

Media Performance and Social Inclusion

Preconference to the 71st Annual ICA Conference

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Venue: online (Zoom / ICA conference platform Cadmore)

Conference organizers:

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Program (version of 5/6/2021)

01:00	Josef Seethaler (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna & Linards Udris, University of Zurich)	Welcome address and introduction
Panel 1: Normative benchmarks in assessing media performance		
01:15	<u>Keynote I</u> Philip M. Napoli (Duke University)	Media performance and the public interest in the disinformation age: Revisiting McQuail
	Thomas R. Schmidt (University of California, San Diego)	Objectivity reconsidered: The tension between journalism and social justice
	Petra Herczeg (University of Vienna)	Multilingualism as a cultural principle: Democracy facing the challenge of linguistic diversity
	Verena Albert, Julius Reimer and Wiebke Loosen (Leibniz-Institute for Media Research Hans-Bredow-Institute)	A remedy for societal polarization? Exploring the notion of cohesion-sensitive journalism
	Kata Horváth (Eötvös Loránd University)	Print It Yourself! - The printed Internet in Hungary
	Discussion	
02:40	<u>Keynote II</u> Nouha Belaid (Central University of Tunis)	Media coverage of the COVID-19 crisis in Tunisia: Economic conditions and resources problems

Panel 2: Citizens and social inclusion

03:10	<u>Keynote III</u> Talia Stroud (University of Texas-Austin)	Description and prescription in media research on social inclusion
03:35	Stephanie Jean Tsang and Yu Wu (Hong Kong Baptist University)	Stay silent or speak out? Comparing the impact of perceived opinion climate on political engagement on Facebook and WhatsApp
03:45	Kaimin Yin (Minzu University of China)	Exclusion or identity in cyberspace? The impact of social media usage on the urban integration of Chinese off-farm workers
03:55	Rouba El Helou-Sensenig (Notre Dame University Louaize)	Be the change: Measuring the impact of social media advocacy campaigns promoting fair labour relations for migrant domestic workers in Lebanon
04:05	Daniel Stegmann, Christina Viehmann, Oliver Quiring, Nikolaus Jakob (all: University of Mainz) and Marc Ziegele (Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf)	Containing the disintegrative spiral: Using different media as channeling mechanisms between distrust in media and opinion polarization
04:15	Discussion	
04:30	<u>Keynote IV</u> Aeron Davis (Victoria University of Wellington)	Uncovering the illiberal, partisan and exclusionary core of the liberal legacy media

Abstracts

Keynotes

Philip M. Napoli (James R. Shepley Professor of Public Policy at Duke University and Faculty Affiliate with the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy)

Media Performance and the Public Interest in the Disinformation Age: Revisiting McQuail

In 1992, the late Denis McQuail published his landmark book, *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest*. In this presentation, I revisit McQuail's field-defining work and consider how the normative and methodological dimensions of media performance research have both evolved and remained consistent in the 30 years since the book's publication. In this presentation, I will consider key normative principles identified by McQuail, such as the Public Interest, Diversity, and Objectivity, with an eye toward: a) identifying points of continuity and change over the past three decades; b) assessing their applicability to recent developments in our media ecosystem; and c) considering whether additional principles need to find their way into the evaluative frameworks employed by media performance researchers.

Nouha Belaid (Academic Program Manager of School of Communication at the Central University of Tunis and a co-founder of the Arab Journalism Observatory)

Media coverage of the COVID-19 crisis in Tunisia: Economic conditions and resources problems

According to Reporters Without Borders's Global Press Freedom Barometer for 2021, Tunisia was ranked 73rd, dropping one point this year. Over the past year, we have repeatedly recorded severe confrontations between journalists, government and parliament because of draft laws which should regulate the sector. Access to information is the major issue that Tunisian media suffered from, especially with the Coronavirus crisis. According to RSF, journalists have faced a blockage in access to information sources, since the COVID-19 crisis under the pretext of the health crisis. And yet, given their crucial role in educating citizens, journalists have tried to find some other ways to provide information around COVID-19 to citizens.

This context led us to examine how Tunisian journalists have assumed their role in this exceptional period. We want to know whether Tunisian journalists have the resources to cover COVID-19 news, taking into account their financial situation and the nowadays critical situation of media. An online questionnaire was therefore launched among Tunisian journalists during the first wave.

Talia Stroud (Department of Communication Studies and Assistant Director of the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Participation at the University of Texas-Austin)

Description and Prescription in Media Research on Social Inclusion

This talk will propose that there are two different types of media research on social inclusion: projects that describe what is happening and projects that prescribe what should happen. I will interweave several example research projects, and make the case that both types of research are critical when it comes to thinking about media performance and social inclusion.

Aeron Davis (Victoria University of Wellington, School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations)

Uncovering the Illiberal, Partisan and Exclusionary Core of the Liberal Legacy Media

After years of political shockwaves, as populations everywhere turned their backs on centrist politics, and elected a series of illiberal, populist and radical right parties, liberal journalism (and establishments everywhere) still fail to see the parts they have played in this. A larger liberal media narrative continues to ally itself to the causes of objectivity, rationality and diversity, to be pitted against the illiberal, irrational, partisan and bigoted views of the supporters of Trump, Bolsonaro, Johnson, Modi and others. In such simply defined discourses, it's all too easy to both dismiss these 'others' and avoid self-introspection.

This paper interrogates the myths and problems of such narratives and professional notions of liberal, objective, inclusive journalism. The paper is not meant to ally itself with the populist right, more to provoke greater questioning of decades of liberal legacy media coverage that has continued to exclude so many sections of society and their interests in multiple ways. Its primary focus will be the liberal, legacy media of the US and UK and its depictions of 'the economy' and economic activity.

As it will show, both economic policy and its reporting became entirely framed and evaluated through the perspectives of competing political and corporate elites; neither of which bore any resemblance to the lived economic experiences of large swathes of citizens. This blindness continued through both left and right political administrations and legacy media of all political persuasions. It was also increasingly couched in the language of expertise, technocracy, science and rationality, without recognizing how partisan, corrupted and exclusionary these discourses had become. Ultimately, many lost faith in such media and political presentation because they didn't reflect their own experiences. It was thus not difficult for citizens to become receptive to populist leaders happy to attack science, rationality and truth.

Presented papers

Thomas R. Schmidt (University of California, San Diego)

Objectivity reconsidered: The tension between journalism and social justice

Objectivity has been the dominant occupational norm in journalism (particularly in the U.S. but also in other parts of the world) for about a hundred years, but now its normative aspirations have come under attack from a variety of sides. With new and increasingly interactive channels of communication, journalists have lost their privileged vantage point as arbiters of truth. In addition, a more partisan and more populist political environment has created a new class of political actors eager to undermining journalists' stance. In the United States and beyond, the Black Lives Matter movement inspired journalists of color to reflect on the systemic blind spots of objectivity reporting when it comes to covering racial and ethnic issues. At the same time, global crises like climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened public awareness that science-based, objective information is more vital than ever. This presentation explores the role of social justice in current journalism, highlighting how journalists can reconcile their quest for truth with acknowledging calls for social justice. Based on textual analysis of journalistic trade publications (Niemanlab, Columbia Journalism Review, Poynter), this presentation will trace and analyze the discursive construction (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, 2018) of social justice in journalism during the summer of 2020.

In particular, this presentation will examine the normative foundations of objectivity as an occupational norm in response to a changing social reality, the epistemological implications

of this transformation as well as journalists' efforts to grapple with these tectonic shifts. While the field of journalism studies has a rich tradition of theorizing what journalism should be, the literature has consistently shown that norms do not necessarily equal "a correct picture of reality" (Mindich, 1998, p.143; see also Mellado & Mothes, 2020; Umbricht & Esser, 2014), and that they can evolve across space and time. Moreover, various scholars have argued that objectivity is not necessarily linked to neutrality and that this may not be the best approach to achieving greater fairness in the news (Lichtenberg, 2000).

Analyzing the changing nature of objectivity is not only of interest to media professionals and political communicators. Citizens in general have become more skeptical that journalism's quest for objectivity is truly non-partisan and consequently they often suspect bias and concealed interests. As a result, many of them are demanding more transparency, accountability and responsibility from the Fourth Estate, no longer willing to accept journalism's self-presentation without scrutiny. Thus, reconsidering objectivity's role in the contemporary environment will contribute significantly and broadly to public debates about the role and worth of journalism in societies around the globe.

Petra Herczeg (University of Vienna)

Multilingualism as a cultural principle: Democracy facing the challenge of linguistic diversity

Based on the seemingly banal statement that democracies 'live' from diversity, this also includes linguistic diversity. Since language - as Wittgenstein (1953) already stated - cannot be the private property of a person, languages are always subject to public regulation and control. Bloomfield's definition of 'speech communities' (1933) identifies people as members of a community who share the same language and cultural values, even if it must be mentioned that it is not only about belonging to a speech community.

The European Union as an area of communication has to deal with 24 official languages, and after Brexit English will remain one of the official languages – that of Ireland and Malta. Over 60 regional and minority languages are spoken by some 40 million people in the EU. The principle of multilingualism is enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

But what is the significance of multilingualism in political discourse or public discussion?

This presentation will discuss the chances and possibilities of participation and inclusion of different languages in public space. It is about an expansion of the dimension 'language' in theoretical discourse. In communication studies, the discussion of language or even multilingualism as an object of knowledge plays a peripheral role. When multilingualism is negotiated in communication studies, it is usually in the context of multilingual or ethnic media. Various theorists, such as Taylor (1992), assume that individuals need dialogue with the other to define their social identity. Languages have the potential to help people standing up for their rights as well. On the other hand we can observe that English as a global language has the potential to transport people's protest all over the world. So for example Li (2007, 434) shows that the protests of European shoemakers was in English with the slogan 'Stop the Chinese footwear invasion'. All over the world this slogan was reported and so different public spaces were addressed. In the presentation will be discussed the ambivalence of how multilingualism can be implemented as a political demand on the one hand, and what it means on the other hand, when English is chosen as protest language to draw attention to grievances. The use of lingua francas – 'languages of wider communication' (Edwards 2007, 455) has implications for the ability to connect more people. Different ethnic groups face the problem of not being able to communicate in their own language in public. Therefore, the presentation will present a model of how different languages can be used in public discourse and the role different media - such as public, private, and community media - can play in this process. The right to communicate is also a

right to use one's own language in public. The question is what perspectives 'smallest mother tongues' have in public discourse. The discourse on access to communicative participation processes should be expanded more to include the dimension of multilingualism.

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Verena Albert, Julius Reimer and Wiebke Loosen (Leibniz-Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institute)

A remedy for societal polarization? Exploring the notion of cohesion-sensitive journalism

The past decade has seen several examples of socio-political polarization as exhibited by Brexit or the so-called refugee 'crisis' in Europe. Correspondingly, there has been wide discussion concerning a sense of dwindling social cohesion most markedly in liberal democracies (Fonseca et al. 2019). Journalism has often been accused of deepening societal divides through superficial and sensationalist coverage (Nielsen & Graves 2017). This exemplifies the common notion that journalism, from a democratic theory point of view, should contribute to social cohesion (Hanitzsch 2004) and is able to strengthen or weaken it. However, social cohesion itself is an extremely controversial and multi-layered subject in public discourse as well as in politics and academia. Therefore, with this study we turn this question into an empirical one in order to explore social cohesion and journalism are interrelated and how journalists can manage responsibly those aspects of their work that may affect social cohesion.

In doing so, we use the term "cohesion-sensitive journalism" as a stimulus in group discussions. More specifically, our research design involves four online focus groups, each comprising five to eight experts from three domains: first, journalists from established media and from start-ups; second, cohesion researchers from different disciplines (e.g. milieu studies, social psychology); and third, 'cohesion practitioners', such as members of minority groups and integration workers. In the first three focus groups, participants discussed if and how journalism and social cohesion are interrelated and developed ideas surrounding the basic principles of as well as the limits to a kind of journalism that is sensitized to questions of social cohesion. In the fourth focus group that has yet to take place, participants will discuss the first draft of a guideline that, based on the insights gathered so far, provides journalists with practical recommendations for cohesion-sensitive journalism.

In the three focus groups already held, participants, for instance, repeatedly stressed the importance of journalism as a "creator of society" (Commissioner for Integration, city of Dessau). There was, however, disagreement about the exact role of journalism: should journalists mediate between conflicting parties or only act as observers, even if this could weaken social cohesion? Some participants even questioned journalism's responsibilities related to social cohesion. Diverse aspects that promote or weaken cohesion were addressed: on a linguistic level, participants assume that discriminating language and dramatizing formulations work to weaken cohesion; on the content level, they find it most important to see all population groups represented by the media. Most experts advocate for inclusive journalism that not only covers marginalized groups, but is also realized in the form

of diverse newsrooms and is transparent with regard to its working procedures. However, (increased) media literacy on the part of the audience is also seen as important.

Our study is part of a national interdisciplinary endeavor that seeks to look into social cohesion in Germany. We will also discuss our findings in relation to this larger context, particularly to the fundamental tension that journalism obviously faces: the tension between facilitating cohesion by reducing complexity (e.g., in the sense of coherence in reporting or even consensus) versus facilitating cohesion by representing complexity (e.g., in the sense of diversity).

Kata Horváth (Eötvös Loránd University)

Print It Yourself! – The printed Internet in Hungary

For the democratic functioning of a society it is essential that citizens have access to diverse information and alternative sources of news. As numerous studies show, the Hungarian media situation is far from balanced, the Hungarian media system does not provide space for voices outside a certain point of view. Therefore, quite extreme forms of expressing independent opinions have emerged in the country. With my research, I would like to present a special movement called 'Print It Yourself!' This 'samizdat' was initiated to challenge the information monopoly of the Hungarian government by printing the Internet out.

In the absence of alternative sources of news and free information, citizens are also limited in their decision-making. In the absence of awareness or cultural capital, the individual also becomes vulnerable to post-truth politics. Citizens of settlements with small populations that do not provide alternative media often have fewer critical resources, which, combined with lower levels of education and a lack of technical knowledge in the older age group, can lead to significant media poverty. This media poverty, which is the movement I am examining, is trying to alleviate.

The 'Print It Yourself!' is an interesting media phenomenon in several respects, which can be examined both as a symptom of the crisis of our present society and as a force that structures society. The movement is a fascinating example of the tools of the post-internet society, with which activists want to reduce Hungarian demographic and generational media poverty. The 'Print It Yourself!' initiative is actually the printed internet, as the creators view news published in the independent online press every week, print out the simplified, edited version of it and distribute in the less urbanised regions of the country. Hence, with 'Print It Yourself!', the activists want to break the monopoly of the one perspective that dominates Hungarian media system and to provide alternative voices to citizens with less economic or cultural capital. The movement therefore plays a very interesting role in the overall media environment.

In my presentation, I would like to acquaint you with the structure and operation of 'Print It Yourself!', placing the movement in the context of the Hungarian media system. Furthermore, I would like to present my own research based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of texts, and structured and semi-structured interviews with active and passive participants. I would also like to address some of the particularly interesting but troublesome side effects of the movement, such as the fear that accompanies both the distribution of 'samizdat' and the public discourse that has developed about it.

Stephanie Jean Tsang and Yu Wu (Hong Kong Baptist University)

Stay silent or speak out? Comparing the impact of perceived opinion climate on political engagement on Facebook and WhatsApp

Objectives

- 1) To ascertain factors that impact perceived public opinion and factors that contribute to more equal outspokenness and inclusive democratic society
- 2) To examine how fear of expression influences both online expression and offline participation
- 3) To test the spiral of silence theory in two different social media settings, Facebook vs. WhatsApp

Method

An online survey about anti-extradition law social movements was conducted in Hong Kong in June 2019 (N = 1038), and participants were paid to answer questions on personal stance, perceived public opinion (i.e., what percentage of Hong Kong people oppose the extradition bill), perceived opinion climate on both Facebook and WhatsApp (i.e., what percentage of Facebook/WhatsApp users oppose the extradition bill), fear of expression, political engagement on the two social media platforms, and willingness to participate in future protest(s).

Preliminary Findings and Implications

This study contributes by adding empirical evidence of the spiral of silence theory in the context of social media. By comparing two social media platforms known for varying degrees of social pressure and self-expression, perceived support on the two platforms was found to be different and, in turn, play different roles in predicting platform engagement and intention to attend protests. Although prior studies have questioned the characteristics of social media environments, such as algorithm usage and the presence of newsfeeds, which could challenge the condition of viewing oneself as a minority and being isolated, this research found that the spiral of silence theory is still valid on social media, particularly on WhatsApp.

To build a more inclusive and equitable democratic discussion space, social media platforms should work toward being more of a space for open expression. The creation and nurturing of online space that enables a venue to perform corrective action are vital for the promotion of public expression and political participation. Future studies can focus on how these factors are applied to social media design and public policy to encourage more involvement from minority groups.

Kaimin Yin (Minzu University of China)

Exclusion or identity in cyberspace? The impact of social media usage on the urban integration of Chinese off-farm workers

Introduction: Chinese off-farm workers refer to those who were born and grew up in rural areas of China, and then enter urban factories to take part in labor-intensive work after growing up. Because of the different life styles and cultural atmosphere between urban and rural areas, these off-farm workers who have lived in rural areas for a long time will encounter culture shock and cognitive gap after entering urban life. In the past, it is difficult for off-farm workers in China to communicate with other groups living in the city. They are excluded by the urban society. With the rise of mobile social network, social media have provided important channels for off-farm workers to disseminate information, communicate with urban residents and establish their own image. Social media is regarded as the best tool to support off-farm workers obtain recognition and integrate into urban life. Therefore, this

study takes off-farm workers working in Beijing as the research object, and studies the impact of social media usage on off-farm workers' urban integration through in-depth interviews. From the perspective of social identity theory, social integration theory and social capital theory, this paper aims to study does social media help off-farm workers in China integrate into urban life or intensify their division with other groups?

Materials and Methods: This study uses in-depth interview methods to study the relationship between social media usage and urban life integration of off-farm workers. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 off-farm workers in Beijing and collected their social media experiences and feelings. The interview time of each respondent was more than 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and sorted into text data, and then Nvivo was used to code and analyze the interview data.

Results: This study finds that social media can help off-farm workers understand urban culture and increase the channels for them to establish their own image. They can observe the lifestyles of urban residents and learn the cultural habits of urban life through social media, which will reduce their sense of discomfort in urban life. In addition, off-farm workers can use short video software such as Tiktok and Kwai to carry out internet broadcast activities to establish their own image. When they receive positive feedback, they will gain a sense of psychological identity and think that they are part of the urban society. Thirdly, social communication software represented by WeChat helps off-farm workers establish strong and weak relationships in the city, which helps to increase their social capital and enhance their trust in urban society.

Conclusion: This paper studies the relationship between social media usage and social integration of Chinese off-farm workers through in-depth interviews. The research finds that using social media to participate in online activities can effectively eliminate the gap between off-farm workers and urban society, reduce off-farm workers' sense of poor adaptation in urban life and enhance their social capital. But in some cases, the process of using social media can also cause culture or identity shock. Especially when they suffer discriminatory remarks from urban residents in the network public space, some off-farm workers will adopt the strategy of alienating from urban society and they will seek to connect with their hometown or rural culture through social media and form their own social network community to obtain social identity. The phenomenon of stigmatization in social media performance brings new challenges to urban life integration of off-farm worker. How to use social media properly to help off-farm workers better integrate into urban society needs further exploration.

Rouba El Helou-Sensenig (Notre Dame University Louaize)

Be the change: Measuring the impact of social media advocacy campaigns promoting fair labour relations for migrant domestic workers in Lebanon

This paper focuses on several social media campaigns in Lebanon during the decade between 2010 and 2020 in the field of labor relations and respect for workers' rights in a home environment. It highlights the online activities of organized labor, feminist organizations, migrant worker self-help initiatives and international players such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWFED) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The data sets used for this study combine a series of interviews with key activists, a survey of various social media campaigns, and a comprehensive study of available primary and secondary sources. The author is also an activist in the field and thus uses an intersectional and rights-based approach when studying the overall role of media in encouraging social change.

Workers' rights campaigners, feminist activists, and the social partners have initiated a variety of social media programs in Lebanon focusing on the precarious situation faced by migrant domestic workers (MDW) in Lebanon. Along with 'name-and-shame' campaigns

targeting flagrant violations of human rights, many of these social media campaigns have attempted to work with employers and employees based on two key principals rooted in longstanding traditions of advocacy mobilization. The first is linked to the tradition of worker-employer cooperation championed by the ILO since its inception in 1919. The second is builds on centuries of personal change and public pledge experience in fields as varied as health, business ethics, environmental sustainability or social justice.

This study will show how several feminist organizations, labour unions, and migrant worker self-help initiatives in Lebanon combined forces to promote awareness raising and changes in labour relations through online campaigns such as the ILO/IDWFED/ITUC backed 'My Fair Home' campaign (MFH), various ongoing campaigns against abuse of MDWs by CLDH, AMEL, KAFA, ABAAD, Fe-Male and This Is Lebanon, and a variety of initiatives supported directly by individual activists. It will use data from a comprehensive survey of several of these social media campaigns, including a complete analysis of the first three years of the MFH Facebook public pledge campaign. Because of the pervasive culture of impunity in Lebanon and the accelerating collapse of the country's financial, regulatory and social welfare institutions, most online campaigns have focused on working directly with employers and employees, along with civil society organizations (CSOs) and those rare government officials willing to take a stand.

The results of this study will illustrate how various types of media platforms, including both social media and 'legacy media' coverage interact to raise awareness, but also to promote stereotypes by 'Othering' predominantly female workers from the Global South. It will also provide a set of empirical measurement on the impact of social media advocacy campaigns and explain how this data was gathered, processed, and analyzed. Ultimately, the researcher will focus on the decentralized nature of the Internet, what types of online behavior elicit conversation, anger, consensus and can ultimately lead to change. Finally, it will demonstrate how activist scholarship can both enrich public debate and dovetail with work of CSO activists by providing them with the science-based arguments desperately need in the highly contentious fields of migration, gender relations and workers' rights.

Social media is a prominent venue for gathering information about public opinion regarding political events. While many studies have focused on how the perception of the larger public opinion climate impacts political expression, few studies have studied how the perceived opinion climate of specific social media platforms contributes to democratic discussion and participation. Further, this study contrasts the impact of perceived opinion climate on engagement in two different settings: Facebook and WhatsApp. The two venues differ in their degrees of openness to social pressure. Following the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), this study takes the fear of self-expression as well as willingness to express opinion into account in the context of the extradition bill controversy in Hong Kong. Hence, this research contributes by testing the effectiveness of the spiral of silence theory in an online setting.

Daniel Stegmann, Christina Viehmann, Oliver Quiring, Nikolaus Jakob (all: University of Mainz) and Marc Ziegele (Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf)

Containing the disintegrative spiral: Using different media as channeling mechanisms between distrust in media and opinion polarization

Recent evidence points to a link between distrust towards the established media and societal polarization (Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Ladd, 2012). This suggests a crucial role of media and public communication in the opinion formation in a society. Yet, when asking for an explanation for this link, the answer often refers to a general „age of skepticism” (Suiter & Fletcher, 2020). While the idea of such a syndrome highlights the interconnectedness of different skeptical attitudes and helps to locate single skeptical attitudes in a broader

phenomenon, it masks the specific links among them. Thus, we aim at investigating the specific link between (dis)trust in media and (issue) polarization in the society.

Findings illustrate that the use of different media channels and platforms can contribute to polarization (Tewksbury & Riles, 2015, Tucker et al., 2018). These effects originate from the way how societal debates are represented in different media channels – ranging from public broadcasting service (PBS), which is to serve an integrative function in society (Helberger, 2015; Mahrt, 2019), to alternative media, who aim at promoting anti-establishment narratives (Boberg et al, 2020). The use of different information sources (i.e., the composition of one's media diet), in turn, crucially depends on one's trust in the media – for example, distrustful recipients turn away from mainstream media (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Thus, we propose considering the use of different media sources for current information as integrative vs. disintegrative mechanisms that channel the effect from trust in media to (issue) polarization.

To test our assumptions, we rely on several waves of a representative cross-sectional survey in Germany that investigates people's political and media-related attitudes. Our core model maps the relationship between trust in media and the extremity of individual attitudes towards a current political issue (refugee policy) with the use of six different media channels and platforms as mediating mechanisms. To ensure the robustness of findings, this core model was replicated in different years (2016, 2017, 2018, 2020) and with different topics (e.g., diesel emissions scandal, Corona measures). Applying a path model (R package lavaan) with age, gender, region, education, and economic outlook as controls, our results show that trust in media consistently predicts the use of different media channels for current information: more trust results in more intense use of PBS, newspapers, and traditional media online (websites, apps) and in less intense use of alternative media and SNS. Moreover, obtaining current information from PBS and newspapers predicts a lower level of extreme attitudes – regardless of the specific topic (expect 2018) – with the indirect effect being mostly significant as well. Thus, using public broadcasting service and newspapers serve as channeling mechanisms for the integrative influence from trust in media to a lower level of extreme opinions in a society. The channel via alternative media and SNS did not seem to uniformly trigger a negative spiral, but was time (i.e., year of analysis) and topic dependent.