Trust in News and Trust through News

The Role of Media Consumption in Social, Political, and Media Trust

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Abstract

On the one hand, media is an instrument of social and political trust building: Through it, trustful citizens are formed and socialized as members of a political community. On the other hand, the media is also an object of trust. And the degree people trust the media and its products has important consequences for the legitimacy of government. The authors use data from their own survey to help answer the question of how trust correlates with patterns of media consumption. They find that consumption of legacy media increases social, political and media trust, whereas social media use demonstrates differing platform-specific patterns. The authors could also state some country differences in terms of how media consumption is related to trust.

Introduction

The news media are commonly analyzed as an instrument of political trust building (Barthel and Moy 2017). Through them, citizens are socialized as trustful members of a political community. However, the news media are also an object of trust, and whether people trust journalists and media institutions has important consequences for democracy and government legitimacy (Broersma 2013). From a comparative European perspective, we know that there are significant differences in the way people trust democratic institutions and the main media institutions in their countries (van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2017). In countries where trust in government is high (mainly the Nordic countries), people tend to also trust journalism and news organizations (mainly public broadcasting and quality news outlets). In countries where political trust is low, people also mistrust journalism and the news (mainly the Southern European countries and the new EU Member States) (see Reuters 2021; Schranz, Schneider and Eisenegger 2016). However, numerous opinion polls also provide evidence of a general decline of trust in both democratic government and the news media in Western societies (Citrin and Stoker 2018). Such a decline of trust is commonly related to the digital transformation of the public sphere and democracy (Habermas 2022).

To study the possible effects of social and digital media on the way people trust each other, their democratic institutions and the news, we need to be able to relate attitudes of trust to differentiated patterns of media consumption. So far, only case study-based evidence exists that social media consumption can undermine trust in democracy (Klein and Robinson 2020). In political debates as well, the social media are often accused of being disruptive, undermining social cohesion and people's support for democracy (Schudson 2019). Existing surveys such as the annual Reuters News Reports or Standard Eurobarometers measure changing patterns of news consumption and attitudes of the population about the trustworthiness of different types of news but do rarely consider media consumption as an intervening factor on people's trust in democracy. European Social Survey provides some data on media consumption but does not measure media trust. We fill this gap by presenting original data from a representative opinion survey in six countries that allow us to measure different types of social, political and media trust in relation to degrees of consumption of different types of media. After deriving a set of hypotheses from the literature of how democracy, media and trust are related to each other, we will test the overall assumption of a potentially negative impact of social media consumption on social trust, political trust and media trust. This allows

us, in the final part of the article, to review the skeptical assessment of a decline of trust in democracy in relation to the digital transformation of the public sphere.

Since we have six countries in our sample, we will also critically engage with the explanations of media impact on democracy in terms of media systems, i.e., liberalization of media markets, independence of journalism, varying degrees of state control of the media and professionalization of journalism (Halin and Mancini 2004). While the media system model was tested with respect to legacy media, this emphasis has shifted to explaining trust in political communication via social media. Instead of country differences, research has pointed to significant effects of platforms on the way political attitudes and opinions are shaped online. The technical capabilities and affordances of the network (Bucher and Helmond 2018) contribute to the construction of platforms as distinct social environments (Jaidka et al. 2022). Therefore, we also bring these two comparative perspectives together and give some first insights both on country and on platform differences regarding trust in and through media.

1 Trust, the Media and Democracy: On Differentiated Patterns of Trust in Democracy

Trust in democratic societies is a multidimensional phenomenon. It may be conceived in moral terms as the faith in political institutions to act in compliance with ethical rules and principles (Offe 1999) or it may be thought of in functional terms as the predisposition to engage in wider social relationships despite uncertainty (Luhmann 2000). As such, trust exists in interpersonal relationships as well as in the relationship between individuals and organizations. Social trust is necessary to enable solidarity, common action, wealth and democratic political participation among strangers (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993). This generalized trust in remote and dissimilar others is based on an agreement that we do not want to harm other members of society disregarding not knowing all of them personally (Uslaner 2002; Delhey and Newton 2005).

As societies grow in complexity, they also need to expand on trust in anonymous institutions and government, i.e., political trust: Fellow citizens can be connected because they both are committed to the same institutions and the norms and values represented by them (Offe 1999). A complex question here is how political and generalized social trust are related. On the one hand, social

trust helps to create an active civil society (Putnam 1993), on the other, state institutions can create trust by supporting and collaborating with civic associations (Szreter 2002). Both forms of trust are related to similar individual characteristics: higher education level, higher income, participation in associations, political interest (Newton and Zmerli 2011). Overall, it seems that social and political trust are both part of the societal and cultural complex of good governance, economic equality, transparency, national wealth and welfare, respect for human rights (Newton, Stolle and Zmerli 2018; van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2017).

This picture is complicated by the necessity of complex democratic societies to rely also on mediators of trust building (Bentele and Seeling 1996). Individuals build trust in the future performance of political institutions based on accumulated information about their present and past performance, which is mediated and as such collectively experienced. However, mediated information is not only the material for individuals to build trust relations among each other and towards political institutions (trust through media), but the mediating institutions themselves need to be found reliable and trustworthy (trust in media). With more and more of our social interactions being conducted digitally and on social networks, there is a growing dependency on mediated information in the formation of social and political trust (Barthel and Moy 2017; Kohring 2004).

As we see, democracy functioning depends on three different layers of trust in fellow citizens, political institutions and mediators. The literature commonly assumes a correlation in the sense that high levels of social trust translate into social capital, which again is needed to improve the performance of government (Putnam 1993). This presumes the unifying functioning of a public sphere where people can rely on trustworthy media organizations and journalism that guarantee the wide diffusion of relevant information. In a highly fragmented public sphere created by online and social media (Bennett and Manheim 2006), such a linear process of mediation can no longer be guaranteed. Instead of the virtuous circle of a positive engagement with news media in support of democracy (Norris 2000), a vicious circle is opened: As trust in political institutions and democracy is undermined through intensified social media interactions, people also lose trust in legacy media institutions, and vice versa (Lee 2010). Based on the distinction between those two information environments, we can ask how citizens who receive information for trust building through social media are distinct from citizens that use legacy media. In order to answer this question, we define hypotheses of the differentiated impact of media consumption on each layer of trust.

2   Trust through Media: Effects of Media Consumption on Social and Political Trust

The emergence of the internet and new social media sparked a discussion on how changing media habits increase or decrease social trust and cohesion of democratic societies. As for Robert D. Putnam, reading newspapers was one of the indicators of high social trust in society, he was very skeptical of the internet as lacking face-to-face interactions would make people lonely and disconnected (Putnam 2000). One recent empirical study, covering solely Italy, found indeed a negative correlation between social media use and social trust (Sabatini and Sarracino 2019). Contrary to this, Eric M. Uslaner (2000) argues that new media have no influence on social trust, as people still socialize online and need to rely on generalized trust to meet strangers. In response to this controversy, we can formulate the following hypotheses: **H1. Legacy media consumption is positively related to social trust. H2a. Social media consumption has a negative impact on social trust. H2b. Social media consumption has no impact on social trust.**

The level of social trust in society depends on socio-economic and political variables (see above, cf. Newton et al. 2018) as well as cultural and historical factors, e.g., ethnic homogeneity and protestant religious tradition (Delhey and Newton 2005). However, there are no studies about whether and how these country level variables impact on the effect social media has on social trust. Therefore, we formulate **RQ1: Do we observe country differences in the way social media impact on social trust?**

In the formation of social trust through social media networks, platform differences matter. Facebook seems to be more symmetrical and homogenous, connecting 'friends'; Twitter's connections are more asymmetrical, diverse and anonymous (Duggan and Smith 2016). Therefore, Facebook might be seen as a safer and more trustful place, sometimes also used for social support (Masciantonio et al. 2021), while Twitter consists of weak and less familiar ties. Instagram has similar platform affordances like Twitter, yet with a focus on visual self-presentation (Ibid). However, the literature does not yet allow to conclude on platform effects on social trust building, which is why we ask **RQ2: Do we observe platform differences in the way social media impact on social trust?**

With regard to political trust, the existing literature points to the potentially negative influence of mass media on trust in government and representative institutions of democracy. According to the media malaise theory, the abundance of commercial and negative news has a negative influence on political

trust and enhance people's cynicism with democratic politics (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Luengo and Maurer 2009). Against this assumption, Pippa Norris formulated the thesis of a "virtuous circle" of media use, and could prove empirically that not too much, but rather too little media engagement with politics leads to a loss of political trust (Norris 2000). Since the literature is divided on the role of news media and journalism, we formulate the following contrary hypotheses: **H3a. Legacy media consumption is positively related to political trust. H3b. Legacy media consumption is leading to an erosion of political trust.**

However, these studies did not consider social media channels for political information. Regarding the impact of social media on political trust, empirical research is inconclusive, with some pointing to a possible positive online interaction effect (Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar 2014), and a more authentic and trustworthy appearance of politicians on social media tends to be noted (Enli and Rosenberg 2018), while others claim that news consumption via social media decreases trust (Ceron 2015). Apart from the type of news that passes the filter of social media, online news consumption also changes the way we interact with politics and news, on the one hand enhancing democratic forms of participation, on the other hand, giving higher salience to radical and uninformed voices (Engesser, Fawzi and Larsson 2017) and thus leading to polarization (Heiss, von Sikorski and Matthes 2019). Even though most studies point indeed at a possible negative association between social media use and political trust (Lorenz-Spreen et al. 2023), in lack of consolidated knowledge and a rapidly changing media landscape, we still work with contrary hypotheses: **H4a. Social media consumption has a negative impact on political trust. H4b. Social media consumption is not leading to the erosion of political trust.**

Not many studies elaborate on how countries vary in regard to the relationship between social media use and trust. Recent meta-analysis of current studies on the impact of social media on democracy indicates that whereas in most Western countries correlation between digital media use and political trust is negative, in authoritarian and Central and Eastern European (CEE) regimes, it might be positive (Lorenz-Spreen et al. 2023). In these countries, the lack of political independence (which is especially the case with Poland, the country in our sample) and absence of news competition, social media may help citizens to access relevant information and to connect in a way to fulfil the role of the democratic watchdog which legacy media fails to accomplish (Placek 2017). Yet, the specific relationship between social media use and political trust in CEE is not clarified. Seemingly, social networks encourage general support for democratic setup but not for political parties or elites which might be to

blame for the weak media position in the first place (Placek 2018). All in all, also in this case we have to restrain from formulating hypotheses and state **RQ3: Do we observe country differences in the way social media impact on political trust?**

As regards possible platform differences in the formation of political trust, we know that Twitter users are more information oriented, younger, better educated and more liberal than Facebook users (Instagram presenting a mixture: young and liberal but average educated and not interested in news) (Shearer and Mitchell 2021). Other studies state that Facebook users are also more attracted by alternative news sources due to the already low trust in legacy media and political institutions (Reuters 2021; Zimmermann and Kohring 2020). As we still lack information on how exactly all these differences in usage translate into patterns of trust, we state **RQ4: Do we observe platform differences in the way social media impact on political trust?**

3   Trust in Media: Effects of Media Consumption on the Trustworthiness of News and Journalism

Democracies need trusted mediators to be able to build trust in political institutions. Media trust is different from political trust, even though they are often conflated and strongly related (Ariely 2015). Basically, trust in media relates to the trustworthiness of news, which again is measured in terms of credibility and reliability of a specific news source. According to this logic, trust in media depends on performance of the media organizations: news organizations which provide accurate information are more likely to be trusted and different news sources can be ranked in terms of trustworthiness (Bentele 2015). Trust in media is however not sufficiently explained in terms of a rational calculation of the accuracy of a news source. Media as an institution is also trusted in terms of the reputation of journalism and other media workers to support a political community and democracy (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen and Steindl 2017).

Like political and social trust, trust in mediators is positively related to individual characteristics, like political interest, satisfaction with government and democracy, trust in other people, whereas extremist political orientation and populist attitudes decrease trust (Arlt 2018; Otto and Köhler 2018; Tsfati and Ariely 2014). As for media consumption, Tsfati and Ariely (2014) find that exposure to television news and newspapers is positively correlated with trust in media. Schranz et al. (2016) argue that habitual exposure to professional and mainstream news is the key, especially so on the public broadcaster (also see Arlt 2018), while Kalogeropoulos et al. (2019) in a comparative survey show

that high levels of news consumption correlate with higher levels of trust in news, and this independently of the news source (offline or digital).

But what about social media? Lost connection to specific news brands and journalists, low quality of news, easier way for dis- and misinformation to spread, harassment, contentiousness, as well as fragmented and polarized publics on social media are the main concerns in terms of their impact on trust (Mont'Alverne et al. 2022; Wike et al. 2022). On the other hand, despite named concerns, social media is seen by the people as a positive thing and good for democracy (Ibid). Social media consumption, whether directly as a source or as a pathway to news, seems to decrease media trust (Karlsen and Aalberg 2021; Park et al. 2020). However, some studies paint a more differentiated picture: Not social media consumption or its use for information, but alternative news on the internet negatively impact on media trust (Arlt 2018; Schultz et al. 2017; Tsfati 2010). Also, only the social media use as the main source of news decreases media trust (Kalogeropoulos et al. 2019).

If we regard both sorts of trust, in legacy and social media, and their use together, the simplest expectation would be that people trust what they use (Toff et al. 2021). That would talk to the results that the largest part of distrust in social media comes from the people not using social media (Mont'Alverne et al. 2022). Otherwise, those who do trust the media, consume many news both offline as well as on social media (Ibid). Therefore, we would expect that: **H5. Consumption of legacy media is positively related to trust in legacy media.** However, we would formulate contradictory hypotheses in terms of legacy media use and social media trust: **H6a. Consumption of legacy media is positively related to trust in social media. H6b. Consumption of legacy media is negatively related to trust in social media.**

Although results for social media vary depending on how they are used, in general, the assumption holds that: **H7. Consumption of social media is negatively related to trust in legacy media.** Does this mean, in turn, that social media users trust the platforms they use? First empirical insights rather point to the opposite: During the Covid-19 pandemic which demonstrated even stronger the value of accurate and reliable information, trust in quality outlets and in media in general has risen, but not trust in social media, although the use of both went in opposite directions: The use of legacy media stayed almost the same (TV) or decreased (print newspapers), whereas the use of social media significantly increased (Reuters 2021; also see Sabat et al. 2020 and Verbalyte and Eigmüller, 2022). Therefore, we assume that: **H8. Consumption of social media is negatively related to trust in social media.**

Trust in media is on average higher in Northern and Western European countries than in Southern and Eastern European countries (Reuters 2021).

The opposite holds for social media trust: The Eastern European countries trust them more, the Northern and Western countries less (Verbalyte and Eigmüller, 2022); the Eastern Europeans also find social media better for democracy and as less dividing and polarizing (Wike et al. 2022). All in all, political trust and legacy media trust seem to go in the same direction. However, some empirical studies provide contradicting results that citizens of prosperous and democratic countries are more skeptical about the legacy media (Tsfati and Ariely 2014).

North-Central corporatist media systems have a strong public broadcaster and strong media ownership regulations and show high levels of media trust; polarized Mediterranean media systems are less regulated but strongly politicized and show lower levels of media trust; and North Atlantic liberal media systems (Ireland, Belgium, USA) show high levels of media market liberalization and vary a lot in terms of trust, e.g. high in Ireland but low in the USA (Hanitzsch et al. 2017; Schranz et al. 2016). This explanation does not include CEE countries but considering their high level of societal and political polarization, media's lack of political independence and weak news competition, we could expect that CEE countries would be the nearest to the Southern media systems. Yet as for the purpose of this article we cannot formulate specific hypotheses for all the countries in the sample, we state **RQ5: Do we observe country differences in the way consumption of different types of legacy and social media impact on trust in the mediators?**

Considering platform differences in media trust, research is equally inconclusive. Existing surveys show that Twitter users are much more interested in news and often follow legacy media sources, whereas Instagram users look just for entertainment and are only incidentally exposed to news. Facebook has become the most widely used platform for news consumption, yet much of this news are incidental and from alternative sources (Reuters 2021). As it is impossible to formulate hypotheses based on these mixed empirical insights, we ask **RQ6: Do we observe platform differences in the way consumption of different types of legacy and social media impact on trust in the mediators?**

Up to this point we did not distinguish the type of media use that might have a strong impact on trust in all its different manifestations. People do very different things with the media, for instance when they read a newspaper or share holiday pictures on Instagram. Differences between legacy media and social media consumption impact on trust might be simply explained by political interest and/or engagement in political communication through the media. To account for these differences in political use (high in the case of newspapers or Twitter and low in the case of TV or other social media) we segregate the group of politically engaged media users for all types of media

analyzed. In the literature, it is generally assumed that politically interested users through engagement with newspapers, through radio and TV or through digital or alternative news sites build trust (Kalogeropoulos et al. 2019). The contrary assumption is made for social media that mainly distrustful citizens engage on them politically, e.g., in the form of user commenting (Karlsen and Aalberg 2021). This allows us to formulate two hypotheses: **H9. Political engagement through (digital) news media positively correlates with social, political, and media trust. H10. Political engagement through social media negatively correlates with social, political and media trust.**

Although countries differ in how politically engaged their citizens are on social media (Wike et al. 2022), we do not know whether that has an impact on trust, therefore we ask **RQ7: Do we observe country differences in the way political engagement through different types of media impact on social, political, and media trust?** In the passages above, we have already described platform differences in terms of consuming and engaging with political news, yet since we again lack sufficient information, we ask **RQ8: Do we observe platform differences in the way political engagement on social media impacts on social, political, and media trust?**

4   Data and Methods

For our empirical analyses, we use an original survey conducted in six European countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain) in May 2021 (in the times of dampening pandemics). The number of respondents was 12,000 individuals, 2,000 in each country. This data set allows us to test all hypotheses through specifically defined variables on all three sorts of trust in relation to media consumption, as well as the possibility of testing for country and platform variation. In this article, we conduct descriptive analyses, provide some information on binary relations between variables and at the end, do multiple linear regressions to control for many relevant factors at once.

Our main dependent variables are the three different sorts of trust. Social trust has been measured as general trust in "most people" (for details on variables see Appendix). Political trust variable is an index of trust in three different political institutions: the national government, the national parliament and political parties of the country. For media trust, we asked how much one trusts "mainstream/traditional media", and how much different "social media".

Our main explanatory variable – media consumption – is measured through the frequency of media consumption. We used responses to the proposed means of media: print newspapers, TV and Radio programs, Facebook,

Twitter, and Instagram. Answers to these questions were grouped into three distinct categories: non-users (those who never or never this month used this media), non-heavy users (from once per month to two or three times a week) and heavy users (every or almost every day). Another explanatory variable – political engagement on the media – was measured as a frequency of bringing politics into conversation on different media. We control for education, gender, age, employment status and evaluation of one's current financial situation. We further include fixed effects for countries which allows us to integrate some country characteristics, like general trust levels of a country, work of political institutions, differing media use patterns and media systems. However, the number of countries in our study limits us in further analyses on specific factors which make a difference in results.

5   Results

5.1   *Social, Political, Media Trust and Media Consumption Patterns Compared*

Countries included in our analyses show significant differences in levels of social, political and media trust (see Figures A4, A5 in Appendix and Table S2 in the online supplement). In all countries, except for Germany, political trust is lower than social trust, and in all countries, trust in social media lower than in legacy media (cf. Schranz at al. 2016).[1] In general, people in Ireland and Germany are more trusting than in other countries. Levels of political trust are lowest in Italy and Poland, social trust in France and Poland, trust in legacy media in France and Italy, trust in social media in Italy and Poland. The distinction between Western and Northern European and Southern and CEE countries applies at the most general level, yet with some exceptions: Spain has the second-highest level of social trust and Poland has the second-highest level of legacy media trust. Also, the distinction between low trusting and high trusting countries fits particularly well political trust, but less social and legacy media trust. It follows that there is no linear relationship between trust in fellow citizens and trust in political institutions as this was still assumed some decades ago in the literature (Putnam 1993). Similarly, we find that the way people trust the media is not related to the question whether people trust the government: Poland and Spain demonstrate low political trust but still find legacy media trustworthy.

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1   For comparison of these levels with other public survey data, see the Appendix under Data Validation.

Media consumption patterns are also different across the countries (see Figure A6 in Appendix). Our data further points at the relative insignificance of the printed press (Reuters 2021). News consumption in all countries has gone digital, with almost triple the number of frequent readers of digital news compared to print news. TV and radio remain the principal news source of Europeans, except for Poland where it equals Facebook use. Social media use patterns are similar to digital news consumption, yet differences between platforms are obvious: Facebook is the nearest to digital news and is the most often used social media. Instagram and Twitter come next. In general, it holds that the higher the rate of the use of legacy media, the lower the levels of the use of digital news and social media.[2] It is especially true for Germany with the smallest decline in print and strong use of TV and Radio, but a comparatively low social media use. Frequent use of legacy media would explain Germany's and to some extent Ireland's high levels of trust, whereas Poland's strong use of in particular Facebook aligns with its low levels of trust. The relationship is, however, not unequivocal: Ireland also shows high social media use, France generally uses less media than people in other countries, while Spain and Italy are more than others fond of all kinds of media. The relationship between media consumption and trust therefore necessitates further enquiry.

People's political engagement in the media also differs by country, media and platform (see Figure A9 in Appendix). Most people bring politics into conversation while communicating face-to-face. Among the media, Twitter is the most political, followed by Facebook and Instagram, and the least politically engaged are consumers of digital news. In Poland, people are politically engaged the strongest, regardless of the medium, probably due to the highly polarized and politicized public space. In Ireland and France, people are the least politically engaged throughout. In Germany, political discussions in person are preferred stronger than in the media, already encounted tendency of Germans to prefer traditional news sources. Anyway, though some of these differences could be explained with country characteristics, they do not correlate with macro-level trust or general media use patterns, suggesting that a look at individual trust and media use patterns might be very fruitful.

5.2 *Media Consumption Effects on Social, Political and Media Trust*
In the next step of the analysis, we correlate social, political and media trust with frequency of use of news media on the individual level to test raised hypotheses.

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2 For comparison of these levels with other public survey data, see the Appendix under Data Validation.
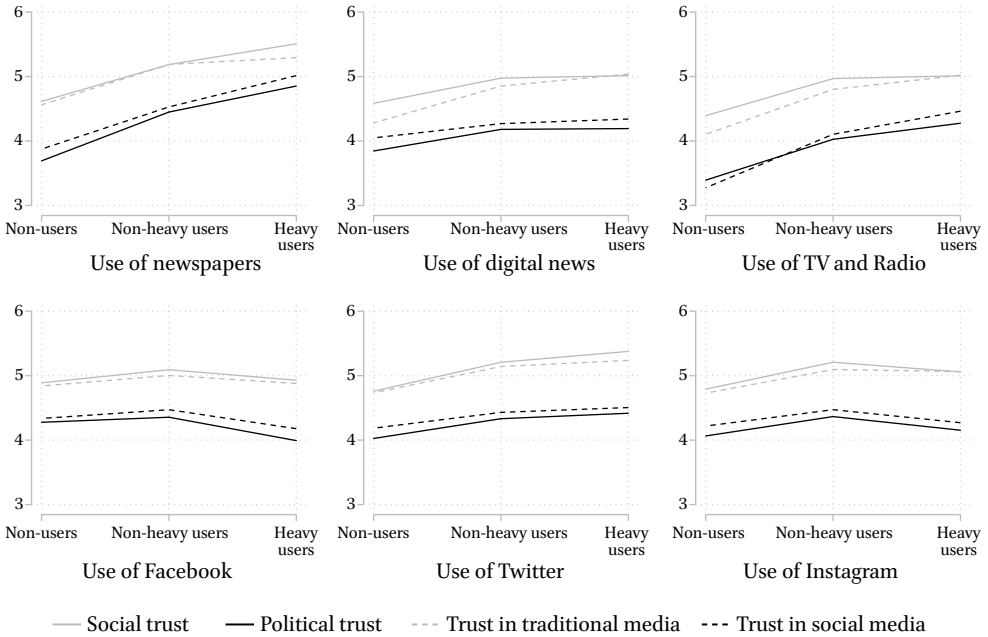
FIGURE 1   Intensity of media use in relation to different types of trust

Graphs above (see Figure 1) display that social trust, political trust and trust in different types of media largely coincide and that users of legacy media (both analogue and digital) show consistently higher levels of trust than non-users. Different degrees of media usage are thus less significant for the formation of trust than non-usage of a particular medium. These findings confirm hypotheses H1, H3a, H5 and H6a: Legacy media consumption is positively related to both social, political, legacy media and even social media trust. Contrary hypotheses H3b and H6b instead are rejected.

With regard to social media use, differences of trust levels between users and non-users are much smaller (see Figure 1). On Twitter, we find a slight increase of trust in correlation with the intensity of its use. The most political of platforms seems to follow the pattern of legacy media's impact on trust. On Facebook, as expected, there is a slight decline of trust with its use. On Instagram, non-heavy users are the most trusting individuals, so it has a positive influence on trust, just the relation between the intensity of use and trust is not strictly linear. We also find that trust in legacy media and trust in social media are not exclusive, to the contrary, heavy social media users consistently express higher levels of trust in legacy media than in social media. At the same time legacy media users are not distinct from social media users in the way that both express highest levels of trust with analogue news sources and are
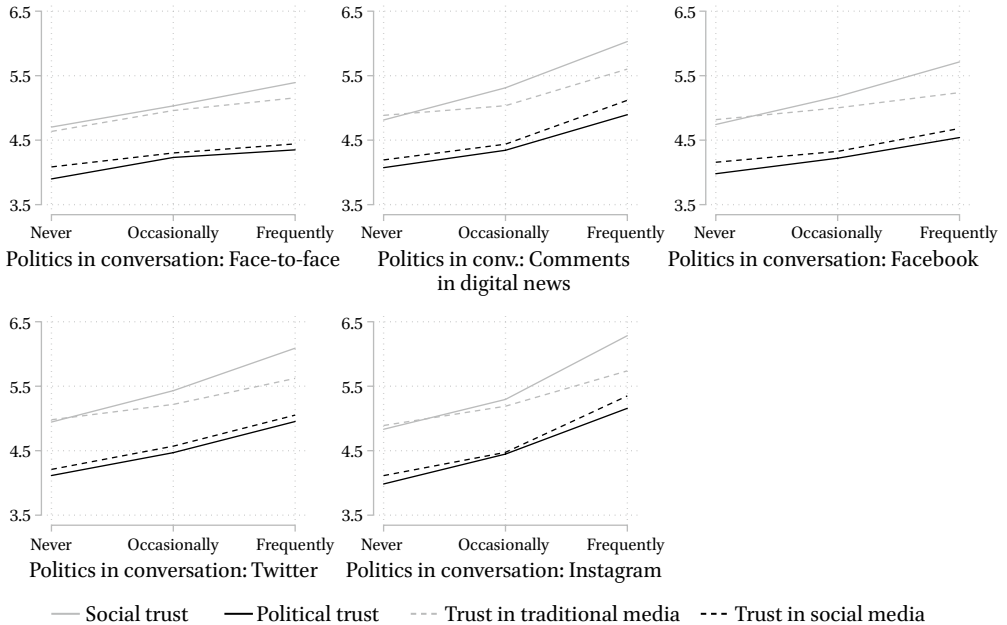
FIGURE 2   Intensity of political engagement in relation to different types of trust

more distrustful of social media. Based on these findings, we cannot state nei-
ther confirmation, nor rejection of hypotheses H2a, H4a, H2b, H4b, H6a, H6b,
H7, H8 and need further analyses. We could also positively respond to RQ2,
RQ4 and RQ6 about the platform effects.

Most importantly, political engagement through any type of media increases
trust in all dimensions and does not erode it (see Figure 2). This effect on trust
is the largest when people politically engage in digital news or Instagram, the
smallest it is for Facebook. Such a strong effect is interestingly not seen for
political discussions in face-to-face interactions. H9 is thus confirmed and H10
rejected. In response to RQ7, we can conclude that platform effects are absent.
The largest differences in levels of trust are between non-engaged and engaged
citizens, and not between citizens who engage online and offline.

At this point of our discussion, a reversed causality is still possible in the sense
that a self-selection mechanism applies, e.g., highly trusting people engage in
political conversation. To be able to control for factors which might generally
increase trust independently of patterns of media consumption, we conduct
regressions. First round of regressions is with media use: Beginning with only
media use variables, then including individual controls and at last country
fixed effects (full models in Table S3 for social trust, S4 for political trust, S5
for legacy media trust and S6 for social media trust in the online supplement).
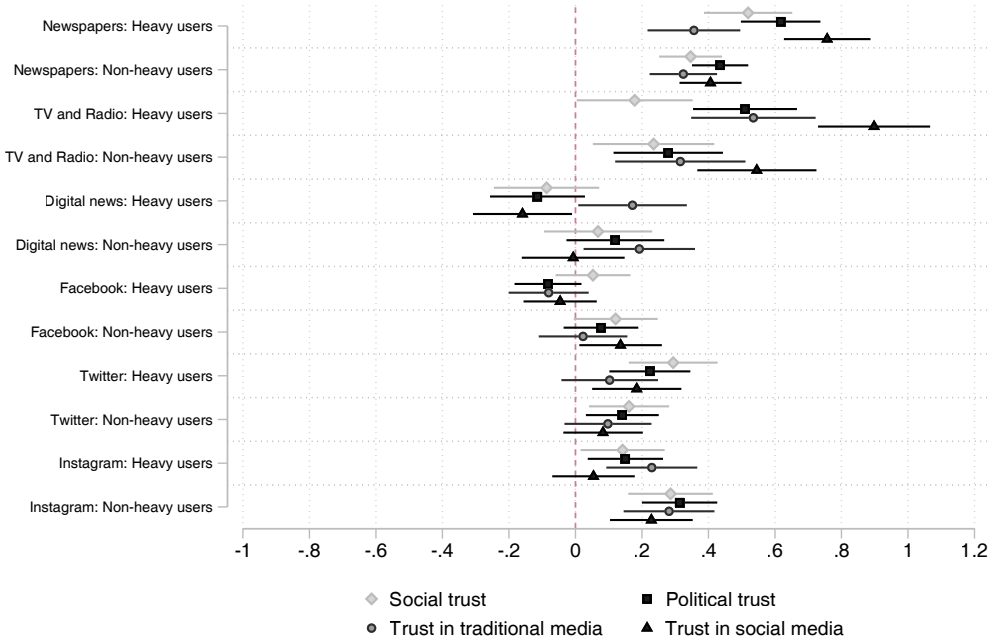
Note: Only the media use variables depicted, all other controls included in the model.

FIGURE 3   Impact of media use on sorts of trust

Figure 3 depicts results of media use variables in regressions on all four sorts of trust when all the controls are included (third models in Tables A4–A7). We can see that also controlling for sociodemographic factors and country effects, consumption of legacy media is always related with higher levels of trust. Digital media use has a positive impact only on legacy media trust and in case of heavy users, negative association with social media trust. This confirms the middle position of digital news in terms of legacy and social media: Being mostly legacy media in the digital form, its use makes people trust legacy media but be rather skeptical of social media. In general, we would still claim that H1, H3a, H5, H6a are confirmed and H3b and H6b regarding the negative association between legacy media use and trust could be rejected.

As for social media use, Facebook seems to have only one significant effect: the positive one of non-heavy use on social media trust. Here, however, is to be said that before all the controls (selection and country context effects) are included, heavy Facebook use has a negative sign for effects on all sorts of trust, which confirms that this social media does erode trust, yet most of this negative influence results from characteristics of its users and context of their use rather than platform affordances. On the contrary, Twitter has a positive

influence on social and political trust, and its heavy use on social media trust. Also, for legacy media trust, before the country fixed effects are included, the association between Twitter consumption and trust is positive. In contrast to Facebook, Twitter demonstrates more consistent effects on trust. The most surprising, though, are results for Instagram whose positive effects on all sorts of trust became even stronger after including controls. This means that either Instagram has some affordances increasing people's trust or that users of this platform have specific attitudes and values, variables going beyond sociodemographic and some basic economic and political characteristics and elevating trust.

Looking at individual controls, for all sorts of trust, political interest and good financial situation lead to more trust. In most cases, a higher level of education also has a positive impact on trust. Yet unemployment reduces only trust in legacy media and politics, and age effects are limited: Both the youngest and the oldest respondents trust legacy media and politics more, but only older people trust other fellow citizens more. Effects of gender are inconclusive. Even with fixed country effects, the explanatory power of the models is only around 10 % of variance (17,5 % for political trust) which indicates that there is still much we do not know about trust.

All in all, we could conclude that social media use does not erode trust, thus reject H2a, H4a, H7 and H8 and at least confirm H2b and H4b, as some platforms not only do not harm but show a positive relationship with trust. However, conclusion holds only if we could also answer RQ2, 4 and 6 positively, i.e. there are some platform differences in regard to trust. Significant country effects on most forms of trust indicate that country differences are significant, and positively respond to RQ1, 3, and 5.

As for political engagement (see Figure 4, more detailed results in the online supplement: Tables S7–S10), personal conversations about politics do increase social trust and decrease social media trust. The relationship with the political trust is rather interesting: occasional conversations do elevate trust, but frequent ones lessen it. The coefficients are not high and not consistently significant, but it might be that after controlling for other personal and context characteristics, like political interest, good financial standing, high education level, good governance in the country, too strong political involvement might not be trust-inducing anymore. However, this variable is presented only as a contrast to mediated political involvement. For example, political engagement with digital news has a positive impact on all forms of trust and confirms H9.

As for political engagement on social media, frequent but not occasional political use of Facebook increases political and media trust; any intensity of
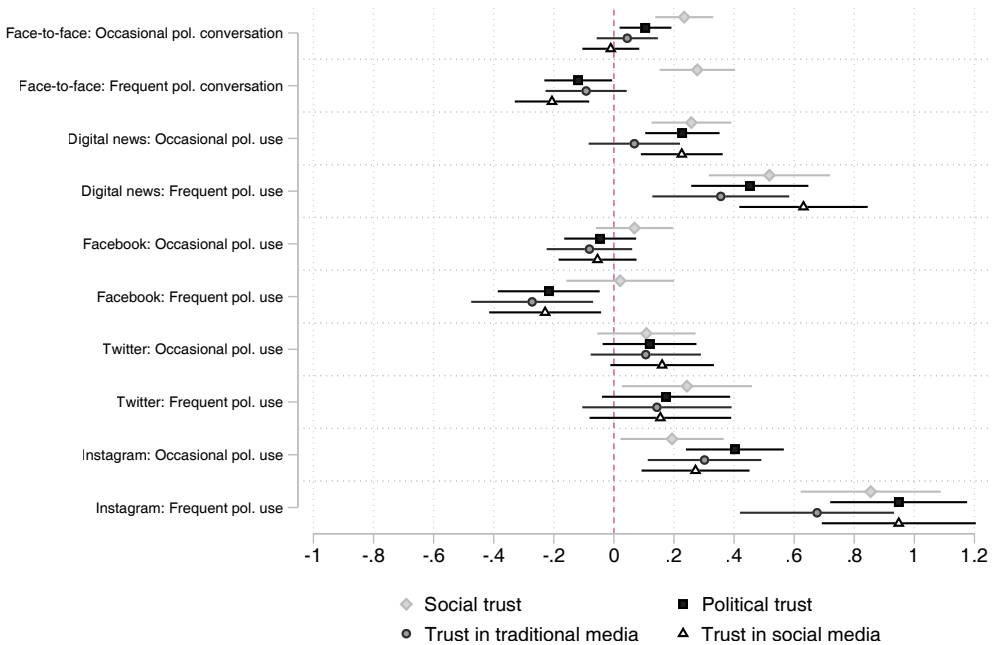
Note: Only the media use variables depicted, all other controls included in the model.

FIGURE 4   Impact of political engagement on sorts of trust

Instagram's political use elevates all forms of trust. Twitter's only positive significant effect is on social trust, although before controls its impact was positive on all forms of trust (see Tables A8–A11). It builds an interesting contrast to the general use of social media and trust: In the last analyses, Facebook's negative influence has been washed out by controls, here it is Twitter whose impact on trust seems to disappear when sociodemographic and economic variables are included. Probably this is due to the known fact of Twitter being a media for politically interested people. All in all, the positive impact of Twitter and Instagram are not enough to disconfirm H10, although it also cannot validate it. But it definitely affirmingly answers the RQ8 on platform differences.

Similarly to media consumption, political use of the media is related to political interest, higher education level, good financial situation, and seniority. In cases of legacy media and political trust, also the youngest people are more trusting, and unemployment reduces trust. Many significant country effects on trust also in this round of regressions positively responds to RQ7. To get a closer look at these differences, we conducted further regressions. As we cannot implement a truly multilevel design in our analyses, we conducted the main analyses for all the countries separately (see Tables A12–A17). The overview tables (Table 1 for media use and Table 2 for political engagement)

TABLE 1 Relation between media use and trust across countries: an overview of regression results

	Newspaper heavy	Newspaper non-heavy	TV Radio heavy	TV Radio non-heavy	Digital news heavy	Digital news non-heavy	Facebook heavy	Facebook non-heavy	Twitter heavy	Twitter non-heavy	Instagram heavy	Instagram non-heavy
ST	+(5)	+(5)	+(0)	+(1)					+(2)	+(1)	+(1)	+(2)
PT	+(5)	+(6)	+(3)	+(2)	and 1−	and 1+		and 2+	+(2)	+(1)	+(2)	+(4)
LMT	+(2)	+(5)	+(4)	+(3)	+(1)	+(1)	and 1−	and 1+	and 1−	and 1+	+(1)	+(1)
SMT	+(6)	+(5)	+(6)	+(4)	−(2)		and 1+	+(1)	+(1) and 1−			+(2)
Ireland												
ST	+	+		+								
PT	+	+										+
LMT	+	+										
SMT	+	+	+									
Germany												
ST	+	+								+		
PT	+	+									+	+
LMT	+	+	+									
SMT	+	+	+	+								

TABLE 1   Relation between media use and trust across countries: an overview of regression results (*cont.*)

	Newspaper heavy	Newspaper non-heavy	TV Radio heavy	TV Radio non-heavy	Digital news heavy	Digital news non-heavy	Facebook heavy	Facebook non-heavy	Twitter heavy	Twitter non-heavy	Instagram heavy	Instagram non-heavy
France												
ST	+	+										
PT	+	+	+	+				+	+			
LMT	+	+	+	+				+		+	+	
SMT	+	+	+	+				+	+			
Italy												
ST	+	+							+			+
PT	+	+	+	+							+	+
LMT	+	+	+	+			−			+		+
SMT	+	+	+	+	−							+
Spain												
ST	+	+									+	+
PT	+	+				+					+	
LMT	+	+	+	+		+			−			
SMT	+	+	+				+		−			

TABLE 1 Relation between media use and trust across countries: an overview of regression results (*cont.*)

	News-paper heavy	News-paper non-heavy	TV Radio heavy	TV Radio non-heavy	Digital news heavy	Digital news non-heavy	Facebook heavy	Facebook non-heavy	Twitter heavy	Twitter non-heavy	Instagram heavy	Instagram non-heavy
Poland												
ST	+								+			
PT	+	+	+		−			+	+			+
LMT			+									
SMT			+		−							+

Note: ST stands for social trust, PT for political trust, LMT for trust in legacy media, SMT for trust in social media. + indicates a significant positive coefficient, − a significant negative effect. The first part of the table (regression results for the pooled data) also displays in parentheses the number of countries for which the result is significant and in the same direction, after "and" the number of the countries for which results are contrary to the effect of the pooled data and then the sign of these significant coefficients. If the cell starts with "and", it means that, for the pooled data, the coefficient was not significant but for some countries it rendered significant results in the indicated direction.

indicate that across countries only some effects are robust. Legacy media use has the most robust impact on trust: Newspaper use on all sorts of trust, TV and Radio use on media trust. Consumption of digital news has a much less robust influence, yet its frequent political use positively affects trust. From social media, Instagram's positive effect on political trust is robust, frequent political engagement on Instagram also on social and social media trust.

What specific country differences do we observe then? Both high-trusting countries, Ireland and Germany, show similar patterns of media impact: Strong influence of print, but not of TV and Radio, and no significant effects of social media, except sporadic for Instagram and Twitter. Even the use of digital news and political engagement on them in these countries is insignificant. Only political use of Instagram in Ireland shows significant effects on all sorts of trust. Political engagement on other social media is significant in some instances, on Facebook and Twitter in Germany more than Ireland. All in all, Germany seems to be the most "traditional" country in terms of media use and media's impact on trust.

Another group of countries – France, Italy and Spain – show similar positive impact of newspaper use on trust, France and Italy also of TV and Radio consumption. In Poland, both legacy media do not affect trust that strongly and the least of all the countries. Political trust is affected the most by consumption of – although governmentally controlled – legacy media which makes sense since we measured political trust in specific institutions and parties, not general support for democratic system. Thus, there is no contradiction between use of "official" media and political trust. Even Italy, with its heavily politicized media, still shows some positive correlation between print news and trust. Also, in contrast to Ireland and Germany, in these countries, political engagement on digital news outlets has a positive impact on trust. Here, again, we do not see the confirmation of the theoretical assumptions that legacy media would be much weaker in Southern European and CEE countries. As we see, even in Poland they do impact on trust at some level.

Social media's impact on trust in these countries is not strong either. Although they show more significant effects for social media than in Ireland and Germany, they are mostly sporadic and vary strongly from country to country. In Italy, non-heavy use of Instagram is related to trust, in France, it is non-heavy use of Facebook and to some extent Twitter. For political engagement on social media, Instagram shapes trust the most and in a positive way, whereas Facebook in France and Italy has a negative impact on it. Sometimes also the sign of effect differs across countries, but to get into these would go beyond the scope of this publication. Shortly, we could argue that platform and country differences are entangled and strengthen each other.

TABLE 2   Relation between political engagement on the media and trust across countries: an overview of regression results

	Face-to-face occasionally	Face-to-face frequently	Digital news occasionally	Digital news frequently	Facebook occasionally	Facebook frequently	Twitter occasionally	Twitter frequently	Insta occasionally	Insta frequently
ST	+(3)	+(1)	+(3)	+(4)		and 1 +		+(1)	+(0)	+(6)
PT	+(1)	−(1)	+(1)	+(3)	and 1 −	−(2)		and 1 +	+(2)	+(5)
LMT	and 1 +	and 2 −		+(3)		−(3)			+(2)	+(2)
SMT		−(1)	+(1)	+(4)		−(2)			+(2)	+(4)
Ireland										
ST	+					+				+
PT	+								+	+
LMT									+	+
SMT				+					+	+
Germany										
ST	+			+						+
PT					−			+		
LMT		−				−				
SMT							+	+		

TABLE 2   Relation between political engagement on the media and trust across countries: an overview of regression results (*cont.*)

	Face-to-face occasionally	Face-to-face frequently	Digital news occasionally	Digital news frequently	Facebook occasionally	Facebook frequently	Twitter occasionally	Twitter frequently	Insta occasionally	Insta frequently
France										
ST	+			+						+
PT		−		+		−				+
LMT	+	−		+		−			+	+
SMT			+	+		−				+
Italy										
ST	+	+	+	+				+		+
PT				+						+
LMT	+			+		−				
SMT			+	+		−				
Spain										
ST			+	+						+
PT				+						+
LMT				+						
SMT				+				−		+

TABLE 2 Relation between political engagement on the media and trust across countries: an overview of regression results (*cont.*)

	Face-to-face occasionally	Face-to-face frequently	Digital news occasionally	Digital news frequently	Facebook occasionally	Facebook frequently	Twitter occasionally	Twitter frequently	Insta occasionally	Insta frequently
Poland										
ST			+				+			+
PT			+			−			+	+
LMT										
SMT	−							+	+	+

Note: ST stands for social trust, PT for political trust, LMT for trust in legacy media, SMT for trust in social media. + indicates a significant positive coefficient, − a significant negative effect. The first part of the table (regression results for the pooled data) also displays in parentheses the number of countries for which the result is significant and in the same direction, after "and" number of the countries for which results are contrary to the effect of the pooled data and then the sign of these significant coefficients. If the cell starts with "and", it means that for the pooled data, the coefficient was not significant but for some countries it rendered significant results in the indicated direction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The news media continue to be an important mediator of social and political trust. In all six countries studied, this key function of the media is fundamentally intact. Also, trust in the media and in journalism is not waning. On the contrary, the functioning country's media system is rewarded with high levels of trust by different types of media users. In particular, this pattern of trust in legacy media and public broadcasting applies not only to traditional newspaper subscribers but also to the users of social media, who continue to recognize the trustworthiness of professional journalism. Thus, the skeptical assessment that social media contributes to a weakening of trust in democracy needs to be revised. Consumption of digital news and social media although not always has a positive impact on trust, is also not eroding it. Thus, legacy media and social media consumption are not mutually exclusive or antithetical. Heavy legacy media users and intensive social media users are not divided or even polarized but inhabit the same public sphere. Rather than drawing a sharp distinction between the effects of the two on patterns of political and social trust, we should speak of "convergence media" (Jenkins, 2006).

Also, in terms of possible diminishing relations between different sorts of trust, concerns cannot be confirmed. Most of the significant predictors affect all sorts of trust in the same direction. Models seem to fit political trust the best, then legacy and social media, and as last social trust; but these are differences of level, not of substance. However, we do encounter platform differences. Instagram has a strong positive effect on trust, while other platforms less or insignificantly so. Twitter is the second strongest platform in regard to the influence on trust. Only Facebook shows a negative impact on trust, but only before controls are included.

Country differences also still matter, not only in terms of the different status of traditional media, but also in terms of the impact of social media platforms. Legacy media seems to be as powerful in high trust countries, Ireland and Germany, as in less trusting European countries, despite in some countries this media being partial or politically controlled. The influence of social media is stronger in less trusting countries, yet the platform which is the most impactful in every country differs. As for the theoretical assumptions that a country's media system influences trust in the media, we should remain critical but cannot completely reject it. Although social media do not exchange legacy media as drivers of trust in Southern European and CEE countries, they have a stronger impact than in Ireland and Germany.

Our research design did not allow us to directly test media system or any other country level variables and social media platforms, i.e., we could not

test what specific type of system variables and what type of network affordances explain differences in trust between countries and platforms. We find that social media platform patterns of trust do not develop independently of national media systems and do not balance cross-country differences. National media systems therefore still account for cross-country differences in the use of both legacy and social media, yet this does not automatically translate into differences of levels of social and political trust. Similarly, and consistently with media systems theory, trust in intermediaries differs between high and low trusting countries and shows a strong correlation with trust in political institutions, but also generally increases as a consequence of media use, regardless of the type of media and platform. This confirms our theoretical assumption that trust in the media is not just a correlate of social or political trust but an independent variable that needs to be considered when studying the current changes in political culture and the democratic public sphere.

This calls for more country-specific explanations of differentiated patterns of trust with moving targets, especially in recent transformation countries of Eastern Europe, where patterns of trust in different types of media are not firmly established. More attention should already be paid to these fine-tuned differences in the use of different types of media and contested notions of trust. Broad distinctions such as those between legacy media and online social media are increasingly falling apart. And although we know some things about Facebook and Twitter, further analyses of Instagram affordances leading to increasing trust might be worth enquiry. In addition to these differentiated and selective processes, the different ways of engaging with news and participating in online political debates need to be further analyzed.

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Appendix

Specifics of the Variables Used
Dependent Variables

Social trust has been measured with the usual question "Generally speaking, would
you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing
with people?" (from 1 – "you can't be too careful" to 10 – "most people can be trusted").

All the other forms of trust were retrieved with the question "On a score from 1 to
10, how much do you personally trust the following groups or institutions?" (1 mean-
ing "do not trust at all", 10 "trust completely"). For *legacy media trust*, we used the cat-
egory "mainstream/traditional media", for *social media trust*, "social media". *Political
trust* variable is an index of three different political institutions also listed as categories
of the trust question: the national government, the national parliament and political
parties of the country (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.915). Exploratory factor analysis also con-
firmed that these items build one single factor, thus the index from the factor scores
was produced and made to range from 1 to 10 as other trust variables.

Explanatory Variables

Media consumption has been formed from the answers to the question "For each of
the following sources, please indicate how often you have accessed it or used it *in the
last month*" (every day/ almost every day/ two or three times a week/ about once a
week/ two or three times/ once/ never this last month/ I have never used this source).
We used responses to the proposed means of media: print newspapers, TV and Radio
programs for legacy media, and Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for social media.
Answers to these questions were grouped into three distinct categories: non-users
(those who never or never this month used this media), non-heavy users (from once
per month to two or three times a week) and heavy users (every or almost every day).

Political engagement was measured as a frequency of bringing politics into conver-
sation on different media. Respondents were asked "For each of the following settings
or situations, please indicate *for the last month* how often did you start a political
discussion? Very frequently/ Frequently / Occasionally/ Never". This question has
been stated only to people who indicated that they use specific medium of commu-
nication. For political discussion face-to-face, only people who were communicating

socially with someone in the last month. For letters to the newspapers' editors, only those who read newspapers. For political discussion in the comment section/post of digital news, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, only users of digital media outlets or respective social media platform. However, the number of people writing letters to the newspaper editor was too low to consider it for analyses (see Table S1 in the online supplement). Also, due to the low number of very frequent political conversations, we put categories "Very frequently" and "Frequently" together and called it "Frequently".

We measured *education* with three levels built from national education system specific answers: ISCED1+2 as low; ISCED3+4 as middle and ISCED5+6 as high (ISCED being International Standard Classification of Education).

Political interest was measured with the question "How interested would you say you are in politics – are you …? Not at all interested/ hardly interested/ quite interested/ very interested".

Gender is a binary variable (female as reference category).

Age in years.

Employment status is a binary variable: 1 – employed, 0 – unemployed or not in the labor market.

Evaluation of one's current financial situation was retrieved with the question: "Which of the following best describes your household's *current* economic and financial situation?" 5–Point Likert scale from "We find it very difficult to live on the money we have" to "We live very comfortably on the money we have".

Data Validation

Our data was collected with the CAWI (Computer assisted web interviews) method, participants were recruited from the IPSOS (survey institute) online panel. Online surveys are increasingly used in social research and studies have shown the similarity between traditional full-probability or CATI (Computer assisted telephone interviews) and online samples (Berrens et al., 2003; Simmons & Bobo, 2015). The internet use in all the countries is also over 90%, except for Poland (78%) (Reuters, 2021). However, we still conduct a few robustness checks on our data.

Some analyses have been conducted by the survey institute itself: While gender distribution of the respondents and general population is well matched (from the methodological report of the survey institute, not publically available), for age and education there are some discrepancies. People of lower education are hard to recruit, therefore in most countries the category of low education, in Germany middle-level education, is under-represented. Interestingly, although most of the online samples are "younger" than the general population, in our data set the category of people over 60 years is oversampled probably due to an attempt to avoid the sample being too "young" and too highly educated. To correct for these discrepancies, post-stratification

weight for gender, age and education is used in our descriptive analyses and for these variables is controlled in our regressions.

If we look at the main variables used in our study, we could also see that age and education provide expected distribution: legacy media and digital news are more often used by older people, social media by younger people (see Figure A8), digital news are also more often consumed by better educated people (see Figure A7). Twitter and Instagram users, as known, are better educated and younger than Facebook users also in our sample. Face-to-face political engagement follows the known pattern, too: better educated people are more often politically involved, but older people are not less politically engaged (see Figures A10–A11).

We also compare trust and media use distributions by countries in our data set and other known public survey data. Social trust has been measured with the same item in ESS (Wave 10, 2020) as in our survey. We just adjusted the scale to range from 1 to 10. Political and media trust variables for comparison were taken from Eurobarometer 94.3 (Spring 2021). Political trust in an index from the same trust items as in our survey: trust in the national government, trust in the national parliament and trust in political parties (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.836). Social media trust was measured with one item asking for trust in "online social networks", but legacy media trust had to be constructed from three items including different legacy media: print press, TV and Radio (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.843). All the variables were rescaled to range as original variables in our survey.
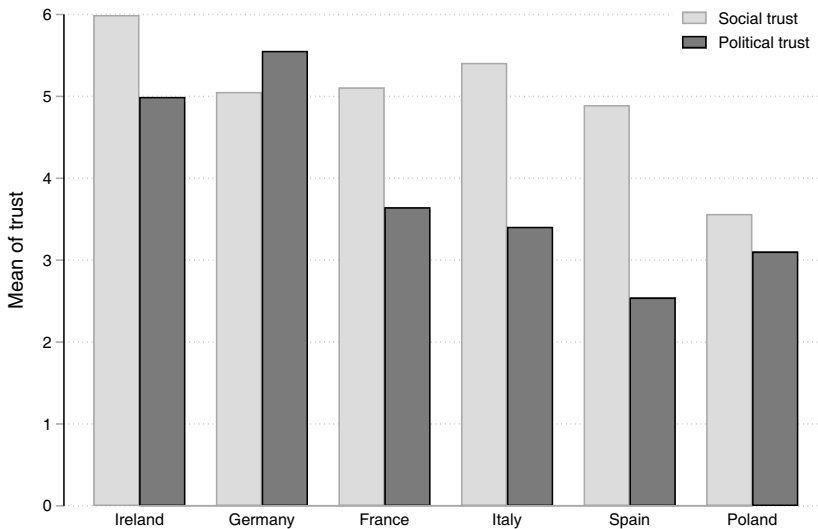
Note: All the analyses weighted with individual weights.

FIGURE A1   Average social and political trust over countries in ESS and Eurobarometer
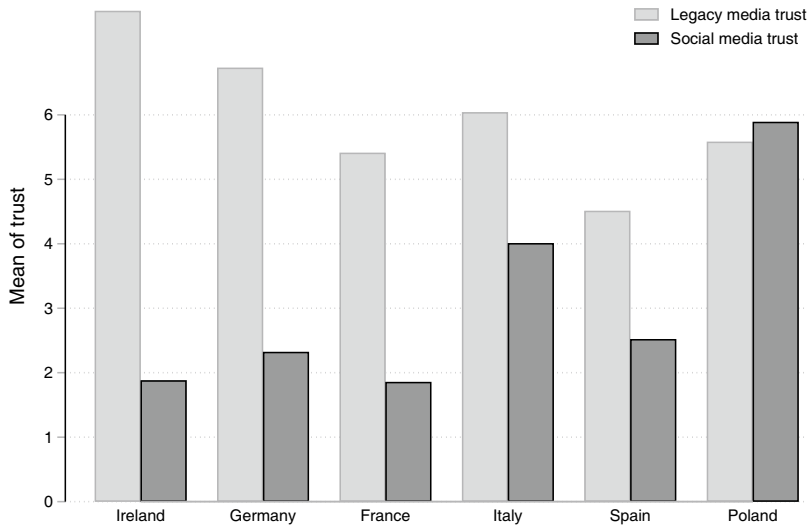
Note: All the analyses weighted with individual weight.
FIGURE A2   Average media trust over countries in Eurobarometer

If we compare levels of social and political trust in our data set (Figure A4) and in ESS and Eurobarometer (Figure A1), we notice that although the levels of political trust in Eurobarometer are generally lower (this probably lies on the way the questions on trust were formulated in Eurobarometer – instead of a Likert scale, respondents were given only two answer categories: trust or do not trust, which might nudge people to respond negatively) and the differences between countries larger, all in all, crude differences between sorts of trust and countries are the same. Levels of social trust are higher than of political trust. Ireland and Germany are the most trusting and Poland the least trusting country. Germany is the only country with higher political than social trust.

As for media trust (see Figure A2 for Eurobarometer and Figure A5 for our data set), again, levels of trust differ and Eurobarometer presents larger country differences. Although we could ignore differences of trust levels in comparing data sets, since we have the same issue with very different question format (again, only two response categories given), we still encounter some rather dramatic deviations between the surveys. The main differences are in values for Spain, Italy and Poland. Although in our data set, these countries have higher levels of legacy media trust than France, and lower levels of social media trust than Ireland and Germany, in Eurobarometer, the legacy media trust is the lowest in Spain and social media trust much higher than of the other three countries. It seems that in Eurobarometer in these three countries legacy media trust is
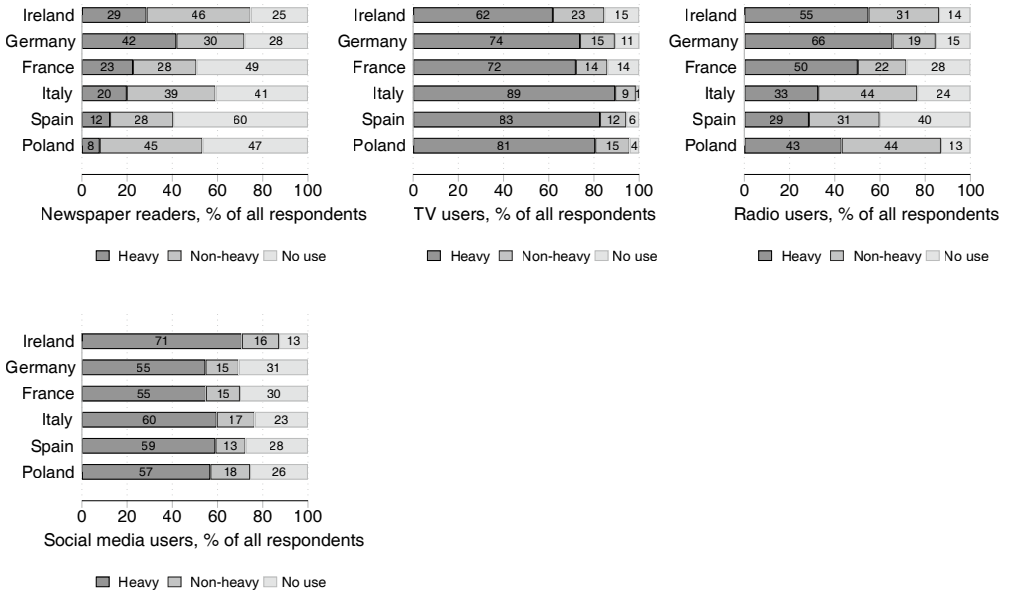
TABLE A1   Data on media trust and use by Reuters

	Trust in news	Trust in news on social media	Print as a source of news	TV as a source of news	Online as a source of news	Use of Facebook	Use of Twitter	Use of Instagram
Ireland	53%	19%	28%	68%	81%	64%	25%	38%
Germany	53%	14%	26%	69%	69%	44%	12%	29%
France	30%	15%	14%	68%	67%	60%	17%	31%
Italy	40%	20%	18%	75%	76%	74%	18%	48%
Spain	36%	24%	26%	64%	78%	66%	33%	55%
Poland	48%	37%	17%	70%	84%	72%	17%	35%

SOURCE: REUTERS, 2021

exchanged for social media trust, in Poland social media trust is even higher than trust in legacy media. In our data set, both sorts of trust run more parallel and social media trust is always lower than legacy media trust.

If we include data of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (see Table A1), we see that they rather follow Eurobarometer trace. This is interesting, since Reuters sample is also recruited online, therefore they claim that older and uneducated people are underrepresented which causes offline media consumption being underestimated (Reuters, 2021: 6). In our survey we have a unique situation where we have drawn an online sample but with overrepresented older population. Could lower trust in social media in our sample be explained by "older" sample, even after controlling for this overrepresentation? It could, however, also be a different wording of the question: While we ask specifically for trust in social media, Eurobarometer enquires about trust in online social networks which by some people and in some contexts might mean something different and have a more positive connotation. That would explain such a high levels of social media trust retrieved by Eurobarometer. For Reuters, the opposite is valid: Here the trust levels are much lower because asked is trust in news on social media, not only social media as such. Since with social media we also speak about a less established object of trust, the wording might matter a lot. And since for other objects of trust the deviations were much smaller, it might really be an issue with social media. Yet, since our question is the most accurate in terms of operationalizing social media trust, we keep it in its current shape in our analyses.

We also compare media use among our (Figure A6) and Eurobarometer (Figure A3) samples. Here it is almost possible to recreate the same categories as in our data: heavy

	Heavy	Non-heavy	No use
Ireland	29	46	25
Germany	42	30	28
France	23	28	49
Italy	20	39	41
Spain	12	28	60
Poland	8	45	47

Newspaper readers, % of all respondents

■ Heavy ■ Non-heavy □ No use

	Heavy	Non-heavy	No use
Ireland	62	23	15
Germany	74	15	11
France	72	14	14
Italy	89	9	
Spain	83	12	6
Poland	81	15	4

TV users, % of all respondents

■ Heavy ■ Non-heavy □ No use

	Heavy	Non-heavy	No use
Ireland	55	31	14
Germany	66	19	15
France	50	22	28
Italy	33	44	24
Spain	29	31	40
Poland	43	44	13

Radio users, % of all respondents

■ Heavy ■ Non-heavy □ No use

	Heavy	Non-heavy	No use
Ireland	71	16	13
Germany	55	15	31
France	55	15	30
Italy	60	17	23
Spain	59	13	28
Poland	57	18	26

Social media users, % of all respondents

■ Heavy ■ Non-heavy □ No use

Note: All the analyses weighted with individual weight.

FIGURE A3   Media use across countries in Eurobarometer

(everyday/ almost every day as one category), non-heavy (two or three times a week/ about once a week/ two or three times a month) and no users (less often/ never/ no access to this medium). The difference is just that orginal categories are „sliced" differently, non-heavy users do not entail those who use the medium once per month, but no users also include people who use the medium less often than two or three times a month, since we cannot say how often that would be. Also, in the Eurobarometer, again, social media is called "online social networks", TV and radio are asked separately, but digital news or specific platforms are not questioned at all. Data sets are similar in their distribution over countries, but not always in specific levels of usership. Although TV and TV and radio use are almost identical in both data sets, newspaper readership is larger in Eurobarometer than in our survey, probably due to the online nature of our sample. If we compare levels of social media consumption, in our data, we do not find Ireland to be stronger drawn to them, however, we also see that Germany and France are less eager than other countries to use social media. However, it is hard to draw strong conclusions on social media consumption since Eurobarometer respondents do not reveal what online social networks they use. All in all, our online sample does not overrepresent social media use, nor strongly underrepresents legacy media use (difference of level but not in pattern).

Reuters also collects data on media consumption and provides data on use of different social media platforms (see Table A1). However, we should keep in mind that Reuters defines users as the ones who consumed that media at least once last week which is a bit lower threshold than for heavy use but higher than for non-heavy use in our case. Also, the question most often asked whether the medium has been used to get news, whereas we asked about the general use. Therefore, again, differences between countries and between different media in separate data sets are more comparable than specific levels. As for levels, Reuters data seem to lie between our and Eurobarometer samples in terms of newspaper readership and social media users. As for country differences , in opposite to our sample, Reuters does not find exceptionally strong wiring of German population towards legacy media, but they do get similar results for social media use which is the lowest in Germany. In Reuters, Poland also has one of but not the highest number of Facebook users, Spain and Ireland has the most Twitter, and Italy and Spain the most Instagram users. France is on the lower end of media consumption. Facebook is the most used and Twitter the least used social media. Differences also here are not too dramatic.
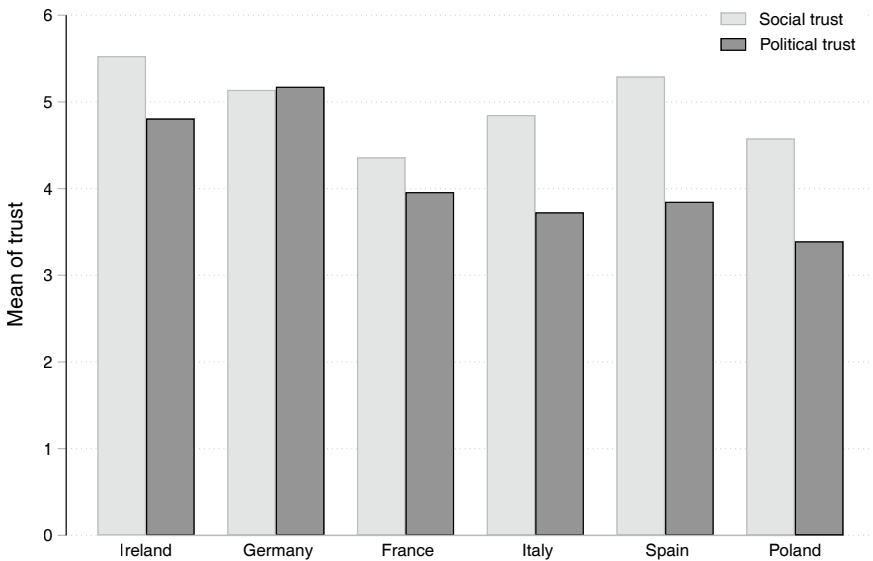

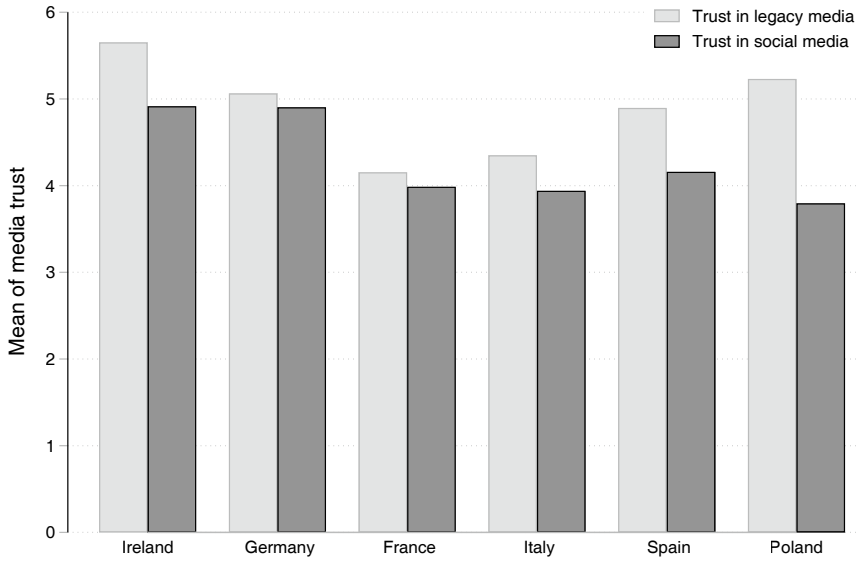FIGURE A4   Social and political trust compared

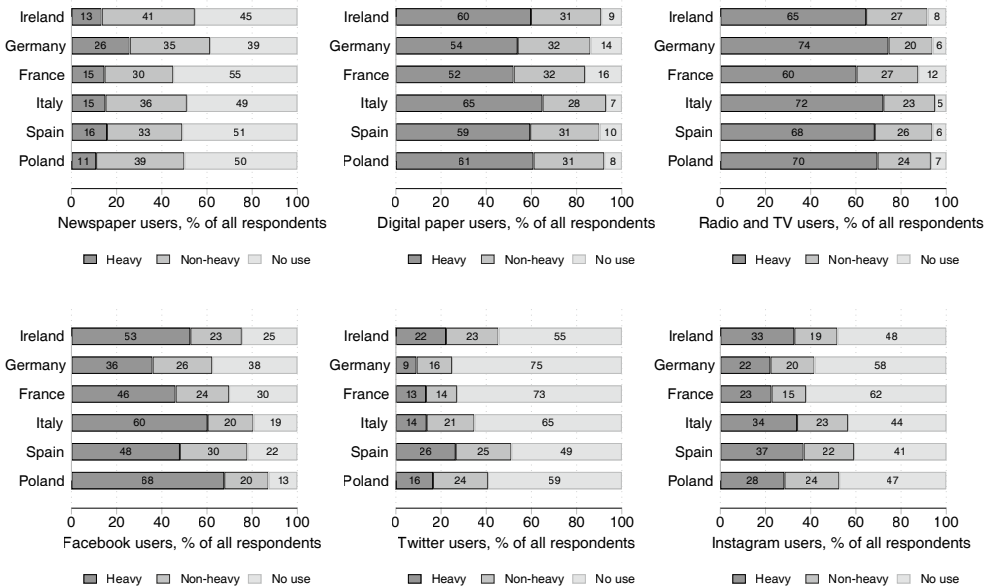FIGURE A5   Trust in legacy and social media compared

FIGURE A6   Intensity of media use compared
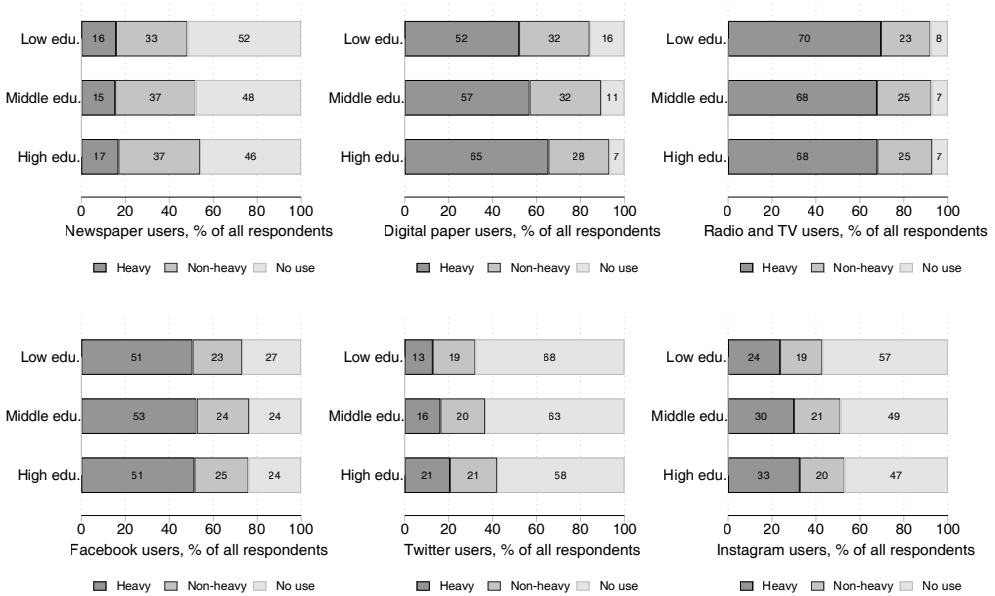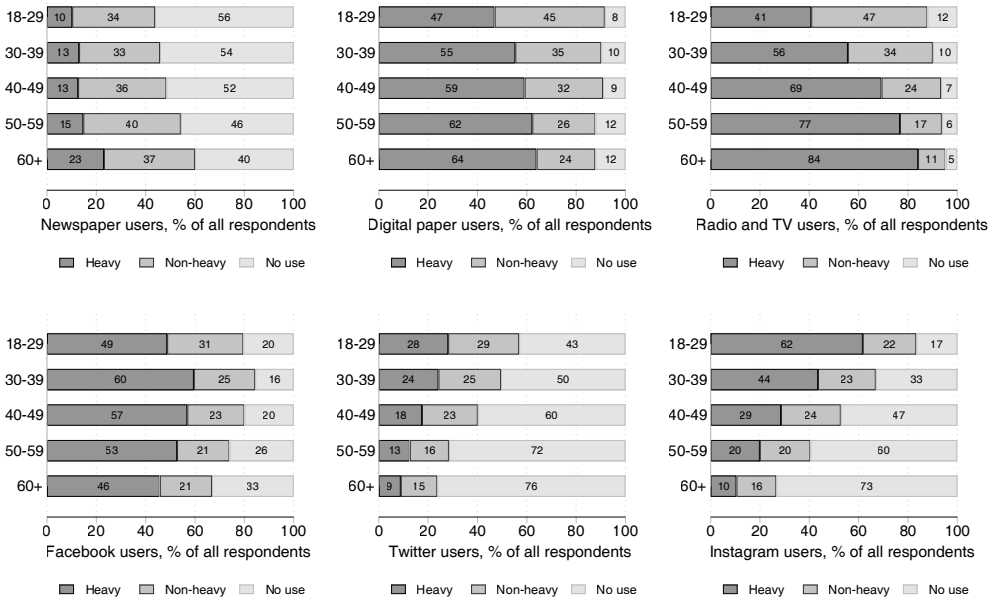
FIGURE A7   Media use by education

FIGURE A8   Media use by age
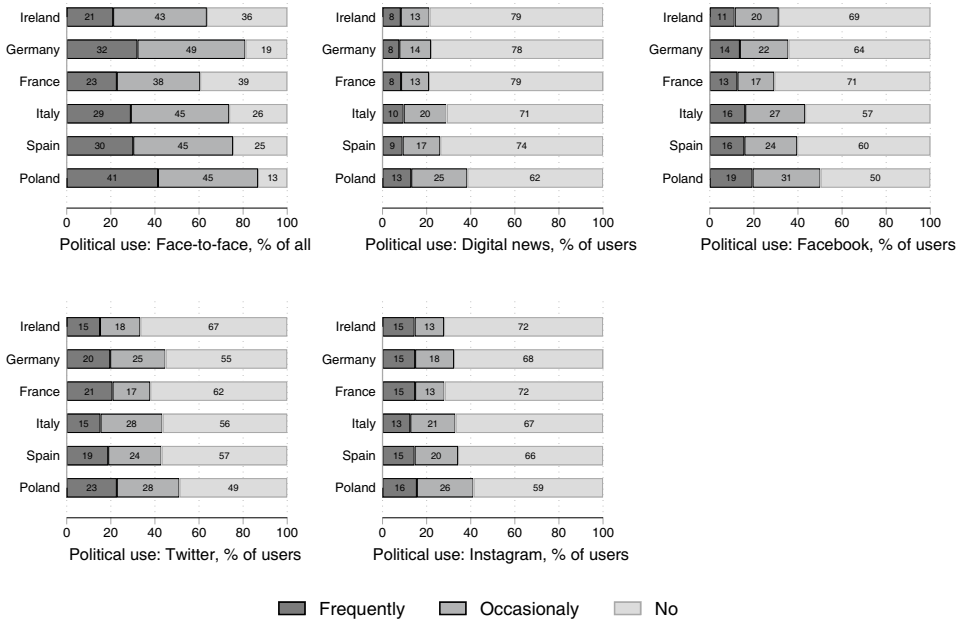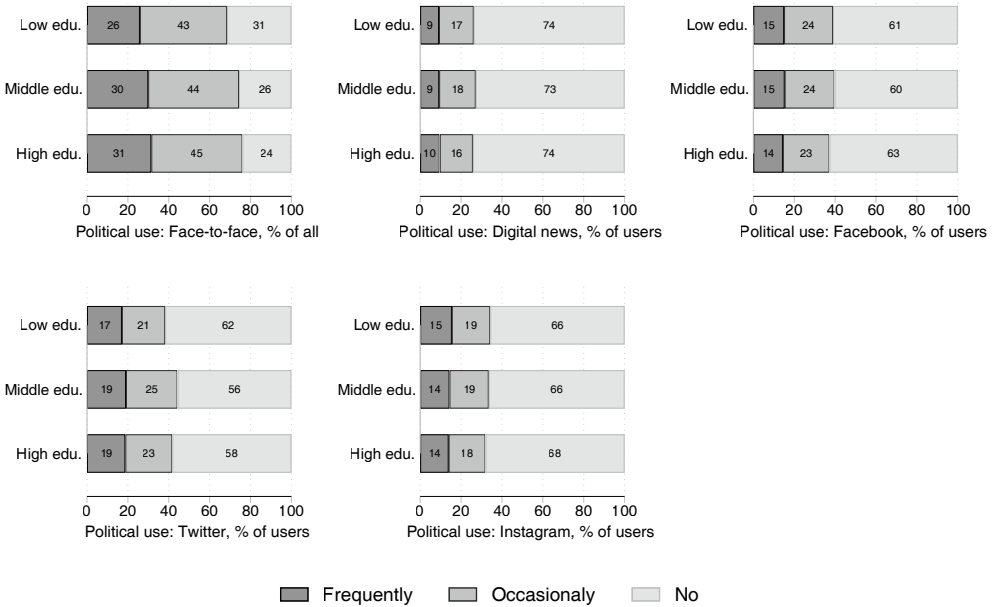
FIGURE A9   Frequency of political engagement compared

FIGURE A10   Frequency of political engagement by education

18-29	39	38	23
30-39	32	42	26
40-49	26	45	29
50-59	25	46	29
60+	27	47	26

Political use: Face-to-face, % of all

18-29	18	17	66
30-39	15	20	65
40-49	8	18	74
50-59	5	17	78
60+	5	16	80

Political use: Digital news, % of users

18-29	20	21	60
30-39	17	25	58
40-49	12	25	63
50-59	12	24	64
60+	14	25	61

Political use: Facebook, % of users

18-29	25	26	49
30-39	24	23	52
40-49	16	22	62
50-59	12	24	64
60+	12	22	66

Political use: Twitter, % of users

18-29	21	21	58
30-39	18	20	62
40-49	12	17	71
50-59	8	16	76
60+	6	18	75

Political use: Instagram, % of users
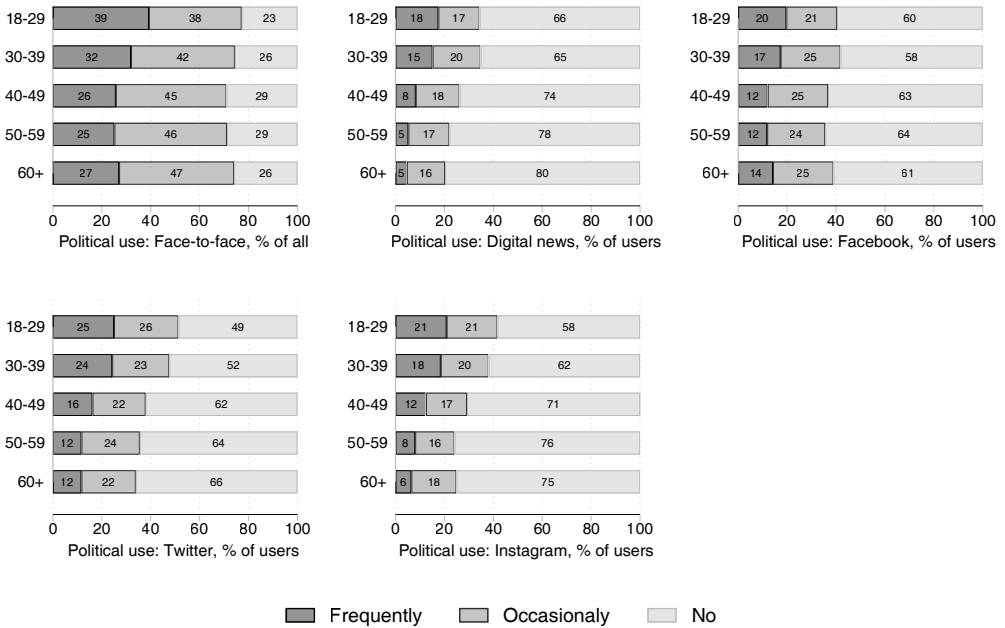
Frequently   Occasionaly   No

FIGURE A11   Frequency of political engagement by age

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