quarters (76 %) of all the articles in *taz* were somewhat negative, as were 86 % of the opinion-focused articles and 67 % of the fact-focused ones. Seven tenths of all of the *SZ* articles were somewhat negative. All of the opinion-focused formats and 58 % of the fact-focused formats were fairly negative.

In response to the first research question, it can be noted that even in the fact-focused formats, there is a significant volume of commentary in the coverage about Pegida. The source selection is not balanced and there is a clear negative bias in the coverage about Pegida. This may be because public opinion has quickly solidified into a negative stance on Pegida and because numerous politicians and representatives from civil society have made negative remarks. The one-sided source selection can also be interpreted as an expression of what Hagen (1992) calls 'opportune witnesses'.

How are the root causes of the formation of Pegida framed?

In order to answer the question about which root causes of the Pegida movement's existence are addressed in the coverage, the occurrences of a range of explanatory frames were recorded. Table 3 shows how frequently the individual frames occur (final column). In just over a quarter of the articles (27 %), Pegida supporters in general are accused of having a Nazi mindset. One fifth of the articles cite dissatisfaction with the government or those in government (21 %). These two frames are used most frequently. The next most frequent frame (14 %) is that Pegida supporters have an intolerant mindset i.e., that they do not accept other people's opinions or lifestyles.

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2   The overall bias was described using one of ten categories, which were re-assigned into three levels for the purposes of this evaluation. The indicators included the evaluative adjectives or descriptions as well as the sources.

Another important frame (totalling 13 %) is dissatisfaction with the media – such as an accusation that media coverage is incorrect, incomplete, one-sided or pro-government. 'Herd mentality' – the assumption that the supporters do not have their own opinion and merely follow others or go along for the ride – is an explanatory frame that occurs just as often. A lack of differentiation between Islam and Islamism is a frame that is present in 12 % of the articles. The same percentage of articles cite a general disenchantment or dissatisfaction with politics.

An additional explanatory frame is anger about the refugee policy, for example about accepting too many refugees, about asylum procedures taking too long or about unfair refugee distribution (11 %). In one tenth of the articles, reference is made to a lack of awareness among Pegida supporters. Both the absence of contact with other cultures and the fear of terrorism are suggested as an explanation in 9 % of the articles respectively. 8 % of the articles make reference to Pegida supporters seeing themselves as 'the people' or 'at the centre of society', suggesting that they therefore need to express themselves as 'normal citizens', whose concerns are to be taken seriously.

Pegida supporters are accused of stupidity or naivety in 7 % of the articles. An additional explanation offered is of Pegida supporters being dissatisfied with their own living conditions, which is also associated with a feeling of envy and being economically disadvantaged (6 %). Both disenchantment with the state and growing up and living in eastern Germany are also mentioned in 6 % of the articles respectively. Actual negative experiences with other cultures are only mentioned in 1 % of the articles.

A principal component analysis was performed in order to group the 17 individual explanatory frames. With an explained variance of 59 %, this generates six dimensions, each with an eigenvalue larger than 1 (KMO = 0.742).[3] The rotated component matrix has a simple structure and is easy to interpret (Table 3). There are four frames that contribute significantly to the first factor, which has an explained variance of 15 %. This factor can be described as relating to a general sense of dissatisfaction with the government, politics and the state. This factor also covers mistrust of the mass media: instances of the coverage referring to the feeling that the mass media is part of the 'system'. The second factor (explained variance of 10 %) groups together the frames that can be summarised by the description 'Intolerance and herd mentality'; there are four variables that particularly

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3   Originally, the content analysis identified 21 individual frames. Five frames were excluded from the analysis because the MSA values were too low. Also, these frames only occurred a few times. The variables included in the principal component analysis have MSA values of at least 0.6, although the values are generally significantly higher.

contribute to this factor. This heading also covers instances whereby the Pegida supporters are accused of having a Nazi mindset and of thinking that they are at the centre of society.

Table 3 *Root causes of the formation of Pegida: Principal component analysis (factor loadings of the rotated component matrix) and proportions*

	1. Dissatisfaction with politics	2. Intolerance and herd mentality	3. Fear of Islam and terrorism	4. Naivety and lack of awareness	5. A particularity of eastern Germany	6. Dissatisfaction with living conditions	Proportion in %
Nazi mindset		0.426					27
Dissatisfaction with the government	0.774						21
Intolerance		0.648					14
Dissatisfaction with media coverage	0.696						13
Herd mentality		0.755					13
A lack of differentiation between Islam and Islamism			0.771				12
Disenchantment with politics	0.716						12
Anger about the refugee policy			0.455				11
Lack of awareness				0.780			10
Absence of contact with other cultures					0.769		9
Fear of terrorism			0.759				9
Perceiving themselves as being at the centre of society and needing to express themselves		0.440					8
Stupidity/naivety				0.798			7
Dissatisfaction with own living conditions						0.711	6
Disenchantment with the state	0.668						6
Growing up/living in eastern Germany					0.764		6
Negative experiences with other cultures						0.573	1
Explained variance in %	15.2	9.9	9.0	8.8	8.5	7.2	--

N = 360 articles; varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation; factor weightings smaller than |0.4| not shown; total explained variance: 58.6 %; Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.742; Bartlett's test of sphericity (significance) = 0.000
Source: Own representation

The third dimension can be summarised with the description 'Fear of Islam and terrorism' (9 % explained variance). This dimension includes three more strongly loading individual frames, including anger about the refugee policy. The fourth factor combines the two frames that relate to 'Naivety and lack of awareness' (9 % explained variance). The fifth dimension views the formation of Pegida as 'A particularity of eastern Germany', characterised by the socialisation of eastern Germany and the absence of contact with other cultures (9 % explained variance). The sixth factor expresses 'Dissatisfaction with living conditions' and also includes negative experiences with other cultures (6 % of explained variance).

Table 4 shows how frequently these six dimensions for explaining the root causes are found in the coverage. If at least one of the individual frames that is assigned to one of the factors is mentioned in an article, it is recorded in this table. The most frequently occurring explanatory frame by a long way is 'Intolerance and herd mentality', which was identified in four tenths of all the articles (41 %). In second place is the dimension 'Dissatisfaction with politics' (27 %), followed by 'Fear of Islam and terrorism' (23 %). The categories 'Naivety and lack of awareness' and 'A particularity of eastern Germany' both made up more than one tenth (13 % and 12 % respectively). 'Dissatisfaction with living conditions' made up 5 %.

Table 4 *Dimensions of the root causes of the formation of Pegida, categorised into fact-focused and opinion-focused formats, by newspaper (proportions in percent)*

	SZ			FAZ			taz			Bild			Total		
	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total
Intolerance and herd mentality	36	55	41	41	28	35	48	51	50	25	40	30	40	42	41
Dissatisfaction with politics	24	30	26	27	36	31	25	33	29	10	10	10	24	32	27
Fear of Islam and terrorism	26	10	21	34	18	27	23	15	20	25	10	20	28	15	23
Naivety and lack of awareness	4	20	9	6	20	12	15	19	17	0	20	7	8	20	13
A particularity of eastern Germany	10	20	13	6	6	6	10	27	18	10	0	7	9	16	12
Dissatisfaction with living conditions	8	0	6	2	8	4	5	8	6	5	0	3	5	6	5
N	50	20	70	64	50	114	60	52	112	20	10	30	194	132	326

Source: Own representation

When breaking down the results according to the type of article, it becomes clear that three dimensions occur more frequently with opinion-focused formats than with fact-focused ones: 'Dissatisfaction with politics' (32 % compared to 24 %), 'Naivety and lack of awareness' (20 % compared to 8 %) and 'A particularity of eastern Germany' (16 % compared to 9 %). These are clearly the explanatory models that tend to be used more in opinion-focused articles – alongside the dimension of 'Intolerance and herd mentality', which is the most important factor throughout. The only explanatory model that occurs more frequently in fact-focused formats than in opinion-focused ones is 'Fear of Islam and terrorism' (28 % compared to 15 %). This may be because this topic is a widely discussed societal challenge.

The use of the six frames is relatively similar across the four newspapers, although some differences can be observed. For example, *taz* generally has a heavy emphasis on explanation. The dimensions of 'Intolerance and herd mentality', 'Naivety and lack of awareness' and 'A particularity of eastern Germany' occur significantly more often in *taz* than in the other newspapers. This may be an expression of the *taz*'s role as a left-wing alternative media outlet that sees itself as a critical, counter-public voice. By contrast, *Bild* places little emphasis on explanation. All of the dimensions occur the least in this newspaper. It is also striking that the dimension 'Dissatisfaction with politics', which was the second most frequent dimension overall, is comparatively infrequent in *Bild* (10 %). It remains unknown whether keeping criticism of the system to a minimum is something that is linked to the newspaper's own policy.

Despite these differences, it can be said that the four newspapers, which span a broad political and journalistic spectrum, consistently trace the root causes of Pegida back to a few dimensions and give fairly similar weightings to the importance of these dimensions. The explanatory frames can be described as being somewhat simple and negative. As well as commenting on general intolerance and a herd mentality, the media outlets are particularly addressing the loss of trust in the democratic system and thus the general sense of dissatisfaction with politics, those in government and the media.

How is the Lügenpresse accusation handled?

Pegida's accusation (*Lügenpresse*) is addressed directly in the papers analysed by this investigation. Table 5 shows how it is handled by the newspapers. In eight tenths of the articles, the accusation is not mentioned at all. In 8 %, the accusation is reported as a fact but no comment is made. In 7 %, the accusation is rejected as not applicable or presented in such a mocking way that it comes across as ridiculous. Only a very small proportion of the articles (5 %) feature a reasoned argument: 3 % refute the accusation and 2 % concede that the press has made mistakes.

Table 5 *Handling of the Lügenpresse accusation, categorised into fact-focused and opinion-focused formats, by newspaper (proportions in percent)*

The accusation is…	SZ			FAZ			taz			Bild			Total		
	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total	fact-focused	opinion-focused	total
…not addressed.	82	79	81	84	71	79	77	75	76	95	90	93	83	75	80
…mentioned but no comment is made.	6	0	4	9	6	8	15	8	12	0	0	0	9	5	8
…generally rejected or mocked without discussion.	6	11	7	5	12	8	8	10	9	0	0	0	6	10	7
…refuted or rejected in an argumentative way.	2	11	4	2	4	3	0	4	2	5	10	7	2	5	3
…conceded (in part) after discussion.	4	0	3	0	6	3	0	4	2	0	0	0	1	4	2
N	50	19	69	64	49	113	60	51	111	20	10	30	194	129	323

Source: Own representation

The results show little difference between the two types of article. In total, three quarters of the opinion-focused articles do not address the *Lügenpresse* accusation. The figure is 83 % for the fact-focused articles. In the cases where the accusation is addressed, the fact-focused articles tend to simply mention it, whereas the opinion-focused formats tend to completely reject it or take an argumentative approach. It is striking that *Bild* hardly addresses the accusation in any of its articles (7 %). The newspaper that addresses it the most is *taz*. *FAZ* concedes the accusation in 6 % of its opinion-focused articles and *taz* does so in 4 %.

Overall, it can be said that the way the *Lügenpresse* accusation is addressed exhibits little reasoned argumentation or complexity. Whether the accusation is justifiable or not, it is surprising that there is so little debate about such a significant accusation – an accusation that is indicative of a severe crisis of confidence and that has the potential to affect additional groups within the population, thus shaking one of the pillars of democratic society.

5   Summary

"Lügenpresse!" This accusation, which the right-wing populist movement Pegida is directing at journalism, was the focal point of this study. The aim was to analyse how the mass media outlets report about those making this sweeping accusation and how the accusation is handled in their coverage. The matter is potent for two reasons. Firstly, this accusation has distinct roots in National Socialism and is levied at an important pillar of democratic society. Secondly, it is precisely this column who has a duty to inform society about the accusation being made. The result is a significant challenge to balanced, objective reporting.

The content analysis of the four (German) national newspapers shows a high proportion of opinion-focused articles. There were also large volumes of comment in the fact-focused articles, despite the requirement that such articles are objective. This violates the requirement for a clear distinction between news and comment. Overall, source selection was one-sided. Sources critical of Pegida were in the clear majority. A significant negative bias was present in the coverage about Pegida. The explanatory frames about the root causes of the movement are relatively simple and negative. The main root causes mentioned are general intolerance and herd mentality, an overall sense of dissatisfaction with politics and the fear of Islam. In the newspapers analysed, volumes of coverage about the *Lügenpresse* accusation are low. The accusation is rarely the subject of reasoned discussion. Overall, the coverage is relatively consistent.

The results prompt debate about the objectivity of media coverage. The results by no means justify the accusatory description of *Lügenpresse* – not to mention the inappropriate nature of the term. In the coverage, the stance held regarding Pegida is clearly negative. This is not something to be criticised. In a democracy, the mass media is allowed to and indeed must play a role in shaping public opinion. What can be scrutinised, however, is whether the way the topic of Pegida was addressed made use of reasoned argumentation and complexity. The findings indicate that this kind of argumentation was in short supply.

There is also scope for scrutiny of the extent to which the distinction between news and comment was violated. The opinion-focused formats are the intended forum for comment. At a higher level, a question that is extremely relevant to society as a whole must be asked: Under what conditions is it permissible – and perhaps also a necessity for the survival of democracy – for the media to take a distinct stance, even in an objective reporting format? Does the mantra of Hanns Joachim Friedrichs, a former news TV anchor of the public-service broadcaster ARD, about not making yourself common with a cause, not even with a good one, still apply? And did it ever really apply universally?

If sweeping allegations of *Lügenpresse* are being directed at the mass media and at journalism, communication scholars should also be taking a stance (Beiler & Bigl, 2017, p. 20). After all, its task is to help (self-) enlighten society about the topics of media and public communication (DGPuK, 2013, p. 128). As an empirical and interdisciplinary social science, it is able to provide an intersubjective foundation for a fair and proper social debate.

This is all the more important in times such as these, when the freedom of the press – which is now taken for granted – is even under threat in established western democracies. This threat is not only coming from smaller political forces and those in the opposition. An adaptation of the term *Lügenpresse* was heard in January 2017 at Donald Trump's first press conference as President-elect of the USA. He declined to answer a question from a CNN reporter, saying, "Not you. […] Your organization is terrible. […] No, I'm not going to give you a question… You are fake news." (CNN, 2017). Half a year later, when in post as President, he posted a video on Twitter showing himself wrestling with a man whose face has been superimposed with the CNN logo (Trump, 2017).

Perfidiously and conversely, Trump's advisor Kellyanne Conway invented the term 'alternative facts' during a TV interview. She did so as she was trying to justify the false statements made by the White House press secretary Sean Spicer. During his first press conference, Sean Spicer had accused the media of deliberately downplaying the size of the crowds at Trump's inauguration ceremony. The information that was available contradicted his statements. Conway explained that Spicer had given alternative facts. This euphemistic term for lies was clarified by NBC presenter Chuck Todd in the interview: "Look, alternative facts are not facts. They're falsehoods." (NBC, 2017).

It is evident here that post-truth politicians themselves are resorting to lies (cf. Körtner, 2017, pp. 9–24). And in many cases, they are no longer making the effort to disguise their obvious falsehoods. They and their supporters are not interested in facts. What counts are opinions and perceived realities, neither of which are open to scrutiny. Post-truth (Keyes, 2004), however, is by no means a new phenomenon. Rather, it is seeing a renaissance. It dates back to antiquity. This pattern is even found in the Bible. In the trial scene of John's passion narrative, which does strike a somewhat philosophical tone, Pontius Pilate ends his discussion with Jesus, saying, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). In essence this is a surrender.

Those who inform citizens about the falsehoods of post-truth politicians are then simply accused by those politicians of being liars. Thus the mass media outlets that are defamed with the term *Lügenpresse* cannot make an effective impact – or at least not on those who support these post-truth politicians and who use social networks to create their own communication networks (Körtner, 2017, p. 12). This

also makes the necessary scholarly debate extremely difficult. After all, even facts that have been determined intersubjectively will not get through to people who perceive things differently anyway. This erodes the foundations of reason – the kind that is informed by fact-based, objective discussion: "La défaite de la pensée" (Finkielkraut, 1987). It endangers not only the freedom of the press but also democracy as a whole. If science becomes the next victim of post-truth logic, another of democracy's pillars may begin to wobble.

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