

## Conference Program



31 August - 01 September 2023  
Berlin, Germany

### WE THANK OUR SPONSORS

## Overview Programme

Thursday, 31 August 2023

08:00 - 09:00	Registration opens (with coffee)
09:00 – 09:15	Opening Remarks
09:15 – 10:00	Keynote Speech
10:00 – 10:30	Coffee Break
10:30 – 12:00	Panel I
12:00 – 13:15	Lunch Break
13:15 – 14:45	Panel II
14:45 – 15:15	Coffee Break
15:15 – 16:45	Panel III
16:45 – 17:00	Refreshments
17:00 – 18:30	Roundtable Discussion
19:30	Conference Dinner

Friday, 1 September

08:30 – 09:00	Morning Coffee
09:00 – 10:30	Panel IV
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break
11:00 – 12:30	Panel V
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch Break
13:30 – 14:30	Political Communication Section Business Meeting
14:30 – 16:00	Panel VI
16:00	Farewell Drinks

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## Presentations

Each presenter will have 15 minutes for the presentation. All conference rooms are located on the ground or first floor of the building at Hardenbergstraße 32 and are equipped with projectors/screens and a computer (Mac or Windows) with internet access.

## Food & Drinks

- Lunch is provided, plus tea, coffee and snacks throughout the days.
- The conference dinner (included in the conference fee) will take place at ["Koko & Lores"](#). **Address:** Revaler Str. 29, 10245 Berlin  
**Public Transport:** S-Bahn (S3, S5, S7) to "Ostkreuz. From there it is a 10-minute walk to the restaurant.

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Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society  
Hardenbergstrasse 32, 10623 Berlin  
Germany

## Thursday, 31 August 2023

**09:00 – 09:15, Room A**

**Opening Remarks** by

Christoph Neuberger, Freie Universität Berlin and Weizenbaum Institute  
Jakob Ohme, Weizenbaum Institute  
Emilija Gagrčin, University of Mannheim

**09:15 – 10:00, Room A**

**Keynote**

***Communicating the Future: Solutions for Environment, Economy and Democracy***

W. Lance Bennett, University of Washington, Seattle

**10:30 – 12:00, Room A**

**Panel I, Session A**

***Alternative Media and Counterpublics***

Chair: Annett Heft

A media-centric approach to elite radicalization: Reconceptualizing “alternative media” as “digital surrogates”  
*Curd Knüpfer, Freie Universität Berlin; Yunkang Yang, Texas A&M University; Mike Cowburn, European University Viadrina*

Curators of Digital Counterpublics: Mapping Alternative News Environments in Sweden and Denmark  
*Eva Mayerhöffer, Jakob Bæk Kristensen, Roskilde University*

Beyond Left and Right: A Content-based Categorization of German Alternative News Media  
*Miriam Milzner, Weizenbaum-Institut und Freie Universität Berlin; Vivien Benert, Freie Universität Berlin*

Media Credibility on social media: Dependency of Alternative Versus Traditional Media in the 2019 Tishreen Uprising in Iraq  
*Haitham Numan, Cihan University - Erbil*

“I have a different story to tell” – A literature review on countering misinformation with narratives  
*Pablo Porten-Cheé, Heidelberg University*

**10:30 – 12:00, Room B**

**Panel I, Session B**

***News Experiences and Reception***

Chair: Tali Aharoni

Information abundance – curse or blessing? A focus group study on how people perceive today's information flows  
*Anne Schulz, Sophia Volk, Sina Blassnig, University of Zurich; Sarah Marschlich, University of Amsterdam; Minh Hao Nguyen, University of Amsterdam, m.h.nguyen@uva.nl; Nadine Strauss, University of Zurich, n.strauss@ikmz.uzh.ch*

Who engages in fact-checking? Predictors of fact-checking behavior among Romanian adolescents  
*Raluca Buturoiu, Nicoleta Corbu, Valeriu Frunzaru, Denisa-Adriana Oprea, College of Communication and Public Relations, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest*

News Avoidance and Consumption: Intentions and Structural Inequalities  
*Morten Skovsgaard, Kim Andersen, University of Southern Denmark*

The Dissatisfied News Audience  
*Kim Andersen, Katrine Bruun Rasmussen, University of Southern Denmark*

The Impact of Media Contact with Refugee Women and Men in the News on Immigration-Related Attitudes and Emotions  
*Meltzer, Christine E., Institut für Journalistik und Kommunikationsforschung, Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover; Pablo B. Jost, Christian Schemer, Simon Kruschinski, Institut für Publizistik, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz; Marcus Maurer, Institut für Publizistik, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, mmaurer@uni-mainz.de*

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**10:30 – 12:00, Room C**  
**Panel I, Session C**  
**Crisis Communication**

Chair: Vaclav Štetka

Media's Construction of Political Leadership in Transboundary Crises. A Comparative Analysis of the Responsibility Discourse in European Media during the Migration Crisis and the Coronavirus Pandemic

Elisabeth Wagner-Olfermann, TU Ilmenau

Populism and government crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic: A comparison of four countries

Sabina Mihelj, Loughborough University ; Daniel Hallin, UCSD; Danilo Rothberg , UNEP; Beata Klimkiewicz, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland; Vaclav Stetka, Loughborough University (v.stetka@lboro.ac.uk), Paulo Ferracioli, UNEP, Sao Paulo, Brazil (ferracioli.paulo@gmail.com), Ana Stojiljkovic, Loughborough University (ana.stojiljkovic@gmail.com), Katarzyna Vanevska, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland (vanevscy@yahoo.com)

Analyzing "New" Aspects of New Right-Wing Extremism in the context of the "Disaster of the Century" Discourse in Turkey

Arzu Bayar, Feride Güner, Research Assistant and PhD Candidate

Media framing of government crisis communication during COVID-19  
Lore Hayek, Department of Political Science, University of Innsbruck

Reporting on immigration by press agency journalists: an analysis of journalists' justifications of actors, sources and frames  
Laura Jacobs, Emmi Verleyen, University of Antwerp; Kathleen Beckers, University of Amsterdam

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**10:30 – 12:00, Room D**  
**Panel I, Session D**  
**Audience-Media Relationship**

Chair: Imke Henkel

Entertaining communication for solving political problems? Explaining perceptions of political relevance in entertaining TV genres in Germany  
Lisa Zieringer, Carsten Reinemann, Lydia Unterstraßer, LMU Munich

Beyond "Master Frames": A Semi-automated Approach to Studying Viewpoint Diversity of the Media Discourse

Kostiantyn Yanchenko, Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw, Gerret von Nordheim, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Hamburg; Jonas Rieger, Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI); Mattes Ruckdeschel, Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI), m.ruckdeschel@leibniz-hbi.de; Gregor Wiedemann, Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI), g.wiedemann@leibniz-hbi.de

What is journalism? Young adults' folk theories

Diego Garusi, University of Vienna; Sergio Splendore, University of Milan

Solutions-journalism at the service of political communication. Theories and perspectives.

Alessandro Martinisi, Franklin University Switzerland

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**12:00 – 13:15, Hall**  
**Lunch Break**

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**13:15 – 14:45, Room A**  
**Panel II, Session A**  
*Trust in Media and Politics*

Chair: Olga Pasitselska

Relegitimation: Re-establishing trust in the news media  
Arjen van Dalen, University of Southern Denmark

Not my positions, not my crowd! Exploring the conceptual nature of media (mis-)representation from an individual perspective to better understand its link to media trust and cynicism  
Christina Viehmann, Nayla Fawzi, Nikolaus Jakob, Ilka Jakobs, University of Mainz; Oliver Quiring, University of Mainz, [quiring@uni-mainz.de](mailto:quiring@uni-mainz.de); Christian Schemer, University of Mainz, [schemer@uni-mainz.de](mailto:schemer@uni-mainz.de); Tanjev Schultz, University of Mainz, [tanjev.schultz@uni-mainz.de](mailto:tanjev.schultz@uni-mainz.de); Daniel Stegmann, University of Mainz, [daniel.stegmann@uni-mainz.de](mailto:daniel.stegmann@uni-mainz.de); Marc Ziegele, University of Düsseldorf, [Marc.Ziegele@hhu.de](mailto:Marc.Ziegele@hhu.de)

~~The Role of Trust and Attitudes toward Democracy in the Dissemination of Disinformation: A Comparative Analysis of Six Democracies~~  
~~Edda Humprrecht, University of Zürich~~

The role of trust in voters' adoption of media projections  
Tali Aharoni, Christian Baden, Maximilian Overbeck, Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem

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**13:15 – 14:45, Room B**  
**Panel II, Session B**  
*Threats and Solutions*

Chair: David N. Hopmann



*This panel is organized by THREATPIE project*

Public perceptions of disinformation and platforms' affordances: The role of media use and previous knowledge  
Karolina Koc-Michalska et al., Audencia Business School

The Perception of Social Cohesion and Media Use in Society: A Comparative Study  
Christine Meltzer, Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover; Jesper Strömbäck, University of Gothenburg; Luisa Gehle, Christian Schemer, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz; David Nicolas Hopmann, [dnh@sam.sdu.dk](mailto:dnh@sam.sdu.dk), University of Southern Denmark;

Third person perceptions about detecting misinformation and fact-checking habits. Evidence from an 18-country survey  
Corbu, N., Halagiera, D., Jin, S., Stanyer, J., Strömbäck, J., Matthes, J., Aalberg, T., Van Aelst, P., Cardenal, A.S., van Erkel, P., Hopmann, D.N., Koc-Michalska, K., Meltzer, C., Schemer, C., Splendore, S., Stępińska, A., Štětka, V., Terren, L., Theocharis, Y., de Vreese, C., Zoizner, A.

Does selective exposure reduce belief accuracy? Evidence from survey and passive meter data across five Western democracies  
Ana Cardenal, Ludovic Terren, Alon Zoizner, David Nicolas Hopmann

Combating misinformation with Media literacy. An experimental study on the framing effects of media literacy messages  
Patrick van Erkel, Claes de Vreese, University of Amsterdam; Peter Van Aelst, Joren Van Nieuwenborgh, University of Antwerp; Michael Hameleers - University of Amsterdam; David Hopmann - University of Southern Denmark

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**13:15 – 14:45, Room C**  
**Panel II, Session C**  
***Personalized Political Communication***

Chair: Linda Bos

Revealing their true colors? The association between politicians' personality and their emotional appeals  
Christian Pipal, University of Zürich

Mother of the nation: Performing credibility in a time of crisis  
Anja Vranic, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo; Sine Nørholm Just, Roskilde University

Who are the losers? Attribution of responsibility for election results in the age of personalized politics  
Katjana Gattermann, University of Amsterdam; Thomas Meyer, University of Vienna

Dealing with the energy crisis in Europe. Political messages on Telegram and citizens' perceptions  
Rubén Rivas-de-Roca, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos; Concha Pérez-Curiel, Universidad de Sevilla

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**13:15 – 14:45, Room D**  
**Panel II, Session D**  
***International Conflict Communication***

Chair: Jihye Park

Laughing Through the Tears: Memes as Coping Mechanisms in the Russian-Ukrainian War  
Junio Aglioti Colombini, Roberta Bracciale, Department of Political Science, University of Pisa

News Framing of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis in the Aftermath of the

Russia-Ukraine War: A Cross-Country Analysis  
Gizem Melek, Yaşar University; Kübra Geysi, Galatasaray University; Zeynep Nur Sarı, Sabancı University

Stereotypical Media Framing in Intergroup Conflict: The Role of Collective Memory as an Interpretative Resource in Coverage of the Polish-Israeli Diplomatic Crisis  
Karen Ornat, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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**14:45 – 15:15, Hall**  
**Coffee Break**

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**15:15 – 16:45, Room A**  
**Panel III, Session A**  
***Hate Speech and Incivility***

Chair: Dennis Friess

Tackling the emotional toll together: How to counter harassment with connective practices  
Anu Kantola, Anu Harju, University of Helsinki

Is it anger or thirst for knowledge? How online incivility impacts political participation  
Laia Castro, University of Barcelona; Michael Amsler, Frank Esser, Jihye Park, University of Zurich; Pamina Syed Ali, University of Zurich; Yuan Zhang, University of Zurich

Moral panic or a real thing? Explaining perceptions of Cancel Culture in Germany  
Lena Mändlen, Carsten Reinemann, Anna-Luisa Sacher, LMU Munich

Silenced about what, where and by whom? Exploring the contextual factors shaping perceptions of free speech  
Anna-Luisa Sacher, Carsten Reinemann, LMU Munich

Untangling the Spread of Political Incivility on Twitter: An Examination of Networked Communities and Contagion Dynamics  
Yuan Zhang, Yuan Zhang, Jihye Park, K. Pamina Syed Ali, University of Zurich; Michael

Amsler, University of Zurich, Laia Castro  
Herrero, Universitat de Barcelona; Frank  
Esser, University of Zurich

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**15:15 – 16:45, Room B**

**Panel III, Session B**

***Messenger Platforms and Chat Groups***

Chair: Toril Aalberg

Criticism, conspiracies and populism: The  
discourse of COVID-19 sceptics in  
Germany's Querdenken community on  
Telegram.

Rémi Almodt, Babes-Bolyai University  
Cluj-Napoca, Department of Journalism and  
Digital Media

Chatting Communities into Existence:  
Exploring the Role of Chat Groups in  
Community Building During the COVID-19  
Pandemic

Olga Pasitselska, University of Groningen;  
Kilian Buehling, Free University of Berlin /  
Weizenbaum-Institut; Emilija Gagrčin,  
University of Mannheim

Comparing German far-right movement  
networks and communities across  
platforms

Baoning Gong, Weizenbaum-Institut / Freie  
Universität Berlin

What do the Spanish parties do on mobile  
instant messaging services? Telegram's  
political functions as a digital  
communication channel by means of three  
electoral campaigns

Alejandra Tirado García, Andreu Casero  
Ripollés, Universitat Jaume I de Castelló  
(Spain)

~~How does right wing propaganda from  
alternative messenger platforms connect  
to mainstream social media platforms? – A  
case study with Telegram and Youtube.  
Christina Dahn, Indira Sen, Katrin Weller,  
GESIS~~

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**15:15 – 16:45, Room C**

**Panel III, Session C**

***Protest and Political Participation***

Chair: Pablo Porten-Cheé

Caught between Attention and  
Acceptance: Media Coverage of  
Environmental Protest Events and Its  
Effect on Protest Group Perception  
Pablo Jost, University of Mainz

Transmedia audiences and events as  
tactics of Russian anti-war movement  
construction  
Svetlana Chuikina, Karlstad University,  
Sweden

Protest and The Power of Unity Claims.  
Analyzing the Resonance of Social  
Movements' Twitter and Facebook Protest  
Messages.  
Luna Staes, University of Antwerp

The Democratic Potentials of Social  
Media: How Focusing on the Bad Can  
Obstruct the Good  
Christian Strippel, Sofie Jokerst, Katharina  
Heger, Weizenbaum-Institut; Martin Emmer,  
Weizenbaum-Institut / Freie Universität Berlin

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**15:15 – 16:45, Room D**

**Panel III, Session D**

***Critical Approaches to Algorithmic  
Platforms***

Chair: Ulrike Klinger

Storytelling, datafication, and the future of  
political advocacy campaigns  
Ariadne Vromen, Australian National  
University; Filippo Trevisan, American  
University; Michael Vaughan, London School  
of Economics

Critical feminist screenshotting: capturing  
the gaze of the search engine  
Renée Ridgway, Aarhus University

Exclusively exclusive, or includes some  
inclusive? – Sentiment analysis of  
Facebook posts about immigration of  
media outlets and politicians in Hungary  
and Germany between 2014 and 2022  
Eszter Farkas, Central European University



Gender, modality, and perceived political authenticity in social media: Evidence from an online survey experiment  
Simon Luebke, LMU Munich; Dennis Steffan, Freie Universität Berlin

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**16:45 – 17:00, Room A**  
**Refreshments**  
*sponsored by THEATPIE project*

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**17:00 – 18:30, Room A**  
**Roundtable Discussion**  
***Solution-based Political Communication***  
*organized by THEATPIE project*

#### **Project Keynotes**

The Threats and Potentials of a Changing Political Information Environment  
***Ana Sofia Cardenal, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya***

Data-driven campaigns: intended and unintended consequences for democracy  
***Rens Vliegthart, University of Wageningen***

#### **Roundtable Discussion**

Tabea Rößner, German Member of Parliament, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen; Chair Committee on Digital Affairs

Michał Chlebowsky, Programming Standards Manager at Polish TVN Grupa Discovery

Jan Nicola Beyer, Digital Democracy Research Coordinator at Democracy Reporting International

Isabelle Wirth, European Media Project Manager at AFP

Moderator: David Nicolas Hopmann, Rens Vliegthart

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**Drink tickets for the conference dinner sponsored by THEATPIE will be handed out at the end of the roundtable**

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**19:30, Restaurant 'Koko Lores'**  
**Conference Dinner**  
Revaler Str. 29, 10245 Berlin, Germany

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## Friday, 1 September 2023

**09:00 – 10:30, Room A**

**Panel IV, Session A**

*Political Talk*

Chair: Ariadne Vromen

Political Correlates of Interpersonal  
Listening Styles

Eike Mark Rinke, University of Leeds; Patricia  
Moy, University of Washington

Can AI Solve Problems of Online Publics?  
User Perceptions of AI Interventions in  
Online Political Discussions

Dennis Frieß, Düsseldorf Institute for Internet  
and Democracy (University of Düsseldorf); Ole  
Kelm, Marc Ziegele, University of Düsseldorf

Empowering voters and fostering healthy  
political discourse: Discursive legitimization  
by digital media platforms in the context of  
election integrity

Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, Niko Hatakka, Mervi  
Pantti, University of Helsinki

Barriers to Participation in Polarized  
Online Discussions about COVID-19 and  
the Russo-Ukrainian War

Martina Novotná, Alena Macková, Karolina  
Bieliková, Masaryk University; Patrícia  
Rossini, University of Glasgow

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**09:00 – 10:30, Room B**

**Panel IV, Session B**

*Algorithmic Media*

Chair: Arjen van Dalen

Learning Iteration Process of Social  
Media: A Framework for Understanding  
How Actor Interplay Shape Behaviour and  
Content Flows

Rasmus W. Schmøkel, University of Southern  
Denmark, Digital Democracy Centre

Detecting Algorithmic Bias and Fringe  
Bubbles in Social Media

Judith Moeller, Leibniz Institute for Media  
Research HBI / Universität Hamburg

From Subjects to Actors: Citizen Agency  
in Automated Content Moderation

Anna Maria Planitzer, Sophie Lecheler, Svenja  
Schäfer, University of Vienna

News recommenders explained  
Valeria Resendez, Theo Araujo, Natali  
Helberger, Claes de Vreese, University of  
Amsterdam

Who encounters and communicates  
politics on which social media platforms?  
Ole Kelm, Gerrit Philipps, Dennis Friess, Marc  
Ziegele, University of Duesseldorf

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**09:00 – 10:30, Room C**

**Panel IV, Session C**

*Media Effects and Social Change*

Chair: Nayla Fawzi

How do news media and internet use  
affect individuals' climate change  
predispositions

Peter Van Aelst; Marthe Walgrave, University  
of Antwerp

Faulty news coverage causes a bad mood  
– how media coverage subtly affects the  
negotiation outcomes of political conflicts  
Marlene Schaaf, Christina Viehmann, Mathias  
Weber, Oliver Quiring, Johannes Gutenberg  
University Mainz

Facilitating Societal Change through  
Fear? Effects of Gain and Loss Frames in  
Media Climate Communication  
Alina Jakob, JGU Mainz

Living up to its promise? Effects of  
Solutions Journalism on  
Pro-Environmental Opinions and Behavior  
Andreas Schuck, University of Amsterdam

Social Cohesion through Media? On the  
Interplay of Media Use, Media  
Representation, and Social Cohesion  
Daniel Stegmann, Johannes  
Gutenberg-University Mainz

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**09:00 – 10:30, Room D**

**Panel IV, Session D**

*Identifying Polarisation in  
Communications*

Chair: Karolina Koc-Mihalska

**Discursive Polarisation: An Analytical Framework**

Michael Brüggemann Hendrik Meyer,  
Universität Hamburg / TNI (The New Institute)

**Determining the Drivers and Dynamics of Partisanship and Polarisation in Online Public Debate**

Axel Bruns, Katharina Esau, Tariq Choucair,  
Sebastian Svegaard, Samantha Vilkins  
Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland  
University of Technology

**Taking Polarisation to the Meso-level: An Analytical Framework for Assessing Positional Changes within the Climate Movement and Political Parties**

Christiane Eilders; Henri Mütschele, Heinrich  
Heine University of Düsseldorf

**Breaking comfort zones: Media trust, out-group media exposure, and reducing affective polarization**

Jihye Park, University of Zurich; Ben Warner,  
University of Missouri

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**10:30 – 11:00, Hall**

**Coffee Break**

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**11:00 – 12:30, Room A**

**Panel V, Session A**

***Populist Communication***

Chair: Sabina Mihelj

**Does party positions matter for the media?**

Exploring the relationship between  
political party positions and media  
Andreea Stancea, Despina Adrian-Nicu,  
National School of Political Studies and  
Administrations

**One people, across conflict lines.**

Experimental evidence on the unifying  
power of morality frames in populist  
appeals

Linda Bos, Alessandro Nai, Mohamed  
Saadettin, University of Amsterdam

**Constructing COVID-19 Disinformation Narratives: The Weaponization Of Public**

**Discontent As Populist Political Communication Strategy**

Roxana-Varvara Boboc, Flavia Durach,  
Cătălina Nastasiu, National University of  
Political Studies and Public Administration

**From the ideological underdog to communication mainstream: The impact of the populist style on social media campaigning**

Yunis Mir, University of Warsaw

**“But I want to believe that the news is true!” The limited effect of warning labels and friend’s recommendations on political partisans’ perception of fake news credibility**

Natalie Ryba, Ole Kelm, Marco Dohle,  
University of Duesseldorf

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**11:00 – 12:30, Room B**

**Panel V, Session B**

***Politicians on Social Media Platforms***

Chair: Simon Lübke

**Beyond anti-media populism: How populist radical right in the Czech Republic communicates about news media on Facebook**

Vlastimil Havlík, Alena Kluknavská, Jozef  
Kunc, Masaryk University

**The Spectacle of “Patriotic Violence” in Romania: Populist Leader George Simion’s Mediated Multimodal Performance**

Teodora-Elena Grapă, Andreea-Alina Mogoș,  
Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania

**Who’s afraid of populism? The strategic use of populist communication by Norwegian parties on social media during the 2021 election campaign**

Melanie Magin, Hedvig Tønnesen, Norwegian  
University of Science and Technology; Anders  
Olof Larsson, Kristiania University College; Eli  
Skogerbø, University of Oslo

**A democrats’ playground? A multimodal analysis of politicians’ TikTok use in the U.S.**

Christian Pipal, Natalia Umansky, University of  
Zürich

Is gender stereotyping of political candidates coming to an end? An experimental study of politicians' political communication on social media in Norway. Toril Aalberg, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Rune Karlsen, University of Oslo; Atle Haugsgjerd, Institute for Social Research, Oslo

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**11:00 – 12:30, Room C**

**Panel V, Session C**

**Politicians and Political Discourse Online**

Chair: Isabella de Gonçalves Souza

Politicians' online news sharing, news credibility and perceived bias  
Willem Buyens, University of Antwerp

Choice Architecture for Messaging  
Corruption: Evidence from an Adaptive Experiment  
Felipe Torres Raposo, University College London; Professor Raymond Duch, University of Oxford

The role of values in user engagement with Facebook news posts  
Cristina Monzer, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Daniela Dimitrova, Iowa State University

Different Groups, Same Dislike? Ingroup Favoritism, Outgroup Derogation amongst Elite Discourse of Populist and Mainstream Parties on Social Media  
Laura Jacobs, University of Antwerp; Caroline Close, Lucas Kins, Université Libre de Bruxelles

My Truth is My Castle - Mapping and Understanding Networks of Truth Contestation on Austrian, Czech, German, and Polish Facebook during the Pandemic  
Alena Kluknavská, Masaryk University; Olga Eisele, University of Amsterdam

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**11:00 – 12:30, Room D**

**Panel V, Session D**

**Audiences during COVID-19**

Chair: Anne Schulz

Cyclic Variation Bias: Misperceiving Infection Trends During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Political Consequences  
Thorsten Faas, Philippe Joly, David Schieferdecker, Freie Universität Berlin

Beyond information: News' role in UK and German democracy, a dual-method approach.

Imke Henkel, Tim Markham, Birkbeck, University of London

Compassion or indifference: The role of news media in constructing empathy during Covid-19

Stefanie Walter, Sean-Kelly Palicki, Alice Beazer, TU München

Who does the public trust in handling a pandemic? The impact of misinformation and populism on trust to political and healthcare institutions in comparative perspective

Francisco Brandao, Vaclav Stetka, Sabina Mihelj, Loughborough University

The rationality of the Corona protest movement: A large scale mixed-methods critical discourse analysis of an emergent alternative knowledge order.

Florian Primig, Freie Universität Berlin

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**12:30 – 13:30, Hall**

**Lunch Break**

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**13:30 – 14:30, Room A**

**Political Communication Section**

**Business Meeting**

Agnieszka Stępińska, University of Poznań (Chair)

Jakob Ohme, Weizenbaum Institute (Vice Chair)

Nicoleta Corbu, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (Vice Chair)

**14:30 – 16:00, Room A**

**Panel VI, Session A**

**Mis- and Disinformation**

Chair: Ole Kelm

The influence of media usage and trust on pandemic misinformation beliefs: evidence from countries under populist rule  
Vaclav Stetka, Francisco Brandao, Sabina Mihelj, Loughborough University

Tackling Disinformation Over Time: How Search Engines Manage False Claims about US Biolabs in Ukraine  
Elizaveta Kuznetsova, Weizenbaum-Institut; Ilaria Vitulano, Martha Stolze

Resilience to disinformation on social networking sites: Motivation and strategies of active users  
Karolína Bieliková, Alena Macková, Martina Novotná, Department of Media Studies and Journalism, Masaryk University

Permeability To Online Disinformation And Strategic Communication  
Iuliana Calin, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration

Mapping the Disinformation Ecosystem in Indonesia's Digital Politics  
Masduki, Associate Professor, Department of Communication, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta

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**14:30 – 16:00, Room B**  
**Panel VI, Session B**  
**Election Campaigns**

Chair: Thorsten Faas

The ineffectiveness political campaign in the algorithmic self's era  
Giovanni Boccia Artieri, Valeria Donato, University of Urbino

Informing, mobilizing and interacting – A cross-platform study of parties on social media during the 2021 Norwegian elections  
Anders Olof Larsson, Kristiania University College; Hedvig Tønnesen, Melanie Magin, NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Eli Skogerbø, University of Oslo

A digital election campaign in a highly digitalised country: Where are we heading?  
Jón Gunnar Ólafsson, University of Iceland

Prioritizing Voter Groups: How political parties target voters in multi-party systems.  
Mads Fuglsang Hove, University of Amsterdam / University of Southern Denmark

Election campaigns and political knowledge about game and substance: Informed, uninformed or misinformed electorate?  
Rune Karlsen, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo; Toril Aalberg, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Atle Haugsgjerd, Institute for Social Research, Oslo

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**14:30 – 16:00, Room C**  
**Panel VI, Session C**  
**Political Actors and Online Campaigns**

Chair: Andreas Schuck

Political Targeting on Social Media: A Study of Tailored Messages and Ad Success in the German 2021 General Election  
Christina Gahn, Universität Wien; Simon Kruschinski, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität; Jörg Haßler, LMU München

Campaigning in the Age of Platforms: A Longitudinal Analysis of German Parties Politicians  
Mike Cowburn, Ulrike Klinger, European New School of Digital Studies, European University Viadrina; Anders Olof Larsson, Kristiania University College

Shaped by gender stereotypes?  
Comparing the election campaigns on Facebook and Instagram by female and male top politicians in Norway and Germany  
Jörg Haßler, LMU Munich; Melanie Magin, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU); Anders Olof Larsson, Kristiania University College; Eli Skogerbø, University of Oslo  
Hope and Outrage in Eastern Europe: A Textual Analysis of Emotionality and Framing in the Romanian Online Media in the Context of the 2022 Schengen Area Expansion  
Radu-Mihai MEZA, Babeş-Bolyai University

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**14:30 – 16:00, Room D**

**Panel VI, Session D**

***(Anti-)Discourses on Gender and Migration***

Chair: Christian Strippel

From migration representations to attitudes and emotions: a meta-analysis on framing effects

Isabella Gonçalves, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

The Potentially Dangerous Connection Between Populist Parties, Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric and Angry Reactions

Katharina Pohl, Jörg Haßler, Anna-Katharina Wurst, Ludwig Maximilians University Munich; Pablo Jost, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz; Márton Bene, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence Eötvös Loránd University Budapest; Simon Kruschinski, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

~~Transnational flows in networked misogyny: exploring links between Sweden, Germany and Russia~~

~~Maria Brock, Tina Askanius, Malmö University~~

Reaching a Deadlock – or Breaking It?

Effects of Explicit and Implicit

(De-)Polarization Depictions in the Debate on Gender-Inclusive Language in Germany

Alina Jakob, JGU Mainz; Janise Brück, Anna Gaul, Lena Maurer, Nariman Sawalha, Carsten Reinemann, LMU Munich

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**16:00, Rooftop Terrace**

**Farewell Drinks**

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## Abstracts

### **A media-centric approach to elite radicalization: Reconceptualizing “alternative media” as “digital surrogates”, Panel I, Session A**

*Curd Knüpfer, Freie Universität Berlin; Yunkang Yang, Texas AM University; Mike Cowburn, European University Viadrina*

Recent years have seen the rise of novel forms of hyperpartisan “alternative media.” While these give shape to informational networks ripe with misinformation and conspiracy narratives, they also provide modes of connectivity that some political elites willingly tap into (Cowburn Knüpfer, 2023). Yet while they often self-stylize as journalistic outlets, they are not news organizations in the traditional sense. They should rather be viewed as “digital surrogates” and part of transformative dynamics, by which political elites or parties might become more radicalized in their positions (Livingston Miller, forthcoming). Our research seeks to highlight mechanisms by which this occurs so as to help scholars and practitioners better understand what these organizations are. Treating them as parts of an extended party network is the first step in breaking some of the ongoing radicalization spirals. To demonstrate this empirically, our research is focused on the flow of information between right-wing alternative news sources (RNS) and Republican members of the US Congress, by analyzing 3,463,453 online articles from 27 RNS sites between 2017 and 2020, and over 100,000 congressional newsletters, as a direct mode of communication with constituents. The study proceeds in three interlocking steps, beginning with a large-scale comparative content analytical approach to identify key topics and frames, using structural topic modeling. Next, we use time-series analyses to identify topics that originate and spread from RNS to politicians. Finally, regression models are employed to determine whether the adoption of these topics is predictive of intra-party cleavages and radicalization dynamics among Republican elites.

In highlighting these forms of content-based connective ties between parties and their extended informational networks, our findings offer insights into the role played by new media actors in shaping the communication behavior of political elites, particularly in a hyper-partisan, highly polarized political climate. Since the rise of RNS or elite radicalization effects are not phenomena exclusive to the US, our approach can also be applied to studying the flow of information between other alternative news sources and political elites in different national contexts. Re-conceptualizing such modes of connectivity between new “media” actors and political elites as extensions of political organizations rather than journalistic entities is crucial for enabling scholars, practitioners, and regulators to treat them as such.

Citation:

Cowburn, M., Knüpfer, C. B. (2023). The emerging fault line of alternative news: Intra-party division in Republican representatives’ media engagement. *Party Politics*, 13540688231157580.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688231157579>

### **Curators of Digital Counterpublics: Mapping Alternative News Environments in Sweden and Denmark , Panel I, Session A**

*Eva Mayerhöffer, Jakob Bæk Kristensen, Roskilde University*

The paper analyzes the role of different types of news curators in the distribution of digital alternative news content in two Scandinavian countries, Sweden and Denmark. We use social network analysis to study cross-platform URL-sharing networks and focus specifically on over 20,000 public social media accounts that have shared more than one million alternative news media URLs on eight different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Telegram, Gab, VKontakte, 4chan) from January 2019 to March 2022. We use a community detection algorithm (Louvain method) to allow for an in-depth analysis of the alternative news curation that takes place in smaller news communities within these broader environments. The results document the importance of different types of curators, such as political actors, social media pundits, public discussion groups, and individual “hyper-tweeters” in multiplying the reach of alternative news content on social media. The results also reveal substantial differences in the digital curation of alternative news between the two countries, as well as between the curation of left-wing and right-wing alternative content. In Sweden, we find a high number of distinct alternative news communities that curate a broad spectrum of alternative news alongside other mainstream news media content, in particular on the political right. In Denmark, alternative news curation in its own right only becomes visible for the anti-systemic news community forming around protest and skepticism against Covid-19 measures. Danish left- and right-wing partisan news communities are in contrast primarily curated by party-political actors, and

alternative news content is here mainly disseminated as a supplement to political party and movement content. The paper discusses how different types of alternative news curation practices contribute to the formation of digital counterpublics, and their implications for processes of digital (dis)integration.

### **Beyond Left and Right: A Content-based Categorization of German Alternative News Media, Panel I, Session A**

*Miriam Milzner, Weizenbaum Institut und Freie Universität Berlin; Vivien Benert, Freie Universität Berlin*

Research on alternative media shows the increasing complexity of categorizing and understanding contemporary media landscapes. Historically, alternative media have been understood as leftist or subaltern publics that provide a platform for anti-hegemonic and marginalized voices. However, the emergence of right-wing media outlets that likewise perceive themselves as an alternative to legacy media calls for a re-conceptualization of the concept of alternative media to encompass outlets from across the political spectrum. Consequently, while the lowest common denominator of alternative media is that they oppose and criticize mainstream media, research suggests that this opposition may vary depending on the type of alternative media. However, systematic and comparative analyses of different types and varieties of alternative media are still lacking. Against this backdrop, we ask

RQ 1: How and to what extent do German alternative media establish themselves as alternatives to mainstream media through topical foci?

RQ 2: To what extent can the analysis of topic foci identify different types of alternative media?

To answer these questions, structural topic modeling (STM) for an inductive classification of topics (RQ 1) is combined with principal component analysis (PCA) and cluster analysis to identify different types of alternative media based on topical similarities and differences (RQ 2). The sample consists of N=10,257 news articles shared on Twitter by 16 mainstream and alternative news outlets. By including both mainstream and various alternative media, the study ensures the systematic comparative perspective of the different types of alternative media vis-à-vis the mainstream.

The STM ( $K = 60$ ) results show that alternative media, compared to mainstream media, focus less on current events, and instead center their issue agenda on challenging social premises through different forms of critique. The PCA and cluster analysis results show that the outlets cluster into six categories based on their topical (dis-)similarity (i.e., the mainstream cluster, the elite criticism cluster, the anti-Covid cluster, the system criticizing cluster, the fact-checking cluster, and the conspiracy cluster). An interpretation of these clusters shows that they can be distinguished by the following dimensions: agenda diversity and thematic focus, overtly negotiated partisanship, and antagonistic stance. Thus, our research contributes to the typological effort currently done in the research field. Overall, the findings underline the need to consider not only anti-mainstream media positions when conceptualizing alternative media but also to engage in broader normative and theoretical inquiry into the role of various forms of critique in the alternative media sphere.

### **Media Credibility on social media: Dependency of Alternative Versus Traditional Media in the 2019 Tishreen Uprising in Iraq, Panel I, Session A**

*Haitham Numan, Cihan University - Erbil*

This research analyzes the theoretical frameworks of media reliance and selective exposure during the Tishreen protest in Iraq. The research attempted to explore the university students' faith in social and traditional media during the demonstrations and how they relied on diverse media sources to suit their information demands. The study surveyed 212 college students who were present during the Tishreen protest. In the months before the coronavirus pandemic forced the entire world into lockdown, Iraq was undergoing one of the most sustained periods of anti-government protest since the 2003 US-led invasion. This "Tishreen" uprising—was named for the month in which it began (Clarke, Killian, Majed, Rima, (2019). gave expression to years of pent-up frustrations among Iraqi citizens (Berman, Clarke, Majed, 2020). This paper explores Iraqi college students' perceptions of media credibility and their changing attitudes toward news sources' credibility during the protests. Survey interviews were conducted on a sample of Iraqi college students. Participants were college students from five universities in Baghdad (125 male and 87 female). The study used phone interviews. We used a snowball sample to identify college students who responded to the survey, and the fieldwork was conducted between August 16, 2020, and September 19, 2020. They included



meta-analysis factors (Gaziano McGrath, 1986) to measure perceptions of the credibility of traditional media (TV and radio) and social media. The results showed a shift in the examined students' perceptions of credibility. The author interpreted the survey results using the media dependency theory, which showed that college students' media dependence shifted from traditional media to social media because they found it more credible during the protests.

### **“I have a different story to tell” – A literature review on countering misinformation with narratives, Panel I, Session A**

*Pablo Porten-Cheé, Heidelberg University*

The spread and effectiveness of digital disinformation and misinformation have become pressing issues of academic inquiry. It is debated how to counter best such phenomena that (among other consequences) potentially harm personal decisions and public opinion formation on domains such as health (e.g., affecting intention to vaccinate), politics (e.g., affecting political attitudes), or gender and sexual identity (e.g., promoting prejudices against LGBTQI individuals) (e.g., Krishna Amazeen, 2022). Among other instruments (e.g., Walter Murphy, 2018), narrative counters have emerged as potential interventions for both platforms and users. The effectiveness of narrative counters is based on narrative persuasion theory (e.g., Green Brock, 2000), which assumes that story-based communication allows recipients to see such narratives through the characters' perspectives. Therefore, narratives need to include a clear beginning, middle, and end and apply personalized and emotionalized language to vividly describe an episode of the main characters (Hinyard Kreuter, 2007). Research has shown that narratives promote narrative-consistent beliefs and behaviors. This paper discusses the growing research literature asking how effective narrative counters are in combating digital disinformation and misinformation. The paper will show which factors have been shown to influence the effectiveness of narrative counters and the boundary conditions the effects depend upon. At a glimpse, narrative counters are effective for communication that sticks to real-life episodes of characters (without combining such with statistics) and applies emotional and colloquial language. Finally, the paper provides suggestions for political communication research on how to move on with studying the effects of narrative counters by emphasizing neglected theoretical assumptions (e.g., transportation) and discussing the role of the user perspective in situations of exposure to such counters.

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### **Information abundance – curse or blessing? A focus group study on how people perceive today's information flows, Panel I, Session B**

*Anne Schulz, Sophia Volk, Sina Blassnig, University of Zurich; Sarah Marschlich, University of Amsterdam; Minh Hao Nguyen, University of Amsterdam, m.h.nguyen@uva.nl; Nadine Strauss, University of Zurich, n.strauss@ikmz.uzh.ch*

Many observers decry that today there is more information published in a day than an individual can process in their lifetime. Information flood, pollution, or even assault are only a few labels under which digital information flows are debated (Bawden Robinson, 2020). In a more neutral attempt, this contribution refers to this phenomenon as information abundance (Boczkowski, 2021) and – in Einstein's spirit (call) – seeks to understand whether there is a 'problem' and what exactly needs solving. Among the many ways to do this, we conducted focus groups to address the following research questions: 1) Is information abundance a relevant component in how individuals' describe their media environment? 2) If so, how is information abundance perceived (curse or blessing)? In spring 2022, we collected data from 40 people, across 8 focus groups (20-79 years old) in Switzerland. MaxQDA was employed to analyze our data (460 minutes material) using structured

qualitative content analysis. First, we asked our interviewees which media they had used during the day and if and how the media and information environment has changed in the past decade. Only later, we explicitly zoomed in on the extent of today's information flows and asked respondents to assess abundance in different contexts (news, entertainment, private communication). Without the need to probe, all focus groups explicitly or implicitly referred to the extensive character of today's information flows. In line with the prevailing narrative, references were often negative (e.g., "bombarding", "overload"). However, when asked to think about it explicitly, many participants appreciated today's abundant opportunities to find and select news and information they like and need. We found similar patterns within the realms of entertainment and private communication. Whether abundance is perceived as a curse or blessing depends on the context in which it is faced (leisure time vs. crisis) and on the strategies individuals believe to have to 'tame the information tight'. Interestingly, if participants consider it a problem, they locate solutions mainly at the individual level and attribute less responsibility to the supply side, or the societal level. Taking the perspective of media users, our study helps to understand benefits but also potential problems of information abundance and identifies the role different stakeholders have in causing and solving them.

Bawden, D., Robinson, L. (2020). Information overload: An introduction. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.

Boczkowski, P. J. (2021). Abundance: On the Experience of Living in a World of Information Plenty. OUP.

### **Who engages in fact-checking? Predictors of fact-checking behavior among Romanian adolescents, Panel I, Session B**

*Raluca Buturoiu, Nicoleta Corbu, Valeriu Frunzaru, Denisa-Adriana Oprea, College of Communication and Public Relations, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania*

While exposure to media mis- and dis-information is a cause of worldwide concern, ample effort is being invested in crafting possible working solutions to reduce the scale of current information-related problems. Specifically, significant effort is dedicated to developing fact-checking initiatives.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such initiatives is largely dependent on media consumers' own fact-checking behavior (Chia et al., 2022). In this context, it becomes important to investigate who is more prone to engage in fact-checking behaviors, in an attempt to understand the potential success or failure of some solutions aimed at combatting information disorders.

Robertson et al. (2020) document that highly educated people of younger age are more prone to engage in fact-checking behavior. While we could not find any other study on this category of people in a European-based context, we are interested in investigating predictors of fact-checking behavior among high school students from an Eastern-European democratic country, namely Romania. By means of a survey on a convenience sample of Romanian high school students in the 12th grade (N=519) from 13 high schools, we explore some potential variables predicting fact-checking behavior among Romanian adolescents.

Main results show that civic involvement, critical thinking disposition, social media dependency, and political involvement are the most significant predictors of fact-checking behavior among Romanian high school students. Such results emphasize the importance of three main ingredients: civic and political involvement and critical thinking disposition (all key factors for the development of an involved and informed citizenry). Such ingredients are important to a well-functioning democracy as they could help enhance the infrastructure of democratic societies. Thus, such results could be used in crafting real-life measures to improve the effectiveness of solutions aimed at combatting/fighting information disorders such as designing media and information literacy programs aimed at improving young people's critical thinking skills and/or designing awareness campaigns aimed at making young people more involved in the civic and political life of their communities.

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demographics, political antecedents, and media use on fact-checking site awareness, attitudes, and behavior. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(2), 217-237.

### **News Avoidance and Consumption: Intentions and Structural Inequalities, Panel I, Session B**

*Morten Skovsgaard, Kim Andersen, University of Southern Denmark*

In an era of misinformation and echo chambers, avoidance of professionally produced journalism presents a key challenge to democracies. However, the implications depend, at least partly, on whether citizens succeed in their avoidance attempts, and whether inequalities in news consumption are determined by structural factors, such as gender, age, and education (Palmer, Toff Nielsen, 2023). Departing from the conceptualization of news avoidance as being either intentional or unintentional in nature (Skovsgaard Andersen, 2020), this study examines the degrees to which citizens engage in such behaviours and how this audiences practice relates to overall news consumption, motivations, and sociodemographic factors.

Empirically, the study is based on a large random probability sample of Danes (N=1,549) collected during the National Election in 2022. Following the news is especially important in this context, as citizens will otherwise have a hard time casting an informed vote. As such, an election campaign represents a critical case for examining the democratic implications of news avoidance. News avoidance was measured by asking to which extent the respondents agreed to the statements “I try to avoid news about the national election” (intentional) and “I don’t mind news about the national election, but I don’t manage to follow them” (unintentional).

Findings show that practices of unintentional news avoidance are more pronounced than intentional news avoidance. Both types of news avoidance are related to lower levels of news consumption, but, importantly, even people who try to avoid news are exposed to them several days a week. In addition, structural factors play important roles, with younger and lower educated people avoiding news to a higher extent and consuming less news. However, motivational factors, such as media trust, news overload, and news interest seem equally important in determining levels of news avoidance and consumption. Thereby, the study provides important nuances to the understanding of news avoidance and the underlying drivers and consequences of this audience behaviour. As such, the findings are also important for the discussion on how to address this democratic challenge.

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### **The Dissatisfied News Audience, Panel I, Session B**

*Kim Andersen, Katrine Bruun Rasmussen, University of Southern Denmark*

Many people are dissatisfied with mainstream journalism. Media trust is declining in many countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2018), and some people in consequence turn to alternative news media (Andersen et al., 2022) or actively avoid news all together (Toff Kalogeropoulos, 2020). This tendency is not only a key concern for the news industry but also for democracy at large. If people do not trust or turn their backs to mainstream news media, we risk losing a shared frame of reference for our public debates (Van Aelst et al., 2017). In an era of misinformation, echo chambers, and polarization, dissatisfaction with mainstream journalism therefore challenges the robustness of our democracies.

This study takes a mixed-methods approach to examine the dissatisfied news audience, focusing on the case of the Danish general election in 2022. First, the study presents an inductive content analysis of more than 1,000 critical Facebook comments to news stories posted by five mainstream news media (TV 2, Berlingske, Politiken, Ekstra Bladet, and BT) in the week leading up to election day. Five categories of dissatisfaction are identified: Mainstream journalism being 1) politically biased, 2) structurally biased, 3) unreliable, 4) bad, or 5) unethical.

Second, 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who expressed

dissatisfaction in the comments. The interview subjects were selected to represent the five identified dimensions. Insights from these interviews provides a more granular understanding of why some people are dissatisfied with mainstream news media and explores how these people would like journalism to change. Thereby, the study does not only provide a better understanding of the dissatisfied news audience, but also suggest potential ways to address this democratic challenge.

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## **The Impact of Media Contact with Refugee Women and Men in the News on Immigration-Related Attitudes and Emotions, Panel I, Session B**

*Meltzer, Christine E., Institut für Journalistik und Kommunikationsforschung, Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover; Pablo B. Jost, Christian Schemer, Simon Kruschinski, Institut für Publizistik, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz; Marcus Maurer, Institut für Publizistik, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, mmaurer@uni-mainz.de*

For many citizens, media coverage remains the primary source of news and political information. It is therefore unsurprising that a large body of research suggests that media diet can influence attitudes towards refugees and immigrants. From the perspective of the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), presenting immigrants as exemplars in the media is a form of intergroup contact. We argue that the visibility of immigrants and refugees as people (and thus the frequency of media contact with them) is relevant for media effects. However, when examining media contact with refugees, their gender is relevant, as male immigrants and refugees are more visible in the media than females (AUTHORS, 2019). Nonetheless, this influence of media coverage on audience attitudes may not be uniform. It is well known that individuals process information differently and are therefore influenced in different ways by media content (Valkenburg Peter, 2013). Therefore, we consider the moderating role of pre-existing political attitudes. In sum, we aim to investigate 1) the effects of the frequency of contact with refugees in the news media, 2) the extent to which the gender of immigrants visible in the media plays a role, and 3) the moderating role of pre-existing political attitudes. This is analysed with respondents' individual media diet, by linking a two-wave panel survey (N = 1801 respondents) with a content analysis about refugee reporting in Germany in 2018 (N = 724 news items) .

The results show that media contact with male refugees (M = 28.83, SD = 31.14) were significantly more likely than with female refugees (M = 8.17, SD = 8.61). However, none of our models showed a significant main effect of media contact with refugees on attitudes or emotions. Furthermore, our data show no differences in the effect of media contact with male and female refugees. Contrary to our expectations, for individuals who identify as right-wing, media contact with refugees had a positive effect on attitudes and emotions towards refugees. The implications of these findings for research and society will be discussed in the presentation.

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## **Media's Construction of Political Leadership in Transboundary Crises. A Comparative Analysis of the Responsibility Discourse in European Media during the Migration**



## **Crisis and the Coronavirus Pandemic, Panel I, Session C**

*Elisabeth Wagner-Olfermann, TU Ilmenau*

One of the most pressing problems of the 21st century is the increasing frequency of transboundary crises (OECD, 2011; Boin, 2009). Prominent examples of the past are the financial crisis, the migration crisis and the coronavirus pandemic. In such crises, political leadership at a transboundary level is essential, but often hampered by an 'authority mesh' beyond the nation-state – even within the European Union (Nugent, 2017; Ansell, Boin Hart, 2014; Parker Karlsson, 2014; Boin, Ekengren Rhinard, 2013; Rhinard, 2009). Public visibility then becomes an essential leadership resource (Glaab, 2010). In this context, media play a crucial role as the most important source of political information, especially when it comes to international politics and crises. Their way of reporting influences the perception and recognition of a political leader (Adam, 2009; Schneider Jordan, 2016). However, despite the large body of work on political actors in media, only little research has focused systematically on media's portrayal of political leadership (Aaldering Vliegenthart, 2016). This study fills the gap by focusing on the question of how transboundary leadership in a crisis is constructed and legitimized within media. The basic theoretical assumption is that perceived leadership in a transboundary crisis results from publicly observable processes of attributing responsibility across geographical and hierarchical boundaries. Based on previous approaches, an instrument was developed to capture attribution statements, their senders and addressees, and their justification (Wagner-Olfermann, 2022; Roose, Sommer Scholl, 2016; Bennister, t'Hart Worthy, 2015; Gerhards, Offerhaus Roose, 2007). The instrument was used in a comparative manual content analysis with two dimensions - a country and a crisis comparison - to determine the influence of the degrees of Euroscepticism and communitization of the policy field a crisis touches. Accordingly, the newspaper coverage during the migration crisis and the coronavirus pandemic was initially captured during three weeks of high media attention in Germany, Austria, Ireland and Great Britain (n=1077). The analysis shows the influence of communitization: Although both crises are transboundary in nature, European actors are much more visible in the responsibility discourse during the migration crisis than during the coronavirus pandemic – in all countries. The data also surprisingly show that attribution addressees are often not personalized, especially beyond the nation state. Finally, despite the need for legitimization of transboundary leadership and the informational opportunities of the media, many attributions are not justified - neither by functional, nor by personal aspects.

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### **Populism and government crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic: A comparison of four countries, Panel I, Session C**

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While the past three years saw a rapid increase in research on the role of the media and political communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, few studies have looked at how the nature of pandemic communication was affected by the presence of populism. Arguably, the presence of populist leaders and their distinct style of leadership and communication can obstruct the capacity of governments to engage in effective health crisis communication. For instance, the centrality of the elite vs. the people rhetoric can foster anti-elite sentiments, including distrust of health experts and their guidance, contribute to divisive media coverage, and thereby encourage polarized attitudes and distrust among citizens, making them more vulnerable to misinformation spreading through socio-digital networks. Given the growing appeal of populism globally, activities aimed at making our societies more resilient in the face of future pandemics urgently need a better understanding of how populism affects government-led health crisis communication.

This paper seeks to advance the knowledge in this area by drawing on data collected in four countries that were led by populist leaders during the pandemic, and which also capture different types of populist responses to the pandemic: Brazil, Poland, Serbia, and the USA. The analysis draws on elite interviews with 80 actors (20 in each country) involved in the crisis communication process, conducted between August 2022 and April 2023, including public health officials, government PR representatives, medical experts involved in crisis management bodies, as well as journalists and editors/managers representing the media industry and media regulators. This was complemented by the analysis of secondary sources and public records, looking at press conferences, media interviews, advertising and media campaigns and other means through which governments communicated with the public.

Preliminary results suggest that populist leaders, and specifically some of the distinct elements of the populist leadership style and communication (including anti-elitism and hostility to experts, the strategy of division and politicization, and direct appeals to the people, bypassing usual intermediaries) had a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of government-led health crisis communication, but that this impact varied across the four countries and also changed significantly during the different stages of the pandemic (e.g. lockdown phase vs. vaccination phase).

### **Analyzing “New” Aspects of New Right-Wing Extremism in the context of the “Disaster of the Century” Discourse in Turkey, Panel I, Session C**

*Arzu Bayar, Feride Güner, Research Assistant and PhD Candidate*

The 7.7 magnitude earthquake centered in Maraş, which occurred in Turkey on February 6, 2023, and caused great destruction in 11 provinces. According to official sources, it is assumed that the death toll exceeds 50 thousand and there are more than 100 thousand injured. Where a great human tragedy has been experienced and one billion-dollar damage has occurred. Reactions and criticisms have still continued against the lack of coordination, rescue, and aid efforts of the state in the region.

The question “where is the state?” turned into a common cry by the earthquake victims. Social media, especially Twitter convert into a platform for a cry for help. Within that process, Erdogan, who has employed many different communication strategies during his 20-year rule, circulated the “disaster of the century” discourse in all pro-government media starting from the 3rd day of the earthquake. This discursive rhetoric expresses the “desperation” in the face of the magnitude, objective and transcendent reality of destruction. This discursive that Erdogan has been using step by step to conceal his failure is particularly important in terms of political communication, especially in regards to the usage of Twitter and new communication technologies. This study is based on the question of how we can understand the political communication strategies, ideological components, and what makes invisible the discourse of the “disaster of the century” in the context of the rising new right and authoritarian communication debates. In this study, the “disaster of the century” discourse employed by the government as a post-earthquake communication strategy is analyzed methodologically by the means of Adorno and Löwenthal’s studies on right agitation. For this purpose, the tweets of Turkey’s government-dependent main news agency, Anadolu Agency, containing the “disaster of the century” discourse were examined. The study has concluded that two discourse tactics materialize in the rhetoric of “the disaster of the century” intending to anonymize the responsibilities of the government. The first one is quantification, which points out that this is the most unique and the largest earthquake is ever seen in the world, and the second one is scientification, which indicates a theological domain such as “fate”, but constructs a scientific language at the discourse level. In this new right discursive social and historical structures are naturalized on the other hand mystified. This emphasis can also be considered as an option for the means of political struggle at a time when assuming political subjectivity imposes itself as a burning agenda. Because this emphasis may indicate more than a theoretical possibility in terms of understanding how politics is caricatured, and what images and emotions of political subjectivity are built around right-wing agitation.

## **Media framing of government crisis communication during COVID-19, Panel I, Session C**

*Lore Hayek, Department of Political Science, University of Innsbruck*

During the early phase of the COVID-19 crisis, one of the preferred means of government communication were televised speeches and press conferences. They emphasize the urgency and severity of the situation (Craig 2016, Ekström Eriksson 2017) and allow actors to lead news coverage (Pollard 1951; Carpenter, Webster, and Bowman 2019). While in the immediate phase of the crisis, these press conferences were directed also at the general public, their original function is of course to inform and influence media coverage.

With this paper, I analyze how government crisis communication strategies were received in newspapers in the early phase of the COVID-19 crisis. As for opposition parties (Chowanietz, 2011) or the public (Hegewald Schraff, 2022), “rally round the flag” effects could also be found for journalists in times of severe crisis (e.g. Barnett Roselle, 2008). How long did these effects last during the COVID-19 crisis, and which rhetorical strategies by political actors were most acclaimed by the media?

To answer these questions, I will draw on a unique dataset including transcripts of all COVID-19 press conferences in six European countries between February and May 2020, as well as opinion pieces from tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. Based on a mix of automated and manual content analysis, the results will reveal how factors like country context, newspaper type or the role of political actors can influence how the government agenda is reflected in the media in times of crisis.

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### **Reporting on immigration by press agency journalists: an analysis of journalists' justifications of actors, sources and frames , Panel I, Session C**

*Laura Jacobs, Emmi Verleyen, University of Antwerp; Kathleen Beckers, University of Amsterdam*

Immigration remains a highly salient and contentious political issue. Public opinion on immigration tends to be negatively biased, and prior studies have identified news coverage of immigration as one of the key sources shaping public opinion on immigration. However, immigration news has been found to be predominantly negative in nature (Eberl et al., 2018; Jacobs, Meeusen D'Haenens, 2016), containing frames in which immigrants are being portrayed as threats or victims (Greussing Boomgaarden, 2017; van der Linden Jacobs, 2016), while individual immigrants are not often being given a voice or relied on as a news source (Beckers Van Aelst, 2019; Benson Wood, 2015). While many studies have systematically examined trends in immigration news as well as its consequences for public opinion, the journalistic process behind immigration news has accumulated less scholarly attention. In the current study, we aim to reflect on the experiences with journalists to explore patterns in immigration news by examining the considerations made by press agency journalists in the news production process. We chose to focus specifically on news agencies, as they are often the starting point for news coverage on immigration, and the frames and actors terms they use have a high chance to be adopted by other news media (Boumans et al., 2018). We adopt an agency-perspective by focusing on journalists' role conceptions, making use of the hierarchy of influences theory in journalism.

The current study in the Belgian context aims to analyze –focusing on the perspective of journalists – the formal and informal processes underlying the production of immigration news. Hence, the objective of this study is to assess to what extent journalists take decisions and rationalize the use of sources, framing, and (political) actors in immigration news coverage. To this end, we have conducted a series of three focus groups (n = 21) in which journalists of the Belgian press agency Belga took part. The journalists represented a diverse group in terms of gender, journalistic specialization and experience.

Preliminary results indicate that journalists do tend to be highly conscious of their key role in influencing public opinion. Regarding the choice of the actors, they think carefully about the most appropriate terms to use. Journalists are also aware of the terminology they use and central their role in how immigration news is framed and disseminated across the audience. We reflect on the implications of these results for public opinion on immigration and its ramifications for journalistic role conceptions at press agencies.

### **Entertaining communication for solving political problems? Explaining perceptions of political relevance in entertaining TV genres in Germany, Panel I, Session D**

*Lisa Zieringer, Carsten Reinemann, Lydia Unterstraßer, LMU Munich*

For some time now, scholars have pointed to the fact that not only news, but also “entertainment” content may have politically relevant consequences (e.g., Delli-Carpini Xenos, 2014; Harbin, 2023; Holbert et al., 2014). They argue that entertainment may fulfill various politically relevant needs, especially for citizens that are otherwise rather uninterested in politics (e.g., Nærlund, 2020; Schneider et al., 2021). In contrast to this enthusiastic debate on solving political problems by reaching politically uninterested audiences through entertainment media, others have argued entertaining formats are the cause of disenchantment with politics (e.g., Leonhard et al., 2019). However, against the background of the changing media landscape and increasing hybridization of content categories, blurring the line between “information” and “entertainment” (e.g., Schneider et al., 2021), scientific consensus states that not all entertainment formats have the same degree of political relevance (e.g., Holbert 2005). The ambiguity of potential political effects of entertainment media as well as the need for differentiated research on various entertainment formats raise the question of how citizens perceive the political relevance of different kinds of entertainment formats and further what might explain these perceptions: This paper raises three research questions with an exemplary application to German television: (1) How do German citizens perceive the political relevance of entertaining TV formats in general and (2) with respect to different entertaining TV genres? (3) Which individual-level characteristics explain varying perceptions of political relevance?

To answer our research questions, we conducted an online survey in February 2021 using a quota-sample (age, gender, education) of the German population between ages 16 and 80. After rigorous checks of response quality the final sample consists of N = 1,800 respondents. Dependent measures are (a) six items asking respondents for the frequency of different effects of entertaining TV formats (e.g. “The entertainment formats that I use make me think about political or social issues.”) and (b) 18 items asking for how often they encountered politically relevant content in different entertainment genres (e.g., satire, sports, drama).

We show that a considerable proportion of citizens perceives politically relevant content in entertainment formats but that there are huge differences between both entertainment formats and citizens. For example, “satire” and “talk formats” are among those perceived most politically relevant and politically interested citizens are overall more prone to perceive political relevance in entertainment – shedding doubt on the assumption that entertainment is an especially important gateway to politics for the uninterested.

### **Beyond “Master Frames”: A Semi-automated Approach to Studying Viewpoint Diversity of the Media Discourse, Panel I, Session D**

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Viewpoint diversity is a recurrent topic in journalism and mass communication research, not least because the promotion of social pluralism is contingent upon multi-perspectival news coverage (Baden Springer, 2017; Masini van Aelst, 2017). Yet, the empirical study of viewpoint diversity remains a resource-consuming task: Most existing contributions on this topic rely on the manual coding of large corpora of data, and this peculiarity determines some conceptual and methodological traditions in the domain. Thus, it is common to study viewpoint diversity at the level of articles rather than sentences/clauses which are the actual carriers of actors' viewpoints. This results in our inability to capture the interaction between different within-article viewpoints and assess their salience in a given news item. Similarly, from the considerations of feasibility, scholars often limit the range of sought-for positions to just several exceedingly broad viewpoints or “master frames” that are unable to capture the whole complexity of the real-life media debates. Building upon the recent advances in two computer science methods – argument mining and few-shot learning (FSL) – this study aims to address these challenges by proposing a novel semi-automated approach to studying viewpoint diversity. The approach is based on supervised learning (SL) and involves the detection of argumentative structures at the sentence level with the subsequent classification of their aspects, i.e., topic-specific micro frames (Ruckdeschel Wiedemann, 2022). When implemented in FSL settings, such an approach demands relatively little manually annotated data to reach substantial levels of accuracy, precision, and recall and can be scaled up to answer the whole array of important questions about the viewpoint diversity of the media discourse. To illustrate the proposed approach, we present a case study of the German media coverage of arms deliveries to Ukraine – a complex and controversial topic that has already been examined using more traditional content analytic procedures (Maurer et al., 2023).

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### **What is journalism? Young adults' folk theories, Panel I, Session D**

*Diego Garusi, University of Vienna; Sergio Splendore, University of Milan*

Drawing from the concept of “folk theories”, this research explores how Italian young adults make sense of the information around them. Folk theories of journalism are “actually existing popular beliefs about what journalism is, what it does, and what it ought to do” (Nielsen, 2016, p. 840) that shape (dis)engagement with news media (Palmer, Toff Nielsen, 2020).

The research consists of two steps. First, we interviewed a balanced sample of 40 Italian young adults (18-22 years old) to identify their folk theories. Then, we conducted a survey of a representative sample of the Italian population with an oversample of 800 young adults. In this study, we focus on this latter population to investigate the distribution of young adults' folk theories and their correlates. Qualitative results highlight that young adults' folk theories are articulated on five layers: ontological (what journalism is), procedural (how journalism works), epistemological (what journalistic reality is), ethical (what good journalism is), and relational (how journalism should interact with the audience). Their discursive constructions differentiate journalism from journalists.

The quantitative analysis shows that young adults share mainly two fundamental epistemological positions: objectivism and empiricism (Hanitzsch, 2007). These epistemological stances are related to the belief that only journalists can convey relevant information.

However, the quantitative analysis also shows that interviewees are skeptical about journalists being able to be objective, echoing literature about journalistic authority and legitimization (Carlson, 2017); they also think that journalists are more interested in personal gain than anything else. Those folk theories are negatively associated with perceived political efficacy and trust in journalists.

Grasping how journalism and journalists are considered by younger generations is a stepping stone to understanding (the future of) journalistic epistemic authority (Abbott, 1988).

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### **Solutions-journalism at the service of political communication. Theories and perspectives., Panel I, Session D**

*Alessandro Martinisi, Franklin University Switzerland*

Effective communication is crucial for solving political problems, especially in our digital information ecosystem. Similarly, solutions-based communication can be an effective strategy that helps to minimize the psychological and economic consequences of a type of communication over-reliant on political problems, or on problems-driven news (Wenzel, Gerson, Moreno, 2016).

Inspired by the artificially generated title for this conference, I also asked Open AI Chat GPT to suggest how we can successfully navigate the informational noise we are all immersed in. Among the items the program has listed, there is one which is of importance to those involved in news literacy: find solutions. In light of this result, it can be argued that such “informational noise” not only refers to fake news or misinformation as such, but it can also refer to “negative news” (Baum and Raman, 2021). Indeed, because of the overwhelming abundance of this negative news, a new, resilient, style of journalism has emerged in the last few years: solutions journalism (SoJo). According to the literature (McIntyre 2019), Solutions journalism (SoJo) is a rigorous news coverage of responses to societal issues.

In this paper I will argue that a solutions-driven approach to political news reporting can be indeed the way out from the vicious cycle of news avoidance and civic disengagement. To be sure, both news avoidance (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020) and civic disengagement (Burton 2019) have been identified as the main threats to trustworthy news and information quality. In political communication

literature, perception of Trust (Van der Meer 2017) and Quality (Vossing 2021) are key elements in the construction of political messages (Switzerland can be taken as an example of this). By suggesting a theoretical framework drawn from the most recent literature (2018-2023), I will therefore argue that Solutions-Journalism can be considered both a strategy and a method: a useful strategy in the enhancement of the perception of trust and quality with regards of political news, and a successful method to finally re-position the people at the centre of the political communication cycle.

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### **Relegitimation: Re-establishing trust in the news media , Panel II, Session A**

*Arjen van Dalen, University of Southern Denmark*

Concerns about groups of the population who do not trust the media have led to growing scientific interest in restoring trust in the news, which is an important pre-requisite of a well-functioning democracy. This type of research primarily addresses how news organizations can rebuild trust by increasing their transparency. This paper proposes a paradigm shift in research on re-establishing trust in the media, changing the focus from the media organizations to the people who have lost trust in the media.

This paper proposes that trust can be rebuilt by addressing the mismatch between distrusters' personal values and their perceptions of the professional values of mainstream media. Seeing personal values as a driver of media trust is in line with the Salient Values Similarity perspective, which has been applied in relation to trust in other democratic institutions. Current media research has not paid much attention to the relation between personal values and media trust, but important correlates of media trust, such as political attitudes or ideological extremism, are rooted in personal values. In line with the Salient Values Similarity perspective, Coleman et al.'s (2012, p. 36) distinguish between first-order and second-order trust in the news media. First-order trust deals with expectations about whether journalists will live up to their own standards. Second-order trust deals with agreement between journalists and the public about which standards journalism should adhere to, and “involves shared expectations and values that constitute an ethically coherent and culturally convincing foundation for evaluating news performance.” This paper argues that in countries with press freedom and a professionalized press corps, loss of trust in the press is less a matter of loss of first-order trust, but rather second order trust: a perceived mismatch between one's own values and the values of media institutions leads to distrust.

Based on this theoretical argument, a three-step research agenda is proposed to rebuild media trust by addressing the perceived mismatch between distrusters' personal values and the professional values of mainstream media outlets and journalists: 1. understand the values of people who distrust the media and their perceived value (dis)similarity with mainstream media (through surveys and interviews); 2. to propose strategies to re-establish trust in the media by addressing distrusters' perceived value (dis)similarities with mainstream media (through best-practice analysis); and 3. to test whether trust in the media can be restored by addressing distrusters' perceived value (dis)similarities with mainstream media (with experiments).



## **Not my positions, not my crowd! Exploring the conceptual nature of media (mis-)representation from an individual perspective to better understand its link to media trust and cynicism, Panel II, Session A**

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Not only “fake news” or “lying press” accusations, but also moderate media criticism addresses the media’s representation function. Building on the idea that media should provide a public forum, they are expected to represent the voices, positions, and issues relevant to society (Schudson, 2008). These expectations are not only directed towards media content, but also journalists as a group are expected to become more diverse since more diversity in the newsrooms presumably results in more diverse viewpoints in the coverage (Lünenborg Medeiros, 2021).

In research, the notion of media (mis)representation often refers to a societal level perspective (Fawzi Mothes, 2020) – i.e., whether the media serve as mouthpiece of “all” citizens. Yet, to better understand consequences such as low levels of media trust or even media cynicism that arise from a widespread perception of misrepresentation, media performance also needs to be evaluated from an individual point of view (Jandura et al., 2018) – i.e., whether people feel their own viewpoints, issues and social conditions represented in media. For a better understanding of the misrepresentation accusation, we address two major gaps in research by 1) investigating individuals’ perceived media representation, 2) based on a broader conceptualization that includes both representation in coverage and representation by journalists.

Based on a CATI-survey conducted in December 2022 representing the German population aged 18+, we show that perceptions of media misrepresentation referred to both the content level and the actor level (journalists), which comprised separate, but highly correlated latent constructs. Both apply to 20 to 25% of the population while distinct groups seem to be more prone to perceive misrepresentation: A structural equation model revealed that both perceptions of misrepresentation were related to media use, political correlates, and indicators of social exclusion. Especially socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., gender age) were important to understand actor-level misrepresentation, while political correlates resonated more widely among content-level misrepresentation (i.e., voting preferences). Looking at media trust and media cynicism as potential consequences, only content-level, but not actor level misrepresentation played a role. The results can support editorial offices’ current attempts to foster media trust by showing which specific audience segments do not feel their interests and opinions represented in media coverage. Beyond that, it might also help to reduce journalists’ misperceptions of a general, widespread media representation crisis (Stepinska et al, 2022) which our results refute.

## **The Role of Trust and Attitudes toward Democracy in the Dissemination of Disinformation: A Comparative Analysis of Six Democracies, Panel II, Session A**

*Edda Humprecht, University of Zurich*

The rise of social media has led to widespread dissemination of disinformation, which can destabilize political institutions and delegitimize media organizations by undermining trust in them (Ognyanova et al., 2020). Disinformation competes with more credible news sources such as news media, government officials, or scientists. By contrast, trust in these institutions could build resilience to disinformation by limiting the exposure to and sharing of it (Humprecht et al., 2020, 2021). This study investigates the role of trust in political actors, attitudes toward democracy, and trust in news media in the spread of disinformation on social media.

Data from a survey of 7,006 participants from six democracies (United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland) conducted in April and May 2020 were used to examine this relationship. Participants were asked about their attitudes toward democracy, trust in political actors and news media, and willingness to react to and spread disinformation. The study used linear regression models with robust standard errors to examine the relationship between these variables. The findings suggest that trust in (right-wing) government at the time of the study was positively associated with willingness to disseminate disinformation in the United Kingdom and United States, while trust in opposition politicians at the time of the study was positively associated with willingness to disseminate disinformation in France and Belgium. Additionally, trust in news media played a less important role than trust in politicians and general attitudes toward democracy in the context of spreading disinformation.

The study highlights the role of influential political actors in different countries. By fomenting uncertainty or even disseminating misleading information, politicians can (un)intentionally contribute to the spread of disinformation. Especially in times of crisis such as during pandemics or military conflicts, these actors bear a particularly huge responsibility.

The results of this study provide insights into how different political and media environments shape individual behaviors and attitudes during crises. The study demonstrates the importance of trust in political actors and attitudes toward democracy in shaping individuals' willingness to react to and spread disinformation. By building trust in credible sources of information and promoting democratic values, societies may be better equipped to combat the spread of disinformation.

### **Combating misinformation with Media literacy. An experimental study on the framing effects of media literacy messages , Panel II, Session A**

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The rise of digital and social media has made it increasingly easy for actors to post mis- or disinformation stories and for these stories to be spread across the globe. From a democratic perspective this development is highly problematic as it may misinform citizens, make them doubt basic facts, and result in losing trust in the news media. It is no wonder then that scholars have increasingly started to study solutions to counter misinformation. One such solution that has received scholarly attention are media literacy strategies or messages, where citizens are taught on a more abstract level how to separate quality news from false and misleading content. Such strategies may not only be useful to counter the misinformation challenge but also to teach people important skills that are necessary for good democratic citizenship.

Research has shown that media literacy messages can in some instances indeed be successful tools (e.g. Guess et al., 2020; Hameleers, 2022). However, an important gap remains as, so far, research has not really investigated how media literacy messages should be defined to have the most optimal effect. Doing so is important as in certain instances these messages could also backfire. Rather than making people critical toward misinformation, it may simply make citizens distrust all news stories and media, even when coming from reliable sources.

This study uses an experiment to tackle the questions raised above. The aim of the experiment is twofold. First, we intend to get a better insight in how to best construct a media literacy message in a way that it trains citizens to recognize misinformation, without backfiring and making them skeptical about all the news. We will compare several media literacy messages that are framed differently. Second, using a factorial design, we will also test which tips resonate best, by manipulating the markers in the misinformation article.

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### **The role of trust in voters' adoption of media projections, Panel II, Session A**

*Tali Aharoni, Christian Baden, Maximilian Overbeck, Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem*

Communication research has long documented the effects of trust on news use. However, it is still unclear how trust in specific outlets influences news reception (Shehata Strömbäck, 2022). In elections, selective news (dis)trust may lead citizens to ignore, negotiate, or reject mediated election projections, thereby shaping their electoral expectations. In this study we investigate news (dis)trust from the prism of media projections (Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al., 2022) and ask: What role does media-specific trust play in peoples' adoption of mediated election projections?

Relying on data from the 2022 French presidential elections, we distinguish between two potential effects of news (dis)trust on the reception of media projections: affecting audiences' selective

exposure to them on the one hand, and shaping the degree of their adoption, on the other hand. We draw upon a five-wave panel survey (N=1,294, respondents) coupled with computational news content analysis (N=141,914 future-oriented segments from 29,378 articles). The survey asked respondents to predict which candidates would win in the first and second election rounds, and to estimate the probability of these projections. It, moreover, measured citizens' exposure to news and social media, their levels of general trust in the media, and in nine prominent French news outlets (four newspapers, three television channels, and two radio channels). Using three sets of validated keywords, the content analysis identified election-related projections and probabilities published in these nine prominent outlets.

Building on the panel survey, we disentangle over time effects of trust on the exposure to mediated projections. Additionally, a longitudinal linkage approach (De Vreese et al., 2017) serves to link citizens' election expectations to the projections and probabilities published in the news media, thereby examining the effect of trust on the adoption of mediated projections. This study thus expands the ongoing scholarly debate about the effects of trust on media use, and paves the way to better understanding the role of trust in political information reception.

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### **Combating misinformation with Media literacy. An experimental study on the framing effects of media literacy messages , Panel II, Session B**

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The rise of digital and social media has made it increasingly easy for actors to post mis- or disinformation stories and for these stories to be spread across the globe. From a democratic perspective this development is highly problematic as it may misinform citizens, make them doubt basic facts, and result in losing trust in the news media. It is no wonder then that scholars have increasingly started to study solutions to counter misinformation. One such solution that has received scholarly attention are media literacy strategies or messages, where citizens are taught on a more abstract level how to separate quality news from false and misleading content. Such strategies may not only be useful to counter the misinformation challenge but also to teach people important skills that are necessary for good democratic citizenship.

Research has shown that media literacy messages can in some instances indeed be successful tools (e.g. Guess et al., 2020; Hameleers, 2022). However, an important gap remains as, so far, research has not really investigated how media literacy messages should be defined to have the most optimal effect. Doing so is important as in certain instances these messages could also backfire. Rather than making people critical toward misinformation, it may simply make citizens distrust all news stories and media, even when coming from reliable sources.

This study uses an experiment to tackle the questions raised above. The aim of the experiment is twofold. First, we intend to get a better insight in how to best construct a media literacy message in a way that it trains citizens to recognize misinformation, without backfiring and making them skeptical about all the news. We will compare several media literacy messages that are framed differently. Second, using a factorial design, we will also test which tips resonate best, by manipulating the markers in the misinformation article.

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## **The Perception of Social Cohesion and Media Use in Society: A Comparative Study, Panel II, Session B**

*Christine Meltzer, Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover; Jesper Strömbäck, University of Gothenburg; Luisa Gehle, Christian Schemer, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz; David Nicolas Hopmann, dnh@sam.sdu.dk, University of Southern Denmark;*

Most people learn about politics, the collective national situation and societal issues through the media (Mutz, 1998; Shehata Strömbäck, 2014). Moreover, the media are centrally involved in the articulation of (shared societal) values (Jakubowicz; 2007) by providing a common understanding of issues and events, creating a sense of community and shared identity, and promoting social norms and values. The news media can therefore play an important role in shaping perceived social cohesion. Conversely, media use behaviour that threatens this shared identity formation can also threaten social cohesion. Recently, there has been an increasing debate about citizens being mis-, selectively and/or insufficiently informed (Scheufele and Krause, 2019, Müller et al., 2017, Elvestad Phillips, 2018). Our study examines whether the perceived harm of these issues is associated with social cohesion. Through a process of impersonal impact (Mutz, 1998), we hypothesize that social cohesion is threatened when individuals in society are perceived to 1) avoid media use, 2) engage in selective exposure, or 3) engage in highly distorted media use (mis/disinformation).

To test the relationship between perceived social cohesion in society and media use behaviour, an online survey was conducted in May and June 2022 in 18 countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, US), resulting in a total sample of 26.000 respondents.

In all countries under investigation, perceived social cohesion tended to be in the middle range (highest in Norway, M = 2.9; lowest in Israel, M = 2.3 on a scale from 1 – 5). With regard to perceived problematic media use, it is evident that misinformation in particular is seen as a threat to democracy, selective exposure to some degree, whereas news avoidance does not seem to concern citizens as much. The perceived harm of all three analysed media information deficits explain perceived social cohesion. Namely, the more the problematic media use patterns are considered to be threatening to democracy the less cohesive society is perceived. This effect is specifically pronounced for mis/disinformation and selective exposure, and to a lesser extent for news avoidance.

Country-specific differences in terms of perceived problematic media use, perceived social cohesion and their systematic relationship will be addressed in the presentation.

## **Public perceptions of disinformation and platforms' affordances: The role of media use and previous knowledge, Panel II, Session B**

*Karolina Koc-Michalska et al., Audencia Business School*

For more than a decade, the research on the effects of social media use has been treating social media platforms in an aggregated manner. Yet, more recent studies suggest that there may be important variance between social media platforms due to different affordances. For example, there is a substantial difference between Facebook and Twitter in facilitating engagement with politics (Theocharis et al. 2020), how the conspiracy theories can be spread (Theocharis et al. 2021), or how people interact with information during the electoral period (Boulianne Larsson 2021). Chiou and Tucker (2018) found that platforms' policy towards disseminating fake news (e.g., eliminating pages or disseminating them) may alter users' level of interactions with falsified information. We do not however know whether individuals who perceive high levels of false information do so because they are well informed and able to identify false information when they see it, because they are misinformed and thus more likely to consider correct information false, or simply that their perceptions are not based on own experience, but rather general assumptions based on prior political beliefs and interests. In this paper we ask how social media platforms' different affordances may affect how users perceive the level of false information present on the platform. More specifically we ask how the distribution of fake news across platforms is perceived, and if this can be explained by respondents' own social media use and their level of factual and contested political knowledge?

The proposed paper is based on evidence from online survey run in 2022 in 17 European countries

and in the US. It employs a representative sample of 26000 respondents. The paper is part of the Threatpie project.

**Does selective exposure reduce belief accuracy? Evidence from survey and passive meter data across five Western democracies, [Panel II, Session B](#)**

*Ana Cardenal, Ludovic Terren, Alon Zoizner, David Nicolas Hopmann*

Abstract coming soon

**Third person perceptions about detecting misinformation and fact-checking habits. Evidence from an 18-country survey, [Panel II, Session B](#)**

*Corbu, N., Halagiera, D., Jin, S., Stanyer, J., Strömbäck, J., Matthes, J., Aalberg, T., Van Aelst, P., Cardenal, A.S., van Erkel, P., Hopmann, D.N., Koc-Michalska, K., Meltzer, C., Schemer, C., Splendore, S., Stępińska, A., Štětka, V., Terren, L., Theocharis, Y., de Vreese, C., Zoizner, A.*

Abstract coming soon

**Revealing their true colors? The association between politicians' personality and their emotional appeals, [Panel II, Session C](#)**

*Christian Pipal, University of Zürich*

Why are some politicians making negative emotional appeals, while others consistently use positive appeals? While previous work in political communication almost exclusively assumed that political language is flexible and reactive to the strategic environment (e.g. Crabtree et al., 2020; Proksch et al., 2019), I follow a psychological literature that argues language is an innate characteristic of politicians themselves (Pennebaker and King, 1999; Pennebaker et al., 2003). Drawing on a growing body of literature investigating the relationship between personality traits and linguistic features (Tausczik and Pennebaker, 2010), I study the association between politicians' HEXACO personality traits (Ashton and Lee, 2007) and their use of emotional appeals across platforms. Using a unique personality survey of Danish politicians administered during the 2015 Danish general election and topic-sensitive sentiment analysis of their parliamentary speeches and Twitter posts, I show in a preregistered analysis that personality traits are predictive of the emotional appeals made by politicians in parliament, but are not statistically significant on Twitter. While politicians scoring higher on emotionality and honesty-humility make more negative appeals, politicians scoring higher on agreeableness use more positive appeals. Overall, the associations between personality traits and emotional appeals are comparable in magnitude to previously studied factors such as government participation or cabinet experience. In parliament, politicians reveal their true colors when communicating to the electorate and fellow legislators. When it comes to emotions in politics, it does matter who we vote into office.

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## **Mother of the nation: Performing credibility in a time of crisis, Panel II, Session C**

*Anja Vranic, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo; Sine Nørholm Just, Department of Communication and Arts, Roskilde University*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, media praised women leaders for handling the pandemic better than men, leading to scholarly investigation of this claim. Some argue that this success was caused by cultural aspects that enable women to become leaders in the first place (Piscopo, 2020), while others find different rhetorical strategies used by female and male leaders (Dada et al., 2021). Taking this further, this study examines the perceived credibility of the female prime ministers in Norway and Denmark, as these countries had similar strategies and came out of the pandemic rather successfully. The data material was collected through three focus groups in each country, asking about the credibility of these PMs. The material was read inductively, taking shape through the recurring “nation’s mother” metaphor. We employ Butler’s (1990) concept of gender performativity, understanding the “mother” persona as created in the perception of the focus group participants. Further, we are guided by the double-bind for women politicians (Jamieson, 1995). The study has these RQs:

How is the credibility of Erna Solberg (N) and Mette Frederiksen (D) perceived during the COVID-19 pandemic? How is the persona of “mother of the nation” negotiated in each of their cases?

The PMs are evaluated differently in our material. Solberg is described as warm and empathic, reflecting a “nation’s mother” persona who is taking care of her citizens in a global health crisis. On the contrary, Frederiksen is claimed to fail to portray motherly care. Unlike Solberg, whose credibility did not decrease despite her breaking with COVID-19 regulations, Frederiksen’s unlawful decision-making during a mink scandal seems to have done irreparable damage to hers. Interestingly, Frederiksen was re-elected as PM following the pandemic, indicating that her credibility is rather high. Here, we explore the potential gendered structural inequalities in which women politicians are discussed in more dramatic and polarized ways (Rogstad, 2013).

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## **Effective communication to reach the voters: exploring how political parties imitate new initiatives and campaign ideas, Panel II, Session C**

*Kajsa Falasca, Christina Grandien, Mid Sweden University*

This paper builds on previous research on the circulation and diffusion of campaign ideas among political parties but aims to identify crucial factors for adopting new initiatives by examining for examples the cases of canvassing 2010 and the use of influencers 2022. Over the years, the ways in which election campaigns are planned, organized, and conducted have changed considerably and political parties employ new ideas and practices in order to communicate as strategically and effectively as possible to reach the voters (Chadwick Stromer-Galley, 2016; Lilleker, Tenscher, Štětka, 2015). Political parties’ increased use of strategic political communication in election campaigning is often referred to as an ongoing process of adaption to changing social, political and media environments (Strömbäck Esser, 2014).

In times of insecurity, organizations tend to imitate other successful organizations by adopting functional solutions and implementing popular or fashionable concepts and ideas. This can be understood as a form of social learning, involving the imitation or translation of successful concepts, where organizations adapt, reshape or add to the concepts they find attractive (Czarniawska Sevón, 1996; Falasca Grandien, 2016).

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to explore the process through which new ideas and practices concerning strategic political communication evolve and how political parties influence these ideas and practices. The paper contributes to our understanding of how political parties influence the range of ideas and practices of strategic political communication. Furthermore, this

paper contributes to an understanding of why some ideas and practices have greater impact on election campaigning than others. Finally, this paper contributes with insights on the dynamics of translation and imitation of fashionable ideas and practices of strategic political communication. The material consists of interviews with leading party officials from political parties represented in the Swedish national Parliament. This material is rare in the sense that political parties as organizations are unusual as research objects in the field of strategic political communication. We also use survey data on the Swedish political parties where different campaign methods and communication channels are valued. The empirical material covers the 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022 Swedish national elections.

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## **Who are the losers? Attribution of responsibility for election results in the age of personalized politics, [Panel II, Session C](#)**

*Katjana Gattermann, University of Amsterdam; Thomas Meyer, University of Vienna*

To what extent and why do media personalize electoral gains and losses when reporting about election results? Our hypotheses are grounded in the literatures on media logic, party competition and electoral systems. Particularly, we expect that more recently appointed party leaders as opposed to long-serving ones are more likely to be reported upon than parties regardless of the election outcome. At the party level, we expect that electoral gains are more likely to be attributed to leaders for challenger parties than mainstream parties, while electoral losses are more likely to be personalized for mainstream parties compared to challenger parties. Lastly, election results are more likely to be reported in personalized ways than attributed to parties as collective actors in candidate-based electoral systems compared to party-based electoral systems. To test our hypotheses, we rely on a secondary analysis of a large-scale content analysis of newspaper coverage in the aftermath of the 2019 European Parliament elections. The case selection covers a total of 64 newspapers from 16 countries. The results shed further light the relationship between media and politics and have important implications for our understanding of responsibility attribution in modern democracies.

## **Dealing with the energy crisis in Europe. Political messages on Telegram and citizens' perceptions, [Panel II, Session C](#)**

*Rubén Rivas-de-Roca, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos; Concha Pérez-Curiel, Universidad de Sevilla*

Crises are moments of strong transformation that imply a change in social priorities. In the summer of 2022, the energy-related crisis derived from the war in Ukraine caused European countries to adopt complex saving measures. In times of mediatization (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014), it is key for the political actors to provide media orientations (Jacobs & Wonneberger, 2019), explaining their positions on social media or mobile instant messaging services such as Telegram (Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2022). Moreover, the Russia's invasion of Ukraine was marked by a proliferation of hoaxes.

Bearing these facts in mind, this research aims to explore the political messages and perceptions of public opinion towards a problem that affects their economy and well-being. First, the evolution of the citizens' perception is described, analyzing trust in public institutions. On this matter, a secondary analysis of data is applied on two waves of the Eurobarometer (EB 96 and 97). Then, the action on Telegram during three months (July 15 - October 15, 2022) is studied with a quantitative content analysis on a sample composed of 930 messages published by the prime ministers' parties and the



main populist leaders in the four most populated countries of the EU: Germany, France, Italy and Spain.

Specifically, we analyze the accounts on Telegram of the following parties: Die Grünen and AfD (Germany); Renaissance and Rassemblement National (France); Partito Democratico and Fratelli d'Italia (Italy); PSOE and Vox (Spain). The objective was to assess the use of emotional tools by these political parties and their impact regarding the energy crisis. Results show a special attention of the public towards this subject. We also find an emotional narrative in the parties, but with relevant differences. In this sense, some accounts have a minimal activity; meanwhile, others produce a large number of messages, linked to political events. There is a disconnection between politicians and citizens that should be further explored in future studies.

### **Laughing Through the Tears: Memes as Coping Mechanisms in the Russian-Ukrainian War, Panel II, Session D**

*Junio Aglioti Colombini, Roberta Bracciale, Department of Political Science, University of Pisa*

In recent years, several impactful global events have occurred: first and foremost, the global pandemic, which affected the entire world, and then the war in Ukraine, which disrupted geopolitical balances and significantly impacted people's lives.

During all these politically and socially relevant events, alongside traditional narratives, a connective user-generated content (UGC) storytelling based on memes has emerged.

Memes are cultural artifacts that spread through digital platforms, reflecting the norms and values of the community in which they circulate (Shifman 2014). Fast, versatile, and easily adaptable to any context, memes promptly respond to diverse public events (Milner, 2013).

Analyzing memes provides therefore an opportunity to observe how information spreads and how participatory behaviors in the networked public sphere change over time.

Memes are used for instance to support or challenge dominant narratives and create alternative discourses fostering connective actions (Bennett and Segerberg 2013) or addressing complex and overwhelming themes to callout (Fahmy and Ibrahim, 2021) or collectively cope with (Ponton and Mantello 2021).

This paper aims to investigate how memes have been used during the Russian-Ukrainian war by the networked publics to narrate the conflict with different communicative purposes. The first part of the paper reconstructs the theoretical framework of the "memeification" of political communication (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2019) and the use of memes during conflictual events. In the second part, the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war is examined through the analysis of memes posted on Twitter with the hashtag #Ukraine. Memes were analyzed to investigate their various storytelling functions during the conflict, utilizing a mixed-method approach consisting of a coding process followed by a Multiple Correspondence Analysis and a Hierarchical Clustering of Principal Components. Finally, using regression models, memetic functions were related to the level of engagement they generated to detect how different types of memes performed differently in terms of visibility and circulation in the Twittersphere.

Our analysis results suggest that memes are effective tools for constructing affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015) and shaping collective identities that participate in online public discourse by expressing opinions, emotions, or criticisms. Memes related to #Ukraine allowed not only to address the geopolitical conflict but also, massively, to express strong and heavy emotions related to an event of such unprecedented proportion and channel the individual experiences in a collective cathartic public conversation. Overall, this paper highlights the importance of memes in political communication and their potential to influence public discourse and construct collective identities.

### **News Framing of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis in the Aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine War: A Cross-Country Analysis, Panel II, Session D**

*Gizem Melek, Yaşar University; Kübra Geysi, Galatasaray University; Zeynep Nur Sarı, Sabancı University*

This study investigates how the media in the US, UK, Germany, France, and Turkey framed the Ukrainian refugee crisis following the Russia-Ukraine War. To date, many scholarly works have identified a systemic pattern for the representation of immigrants in the media. Studies have shed light on the framing mechanism, which portrays immigrants as either "innocent" or "perpetrators" (Horsti 2008; van Gorp 2005) in different contexts and settings. In many instances, immigrants from the

Middle East or Africa are depicted as a threat to the cultural, economic, and security requirements of the host nation. Regarding the Ukrainian refugee crisis, some critics have accused Western media of favoring refugees who are blonde and blue-eyed while portraying Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi refugees as uncivilized and uncontrollable. Thus, we aim to determine whether specific framing strategies are used on the matter by different media outlets across the US, Europe, and beyond. Using framing theory and drawing on studies conducted in the past decade on refugee crises, this study content analyses the English editions of ten news outlets from across the globe, including USA Today and AP from the US, the Guardian, and Reuters from the UK, Der Spiegel and DW from Germany, Connexion France and Le Monde from France, and Anatolian Agency and Hürriyet from Turkey. The sampling period covers nine weeks, starting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 until 28 April 2022. An assistant archived all news materials, including news stories, editorials, opinions, and commentary pieces, available on the websites of the outlets using keywords such as Ukrainian refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. Through this procedure, we collected and analyzed a total of 1,238 news stories. The coding sheet included economic, cultural, and security threat frames, as well as economic, cultural benefit frames, victim, humanitarian aid, and human-interest frames. By conducting a cross-country analysis, our objective is to identify any potential differences in framing strategies as compared to previous studies on non-Western refugees.

Keywords: Framing theory; refugee crisis; Ukrainian refugees; comparative; content analysis.

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### **Stereotypical Media Framing in Intergroup Conflict: The Role of Collective Memory as an Interpretative Resource in Coverage of the Polish-Israeli Diplomatic Crisis, Panel II, Session D**

*Karen Ornat, Doctoral student, The Department of Communication and Journalism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, supervised by Christian Baden*

Collective memories and traumas of past intergroup relations often continue to inform perceptions of out-groups, shaping persistent, negative cultural stereotypes (Bar Tal, 1997). Journalism can play an active role when it comes to forming collective memories (Zelizer, 1992), while established collective memories may contribute to the framing and contextualization of current events (Edy, 1999), and collective memory can make news resonate with the audience (Berkovich, 2011). In the present study, I argue that journalists' mobilization of collective memory-based outgroup stereotypes serves a key political function. The study uses the context of the recent diplomatic crisis between Poland and Israel, marked by conflicted perceptions of the Polish-Jewish past, to explore how negative memories become an integral part of Israeli news media's framing of the diplomatic conflict. A qualitative framing analysis of articles from three opinion-leading news media in Israel over four years illuminates a promotion of negative collective memories as well as memory-based stereotypes. The findings demonstrate how journalists' use of collective memories and stereotypes serve political objectives and alliances. The study points to underlying dynamics driven by collective victimhood and siege mentality, which characterizes the national identities of both Poles and Israelis (Bar-Tal Antebi, 1992; Vollhardt et al., 2015). These tendencies encourage a sense of competitive victimhood, characterized by an in-group claiming to have suffered comparably more and struggling to recognize the out-group's victimization (Noor et al. 2012). Because competitive victimhood is negatively associated with a willingness to forgive and reconcile with the out-group, it raises the question of how news media can avoid supplying the vicious circle of negative out-group perceptions that hinders reconciliation. The study concludes by discussing existing insights from research on competitive victimhood, memory in ethnic conflict, and conflict discourse. I propose that valuable insights can be gained by better integrating scholarship in conflict communication and journalism with existing work on collective memory and stereotyping.

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### **Tackling the emotional toll together: How to counter harassment with connective practices, Panel III, Session A**

*Anu Kantola, Anu Harju, University of Helsinki*

External harassment has become a regular trait of public life. External interference aims to delegitimize and silence people who are active in public life in professional or civic capacity. Yet, relatively little is known about coping with harassment, and what the most effective ways of coping are. In this article, we examine how journalists have developed new practices through mutual engagement to counter the emotional effects of harassment and hate speech. Theoretically, we bridge community of practice research with theories of emotional labour to develop a novel perspective to examine online harassment. Work on communities of practice (CoP) investigates how people develop new practices through mutual engagement. The concept CoP has been employed to examine a wide spectrum of groups of people who are engaged in a joint enterprise where they share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Drawing on 22 interviews with Finnish journalists, we suggest that while harassment often concerns individual journalists, the most effective practices of countering harassment are connective practices that connect the harassed journalists with peers, managers and the wider public, and thus the emotional strain experienced by individual journalists is tackled as a community. In the study we show how journalists as a community of practice develop new practices through dynamic processes innovation, improvisation, trial and error, reciprocal learning, and mutual engagement. We find three categories of connective practices that are particularly effective in tackling harassment: 1) supportive connection between the journalist and the editor; 2) shared collegial practices among peers in the newsrooms; and 3) emotional engagement among peers outside the newsroom. Importantly, emotional labour forms a pivotal dimension of these practices. According to our findings, the effectiveness of the connective practices stems from their capacity to tackle the emotional toll of harassment. They help journalists to overcome the feelings of isolation, shame, anger, fear, and self-doubt that harassment often evokes, and which can hamper everyday work, but also lead to self-censorship. Furthermore, we suggest that besides journalists, also other professions, organisations and civic movements could develop connective practices to counter the negative effects of harassment and hate speech. Finally, based on our findings on the best practices in newsrooms, we offer recommendations on how to collectively develop policies to address harassment.

### **Is it anger or thirst for knowledge? How online incivility impacts political participation, Panel III, Session A**

*Laia Castro, University of Barcelona; Michael Amsler, Frank Esser, Jihye Park, University of Zurich; Pamina Syed Ali, University of Zurich; Yuan Zhang, University of Zurich*

Several studies have investigated the impact of reading or viewing uncivil content via news TV or social media on political participation (e.g. Siegel, 2019; Mutz, 2015). However, less is known about how exposure to information and to political discussions in the online domain intertwine and jointly explain levels of political participation. In this study we investigate the extent to which being embedded in particularly uncivil political communities on Twitter enhances offline political participation by encouraging citizens to seek more news information and visit more uncivil web sources. We



explore the mediating effect of both an increase in information used vis-à-vis an increase in consumption of more extremist websites on levels of (offline) political information, as previous studies have posited that anger but also increased interest in politics might unfold the mobilizing potential of uncivil political interactions (Edgerly et al., 2013; Mason, 2018).

To this end, we combine survey, Twitter and web-tracking data from a sample of citizens in Brazil (N=271) over a two-month span (the 2022 Presidential election campaign). In a second step, levels of political online incivility individuals are exposed to are analysed along seven different dimensions (impoliteness, negativity, argument simplicity, exclusion, sarcasm, hate speech, threat to democratic freedoms) by use of a supervised classifier. Thereby, we are able to identify the level of incivility that users are exposed to through their Twitter political conversations, and the amount of news sources individuals are visiting before and after their Twitter interactions, as well as their use of sources conveying high levels of uncivil rhetoric. We use survey data for self-reported offline (conventional and non-conventional) political participation.

Our contribution is three-fold. First, our study sheds light on how being exposed to political incivility via interpersonal communication and information consumption explain political mobilization in the midst of a particularly polarized electoral campaign (Brazil's 2022 Presidential election), with some politicians and social media communities normalizing uncivil and anti-democratic discourses. Second, while most of previous studies have addressed the relationship between online behavior and offline political participation at the aggregate, our unique dataset and analytical approach allow us to trace back and link individuals' online interactions, information patterns and offline behaviors in a sequential manner. Last but not least, our study will also allow digging deeper into the online political atmosphere that paved the path for the 2023 Brazilian Congress attack, thereby contributing to the study of the antecedents of support for democratic backlash.

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### **Moral panic or a real thing? Explaining perceptions of Cancel Culture in Germany, Panel III, Session A**

*Lena Mändlen, Prof. Dr. Carsten Reinemann, Anna-Luisa Sacher, Department of Media and Communication (IfKW), LMU Munich*

The debate about an alleged "Cancel Culture" has recently arrived in Europe. Closely connected to discussions about free speech, the public debate oftentimes relies on anecdotal evidence of cases in popular culture or at universities (e.g., Clark, 2020). This has led some to argue that the "cancel culture" is just a "moral panic" (Ben-Yehuda, 1986) promoted by right-wing media and political parties, while others suggest that fears of declining tolerance of differing opinions may be substantiated (for an overview see Norris, 2021). Unfortunately, scholars have only just begun to study phenomena surrounding "Cancel Culture" empirically, mostly in the US context and concentrating on academia (e.g., Norris, 2021). As we know little about how European citizens perceive "Cancel Culture" and whether they may experience phenomena connected to it, we put forward four research questions:

Taking Germany as an example, we ask (a) whether citizens are aware of the "Cancel Culture" and how they understand it; (b) whether they perceive phenomena described by "Cancel Culture" even if they are not aware of the term; (c) whether they experience or use activities described by "Cancel Culture" themselves or in their personal environment; and (d) which personal, political and media-related characteristics predict these perceptions.

We conducted an online survey in June/July 2022 using a quota-sample of the German population (N = 1080). Our results show that only about one-third of respondents is familiar with the term "Cancel Culture", but many more are aware of phenomena behind it and agree to its existence when the term is explained. Moreover, almost half of respondents has actively turned to some kind of activity that can be seen as an act of "Cancel Culture" (e.g., "privately or publicly boycotted a person because of not liking their political opinion"). Perceiving a "Cancel Culture" is, for example, related to right-wing political attitudes, perceptions of restricted free speech, and negative attitudes toward "Political

Correctness". However, personal experiences with being canceled also play a part. This suggests that "Cancel Culture" may not only be a perceptual phenomenon, but at least partly be a real thing – at least for some.

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### **Silenced about what, where and by whom? Exploring the contextual factors shaping perceptions of free speech, Panel III, Session A**

*Anna-Luisa Sacher, Prof. Dr. Carsten Reinemann, Department of Media and Communication (IfKW), LMU Munich*

In recent years, there have been controversial discussions regarding whether a fundamental pillar of democracy, the right to free speech, is increasingly curtailed in European countries. Taking Germany as an example, preliminary studies indicate that the German population increasingly feels that their ability to express themselves freely is restricted (Petersen, 2021). Recent findings suggest that political beliefs drive these perceptions, particularly conservative to far-right attitudes (e.g., Norris, 2021; Revers Traunmüller, 2020; Petersen, 2021). However, most of these findings relate to free speech in general (see Köcher, 2019 for an exception), neglecting possible differences of perceptions on specific issues, environments or actors that might be the source of restrictions.

As the current body of studies is surprisingly limited in this regard, we, therefore, aim to examine these factors in greater detail by asking (a) on which topics citizens perceive restrictions; (b) in which communicative environments they perceive restrictions (e.g., social media or friends); (c) which actors they perceive as the greatest threat to free speech (e.g. the church or the state); (d) how these factors are interrelated; and (e) how they can be explained by individual-level factors.

To answer our questions, we conducted a quota-based online study with 1490 citizens in July/August 2021. Almost half of the respondents perceived free speech in Germany as too restricted. However, this perception varies greatly depending on the context. While respondents felt the freest among their family and friends, they believe that opinions are currently being most restricted in the political sphere and that extremist groups pose the biggest threat to free speech. Additionally, social media appeared to influence the perception of free speech significantly. The assessment of the topics suggests that issues typically associated with conservative views are particularly perceived as restricted, regardless of the communicative environment. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no uniform perception of free speech, and as previous studies have suggested, the issue appears to be primarily political in nature.

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### **Untangling the Spread of Political Incivility on Twitter: An Examination of Networked Communities and Contagion Dynamics, Panel III, Session A**

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Prior research has established that political incivility is contagious on social media, with exposure to uncivil environments increasing the likelihood of individuals adopting uncivil behaviors (Chen Wang, 2022). However, the influence of users' exposure to specific political communities on the contagion effect of online political incivility remains unexplored. In this study, we define a community as a virtual entity formed through frequent interactive behaviors on social media. Our objective is to investigate the role of social media's networked structure in the contagion of online political incivility, with a focus on Twitter. We hypothesize that exposure to different types of communities and individuals' willingness to engage with community content will moderate the contagiousness of political incivility.

Research Questions:

1. What political communities exist on Twitter?
2. How does individuals' willingness to engage with community content vary across different political communities?

Hypotheses:

1. Uncivil political communities on Twitter will promote uncivil expression among their members.
2. The contagion effect of political incivility is moderated by the type of political community and individuals' willingness to engage with the community.

To address these questions, we resort to 1,018 participants of a survey fielded between September and November 2022, whose Twitter and browsing activity were tracked over the same time span. We employed a mixed methodology, combining network analysis, deep learning, and regression analysis. The analysis procedure comprised four steps: (1) modeling our data as a network based on survey participants and the Twitter accounts they followed, subsequently identifying political communities in the network using a community detection algorithm; (2) assessing the extent to which survey participants were willing to engage with their respective communities based on the similarity of visited/shared content between the individual and the community; (3) identifying uncivil messages posted by communities and survey participants using natural language processing models; and (4) examining the effect of uncivil political communities on individual-level incivility and the moderating influence of community types and engagement willingness using regression analysis.

This study's findings will offer valuable insights into the contagious effect of online political incivility within distinct political communities. Additionally, our innovative mixed-methodology approach utilizes survey data as a ground-truth check of computational measures and computational measures as supplementary variables of survey data.

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### **Criticism, conspiracies and populism: The discourse of COVID-19 sceptics in Germany's Querdenken community on Telegram., Panel III, Session B**

Rémi Almodt, Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, Department of Journalism and Digital Media

Telegram is a central space for unifying far-right actors and ideology, activists and protest movements, alternative, partisan media, conspiracy theories, and in recent years, Coronavirus scepticism. As such, the platform has been used as a communication tool by Germany's largest COVID-19 protest movement, Querdenken. While a growing body of scientific literature focuses on network dynamics and general topic modelling, there is relatively scarce academic research on large scale and more in-depth content analyses focused on determining the discursive features of the politicisation of public crises. To that end, the present research examines this environment through a semi-automated content analysis between April 2018 and January 2022. The study aims to examine possible influences by far-right information infrastructure via link sharing (RQ1), as well as determine to what extent far-right populist discourse is employed in the movements communications (RQ2) and look into how narratives within the different Querdenken communities on Telegram compare (RQ3). Within a

corpus of around 1.4 million chat messages, key elements of right-wing populist discourse can be detected in a number of smaller community categories. People-centered narratives involving the homeland and a common 'us' set this in-group against an oppressive, corrupt government and politicians, connecting those to vaccines and the perceived mainstream media. External links shared to these channels and groups lead towards alternative news media publications promoting far-right ideology and conspiracies. Within this environment, anti-COVID-19 restrictions narratives are combined with populist discourse, which are further distributed from Querdenken channels via general information channels about various topics regarding COVID-19-related subjects, connecting to activist, protest, news, lawyer and doctor-themed groups and channels, thus effectively politicising this public crisis.

### **Chatting Communities into Existence: Exploring the Role of Chat Groups in Community Building During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Panel III, Session B**

*Olga Pasitselska, University of Groningen; Kilian Buehling, Free university of Berlin and Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society; Emilija Gagrčin, University of Mannheim*

Community, a "golden age" concept of political communication, is profoundly changing. Increasingly connected by digital technologies, communities reappeared on the political stage as more tangible but also more fluid than in the pre-online era. Communities that emerge through mobile messenger groups neither resemble the idyllic town-gatherings of the early democratic thought, nor do they retain the globally networked structure of online forums and social media. Rather, the new type of community is constituted through the interplay between online/offline, global/local and private/public dimensions (Tenenboim Kligler-Vilenchik, 2020; Pfetsch et al., 2021). The community becomes actualized through messenger networks as a crisis response, falling dormant as life gets back to "normal". In this study, we examine "Anti-Corona Solidarity" Telegram groups and assess affordances and limitations of the digitally augmented community action in urban communication infrastructure. During COVID-19 pandemic, borders between countries, cities, and even neighborhoods and buildings suddenly became impenetrable. In response, during March 2020 at least 200 "Anti-Corona Solidarity" groups were created on Telegram by individual users in Germany. Apart from sharing official information about sanitary norms and quarantine restrictions, these groups became forums for discussion of local and national issues, hubs for coordinating mutual aid, and ultimately, spaces for community building. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 47 public Telegram groups in Germany (N = 48,392 messages), we analyze information sharing, action coordination, and community building practices, and their relations with the spatial organization, informational flows, and socio-political environment.

Our findings show that while the groups contained similar content repertoires (e.g., self-help tips, news links), they varied significantly in terms of group dynamics, amicability, and inclusiveness of the groups' discourse. Depending on the role distribution and established group norms, some groups referred to a larger discourse, connecting their neighborhood to governmental institutions, health organizations, and journalistic media. Other groups, however, preferred to stay within local context and focus on immediate material needs rather than more loosely defined civic or political activity. Overall, our findings suggest that the chats enable their participants to see a locality as a community through the affordances of chat groups (such as connectivity, visibility, and searchability). The networked community manifests on different levels, and especially through digital infrastructure, which allows networked citizens to rely on community resources and employ civic potential of messenger groups. We discuss the implications for studying civic engagement, citizenship norms, and fostering social cohesion in urban environments.

### **Comparing German far-right movement networks and communities across platforms, Panel III, Session B**

*Baoning Gong, Weizenbaum-Institut Freie Universität Berlin*

Many western democracies are facing the rise of the far-right. While the role of digital communication for far-right movements has gained extensive scholarly attention, the research field lacks insights into how different platforms shape the far-right online ecosystem and communication. With far-right actors deemed extremist and harmful being deplatformed on major platforms, many have turned to alternative and fringe platforms calling into question whether these confined but unmonitored and largely unregulated spaces harbor extremist actors and ideas (Jasser Wankmüller, 2020).

This paper tests the thesis that alternative and fringe platforms offer a more fertile ground for extremist actors than mainstream platforms. I understand platforms as opportunity structures and argue, that they offer different affordances (Baele et al., 2020) for social movements and extremist groups including technological features, regulation, branding, ownership and use culture. This paper

therefore, asks how German far-right movements and communities are connected on Telegram, Gettr, and Twitter, and whether extremist actors are more prevalent in the networks of alternative and fringe platforms than on mainstream platforms.

Far-right social movements and groups' online datasets are collected for Telegram, Gettr, and Twitter. The sampling begins with a common pool of known movements, groups, and activists on each platform, and is then expanded through snowball sampling based on social relations and interactions. A forwarding-network is established within each platform and clusters of far-right actors and their connectedness are identified through social network analysis and community detection. The most important actors in these clusters are classified as to their ideological leaning via expert classifications to determine, whether extremist entities are more prevalent in the networks of alternative and fringe platforms than on mainstream platforms. Differences in network characteristics and the role of different actor types in the network are identified.

This study contributes to existing research by expanding the scholarly focus on single cases, nations, and platforms to trans- and cross-platform analysis, furthering the comparative agenda. It also adds to the understanding of how movements have adapted to platform regulation and how different platforms come together and are utilized differently by far-right movements in a bigger far-right ecosystem online.

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### **What do the Spanish parties do on mobile instant messaging services? Telegram's political functions as a digital communication channel by means of three electoral campaigns, Panel III, Session B**

*Alejandra Tirado García, Andreu Casero Ripollés, Universitat Jaume I de Castelló (Spain)*

The digital environment has led mobile instant messaging services to become a new communication channel for political parties and citizens. These have become useful tools to disseminate information more directly given the private environment that characterizes them. In this way, the parties avoid any type of censorship, gatekeeping or ideological framing by the media and shield themselves from possible in-depth analysis, debate and criticism. Among these platforms, Telegram is breaking into the field of political communication strongly. It is a free programming and free of cost service that has reaped a significant boom in the Spanish geographical context motivated, in part, by the blocking of WhatsApp to the parties in 2019 in the sending of mass messages during the electoral campaign. The main aim of this study is to know which is the digital strategy of political use of this application in the Spanish context. That is, to examine the functions given to Telegram by the Spanish political parties from the point of view of political communication. For this, a descriptive study with exploratory purpose is chosen and a quantitative content analysis is applied to 2187 messages published by the main Spanish parties on their Telegram channels in three different electoral campaigns: national elections of November 2019, elections to the Catalan Parliament February 2021 and elections to the Community of Madrid in May 2021. The results show four main functions: respread, self-promotion, mobilization and, incipiently, criticism. Thus, the parties use Telegram in the electoral campaign as a campaign loudspeaker for other social networks, as a bulletin board to self-promote their electoral campaign, as a mobilizing instrument to request the vote and as a space to develop the negative campaign by means of criticism to the opponent. In addition, the study has shown that the use of these functions is conditioned by factors such as ideology, trajectory and position on the government/opposition axis of each party.

This work is linked to the project "The use of mobile instant messaging services by political actors: communication strategies and impact on citizens" (UJI-B2020-14)", funded by the Universitat Jaume I (Promotion Plan of the Investigation 2020).

### **How does right-wing propaganda from alternative messenger platforms connect to mainstream social media platforms? A case study with Telegram and Youtube., Panel III, Session B**

*Christina Dahn, Indira Sen, Katrin Weller, GESIS*



### Background and Research Gap.

The alternative messenger platform Telegram functions as a rallying place for a fringe group of German right-wing extremists. Here, the “Querdenken”-movement organizes its protests, right-wing extremists discuss plans for a coup, and explicitly racist, antisemitic, and misogynist content is posted despite European hate speech laws (1, 2, 3).

Given the growing threat of right-wing extremism in Europe (4), it is of crucial importance to improve our understanding of hate speech dissemination patterns. While many studies focus on a specific platform, powerful actors in the right-wing scene are connected by an online ecosystem encompassing multiple platforms (3). Often, hateful content is linked to on other platforms (2), while actors tailor their language according to platform affordances (e.g. the level of enforced content moderation) (1), facilitating a ‘digital ecosystem of hate’ (3).

### Proposed Contributions.

This work aims to improve our understanding of how hate speech is disseminated by fringe communities on Telegram to mainstream platforms like YouTube:

First, we will gather a large-scale dataset of selected German speaking right-wing actors’ communications on Telegram using web scraping. We will use machine-learning and dictionary-based techniques to label and analyze this dataset. Second, we will generate a cross-platform dataset by connecting the Telegram messages to YouTube videos based on respective links to YouTube posted on Telegram.

Third, this setup enables us to analyze how communication from right-wing actors on Telegram relates to mainstream online media content on YouTube. By applying content analysis methods and potentially also identifying communication networks our work will contribute to an improved understanding of right-wing extremist strategies making use of mainstream platforms like YouTube.

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## **Caught between Attention and Acceptance: Media Coverage of Environmental Protest Events and Its Effect on Protest Group Perception, Panel III, Session C**

*Pablo Jost, University of Mainz*

Social movements try to draw attention to issues they consider important by organizing public protest events. Therefore, groups engage in protests that meet journalistic selection criteria to provoke media coverage (Wouters, 2013). However, according to the “protest paradigm” media coverage tends to focus on the harmful consequences of protests, such as the violence, damage, or traffic congestion, and criticizes protesters as deviant and a threat for society (McLeod, 2007). Using the German environmental activist group “Last Generation” (LG) as an example, two studies aim at answering which characteristics of protest events lead to media coverage (RQ1) and how scandalized coverage affects the perception of the protest group (RQ2).

In study one, protest events were identified based on press releases from the LG website between November 2021 and December 2022. Characteristics of the protest forms used (e.g., roadblocks, paint smearing), locations targeted (e.g., government buildings, museums), and damages (e.g., injured persons) were determined for 108 protest events (half sample). A keyword search (“Letzte Generation”) on Factiva identified a total of 1165 articles from 19 German national and regional daily newspapers covering LG’s protests. Results of a vector autoregressive model suggest that protest events Granger cause the volume of coverage on the two following days. A negative binomial regression reveals that disruptive protests forms (blocking streets and airports) as well as damage (injured persons) significantly increase the number of articles published (RQ1).

In the second study, a convenience sample of 231 respondents (63% female; M\_age = 35 years) was exposed to an article about a LG protest event (roadblock). One group received a neutral article (describing the event); the other group was exposed to a scandalized version (portraying the protest as a danger to society, using derogatory vocabulary). ANOVA results indicate that scandalized framing significantly reduced the protest group's perceived credibility (RQ2).

Thus, the studies suggest that protest groups are caught between a rock and a hard place: either they are ignored by the media, or they create disruptive events that attract media attention, with the risk that a scandalized framing leads to decreased acceptance.

In addition to the two studies, a quantitative content analysis of the articles is currently being carried out. This will allow us to test whether the characteristics of protest events that attracted media attention will also lead to a more scandalized coverage. The results of this analysis will also be presented and discussed.

### **Transmedia audiences and events as tactics of Russian anti-war movement construction, Panel III, Session C**

*Svetlana Chuikina, Ph.d. candidate, Department of geography, media and communication, Karlstad University, Sweden*

Currently, in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine, many among the politically active youth have left the country and become part of a (re)construction of the anti-war movement outside Russia. The project studies the construction of Russian protest movements, including activists, but also in a wider sense as related to media practices of broader audiences and publics; and recognises the politicisation of Russian youth as a continuum unfolding in time and space, in accordance with mediatization of everyday life.

There are numerous approaches to studying digital audience participation in political action: earlier and more technologically oriented based on the 'network' (Castells, 2007) metaphor, the concept of 'connective action' (Bennett Segerberg, 2012), and the 'participatory' framework (Jenkins, 2006). However, such approaches often overlooked "the importance of meso-level collective initiatives which generate 'multitudinous identities' (Bakardjieva, 2015), connected in complex patterns via transmedia platforms and media practices of everyday life. This openness towards mediated practices of broader publics allows for grasping the process of social orientation –experiencing engagement, as pre-conditions for participation in political action, (chiefly relying on media infrastructures and technological affordances).

The aim is to understand:

What within digital media, and transmedia platforms in particular, do meso-level movement actors identify as significant, in terms of linking everyday life with political participation? In what way do people imagine, decode and enact the affordances of transmedia platforms, especially how such (different) platforms contribute to logistical processes, shared time and space construction and experiencing 'togetherness'?

The paper thesis envisions a theoretical framework that recognises how transformed media environments of the mundane change the nature of event(s) (e.g. 'media event', see Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018), how actors experience 'togetherness', reassurance and belonging through these 'small acts of engagement' – SAE (Picone et.al., 2021), as a means of orientation by negotiating algorithmic 'logistics' (Rossiter, 2021). The guiding empirical question for in-depth interviews is: in which contexts do young adults bring up media when reflecting on their experience of engagement in political anti-war activism?

The study contributes to research recognizing the political engagement of broader publics, positioned between activism and mundanity. Bringing together debates on social movement construction and audience study (Livingstone, 2019; Ytre-Arne Das, 2020) as one branch of discussion, and theory of affordance (Nagy and Neff, 2015; Shaw, 2017) and transmedia environments (Jenkins, 2013; Fast Jansson, 2019; Peters, 2015).

### **Exploring the EndSARS Movement: Police Brutality in Nigeria through the lens of Memory, Panel III, Session C**

*Silas Udenze, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain*

On 3 October 2020, a young man was reportedly shot dead by a team of Nigeria's Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Delta State, Nigeria, on the allegation that he was an internet fraudster. The evidence of Joshua's shooting was captured in a video. The audio in the video states that the Police just shot and killed the owner of the Lexus SUV and zoomed off with his car (Agbo, 2021). Within a few days, the viral video generated outrage and engendered vast decentralised street protests in major cities in Nigeria, mainly organised through social media. From 2020 till date, the Movement has had two protest Anniversaries (EndSARS 1.0 and 2.0). The Movement has continued to construct memories across times, a study domain dominated by studies from the West (Smit, 2020; Daphi Zamponi, 2019), with a dearth of studies from the Global South, Africa, specifically. Also, despite the burgeoning study (Nwakanma, 2022; Wada, 2021; Uwalaka, 2022) on EndSARS, the literature is devoid of studies from the memory study perspective, a critical area in social movement studies (Smit, 2020; Daphi Zamponi, 2019). Consequently, this study uses the digital ethnographic approach to understand how protesters use Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram "Stories" (Ephemeral; 24-hour Story) to construct memories of the EndSARS Movement in Nigeria from 2020 and through its Anniversaries in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Preliminary findings indicate that the "Story" enables connective memory work and constructs memetic resurrection, networked commemoration and digital narration of the EndSARS agitation.

### **Protest and The Power of Unity Claims. Analyzing the Resonance of Social Movements' Twitter and Facebook Protest Messages., Panel III, Session C**

*Luna Staes, University of Antwerp*

Protest and The Power of Unity Claims. Analyzing the Resonance of Social Movements' Twitter and Facebook Protest Messages.

To what extent does street protest resonate online? And which protest features affect public resonance in the hybrid media system? For protests to succeed, it is crucial for social movements to convey their protest messages directly to the broader public (Burstein, 2014). Social movements and media scholars consider digital media as an important communication tool to do so (Chadwick, 2017). Social media are perceived nowadays as the main conduit through which protest groups can propagate their protest claims immediately to the public without mass media mediation (Cammaerts, 2021). However, to what extent do their protest messages about their physical street protests resonate among the online public? And, which protest features affect public's interest?

In this study, we analyze the Twitter and Facebook messages (N=2.849) from different social movements (N=186) about their own street protests (N=232) staged in Brussels (Belgium) between January 2017-December 2021. We measure to what extent protest resonates online and which protest features affect public resonance on Twitter and Facebook. Scholars consider social media audience analytics as a measure of public opinion (Freelon et al., 2018; McGregor, 2019). As such, public resonance is measured in the form of: likes, shares, comments/replies and retweets. Preliminary results indicate that the online protest messages of social movements tickle the attention of the online public. Both on Twitter and Facebook, protest messages are often liked (mean N likes Twitter=34; N likes Facebook=112) or shared (mean N shares Twitter=52; N shares Facebook=43), but commented upon less frequently (mean N comments Twitter=1; mean N comments Facebook=12). Especially protest messages containing Unity claims stimulate public resonance online. Findings contribute to the impact of social movements' protest communication on public opinion in today's hybrid media system.

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## **The Democratic Potentials of Social Media: How Focusing on the Bad Can Obstruct the Good, Panel III, Session C**

*Christian Strippel, Sofie Jokerst, Katharina Heger, Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society; Martin Emmer, Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society / Freie Universität Berlin*

In the debate around the democratic potential of social media, two assumptions confront each other in research and public discourse. On the one hand, social media are assumed to have positive effects on how people engage with politics (Boulianne, 2015). On the other hand, social media are often held responsible for bad outcomes such as an increasing polarization of society (Kubin von Sikorski, 2021). Regardless of which of the two diagnoses is true, in the proposed paper we want to explore whether a negative assessment of social media can affect the extent to which people use them for political participation.

We think it is plausible that people who evaluate social media negatively in terms of their democratic potential are more likely not to use them to get involved politically. If this can be confirmed, we would in a sense be dealing with a self-fulfilling prophecy, since focusing on the negative potentials of social media can weaken the realization of the positive ones. Then, it would be important to further investigate the reasons behind the negative assessment of social media. Specifically, we wonder whether people rate social media poorly because they have made bad experiences themselves; or whether the poor rating is an outcome of the negative public discourse about social media.

To answer these questions, we draw on data from a survey of the German population conducted at the end of 2022. Here, respondents were asked, how they rate social media and whether they had used them to disseminate political content or to comment on political issues in the past year. An initial analysis of the responses shows that people who rate social media negatively use them significantly less for political activities than those who rate them positively. However, the assessment correlates positively with both general social media use and the use of other media such as newspapers, radio or television.

At the conference, we would like to present and discuss these results and further analyses. In our view, the study can raise awareness for the negative consequences that the increasingly critical view of social media can have.

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## **The Forgotten Human-in-the-Loop: Citizen Agency as a Means for Responsible Automated Content Moderation, Panel III, Session D**

*Anna Maria Planitzer, Sophie Lecheler, Svenja Schäfer, University of Vienna, Department of Communication*

Political discussions on social media are increasingly affected by toxic content. Due to the vast quantity of such user-generated content, platforms are more and more dependent on automated moderation for timely action (Gillespie, 2020). There is a general consensus that when platforms engage in algorithmic moderation through actively altering and steering information/communication flows, it needs to be done "responsibly". However, how to define what is responsible is a much harder question, often discussed in terms of who would govern these algorithms, or how platforms respond to such governing influences. What is much less explored is how citizens themselves perceive central aspects of responsible algorithmic moderation, and how accepting they are of reigning normative discourses surrounding it. This is problematic, as for moderation to be accepted it is crucial that citizens feel a sense of agency (Molina Sundar, 2022) and this cannot be achieved through more complexity but fairness, trustworthiness, transparency, and understandability (Suzor et al., 2019). Additionally, evaluations between users vary based on contextual and individual variables such as content topic, attitudes towards automation or political orientation (Wojcieszak et al., 2021). We therefore propose a fine-grained approach towards responsible algorithmic moderation through interaction with citizens to provide meaningful insights into how digital moderation architectures should be constructed to benefit democracies instead of harming them.

To provide a more nuanced understanding of responsible platform governance, its individual/contextual variables and their underlying relations, we propose a quantitative survey design, with a representative sample of Austrian citizens (N=1.000) to address which algorithmic content moderation procedures are perceived to be responsible and which factors determine these perceptions. The empirical evidence will contribute to the ongoing debate on the participatory role of citizens in digitized democracies and platform governance. Therefore, the results will be relevant for

those who employ moderation (media organizations, platforms), as well as to those who wish to understand and regulate it externally (EU, national committees).

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### **Storytelling, datafication, and the future of political advocacy campaigns, Panel III, Session D**

*Ariadne Vromen, Australian National University ; Filippo Trevisan, American University ; Michael Vaughan , London School of Economics*

This paper asks: what is the impact of digital systems for collecting, archiving, and automatically organizing very large amounts of personal stories used in political campaigns on how people, groups, and their grievances are represented in public debates? We argue that the use of crowdsourced databases, algorithms, and AI by political organizations ushers in a new phase of datafied storytelling, digital advocacy, and political campaigning more broadly. To explore this trend, we draw on our analysis of U.S.- and Australia-based advocacy organizations that pioneered the use of technology-driven crowdsourced storytelling in campaigns on a range of issues, from disability rights to LGBTQ+ rights, and from essential workers' rights during the COVID-19 pandemic to broader healthcare issues. Within this framework, we also explore the implications of these tactics and technologies for different types of organizations as we focus simultaneously on grassroots volunteer groups (Little Lobbyists), coalitions (Every Australian Counts, Australian Marriage Equality), and longstanding membership organizations (all the ACTU- and AFL-CIO-affiliated labor unions in Australia and the U.S., respectively). To explore these cases, we use a mixed methods approach that includes: analyzing the evolution of technological choices and processes through a qualitative survey of digital story collection interfaces and in-depth interviews with campaigners; and examining storylines and representations in story-centered digital advocacy campaigns through quantitative content analysis.

Results show how “big data” approaches to political storytelling have diffused across national borders and increasingly pervade different types of organizations, including through investments in digital “story bank” systems that automatically suggest storylines to support an organization's efforts to intervene in the political information cycle in real time. This move toward political story “on demand” is reshaping the power relationships and interactions among political organizations, their constituents, technologies, and technological companies. This has important consequences for political agency, both at the individual and organizational level. Our research shows that individual citizens can have more agency than before to share personalized stories for mobilization. However, their agency is also constrained by technological architecture and those behind it. Datafied storytelling boosts the agency of “story banking” organizations in political spaces because it provides them with arguably – more effective narrative “ammunition.” Yet, these organizations' agency is also constrained by the publics they need to address and the mechanisms of the hybrid media system. The paper concludes by considering the implications these changing patterns in strategic storytelling have for the legitimacy and accountability of democratic political advocacy organizations.

### **Critical feminist screenshotting: capturing the gaze of the search engine, Panel III, Session D**

*Renée Ridgway, Post-Doc, Aarhus University*

‘Ubiquitous googling’ (Ridgway 2021) with keywords is a new media habit (Chun 2016) and Google serves a window into users' thoughts, interests and desires. Instead of receiving 10 hyperlinks on a page, increasing AI chatbots (Bard) deliver search results yet Google's proprietary algorithms are shrouded in patents and ‘guarded, like missile codes’ (Noble 2018). Transient as well as opaque,



what are the criteria determining search results and how can they be captured? Latanya Sweeney's screenshotting showed how Google Ads with a greater percentage of the word 'arrest' appeared more often for black identifying first names in searches' (2013:34), including her own. Safiya Noble unearthed how Google's 'algorithmically crafted web search' delivered racism and sexism as the first results with 'black girls' through paid advertising (2018:5), based on her own searching and screenshotting. These examples of discrimination within machine learning search algorithms (Chun 2019:64) reflect how data sets are attached to bodies as 'biopolitical implications' related to 'gender, race, sexuality, class, disability' (Cifor et al., 2019).

In this presentation I show results of an auto-ethnography that visualises the black-boxed algorithms of search results through critical feminist screenshotting, which reflects the 'partial perspective' of 'situated knowledge' (Haraway 1988:587). Documentary, evidentiary but also empowering, screenshots capture the 'gaze of the search engine' (Noble 2018:71,116) yet an intersectional lens of analysis also exposes some of their workings and effects. The method contributes to the scholarship 'Feminist Data Manifesto No' and subversive movements informed by feminist, critical data and critical archival practices (D'Ignazio and Klein, 2020).

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## **Exclusively exclusive, or includes some inclusive? – Sentiment analysis of Facebook posts about immigration of media outlets and politicians in Hungary and Germany between 2014 and 2022, Panel III, Session D**

*Eszter Farkas, PhD Candidate, Doctoral School of Political Science, Central European University*

Increasing negativity in the discourse and attitudes about immigration was revealed by numerous empirical research, especially since the 2015 migration crisis. While Hungary is always mentioned as a country of extreme anti-immigration, Germany can be regarded as a counter example in several aspects. First, leading politicians took greatly different attitudes and communication: Viktor Orbán's exclusionary politics towards immigrants and refugees was a complete opposite to Angela Merkel's "Willkommenspolitik" in 2015. Second, whereas Hungarian media outlets and politicians represent a negative picture about immigration overwhelmingly, more inclusive aspects appear in the German discourse. This comparative study focuses on the dynamics and prevalence of more positive or inclusive immigration frames, and examines Facebook posts of media outlets and leading politicians in Hungary and Germany between 2014 and 2022. This time frame is sufficient to outline trends before and after the 2015 migration crisis, to have an overview about the coronavirus pandemic, when the immigration discourse was obviously less intensive, and to include the first year of Russia's war in Ukraine, which meant a new wave of refugees and immigrants in Europe. Sentiment analysis will evaluate the texts of Facebook posts on a negative-positive scale, and every Facebook post will receive a score respectively. As a result, changes in positivity (inclusiveness) and negativity (exclusiveness) can be detected across time, media outlets and politicians, comparing the two countries. The analysis will reveal, (1) whether the anti-immigration dominance in Hungarian media and political communication is really that extreme compared to social media trends in Germany, (2)

when do inclusive frames appear and how long do they sustain across countries, and (3) whether media outlets or leading politicians hit a more positive tone in immigration related Facebook posts.

### **Gender, modality, and perceived political authenticity in social media: Evidence from an online survey experiment, Panel III, Session D**

*Simon Luebke, LMU Munich; Dennis Steffan, FU Berlin*

The authenticity of political candidates has become a decisive factor in their public evaluation and citizens' voting decisions (e.g., Enli Rosenberg, 2018). In response to this demand, politicians employ self-presentation techniques to appear genuine to constituents. Authenticity is attributed to politicians who convey consistent viewpoints across time and situations (consistency), appear approachable and down-to-earth (ordinariness), and seem to show their true selves to others (immediacy) (Luebke Engelmann, 2022). Social media provides them with new means to perform these authenticity elements, enabling direct communication with followers and the bypassing of journalistic media (Szebeni Salojärvi, 2022). Given that traditional media tend to portray female politicians as less authentic (Parry-Giles, 2014), social media can provide a solution, particularly for female candidates, to enhance their authenticity ratings. Yet, we still know little about how politicians can effectively perform authenticity on social media and how gender and self-presentation modes (text vs. image) influence perceived authenticity. In this study, we draw on the literature on the relationship between authenticity, self-presentation, gender, and modality in social media to examine how politicians' gender (male vs. female) and modes of self-presentation (text-only, image-only, and text-image combined) affect perceived political authenticity. We define perceived political authenticity as citizens' subjective assessment by citizens of whether they believe politicians are true to themselves. Results from a 2x3 online survey experiment in Germany (N = 1,485) show that candidate gender alone does not explain differences in the perceived authenticity for fictitious politicians when self-presentation is held consistently. Furthermore, we do not find significant effects of different self-presentation modes in social media. However, additional analyses reveal that physical attractiveness is the primary factor for higher authenticity ratings. We discuss the implications of these findings.

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### **Political Correlates of Interpersonal Listening Styles, Panel IV, Session A**

*Eike Mark Rinke, University of Leeds; Patricia Moy, University of Washington*

Political voice is a cornerstone of democratic theory and a well-researched variable of interest. Yet, democratic theory increasingly acknowledges that its silent counterpart, political listening, may be just as important for democratic life. But empirical research has largely ignored listening as a political activity. We address this shortcoming and provide the first systematic exploration into the political implications of citizens' political listening styles.

Political listening as a concept. Communication research has traditionally referred to listening styles as individuals' "attitudes, beliefs, and predispositions about the how, where, when, who, and what of the information reception and encoding process" (Watson et al., 1995, p. 2). These styles vary across individuals, with extant research having identified four distinct styles (Bodie et al., 2013; Gearhart et al., 2014): relational (in which listeners build rapport and work to understand others' feelings); analytical (in which listeners withhold judgment and consider multiple sides of an issue); task-oriented (in which listeners work to ensure that their time is not being wasted); and critical (in which listeners work to identify errors and inconsistencies). But we do not know how these listening styles connect to how individuals behave as political beings. We argue that such a connection likely exists, and

characterize relational and analytical listening styles as apophatic listening, which is dialogic and facilitates discussion across lines of difference, and task-oriented and critical listening styles as cataphatic listening, which is monologic and disruptive in nature (Dobson, 2014).

**Data and Analyses.** To understand the empirical implications of apophatic and cataphatic listening, we analyze data from two disparate samples. The first data set comes from a national sample survey of Latinos fielded shortly after the 2016 U.S. presidential election (N = 720). The second data set comes from a wave of the GESIS Panel, fielded among a nationally representative sample of German adults in April and May 2019 (N = 3,770). To measure apophatic and cataphatic listening, we draw on a validated short form of an established instrument to measure individual listening styles, the Listening Styles Profile-Revised short scale (LSP-R8) (Rinke, 2016; see also Bodie Worthington, 2017). We explore how people's varied approaches to listening in political discussions are associated with standard measures of political interest, knowledge, news use and information processing, trust, and participation and provide the first available population-level estimates of the independent associations of the four listening-style dimensions with these basic political outcomes.

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## **Can AI Solve Problems of Online Publics? User Perceptions of AI Interventions in Online Political Discussions, Panel IV, Session A**

*Dr. Dennis Frieß, Düsseldorf Institute for Internet and Democracy (University of Düsseldorf); Dr. Ole Kelm, Prof. Dr. Marc Ziegele, University of Düsseldorf*

Even though technologies based on Artificial Intelligence (AI), have often be blamed to foster problems of online publics such as hate speech or polarization, AI has also been discussed as a solution to those problems, for example by automatically detecting or deleting hate speech. To date, however, we know little about how users perceive such AI interventions and what factors influence these perceptions?

Drawing on technology sociological studies, technical innovations regularly emerge in a dialectical tension of fear and hope. This also applies to AI, which is why this study asks about both, potential benefits and threats of AI interventions for online discussions. Doing this, the study distinguishes between different forms of interventions (e.g., AI that deletes comments autonomously – AI that merely makes suggestions for humans). Using a theoretical model of online deliberation, we assume that perceptions differ depending on how users perceive conditions for public discourse (=input, e.g., plurality), the quality of online discussions (=throughput, e.g., civility), and the potential effects of online discussions (=output, e.g., polarization).

Our analyses are based on an online survey among 1,697 Germans (online access panel; quota sample). Respondents were asked about their perceptions regarding nine AI interventions and about their perceptions regarding the conditions, quality, and effects of online discussions. Control variables were measured.

Results indicate that people's evaluation of AI interventions is three-dimensional: AI interventions that promote (1) civility, (2) interactivity and reciprocity, and (3) diversity. Respondents tended to rate AI interventions that promote civility as more useful and less dangerous than AI interventions that promote diversity. AI interventions to promote interactivity are rated least promising and most dangerous for shaping political opinion. However, the analyses also showed that people's evaluations vary between platforms. For example, AI interventions to promote civility are rated significantly more

useful on Instagram and TikTok than on Telegram. Linear regressions suggest that people's perceptions of online discussions shape how AI interventions are evaluated: For example, AI interventions were evaluated better the more pluralistic (input), uncivil (throughput), and harmful (outcome) online political discussions are perceived.

The study's findings illustrate the potential of different AI interventions in online discussions from the perspective of users. Moreover, it shows that people see different potentials and dangers in AI interventions depending on how they evaluate the conditions, quality, and effects of online discussions. This can help providers of online discussions to develop targeted AI interventions for their communities.

### **Empowering voters and fostering healthy political discourse: Discursive legitimization by digital media platforms in the context of election integrity, [Panel IV, Session A](#)**

*Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, Niko Hatakka, Mervi Pantti, University of Helsinki*

The consequences of the growing centrality of social media in political communication have gained increasing attention. Research has addressed how social media platforms, through their design, user incentives, and moderation choices, intervene in digital campaigning (e.g., Nelimarkka et al., 2020; Freelon, 2015). Platforms have been argued to stimulate more individualized, visual and interactive communication (Enli Moe, 2013), and negative communication (Gerbaudo et al., 2023; Knuuttila Laaksonen, 2020). Further, platforms affect the practices of other actors pertinent to elections, such as journalists, voters, and users (Dommett, 2021; Miller Vaccari, 2020; Thorson et al., 2021).

Following increasing public scrutiny of harmful activities and information operations on digital platforms, platform companies have acknowledged their role in shaping political communication—either as enforced by regulators and politicians, or voluntarily in an effort to self-regulate and maintain their operational freedom. As Moss and Ford (2020) note, platforms' willingness to self-regulate beyond their legal requirements counts as a nascent mechanism for accountability. In this study, we focus on the discursive strategies adopted by the platforms to publicize and justify their actions related to electoral and political communication on their services. We ask, how do platform companies articulate elections as a context through which they discursively construct their role and legitimacy as major actors in society?

We explore the responses and justifications given by the major platform companies (Google, Youtube, Meta, Twitter, TikTok) when publicizing their election-related actions. We use a large scraped dataset of corporate blogs (N=27,616, years 2006-2022). We used automated dictionary-based methods to filter entries related to elections (n=313). We analyze these texts as strategic, discursive justification and legitimization (Suchmann, 1995; Van Leeuwen, 2007) amidst the calls for platform accountability in safeguarding election integrity.

Our initial findings show a shift from an opportunity-focused discourse that promotes participation, digital democracy, and politician-citizen interaction to a more defensive discourse stressing companies' responsible attitude to elections, as evidenced by their transparency efforts, advertising control, fact-checking initiatives, and strategic partnerships. A key turning point was the 2016 US presidential elections and revelations related to Cambridge Analytica and Russian interference. We also detected a change from a US-centered focus to a wider outlook, indicating a reaction to the increasing public demands for a more global oversight. Overall, our findings demonstrate an institutionalization of discourses among the platform companies and highlight their reactive response strategies from feature development (Bossetta, 2020) to corporate legitimization strategies.

### **Barriers to Participation in Polarized Online Discussions about COVID-19 and the Russo-Ukrainian War , [Panel IV, Session A](#)**

*Martina Novotná , Alena Macková , Karolina Bieliková , Masaryk University; Patrícia Rossini, University of Glasgow*

Social network sites offer a unique online public sphere for political communication and opinion exchange, but only a small fraction of citizens actively participate in online discussions. Previous research shows that current online discussions are often uncivil, hostile and polarized. Furthermore, the number of heated online discussions has increased during recent health and security crises. Studies suggest that we are far from fulfilling the ideal deliberative model of democracy with equal and respectful online discussions (Rossini Stromer-Galley, 2019). Despite the potential benefits of online

political engagement and abundance of studies examining characteristics of online discussions (Numerato et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021), research investigating the barriers to participation and active citizenship is limited. This study investigates the perceived barriers to participation in Facebook discussions, focusing on two topics: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russo-Ukrainian War. It explores the perception of the discussion dynamics, e.g., the tone, content, and heterogeneity of opinion expression, that discourage citizens from participating in debate. We collected and analyzed 50 semi-structured interviews with Czech Facebook users who participated in discussions (age: 21-74, female: 35%) during the spring of 2021 and 2022. The results show that, after initial mobilization at the beginning of the pandemic, the crisis reinforced several crucial barriers to participation in discussions due to the perceived persistence of polarization (e.g., spread of disinformation, the bipolar character of discussions, negative perception of opponents), which subsequently spread to other areas and issues. However, personal characteristics and experiences with online discussions shaped the perception of barriers. It seems that mainly less uncivil, non-extreme, and those participants who expect discussions to fulfil the normative ideal of opinion exchange were more likely to be discouraged from participation. Implications of imbalance of shared opinion, considering opinion polarization in online environments, are discussed in the context of participatory democracy.

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### **Join the conversation (but follow the rules!): Grice’s cooperative principle within interpersonal political communication on social media, [Panel IV, Session A](#)**

*Liz Solverson, Nord University*

Social media are an important aspect of the political communication landscape today. Unlike traditional media, social media allow citizens to not only consume but create, circulate, and comment on political messages. Political information travels through social networks, coming to citizens via various social actors, both familiar and unfamiliar. While we have substantial knowledge about how citizens evaluate traditional news media, we are only beginning to understand how the complex sociality of social media impacts citizens’ interpretations of and approaches to interpersonal political communication on social media.

This article contributes to advancing this knowledge, asking ‘What normative expectations guide young adults’ interpretations of and approaches to interpersonal political communication on social media?’ The study is based on qualitative data from focus groups with 20 young adults conducted in Norway in 2021 and 2022. During these focus groups, participants discussed their own approaches to social media and collectively evaluated several examples of political contributions from social media. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun Clarke, 2006).

The study makes a theoretical contribution by applying Grice’s (1989) cooperative principle as a normative framework shaping interpersonal political communication. The cooperative principle states that all successful communication requires participants to cooperate with one another to achieve the common purpose of the present conversation. Findings from this article demonstrates how the cooperative principle guides citizens’ decisions about what kinds of information to contribute (or not contribute) in different online settings, as well as informing their interpretations of other users’ actions. Social media is envisioned as a collective conversation, where the purpose is primarily to entertain but also inform those involved about matters of public concern. Those contributions which adhere to the cooperative principle are appreciated, whereas those which violate it are unwelcome, yet highly salient. Thus, the article offers a fresh perspective for understanding how citizens navigate the noise on social media, whilst highlighting the ways established communicative norms play out in complex online social spaces.



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### **Learning Iteration Process of Social Media: A Framework for Understanding How Actor Interplay Shape Behaviour and Content Flows, Panel IV, Session B**

*Rasmus W. Schmøkel, University of southern Denmark, Digital Democracy Centre*

In recent decades, news consumption and information gathering have shifted from analogue to online media, especially to various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. The prominence of social media platforms in today's hybrid media environment (Chadwick, 2017) has made filtering and curating by learning algorithms central to understanding news creation and exposure (Beckett, 2019; Gillespie, 2014; Pariser, 2011). Existing literature conceptualises the algorithm as amplifying or mitigating existing characteristics, what is loosely referred to as feedback loops (Dylko, 2016; Knudsen, 2022; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016), and thereby it does not capture the dynamic relationships between various social media actors. In this article, I present the Learning Iteration Process of Social Media (LIPS) framework conceptualising that behaviour and content flow on social media platforms is the product of a complex interplay between the algorithms and supply and demand side actors. I argue that algorithms should be seen as quasi-autonomous actors functioning as managers between supply and demand side actors. The underlying mechanism of news creation and exposure is a learning iteration process, where supply-side actors, such as news media organisations, send contracts to the algorithm who can discriminate between competing offers. Based on this theoretical framework I review and systematise the literature on news creation and exposure on social media platforms as a case of future application. Most importantly, future studies need to open the black box of algorithms while considering the demand side and supply side dynamics.

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### **Detecting Algorithmic Bias and Fringe Bubbles in Social Media , Panel IV, Session B**

*Judith Moeller, Leibniz Institute for Media Research HBI Universität Hamburg*

This study investigates the emergence of fringe bubbles on social media platforms, examining the interplay between human self-selection and biased recommendations provided by artificial intelligence (AI) recommendation systems. Fringe bubbles refer to niche communities with extreme opinions, usually located at the margins of the mainstream public sphere. These bubbles can grow and impact

the broader public sphere, as demonstrated by the anti-vaccination movement. The study aims to identify the presence of algorithmically curated biased content recommendations on YouTube and their effects on the formation and growth of fringe bubbles.

The causal mechanism linking exposure to biased content recommendations and extreme attitudes within fringe bubbles is conceptualized as a spiral of noise. In contrast to the spiral of silence theory, the spiral of noise suggests that selective exposure and algorithmic filtering systems amplify fringe voices. Through the specific affordances of AI-filtered system, people with moderate to strong opinions are mostly exposed to information that reinforces their attitudes. This leads to a biased perception of the opinion climate which bolsters the confidence of fringe bubble inhabitants to reach outside the bubble. This potentially has three consequences: (1) the radicalization of existing attitudes; (2) greater willingness to speak out online or offline; and (3) increased mobilization. This means that the spiral of silence is essentially reversed due to selective exposure and algorithmic filtering systems. Rather than being muted, fringe voices are amplified into a spiral of noise.

The study's objectives are threefold: (1) demonstrate that users are profiled to have fringe interests; (2) show that people with fringe interests are exposed to more of that content; and (3) confirm that exposure to fringe content follows an upward trend over time. To achieve these aims, we rely on a combination of data donations of YouTube use data and survey data (N ~ 400) in the Netherlands.

The analytical strategy includes content analysis to identify videos on fringe issues, identification of algorithmic user profiles, and correlation analyses between interest in fringe issues, fringe content exposure, democratic values, political mobilization, perceived societal support, and perceived visibility of fringe issues. The study's findings will contribute to understanding the role of AI-filtered systems in the formation and growth of fringe bubbles and their potential impact on democratic societies.

### **From Subjects to Actors: Citizen Agency in Automated Content Moderation, Panel IV, Session B**

*Anna Maria Planitzer, Sophie Lecheler, Svenja Schäfer, University of Vienna, Department of Communication*

Toxic content in political discussions on social media is on the rise, potentially fueling prejudice and polarization. Therefore, platforms apply content moderation - yet, due to the overwhelming volume of user-generated content, platforms rely on automation for timely action. The issue, however, is that current research on automated moderation is mostly tech-/elite-driven, neglecting individual perspectives, subjectivity, or context which can introduce biases and discrimination in regulating political discussions (Suzor et al., 2019). E.g., perceptions of toxicity and what content should be moderated depend on individual, cultural or contextual factors, leading to the same content being perceived as toxic by one while another finds it perfectly acceptable (Otto et al., 2019). Incorrect or overly general definitions may therefore prove inappropriate, resulting in peoples' rejection of moderation and a reduction of constructive political discourse (Gorwa et al., 2020). This lack of common clarity can result in uncertainty on how to respond to different types of content and a discrepancy between platforms and users. While recent research has tried to conceptualize how to responsibly govern algorithmic moderation through fairness, accountability, and transparency, they also highlight the problems associated with relying on terms that are predefined, highly abstract, and therefore difficult to measure by objective standards (Shin Park, 2019). This is problematic, as top-down approaches further remove agency from the public in times where platforms already alter and steer information/communication flows, pushing them further away from their democratic role. Therefore, we propose a fine-grained approach through interaction with citizens to allow for exploratory insights beyond existing definitions, through a qualitative focus group study across a diverse sample (age, gender, race, political orientation, rural-urban) of adult Austrian citizens addressing what types of comments are in need of moderation and what algorithmic moderation procedures are perceived as responsible. The empirical evidence will contribute to the ongoing debate on the participatory role of users in digitized democracies and platform governance. Therefore, the results will also be relevant for those who employ moderation (media organizations, platforms), as well as to those who wish to understand and regulate it externally (EU, national committees).

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### **News recommenders explained, Panel IV, Session B**

*Valeria Resendez, Theo Araujo, Natali Helberger, Claes de Vreese, University of Amsterdam*

News recommenders' use by voice assistants and social media platforms is increasing. To address the lack of transparency in these recommenders, different methods of explainability have been developed (Dodge et al., 2019). Two challenges arise in this context. First, determining the explanations' depth for the public (Büchi et al., 2021). Second, incorporating these disclosures in different news recommenders (Ehsan et al., 2021).

Existing research shows explanations can influence trust in the system, operating through perceived personalization (De Keyser et al., 2015) or privacy concerns (Dogruel, 2019). Additionally, including voice to the recommender might trigger social presence (Cho, 2019). Thus, modality could also influence users' perceptions.

To assess the impact of explainability and modality on trust, we conducted a 2x2 survey- experiment. We tested the influence of explanations' depth (global vs local) and modality (text vs audio and text) on trust, through the mediating role of perceived personalization and privacy concerns. Our results suggest that providing local explanations can foster a sense of personalization among users, leading to trust. Modality did not significantly moderate impact of explainability on perceived personalization or privacy concerns.

These findings suggest that providing users with specific explanations for recommendations can help them feel acknowledged, fostering a sense of personalization and leading to trust. Additionally, modality may operate independently from the content. This research contributes to the understanding of the effects of explainability and modality on users' trust in news recommenders.

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### **Who encounters and communicates politics on which social media platforms?, Panel IV, Session B**

*Ole Kelm, Gerrit Philipps, Dennis Friess, Marc Ziegele, University of Duesseldorf*

People's use of legacy media to obtain political information is declining. This is especially true for adolescents and young adults with low income, low education, and low political interest. However, exposure to political information is important for forming political opinions. Recent studies have investigated whether social media could contribute to solving this problem, as politically uninterested social media users can get incidentally exposed to political content and become active in a low threshold environment. Still, since different social media platforms offer different affordances, it is unclear to what extent they fulfill the function of political information and participation. Therefore, we ask two questions: How often do people face political information and express themselves politically on different social media platforms? How are sociodemographic characteristics and political attitudes

related to these political experiences and expressions?

Our analyses are based on a quota-based survey of German Internet users in 2022 (N=1181). In addition to sociodemographics, political attitudes, and social media and legacy media use, we surveyed how frequently participants face political information on nine platforms (Facebook/Instagram/Reddit/Snapchat/Telegram/TikTok/Twitter/YouTube/WhatsApp) and how frequently they become active by liking, sharing, commenting, or posting political content.

Descriptive results show that half of Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok users encounter political information at least once a week. On Snapchat and WhatsApp fewer than a quarter do so. Political expressions occur less often: While more than 20 percent of Reddit, Telegram, and Twitter users express themselves politically at least once a week, less than 10 percent do so on WhatsApp and YouTube. Regressions indicate that younger social media users are more likely than older users to be confronted with political content and to express themselves. Education is negatively related to political encounters and expressions on Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. In most cases, sex and income are unrelated with the dependent variables. Political interest mostly did not increase the probability of being exposed to politics or becoming active on most platforms. A right-wing political orientation is associated with a higher probability of political encounters and expressions.

Our findings suggest that statements about the social media are too generalized; the political potential of platforms differs remarkably. In contrast to legacy media, political interest is not associated with political experiences on social media. Via incidental exposure, social media may for those users be part of a solution to compensate for the decline in the political use of legacy media.

### **How do news media and internet use affect individuals' climate change predispositions, Panel IV, Session C**

*Peter Van Aelst, University of Antwerp; Marthe Walgrave, University of Antwerp*

As scientific knowledge about what we need to do to prevent climate change is now widely established, climate change has mainly become a social and political problem. The challenge primarily is to change people's behaviour and implement substantial climate policies. Because public opinion indirectly drives policies, it is relevant to analyse what the public thinks about climate policies and, what drives people's opinion about (addressing) climate change. The news media have repeatedly been portrayed as being a powerful actor that may affect public opinion on this matter—the main reason being that the media's climate frames may impact people's climate policy support. However, the exact effect of news media on individuals' climate predispositions is unclear and remains debated. Research is limited and fragmented, and results contradict each other. Even less is known about the effect of digital and social media use on climate predispositions. This study aims to better understand how news media and internet use affect individuals' climate change predispositions. Concerning the dependent variables, a distinction is made between knowledge, attitudes and behaviour related to climate change. Regarding the independent variables, the study provides a novel, fine-grained measurement of individual news media and internet use. For instance, specific media-outlets and certain specific forms of internet use are tested, going beyond the testing of types of news media (e.g. TV vs. newspapers). The study draws on an extensive cross-sectional survey (N= 1.300) conducted in Belgium and will be later linked with a content analyses of the climate change coverage in the different traditional and online media. Results of a pilot study (using a non-representative sample) point towards an outlet-specific media-effect. As popular and elite media vary both in the amount of attention given to climate change and in their framing of climate issues, the pilot study found that elite media use contributed to higher levels of climate knowledge, attitudes and behaviour while popular media use led to the exact opposite. Confirming this outlet-specific media-effect would be a substantial contribution to what is known about information sources and climate predispositions.

### **Faulty news coverage causes a bad mood – how media coverage subtly affects the negotiation outcomes of political conflicts, Panel IV, Session C**

*Marlene Schaaf, Christina Viehmann, Mathias Weber, Oliver Quiring, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz*

Negotiations are a key mechanism for solving political conflicts, e.g., to decide on a tax reform or bring an agreement into wage disputes among unions and employers' organizations (Benz, 2007). The results of these decision-making processes often depend, amongst other factors, on the atmosphere at the bargaining table. Contrary to the normative ideal (Sarcinelli, 2011), negotiations are



not free of subjective perceptions and feelings (Bazerman Chugh, 2006, Forgas, 1998). Following Mood-Management (Zillmann, 1988) and Appraisal-Theory (Schmidt-Atzert et al., 2014) media can have a decisive impact on such feelings. Particularly, if negotiations are in the public spotlight, (subtle) media influences become plausible. However, little is known about 1) how the atmosphere among negotiators can be affected by the media and 2) how these media-induced feelings affect their actions.

Relying on a mixed-method design, we provide both generalizable insights and a deep understanding of the specific contexts and mechanisms. In detail, we combine a quantitative survey among negotiation experts (N = 326) in the field of collective bargaining with extensive and exclusive qualitative interviews with 33 high-ranked negotiation experts from employers' associations and trade unions.

A path model showed that the degree of public attention was directly associated with a poorer atmosphere at the negotiating table. If the negotiators perceived a lot of public attention for their negotiation, not only the climate was harmed, but also the evaluation of the negotiation outcome was dampened. While a perceived bias in reporting was not associated with a worse atmosphere, a perceived lack of accuracy dampened the mood among the negotiators, which was also linked to a poorer evaluation of the negotiation on an outcome level. The interviews stressed the relevance of a pleasant working atmosphere: Although the climate was enclosed by stable negotiation rituals, public attention had the power to create a general tension at the negotiating table. In particular, perceived failures in media coverage caused anger and frustration among the negotiators. However, publicity was also instrumentalized to regulate the atmosphere among the parties.

Since both studies retrospectively measured the atmosphere in the negotiation process, findings are not immune to bias. However, the combination of both data sets provides unique insights into the emergence and consequences of media-induced sentiments among societal decision-makers, which can also have a long-term impact on negotiation cultures.

### **Facilitating Societal Change through Fear? Effects of Gain and Loss Frames in Media Climate Communication, Panel IV, Session C**

*Alina Jakob, Department of Communication, JGU Mainz*

Societal change is needed to mitigate anthropogenic climate change. As one of the most relevant sources of climate information for the population (Schäfer Painter, 2021), news media have the potential to facilitate this change. For example, through a specific depiction of the climate future, frames can “ultimately shape actual future pathways” (Guenther et al., 2022, p. 132). However, in line with prospect theory studies, it is questionable whether the use of gain frames, which highlight solution paths, would not be more effective than the dominant loss frames, which emphasize drastic consequences inaction (León et al., 2021). Based on these considerations, this study examines the extent to which media frames can influence pro-climate attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, since the current media reality is multimodal and to expand existing framing research that focuses mainly on textual or verbal frames (Geise Baden, 2015), this paper pays particular attention to frames from different modalities. We developed a 3x2 experimental design that considered textual, visual, and multimodal framing effects (factor 1: modality) of gain and loss frames (factor 2: outcome frame). Results show that loss frames of all modality groups lead to stronger climate policy engagement than gain frames. For other dependent variables, such as support for climate policy, fully mediated relationships can be demonstrated via the fear response evoked by loss frames. This study thus identifies a central, but so far largely neglected mediator in this context. Furthermore, it becomes clear, that the use of certain frames can contribute to the necessary societal change and thus be a part of the actual solution, the implementation of political mitigation measures.

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### **Living up to its promise? Effects of Solutions Journalism on Pro-Environmental Opinions and Behavior, Panel IV, Session C**

*Andreas Schuck, University of Amsterdam*

The public receives most of their information about the issue of global climate change from the media. At the same time, news media have an inherent negativity bias and political psychology suggests that people are more attentive to negative news. However, exposure to negativity or fear appeals can make citizens shrink from action (O'Neill Nicholson-Cole, 2009), especially when such information does not provide cues about possible remedies to the problem. Solutions journalism discusses societal problems in combination with viable solutions, integrating practical solutions as well as explanations of how and why resolving strategies work (or don't work). Compared to conventional journalistic practice, solutions journalism thus not only presents problems, challenges, and conflict but tries to provide a more comprehensive picture by also including information about possible solutions. Empirical research about the effects of solutions journalism, however, is still only just emerging. Findings suggest solutions journalism does have the potential to increase perceived knowledge and interest in the topic (Curry Hammonds, 2014) and is generally well appreciated by audiences – but does solutions journalism really live up to its promise? Findings regarding possible behavioral effects of solutions journalism are, for example, mixed at best and previous research has called for further research to disentangle the exact conditions under which solutions journalism might have effects on audiences, and which underlying mechanisms might explain these (McIntyre Gyldensted, 2017). The current study is concerned with exactly this question and directly relates to the conference theme as its central aim is to test effective communication for solving political problems, i.e. climate change in this context. Based on an experiment (N=1,006), conducted in Germany, the study shows that how solutions are being framed matters and different frames have different effects on audiences. Further, it shows that emotions mediate the effects and that exposure to solutions journalism can reduce negative emotions which, however, makes citizens less concerned about the problem and, unintendedly, leads to lower levels of engagement.

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### **Social Cohesion through Media? On the Interplay of Media Use, Media Representation, and Social Cohesion, Panel IV, Session C**

*Daniel Stegmann, Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz/Department of Communication*

In recent years, social cohesion has seemingly become increasingly fragile, as Western societies are divided along ideologies, party lines, or group memberships (Iyengar et al., 2019; McCoy et al., 2018). Digital and traditional media alike are accused of fostering these divisions by fragmenting audiences or exacerbating polarization (Sunstein, 2018). However, this narrowed perspective neglects the cohesive potential of media coverage which is conceptualized and empirically tested in this paper.

I argue that news media promote social cohesion by adequately representing social heterogeneity. News media are supposed to be a public forum that adequately represents diverse voices, positions, and issues (Habermas, 1996, 2022). By seeing their important issues and perspectives publicly represented, individuals can perceive themselves as a valid part of the citizenry (Imhof, 2011; Strömbäck, 2015). Conversely, media representation enables insight into the "lifeworld" of other social groups. This knowledge about each other is likely to connect and create a sense of community by reducing social distance and promoting tolerance towards citizens with different perspectives (Jakubowicz, 2007; Schiappa et al., 2005).

Perceptions of media representation depend on different media types, people use to obtain current information (Jandura et al., 2018). For example, public service broadcasting (PSB) is supposed to provide diverse coverage and represent all social groups (Mahrt, 2019; Udris et al., 2023), while anti-systemic right-wing alternative media (RWAM) may undermine social cohesion through narratives that explicitly exclude groups, for example ethnic minorities, from being part of society (Holt, 2018).

To explore the relationships between the use of different media types, media representation, and social cohesion, I conducted a representative cross-sectional, mixed mode survey (50% each CATI and CAWI) in Germany in August and September 2022 (N = 1008). Multiple regression and mediation analyses confirm that perceived adequate media representation is positively associated with social cohesion while these perceptions depend on the types of media people use. In addition to direct effects of media use on social cohesion, the analysis reveals indirect effects: For example, and as expected, the use of PSB positively impacts perceived media representation and, partly mediated by high levels of perceived media representation, social cohesion, while the opposite is true for RWAM. Overall, thus, media coverage has cohesive and divisive potential, dependent on the type of media. The presentation will expand on these findings and include more media types to provide a comprehensive picture of the links between media use, representation, and social cohesion.

### **Discursive Polarisation: An Analytical Framework, Panel IV, Session D**

*Michael Brüggemann Hendrik Meyer, Universität Hamburg / TNI (The New Institute)*

To guide future empirical studies of polarisation in media content, we introduce the concept of Discursive Polarisation defined as a process of social divergence emerging in communication. It may emerge in direct and mediated communication and in both digital media networks and journalistic content as interconnected drivers of this process. Discursive polarisation may disrupt the public sphere if left untamed. It is a multi-dimensional meta-process that can be measured drawing on the basic distinction between ideological polarisation (increasing disagreement about issues) and affective polarisation (growing disaffection between groups). We propose a framework that combines the analysis of journalism and digital networks, looking (1) at the content of statements and (2) at networked interactions that are relating to both ideological and affective polarisation, thus opening a four-field matrix. Exploring Discursive Polarisation may help us to understand the wider social phenomenon of polarisation: before societies break apart, debates break apart.

### **Determining the Drivers and Dynamics of Partisanship and Polarisation in Online Public Debate, Panel IV, Session D**

*Axel Bruns, Katharina Esau, Tariq Choucair, Sebastian Svegaard, Samantha Vilkins  
Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology*

The literature on polarisation has seen a proliferation of possible types of polarisation in recent years: from conventional forms of ideological and issue-based polarisation through affective and identity-based polarisation to interpretive and interactional polarisation, and beyond. It remains unclear how these may be systematically identified and distinguished by comparative empirical work, especially if such work is also going to take into account national and regional specificities. We present a conceptual framework of a large-scale research project that explores the drivers and dynamics of partisanship and polarisation in online public debate. We approach this challenge by identifying four major domains: polarisation in news coverage; polarisation amongst news audiences; polarisation in online public discourse; and polarisation in the underlying structure of online networks. Further, it is important to note that not all polarisation is inherently problematic. We therefore also ask at what point polarisation turns from benign to destructive.

### **Taking Polarisation to the Meso-level: An Analytical Framework for Assessing Positional Changes within the Climate Movement and Political Parties, Panel IV, Session D**

*Christiane Eilders Henri Mütschele, Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf*

Existing research on polarisation mostly refers to the distance measurement of societal groups (macro-level) or individual positions (micro-level). Conceptualisations and empirical analyses

of polarisation on the meso-level, alias within groups, represent a gap in the research landscape on polarisation. The relevance of this perspective is illustrated by the differentiation of the climate movement in Germany, which has generated several groups with varying degrees of radicalization. We present an analytical framework to measure movement directions of positional changes of groups within the climate movement and within political parties based on several dimensions of political conflict (e.g. left-right, GAL-TAN), of which one potential outcome is polarisation. In order to identify and assess factors that affect groups' positions over time, a content analysis of groups' manifestos and public communication will be conducted and the distances between groups will be measured.

### **Breaking comfort zones: Media trust, out-group media exposure, and reducing affective polarization, Panel IV, Session D**

*Jihye Park, University of Zurich; Ben Warner, University of Missouri*

As affective polarization became intensified in the high-choice media environment, much scholarly attention has been paid to various ways of reducing affective polarization. There are myriad evidences that prove the depolarizing effects of out-party media exposures (Garrett et al., 2014; Garrett Stroud 2014). However, it is less known through which mechanism and which condition media users are encouraged to consume counter-attitudinal media outlets or more balanced media outlets and its spill-over effects on reducing affective polarization (Castro-Herrero et al., 2018; Wojcieszak et al., 2020). Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to explore conditions to promote partisans to expose themselves to counter-minded or balanced media (i.e., out-party media and mainstream media), thereby alleviating affective polarization, especially out-group hostility.

The current study focuses on media trust and its effects on media selection and further outgroup hostility alleviation. Given that trust is defined as “the expectation that the interaction with the trustee would lead to gain rather than losses” (Tsfati Cappella, 2003, p. 506), partisans with strong media trust may consume specific media to gain and learn new and useful political information. With regard to information utility, there are more chances to gain useful information through cross-cutting media or balanced media exposures because out-party media or mainstream media offer opposing views or both sides of a political issue which are less or never delivered in in-party media.

We argue that individuals with strong media trust less rely on inparty media outlets or like-minded political contents. In contrast, they are more motivated to explore diverse political contents and media resulting in attenuating out-group animosity. That is, we assume that media trust indirectly reduces out-group hostility through cross-cutting and mainstream media exposures. For this study, a survey is conducted in the U.S. and South Korea respectively. OLS regression models and mediation model are used to test the depolarizing effects of media trust.

This study has several contributions. This study introduces the role of media trust and attempts to explain the mechanism how media trust influences media selection and even reducing out-group hostility. It will help us understand the extent to which people trust media and how much it matters for media selection. In addition, this study offers a potential remedy to reduce affective polarization and provide practical advice to journalists and media companies that creating reliable media environments matters to reduce intergroup bias.

### **Does party positions matter for the media? Exploring the relationship between political party positions and media, Panel V, Session A**

*Andreea Stancea, Despina Adrian-Nicu, National School of Political Studies and Administrations*

Media leaning has become a significant concern for media scholars and practitioners in recent years. The increasing polarization of political discourse and the rise of partisan media outlets have exacerbated this issue. Media leaning is often associated with political parties, with media outlets being accused of favoring a particular party's positions. However, the relationship between media leaning and party positions remains unclear, and there is a need to explore this relationship further. In this context, this paper aims at examining the relationship between party positions and media, and to understand how this relationship varies across different contexts. The paper is trying to answer three main research questions: (1) To what extent do party positions influence media? (2) How does the relationship between party positions and media vary across different contexts, such as party system type and media market characteristics? and (3) What are the potential implications of this relationship

for political outcomes, such as voter attitudes and electoral success? To address these questions, this paper utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis of party positions with survey data analysis. The qualitative analysis will involve coding media coverage of political parties according to their perceived ideological leaning, as well as coding party platforms and manifestos according to their policy positions. Employing an original dataset collected in 2023 in Romania, this paper compares the opinions of experts and individuals regarding party positions and the actual party positions as resulted from the content analysis. The paper is expected to yield several potential findings. First, it is anticipated that party positions will have a significant influence on media leaning, with parties that adopt more extreme or distinctive positions receiving more polarized media coverage. Second, the study may find that the relationship between party positions and media leaning varies across different party system types, with more fragmented systems showing a stronger relationship. Finally, the study may uncover implications of this relationship for political outcomes, such as the impact on voter attitudes towards political parties and the potential for electoral success. This paper will contribute to our understanding of the complex relationship between political parties and the media, shedding light on the potential role of party positions in shaping media coverage. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study will provide a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of this relationship, highlighting the potential implications for political outcomes. The findings of this paper may also have practical implications for political parties and media outlets, helping them to better navigate this relationship and optimize their communication strategies.

### **One people, across conflict lines. Experimental evidence on the unifying power of morality frames in populist appeals , Panel V, Session A**

*Linda Bos, Alessandro Nai, Mohamed Saadettin, University of Amsterdam*

To what extent are moral appeals in populist messages able to reach across different sides of societal cleavages? To unite different 'peoples' populists need a strong communication frame, one that highlights commonalities and minimizes any differences. Central to the populist frame is the moral distinction between the people and the elite; the people are good, moral, honest and pure, and the elite is bad, immoral and corrupt. This "vertical" distinction between the people and the elite is rooted in morality. We argue that the moral populist frame can, under certain circumstances, yield a unifying power that transcends traditional conflict lines and unite different peoples under the banner of "people-as-underdog." We expect this to be particularly the case among voters showcasing high levels of populist attitudes, on, and voters showcasing higher levels of systemic victimhood. We present comparative evidence from online survey experiments fielded in the three countries (n=1800 for each), with an equal-size sample on each side of the conflict: (i) the United States: political conflict between Republicans and Democrats; (ii) Belgium: economic/cultural conflict between Walloon Flemish regions; (iii) Spain: nationalist conflict between Catalonia and Spain. A 1x4-between-subjects task experiment investigates differences between four conditions: (1) empty (no stimulus), (2) control (negative message about politics) (3) populist (populist message about politics), and (4) populist moral (populist message is moralized). Dependent variables tap (1) attitudes towards people across the conflict line, using feeling thermometers, social distance items and moral disengagement, as well as (2) perceptions of commonalities across conflict lines, measured with perceived collective identity and shared victimhood. Populist attitudes and systemic victimhood are included as moderators. Expectations are preregistered.

The results from a pilot study (United States, n=1,751) lend no support to our general expectation that moral populist frames change attitudes towards the outgroup, but populist attitudes and systemic victimhood did moderate the main effects. Based on insights from the pilot study, the manipulations were strengthened and piloted (n=305), serving as input for the main study, which will generate insights on the impact of these frames in three different countries. While we want to refrain from drawing final conclusions on the basis of the first pilot study, these findings indicate that moral populist frames can bridge conflict lines, but only for subsets of the population. The main study will show whether these results hold in the three cases under study.

### **Constructing COVID-19 Disinformation Narratives: The Weaponization Of Public Discontent As Populist Political Communication Strategy, Panel V, Session A**

*Roxana-Varvara Boboc, Flavia Durach, Cătălina Nastasiu, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration*

## **From the ideological underdog to communication mainstream: The impact of the populist style on social media campaigning, Panel V, Session A**

*Yunis Mir, University of Warsaw*

Populism has left an imprint on European politics through the last decade. The ideological positions of the populist parties have been primed in the media discussion, while the non-populist political parties had to respond to the issues that the former raised. As a result, radical ideologies have been accepted in the political discourse (Mondon Winter, 2020). However, the role of ideologies has been diminishing through the years, as the current political parties adopt syncretic ideological positions that encompass an ample spectrum of different ideas. Moreover, populist ideological positions are hardly self-sufficient without the main ideas, which could equally be liberal, right-wing, or leftist. Alternatively, the style of the populist political parties is something that makes them stand out from the rest. The vivid, emotional, and provocative character of political communication unites populist politicians globally. Even more, this style shaped the party-political communication of non-populist parties, which turn to some populist frames to stay competitive for electoral attention. This theoretical paper assesses the impact of the populist style on political communications. In particular, the research harnesses the example of the 2022 social media campaign for the Italian general elections as the case study. It claims that the populist style has influenced electoral campaigning on social media by appreciating vivid appearance, provocative language, and rhetoric, as well as the simple short messaging for the campaign. As a result, ideologically non-populist parties tend to employ populist frames in their rhetoric to attract more attention from social media users.

## **“But I want to believe that the news is true!” The limited effect of warning labels and friend’s recommendations on political partisans’ perception of fake news credibility, Panel V, Session A**

*Natalie Ryba, Ole Kelm, Marco Dohle, University of Duesseldorf*

Fake news are often not recognized as such by individuals. Especially, political partisans more likely believe and spread fake news via social media when these correspond to their own opinion. This can have serious political consequences. One way to help identify information as misleading are warning labels from fact checkers. However, these warning labels are not the only possible information which could affect social media users’ perception of fake news credibility. Additionally, there are social cues, such as when a friend recommends a certain fake news. Therefore, the question arises to what extent the perception of credibility of fake news among partisans in a conflict is influenced by warning labels and friend’s recommendations.

Our analyses are based on a 2x2x2-between-subjects experiment among supporters and opponents of the speed limit on the German Autobahn (N=522). Participants were randomly exposed to a fake news Facebook post of the non-existent news website “Magazin24” (“New study shows: Speed limit brings neither safety nor CO2 reduction”). The post varied concerning the warning label (factor 1: with/without label) and concerning a friend’s recommendation (factor 2: with/without recommendation; similar approach: Kaiser et al., 2021). Moreover, participants’ opinion on the speed limit was considered (quasi-factor 3: opponents/supporters). After exposure, participants were asked how credible the post is and how likely they would actively respond to the post (corrective/disseminative actions).

Three-way ANOVA indicate that neither the warning label nor the friend’s recommendation influence the perceived credibility of the post or the participants’ reactions. Only participants’ topic-specific attitude was decisive: Opponents of the speed limit considered the post much more credibly than the supporters did. Opponents were also more likely to disseminate the post (e.g., share it), whereas supporters were more likely to correct it (e.g., by comments). Credibility was a strong mediator between political opinion and corrective/disseminative actions.

The outcome that partisans more likely believe and spread fake news when these conform to their opinion supports results of previous studies. However, it is noteworthy that partisans don’t get irritated or influenced by warning labels and friend’s recommendations. But the results also indicate that users are willing to correct fake news that doesn’t match their opinions. Thus, one solution could be that platform providers motivate its users to undertake constructive corrective actions or provide better environments for those actions. Perhaps substantial comments from other users are more effective than warning labels from professional fact checkers to prevent fake news distribution.



## **Beyond anti-media populism: How populist radical right in the Czech Republic communicates about news media on Facebook, Panel V, Session B**

*Vlastimil Havlík, Alena Kluknavská, Jozef Kunc, Masaryk University*

While some news media criticism is essential for a healthy democracy, journalists have in recent years faced increasing verbal attacks by parts of politicians. The populist radical right (PRR) political actors accuse journalists of being a part of the lying elite but also use the news media to communicate information and messages to their audiences. Despite worries about delegitimisation of journalists, we lack empirical studies bringing a complex understanding of the nature of the PRR-news media relationship beyond anti-media attacks. This study investigates the PRR's communication about the news media on the social networking site Facebook. We look at the two-fold constructions of different types of news media outlets: the post-truth attacks, captured through the references to untruthful news media, and how the PRR uses the news media as legitimate actors for their two main functions, as a source of information and an arena for communication. We investigate claims about news media within a hybrid media system: the news media as an institution (the news media and journalists in general), public service media, privately-owned news media, and disinformation (fake news) websites. Analysing conditions that determine PRR communication, we suggest that differences in the news media claims are firstly driven by the populist Manichean construction of society divided into pure people and evil elites, assigning blame to news media and finding affinity with fringe websites spreading fake news. The PRR communication is then influenced by how the PRR party positions itself by adopting a party program increasing its chances of electoral success and by specific contextual conditions (the immigration topic, refugee and COVID-19 crises) which facilitate certain communication strategies about the news media.

To address our research aim, we focus on the claims about the news media made by the Czech PRR leader Tomio Okamura on Facebook between 2013 and 2020. The Czech Republic is an interesting case as it has seen the rise and radicalization of the PRR party led by Tomio Okamura throughout the years. Our analysis builds on a random sample of 1,207 Facebook posts mentioning any news media or journalist, leading to 1,740 news media-related claims. Our inquiry sheds light on the communication strategies used by PRR groups to shape public opinion and gain political support, helps to understand the PRR-news media dynamics, and provides a detailed analysis of the opportunities provided to PRR to frame news media in a certain way.

## **The Spectacle of “Patriotic Violence” in Romania: Populist Leader George Simion’s Mediated Multimodal Performance, Panel V, Session B**

*Teodora-Elena Grapă, Andreea-Alina Mogoș, Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania*

Political actors who adapt their performance to the logic of politainment gain visibility and success in the public sphere. Such is the case of George Simion, an emerging politician and leader of the newest parliamentary party, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), a populist radical right party that proved especially attractive to Romanian diaspora voters. The party currently dominates the Romanian populist landscape as the only PRRP represented in Parliament. In line with some of his populist counterparts and predecessors, George Simion has also indicated an interest in the presidency of Romania. Considering Simion's current centrality to Romanian populism and his high mediatization, our research proposes a multimodal analysis (text and image), aiming to contribute to academic knowledge on politainment and populist communication through a multilevel mixed-methods content analysis focused on a populist leader's multimodal performance. As such, this study looks to identify the discursive and stylistic dimensions of Simion's newsworthiness and mediatization. Additionally, a multiplatform analysis of his populist communication content and style is conducted with the aim of determining degrees of populism. Besides the proposed methodological framework, the novelty of this research is its examination of discursive features of religious nationalism and unionism as peculiarities of understudied populist communication style specific to a Christian-Orthodox, East-European, former communist country. The mixed-methods approach combines corpus linguistics and semi-automated content analysis with thematic coding and visual semiotic analysis. The media-reported performance analysis focuses on content (n = 963) produced by three mainstream online news media outlets (Digi24.ro, Adevărul.ro, and Antena3.ro) between May 2015 and April 2022, while the analysis of Simion's discourse examines his Telegram channel's feed (738 messages and 383 images) between March 2021 and April 2022 and his authored texts between July 2014 and April 2022, published in Adevărul.ro (n = 116). The results indicate that news media reports are defined by conflict (aggression, violence), scandalization, negativity, emotionality, and by a prevalent use of arresting quotes that employ colloquial language (sarcasm, vulgarity). Simion's celebrity populism is styled through an “ideal candidate,” “populist campaigner” image and framed through the emotional glorification (unionism, patriotism, Orthodoxy) of a potentially united

“homeland,” a democratic space that reflects the unadulterated will of ordinary Christian-Orthodox Romanians whose sovereignty is currently undermined by corrupt political elites. He invokes historical narratives (e.g., founding fathers, retrospective utopia) reinforced through othering the EU and ethnic/sexual minorities as forces that threaten the purity of “the people.”

### **Who’s afraid of populism? The strategic use of populist communication by Norwegian parties on social media during the 2021 election campaign, Panel V, Session B**

*Melanie Magin, Hedvig Tønnesen, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Anders Olof Larsson, Kristiania University College; Eli Skogerbø, University of Oslo*

The rise of populism which started in Europe in the 1990 has intensified in the recent past. Feared consequences are increasing polarization, disintegration, and eroding trust in democracy.

Researchers largely agree that the recent rise of populism was fueled by the simultaneous rise of social media whose affordances provide political actors with excellent opportunities to reach out directly to the citizens and mobilize their voters (Engesser et al., 2017). By far not only political actors labelled “populists” make use of populist communication, but it is often them who are particularly successful in doing so (Maurer, 2022).

Despite a growing body of literature on the connection between social media and populist communication, however, we still lack systematic knowledge on how platforms and party characteristics foster its use. Employing the three-dimensional concept of populist communication suggested by Reinemann et al. (2017; see Mudde, 2004), we contribute to closing this research gap by means of a standardized, manual content analysis on how parties utilized populist communication on social media in the 2021 Norwegian election campaign. Norway has not experienced a recent rise of populism and the classification of the Progress Party as populist (the only party which was traditionally considered as such) has recently been discussed. This makes our study a rather conservative test of the spread of populist political communication. We measured the presence and strength of all three dimensions of populism (people-centrism, anti-elitism, exclusion of outgroups) in 2,518 posts by all none parties which made it into the parliament on three platforms (Facebook: 1,030; Instagram: 576; Twitter: 912). Reliability was satisfying (Brennan’s Predige’s kappa > .78 for all variables).

We find that populist communication is more widespread on Facebook than on Instagram and Twitter. Two possible reasons thereof are the larger text-heaviness of Facebook which provides more space for populist communication and the broader user base of Facebook which might make populist communication even more effective. Opposition parties use more populist communication than governing parties, explained by their position which makes it easier to attack the governing elites. Moreover, using populist communication is fostered by more extreme and by populist party ideologies. The party ideology also affects which type of populism is used, with left-wing parties rather using anti-elitism while the only populist party in the sample was the only one using exclusion of outgroups to a notable extent. Overall, however, the parties’ use populist communication is quite limited.

### **A democrats’ playground? A multimodal analysis of politicians’ TikTok use in the U.S., Panel V, Session B**

*Christian Pipal, Natalia Umansky, University of Zürich*

TikTok has rapidly turned into a new venue for ideological formation and political activism. In fact, despite the ongoing controversy related to the TikTok ban, the massively popular short-form video app has become a formidable player in U.S. politics. However, while other social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have been quickly adopted by politicians across the political spectrum, TikTok appears to be a democrats’ playground. Relying on multimodal computational techniques, this paper explores the ways in which politicians use TikTok to communicate with their constituents. We develop a novel empirical strategy to study political frames from video, text, and audio in an original data set of hundreds of TikTok videos produced by U.S. Governors and members of Congress. Overall, this analysis provides new insight into the ways in which U.S. politicians across party lines adopt TikTok as a new tool for political communication and how they employ this modern audiovisual channel.

### **Is gender stereotyping of political candidates coming to an end? An experimental study of politicians’ political communication on social media in Norway. , Panel V,**

## Session B

*Toril Aalberg, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Rune Karlsen, University of Oslo; Atle Haugsgjerd, Institute for Social Research, Oslo*

For a long time, experimental studies have demonstrated that candidates' traits, beliefs and issue positions have been perceived differently purely based on the candidates' sex (Sapiro 1982, Matland 1994). While female candidates are affiliated with certain soft issues such as welfare and health, men are believed to be more knowledgeable when it comes to harder issues related to the economy or foreign policies. This gender stereotyping has also influenced the way voters evaluate the qualities of a political speech and the likelihood of supporting the candidates' party. Even if presented with an identical message a male "politician" is believed to be more knowledgeable, trustworthy and convincing than a female "politician", even in a gender equal society such as the Norwegian (Aalberg Jenssen 2007). More recently, research indicate that voter preference is not a major factor in explaining the persistently low rates of women in elected office (Saha Weeks 2022), and that candidates' issue positions are more important than their social characteristics (Arnesen, Duell and Johannesson 2019). Does this suggest that gender stereotyping is coming to an end? Based on a vignette experiment conducted during the 2021 Norwegian Election Campaign, we no longer find strong and general differences in the way the electorate evaluate a political message depending on the sex of the source. However, while men, in general are not affected by the sex of the political candidate, female voters evaluate candidates different depending on their own age. While young women tend to prefer the female candidate, older women are more skeptical towards the candidate if she is a woman. We discuss potential explanations and implications of this gender-generation gap for political communication and representation.

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## Politicians' online news sharing, news credibility and perceived bias, Panel V, Session C

*Willem Buyens, University of Antwerp*

When politicians share news items on their social media pages, they act as secondary gatekeepers (Singer, 2014) and affect the reach of the item and the outlet. Moreover, they might affect the perceptions that are held by their online followers with regards to the content of the news item and the news outlet that published it. Previous research has indicated that the intermediary sender, or the page on which the news is shared, influences news credibility (Karlsen Aalberg, 2021). This study tests the influence of partisan news sharing on news credibility and perceived bias, and accounts for differences between mainstream, alternative and public broadcaster news.

Data were collected through a representative 3 (intermediary sender) x 3 (source) survey-experiment (N = 1,300) with Dutch-speaking Belgian respondents that was fielded in January 2023. Respondents were shown a Facebook-post with a link to a news item. The intermediary sender was manipulated to be either the leader of the party with the respondent's highest PTV, the leader of the party with the respondent's lowest PTV, or the outlet that published the news. The source of the news was manipulated to be the public broadcaster, a popular newspaper, or an alternative news outlet. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the nine treatment groups. In the analysis, the effect of the treatments (intermediary sender and source) on news credibility and perceived bias is tested,

controlling for media trust, news consumption and ideological position.

In general, partisan cues are expected to affect news credibility and perceptions of bias. The effect of partisan cues is hypothesized to be stronger when the news item was published by an alternative news outlet. Findings will allow for a deeper understanding of the effects of politicians' news sharing behavior online and have implications for partisan selective exposure to different types of news outlets.

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## **Choice Architecture for Messaging Corruption: Evidence from an Adaptive Experiment, Panel V, Session C**

*Felipe Torres Raposo, University College London; Professor Raymond Duch, University of Oxford*

The presentation and framing of information are important foundations of many behavioural experiments. In the case of corruption, policymakers such as NGOs face the challenge of informing citizens about the levels of malfeasance found in their local constituency. This challenge implies identifying an optimal messaging strategy that is sufficiently compelling to bring the interest of citizens. We addressed this challenge by evaluating six strategies for information messages often used in corruption information experiments. Using historical data from local governments audit reports in Chile and in partnership with the NGO Chile Transparente, we implemented an online adaptive experiment using a modified Thompson Sampling algorithm (Exploration sampling) in which the assignment probabilities of the information treatments were updated in 11 batches of 100 subjects each ( $n = 2000$ ). The results show no unique optimal information strategy for malfeasance messages. However, a loss-frame information strategy tends to be slightly more persuasive than other ways to convey information about corruption. We also find evidence that less sophisticated information metrics of corruption can be equally persuasive as more detailed ones. Finally, there is evidence that there are no significant differences between using spatial comparison (i.e. comparing corruption in a local government across local constituencies within the same region) versus a temporal comparison (i.e. comparing the same local government across time).

## **The role of values in user engagement with Facebook news posts, Panel V, Session C**

*Cristina Monzer, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Daniela Dimitrova, Iowa State University*

Within scholarly literature aimed at identifying patterns of audience engagement with news on social media, studies have investigated various factors that generate user reactions: news values (Heidenreich et al., 2022), emotions (de León Trilling, 2021) and other characteristics of news content (Salgado Bobba, 2019). In an effort to systematize our knowledge of engagement patterns, researchers ask whether there are “cultures of engagement” that vary across national borders (Ferrer-Conill et al., 2023). Yet, we do not know the role values play in driving these “cultures of engagement” at either the individual or aggregate levels. We know that citizens consider values more important in evaluating policies than content specific information (Lindgren, 2022), which renders value references an important factor for how users react to social media news posts (Kaiser, 2020). We contribute to news engagement studies by investigating how values in connection to different political topics surrounding the Covid-19 discourse of mainstream media drive user responses (i.e., likes, shares, and comments). Our results show that value framing affects citizens' engagement with Facebook posts from mainstream media. The contributions of our study are: (a) we introduce a novel approach to measuring value references in news content with Schwartz' (1992) relational model of values and word embeddings; (b) we advance current knowledge about how value references in media coverage drive user engagement; and (c) we demonstrate the role of values for social media engagement in a comparative setting.

For this purpose, we analyze Facebook posts from mainstream media outlets about Covid-19 collected through Facepager (Jünger Keyling, 2018) from January 2020-March 2021 ( $N=134,763$ ). The two chosen countries--Romania and the United Kingdom--score oppositely on Hofstede's (2011) individualism versus collectivism cultural dimension, which encompasses the extent to which people



are connected to their communities and social groups: Romania = 30/100 is a collectivist country; United Kingdom = 89/100 is an individualist country. We expect the patterns of value references we identify in the media posts to draw on their respective cultural repertoires. Our study follows these analytical steps: (1) identify to what extent media outlets reference values in their posts by leveraging a word embeddings approach already successfully used in cultural analysis - Concept Mover's Distance (Stoltz Taylor, 2019); (2) establish the relationship between value references and Covid-19 topics through a BERT based topic modelling approach (Grootendorst, 2022); and (3) test how values and topics drive user engagement with the posts.

### **Different Groups, Same Dislike? Ingroup Favoritism, Outgroup Derogation amongst Elite Discourse of Populist and Mainstream Parties on Social Media, [Panel V, Session C](#)**

*Laura Jacobs, University of Antwerp; Caroline Close, Lucas Kins, Université Libre de Bruxelles*

Ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation are two central concepts in Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Bornschieer et al., 2021; Tajfel Turner, 1986). While ingroup favoritism refers to a tendency to ascribe favorable characteristics to ingroup members, outgroup derogation denotes a tendency to associate outgroup members with unfavorable traits (Adorno et al., 2019; Allport, 1954; Rooduijn et al., 2019). Various scholars have observed a link between populism and SIT, especially for populism that is grounded in nativism and/or nationalism. Still, it remains unclear to what extent vertical (people vs. elites) and horizontal opposition (between different groups in society) of populism is cultivated by different types of parties. Nowadays, affective polarization seems to be on the rise in which divisions are being created between supporters of various parties (Harteveld et al., 2021). Hence, this study aims to systematically analyze whether and to what extent parties create antagonisms and adopt 'us' versus 'them' frames, taking into account party traits (i.e., level of populism, ideology, incumbency).

Theoretically, we expect negative references to outgroups and positive references to ingroups to be present mostly in social media messages of populist parties compared to mainstream parties. We anticipate that in their discourse mainstream parties will be more likely to refer to horizontal opposition while populist parties will –in addition to the horizontal dimension –refer more frequently to the vertical dimension of people versus the elite. Still, we argue that parties with distinct ideologies –including mainstream parties– will adopt an image of outgroups and ingroups that is conditional upon their respective ideology. Finally, we also expect differences in the discourse on ingroups and outgroups in function of incumbency status with non-incumbent parties invoking more vertical than horizontal opposition.

We apply a broad typology –informed by categorizations in social psychology– of ingroups and outgroups ranging from a classification based on social, economic, political, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and/or religious grounds. To this end, we conduct a longitudinal, quantitative content analysis of 6 months of elite discourse on social media (Twitter) in Belgium in which we systematically examine which ingroups and outgroups elites associate or disassociate with in their digital communication. The full population of Twitter communication by political parties, party presidents and key leaders will be examined. In this way, we intend to develop a typology which can be applied to study ramifications of exposure to this discourse via exploring dynamics in affective polarization, ingroup favoritism, outgroup derogation and division in society. Preliminary results indicate that populist parties –both left-wing and right-wing– are more likely to make references to ingroups and outgroups, although left-wing populists mostly refer to vertical, while right-wing populists mostly target horizontal outgroups. Parties' ideological orientation is also reflected in their discourse.

### **My Truth is My Castle - Mapping and Understanding Networks of Truth Contestation on Austrian, Czech, German, and Polish Facebook during the Pandemic, [Panel V, Session C](#)**

*Alena Kluknavská, Masaryk University; Olga Eisele, University of Amsterdam*

One of the most pressing issues concerning today's political environment is an increasing relativization of truth in public discourses. Politicians challenge their opponents by accusing them of lying and manipulating the people, while creating their own versions of a "truer" reality. Such truth contestation nurtures political polarisation and thus contributes to societies drifting apart to potentially irreconcilable degrees. It is accelerated by social media, through which politicians gain unmediated access to people in a homophilic environment, easily reaching users with similar views and ties. It is



important to map and trace truth contestation in these environments to gain a better understanding of who is taking part in these discourses, which issues accommodate truth contestation more easily, and how the two variables (actors and issues) interact. We use a discourse network approach to investigate the dynamics of truth contestation as well as the actors driving it, looking particularly at the role of government actors who are central in developing and implementing policies and their communication to the public.

Our study is based on an original dataset of 4,913 manually coded claims (out of which 372 are truth claims) raised by government and opposition party leaders on Facebook in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland. Claims are understood as any evaluations or assessments of other political or public actors. Truth claims are best understood as evaluations of truthfulness or accusations of untruthfulness. Specifically, we take the first year of the pandemic (March 2020 - February 2021) as a case in point to better understand truth contestation in a context of crisis, i.e., uncertainty, increased need for information, and a window of opportunity for political contestation of governmental crisis policies. All four cases, while subject to the same crisis condition, dealt differently with the challenges of the pandemic and were met in different states of domestic politics, potentially resulting in different varieties of truth contestation. Overall, our results shed light on (coalitions of) driving forces of truth contestation across four different political contexts. We contribute to the literature on post-truth discourses, misinformation, and disinformation as well as fake news in terms of discourse dynamics between executives and opposition politicians during a crisis.

### **Cyclic Variation Bias: Misperceiving Infection Trends During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Political Consequences, Panel V, Session D**

*Thorsten Faas, Philippe Joly, David Schieferdecker, Freie Universität Berlin*

One disturbing feature of COVID-19 infections was their apparent weekly oscillation. In this paper, we examine the effects of the periodic variation in reported COVID-19 cases on people's perception of the pandemic trajectory and their attitudes towards containment measures. We define cyclic variation bias (CVB) as the misperception of an underlying trend due to regular oscillation around this trend. This bias adds up to the well-known exponential growth bias. We ask three questions: 1) How does the cyclic variation in reported cases affect people's general assessment of the infection trend? 2) How does it influence their prediction of the number of infections in the near future? And 3) how does it affect their support for government intervention? To answer these questions, we first examine official data on daily infections in Germany and demonstrate that the weekly variation in reported COVID-19 cases is substantial. Second, using an experiment conducted as part of a nationally representative survey, we show that CVB has a significant effect on people's general assessment of the development of the pandemic, their predictions about future infections, and their support for government intervention. In this experiment, we reproduced and manipulated a graph of new COVID-19 cases presented in the most popular daily news program in Germany. We suggest that the effect of CVB is not limited to the assessment of infection trends and could help explain the misperception of other phenomena such as climate change.

### **Beyond information: News' role in UK and German democracy, a dual-method approach., Panel V, Session D**

*Imke Henkel, Tim Markham, Birkbeck, University of London*

Research into how news impacts politics has recently focused on "information pathologies" (Culloty Suiter, 2021), including disinformation, lack of trust, and news avoidance (e.g. Bennett Livingston, 2018; de Bruin et al., 2021; Toff et al., 2021). Such studies often build on the implicit assumption that exposure to and engagement with news is democratically desirable. The dominant scholarly and indeed popular view of news underlying this research assumes that news' function in democracy is to provide accurate information that enables citizens to participate in politics on the basis of well-informed rational decisions (Habermas, 1962; 2006). This paper builds, instead, on emerging research into a more complex functionality of news, contending that news engages beyond the structured expression of opinion or information (Papacharissi, 2015); reports, performs, and elicits emotions (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019); acts as moral educator and cultivates "cosmopolitan sensibilities" (Chouliaraki, 2008, 831); or evokes imagined identities revealing as much about the reporter who "draws" a picture of the object as about the object itself (Chernobrov, 2019).

As a case study, we analysed news websites during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic was chosen because it affords a well-defined and shared focus on a common experience. In addition, Covid-19 poses a tough test for democracy's ability to respond (Greer et al., 2020; Karabulut et al.,

2021) and consequently to news' role in a challenged democracy. Furthermore, we compare news audiences in the UK and in Germany to assess the impact of similar yet different media systems (Henkel et al., 2019).

We collected the top news stories from twelve news websites (using place as proxy for importance after confirming that none of the websites personalised the order of their stories) in the UK and in Germany in early spring 2020 and late winter 2021 (N=776). We coded these texts applying a constructed grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) and using the coding software Nvivo. We identified a number of emerging themes that are relevant for news media's role in democracies, e.g. imagining shared communities; evoking reassuring normality; constructing debates; creating temporal and spatial drama; imagining a better future.

In a second step, we recruited four focus groups (two for each country) among the audiences of the analysed websites. For the group discussion, we built on the emerging themes of our text analysis. We find that news audiences partially resist news media's imagined communities and debates, but accept other democratic roles news media take on.

### **Compassion or indifference: The role of news media in constructing empathy during Covid-19, Panel V, Session D**

*Stefanie Walter, Sean-Kelly Palicki, Alice Beazer, Technical University of Munich*

News media have not only been a crucial source of information during the pandemic, but they have also brought attention to how different social groups experienced Covid-19, with minorities being the most negatively impacted (e.g., Baena-Díez et al., 2020; Williamson et al., 2020). Having insights into the lives of others facilitates social empathy and allows us to understand different living situations, structural inequalities, and disparities. This study is interested in the question: How can news media evoke social empathy through their coverage, and how empathic was covid news coverage? Based on previous work, minimal conditions for social empathy are that another person's point of view is being expressed and emotions are conveyed (Hosseini Caragea 2021; Oliver et al. 2021, Shen 2010). To identify news that meets these criteria, we use named entity recognition to identify persons and social groups, and dictionaries to count the relative number of pronouns, and the relative frequency of words expressing subjectivity. To measure emotions, we use sentiment analysis and calculate the relative number of emotions in texts. Social empathy is then operationalized as an index comprising these different components. Analyzing 65,000 (online and offline) news articles published between 2020-2021 in tabloids and broadsheets from the UK and the US, we find that the Covid-related news is rather surprisingly less empathetic than non-Covid news. What is more, we find significantly less empathy expressed in Covid news during lockdown periods while the number of Covid-cases does not have a significant effect on empathy. One explanation for the lack of empathy in Covid news is the novelty and the scientific nature of the disease. In line with this argument, we do see a slight increase in empathy in Covid-19 news across time. We thus conclude that the news media have not realized their full potential in contributing to social empathy during the pandemic by foregrounding people, minoritized groups, and their experiences. At times where debates become more heated and polarized, this study makes an important contribution by investigating how news coverage can facilitate social empathy and in turn contribute to social cohesion. We furthermore argue that while researchers often rush to conclusions about the negative effects of 'soft news' for democracy, they overlook that a more people-centered focus also comes with positive side effects.

### **Who does the public trust in handling a pandemic? The impact of misinformation and populism on trust to political and healthcare institutions in comparative perspective , Panel V, Session D**

*Francisco Brandao, Vaclav Stetka, Sabina Mihelj, Loughborough University*

The Covid-19 pandemic imposed an unprecedented test on governments and authorities, which have adopted various measures to mitigate the impact of the disease. This was particularly challenging in countries with populist leaders who have been known to obstruct the capacity of both public health organizations as well as the media to engage in effective health crisis communication – a task made even more complicated due to the widespread dissemination of misinformation regarding Covid-19 and strategies of its mitigation.

While there is a general assumption that these phenomena have had a negative impact on public trust, we are still lacking a more systematic understanding of whether and how the exposure to

misinformation and populist political orientation affected people's approval of the government's actions during the pandemic, as well as their trust to political and healthcare authorities in case of a future crisis.

This paper aims to fill these gaps, by examining four countries led by populist leaders during the pandemic: Brazil, Poland, Serbia, and the United States. Using data from a cross-sectional survey with nationally representative samples (N= 5,000, collected between November-December 2022), we explore the impact of misinformation beliefs, together with populist attitudes and electoral behavior, on people's trust in the ability of both political and expert institutions to handle a new pandemic.

The preliminary findings indicate that trust in these two types of institutions is influenced by different factors. Populist attitudes are the most significant predictor of distrust in political institutions - not only for national governments but also for local governments in all four countries. Believing in false information related to Covid-19 (measured as a composite index of 14 items), on the other hand, has a stronger impact on distrust in healthcare institutions – public health authorities, scientists, and medical professionals.

In addition, respondents' support for government measures to mitigate the pandemic increased trust in both the government and public health authorities and experts.

The data also highlight the importance of local context, calling for a more nuanced approach when searching for strategies to enhance trust in crisis communication. Populist voters appear to have more trust in healthcare authorities, and governments in Poland and Serbia, where the populist leaders' responses to the pandemic were more in line with expert advice. In Brazil and the United States (where both incumbent Presidents lost in the elections), populist voters mostly distrust political and expert institutions to handle future pandemics.

### **The rationality of the Corona protest movement: A large scale mixed-methods critical discourse analysis of an emergent alternative knowledge order., Panel V, Session D**

*Florian Primig, Freie Universität Berlin*

The far-right Corona protest counter public has become a contentious topic recently (e.g. Dowling, 2023, Zehring Domahidi, 2023, Pantenburg et al., 2021). In this study, I situate it in the contemporary epistemic crisis of our knowledge society that is characterized by growing tensions around hegemonic epistemic and normative orders and accelerated by digitalization (Morelock Narita, 2022; Neuberger et al., 2023; Rosa, 2013; Špecián, 2022). I use a mixed-methods 2-step procedure to analyze (1) how the movement constructs its counter-knowledge order and (2) what specific entanglement of discourses constructs its alternative reality. I focus on the movement's Telegram network and its protest newspaper "Demokratischer Widerstand". I first conducted social network analysis and structural topic modeling on 2,032 Telegram groups and channels (28.832.836 messages between Jan. 2020 and Mar. 2022; topics K = 30; Louvain modularity = .38), and deep-reading of the protest newspaper to get a comprehensive account of the movement's discursive statement repertoire and actors (see e.g. Jäger, 2015). I then conducted critical discourse analysis (Machin Mayr, 2012) on selected cases from the topics and the newspaper issues.

The movement's thematic focus alternates between right-wing extremism, libertarianism and esoteric conspiratoriality and swiftly subsumes new subjects, e.g. Russia's Ukraine invasion, under its normalisms. Epistemic hierarchies empower the ignoramus by supporting his assumptions while partially maintaining their high standing as "parodies" (Holzer, 2021). Marginalization prevalent in the hegemonic knowledge order is selectively inherited, as for instance the strong demarcation from BLM protests shows. Key findings include:

Love, light and hatred: The movement's esoteric/spiritual discourse is fraught with exaggerated and fanatical enemy constructions that expand the movement's scope for action and justification. This discourse feeds the movement's self-image, as peaceful, awakened, spiritual, and, at times, also as feminine.

Global collapse and betrayal: This transnational Q-anon influenced discourse is more geopolitically focused. An imminent global collapse is blamed on an evil elite and eagerly awaited. The betrayal by the elite is evident both in their (imagined) actions and their interpretative sovereignty over society and its crises. Their actions are considered an unforgivable violation of norms that ought to be punished.

Violation of norms: Closely interwoven with this discourse and existential for the justification logic of the movement is the violation of norms by others. Popular subjects are children and other bodies that are penetrated by outside powers. In parts of the movement the savior is Donald Trump, in other parts an ambiguous but healthy/purified people.

While in crises knowledge and interpretative sovereignty are always sites of struggle particularly in social movements (della Porta Pavan, 2017, pp. 297-299; Casas-Cortés et al., 2008), in the Corona protest movement the alternative knowledge order becomes an end in itself. To understand this

fundamental opposition to the established order we must unravel its discursive entanglement - an undertaking to which this study contributes.

### **The influence of media usage and trust on pandemic misinformation beliefs: evidence from countries under populist rule , Panel VI, Session A**

*Vaclav Stetka, Francisco Brandao, Sabina Mihelj, Loughborough University*

The Covid-19 pandemic was accompanied by an unprecedented spreading of misinformation and conspiracy theories, with online platforms being commonly seen as the main culprit by the public. However, relatively little is still known about how exactly people's information-seeking behaviour impacted on their tendency to trust misinformation, and what differences there were among specific platforms when it comes to their users' susceptibility to misinformation beliefs. At the same time, while we know that populist leaders have themselves often contributed to the dissemination of misinformation, we are still missing more comprehensive understanding of whether and how is people's affinity towards populism related to their exposure to and beliefs in pandemic-related misinformation, especially in a comparative context.

Utilizing data collected between November and December 2022 by a representative cross-country survey (N=5,000) in four countries led by populist leaders during the pandemic – Brazil, Poland, Serbia, and the United States – this paper examines the relationship between information-seeking behaviour across both online platforms and traditional media types, and vulnerability to misinformation. Individual misinformation beliefs were measured as a composite index of 14 selected misinformation claims and conspiracies. As for independent variables, we used frequency of consumption of specific news media types (television, radio, print, online) and social media platforms (including messaging apps), as well as people's trust in news media, populist attitudes, and voting behaviour.

Preliminary findings suggest that news media exposure and trust is indeed an important factor for beliefs in false statements about the pandemic and vaccines: low-frequency consumers of news, as well as those expressing distrust to news media, are clearly more at risk to believe in misinformation. We have not found differences between specific news media types; however, this is not the case for social media. While social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube) do not appear to be significant predictors, messaging platforms are strongly associated with beliefs in misinformation in all countries, especially Telegram (in the U.S., Serbia and Brazil) and Viber (the U.S., Serbia and Poland).

Furthermore, the data suggest that both populist attitudes and voting for populist candidates in the last elections significantly increased the likelihood of believing in pandemic misinformation in all countries. The paper discusses how these findings can help us unpack the complexity of the contemporary information ecosystems when assessing the risks of specific media types in disseminating disinformation, and contribute to the more informed discussion on improving society's resilience in the face of future pandemics.

### **Tackling Disinformation Over Time: How Search Engines Manage False Claims about US Biolabs in Ukraine, Panel VI, Session A**

*Elizaveta Kuznetsova, Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society; Ilaria Vitulano, Martha Stolze*

Russian disinformation campaigns have been part of scholarly and political discourse, focusing on computational propaganda (Crothers et al., 2019; Zannettou et al., 2019), on developing tools to prevent the spread of disinformation by identifying and removing false information (Aguerri Santisteban, 2022; Saurwein Spencer-Smith, 2020), and on the relationship between platform algorithms and propaganda content (Bradshaw, 2019; Kuznetsova Makhortykh, 2023). However, we still lack an understanding of how algorithmic systems tackle development of disinformation stories over time and we lack potential solutions for managing disruptive content in real time.

Drawing on the revised 'cascading network activation' framework (Entman Usher, 2018), we used agent-based algorithm auditing to investigate what role search engines play in distribution of the 'US biolabs' disinformation narrative. By simulating user browsing activity from German and Swiss IPs, we examine how Google, Bing, and Yandex retrieve content about the biolabs disinformation narrative in response to queries in English, German, French, Ukrainian, and Russian for two time periods: in June and December 2022. We then investigate what sources different search engines prioritize, whether these sources promote or debunk disinformation, and how the selection of sources varies depending on the location, the language of the query, over short and long periods of time.

Our preliminary results show that neither Western nor non-Western did sufficiently control



dissemination of disinformation concerning the US biolabs and users from Germany and Switzerland were likely to be exposed to unreliable sources of information. We conclude by discussing the reasons for the poor performance of search engines in filtering of disruptive content in real time and propose potential solutions for a more sustainable information management online.

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### **Resilience to disinformation on social networking sites: Motivation and strategies of active users, [Panel VI, Session A](#)**

*Karolína Bielíková, Alena Macková, Martina Novotná, Department of Media Studies and Journalism, Masaryk University, Czech Republic*

Disinformation has become an established part of social networking sites (SNS) and its dissemination affects not only the users but has larger implications for democracies (Humprecht et al., 2021; McKay Tenove, 2021). While scholars have examined their spread and its impact (Hameleers, Brosius de Vreese, 2022), there remains a gap in understanding the potential resilience of users. The importance of corrective actions, such as debunking false information, lies in their potential to mitigate the spread of disinformation (Colliander, 2019). If user behaviour can contribute to the overall resilience of online environment, it is important to study it more closely. This study focuses on users' interactions with disinformation on SNS and their strategies for preventing its further dissemination throughout period that was influenced by ongoing crisis (Covid-19, Russo-Ukrainian war). To understand their motivations and strategies, we use qualitative methods, which are currently lacking in research. We conducted 50 in-depth qualitative interviews with people living in Czech republic over the course of two years (2021-2022). A third wave of another 20 interviews will be collected in the spring of 2023. Preliminary results show that reacting to disinformation is mostly connected to the normative responsibility to offer the correct information to others (not only those who share it but also readers). Other motivating factors include the source of the information (public figures/strangers/family) and the environment where it was shared (news media/personal page/private group). Users often decide to react when discussing topics that are important to them and elicit strong emotions, such as Covid-19 or Russo-Ukrainian war. However, incivility and conspiracies are shown to discourage users. Even active users, who are willing to debunk disinformation are often discouraged after a while by the perceived hostile environment.



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## **PERMEABILITY TO ONLINE DISINFORMATION AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION , Panel VI, Session A**

*Iuliana Calin, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (ROMANIA)*

Amidst the contemporary hybrid warfare, strategic communication through awareness campaigns can be one of the most successful measures in boosting societal resilience against information disorder. Training social media users against the negative effects of disinformation or the psychological inoculation (prebunking) has proven more effective compared to other measures, like dismantling false messages (debunking) (Roozenbeek et al., 2022). In this context, a good knowledge of what causes people's permeability to mis-/disinformation could be of high importance to public decision-makers in adapting their online messages according to the predictors of this vulnerability. People's psychological characteristics can be identified based on their digital fingerprinting, in correlation with their five dimensions of personality, known as the Big Five or the OCEAN model (Kosinski et al., 2013, 2016). Cognitive errors, which increase the permeability to mis-/disinformation, make people view reality in inaccurate ways, to a higher or lower extent depending on their psychological factors and digital media consumption habits. Through a questionnaire-based survey this research intends to establish some correlations between personality traits and digital consumption patterns, on the one hand, and permeability to online mis-/disinformation, on the other. Our objective is to explain the causes of the high impact of this widespread phenomenon on some category of people, by identifying psycho-social predictors that characterize online audience's permeability to the information disorder. The goal of this study is to support public institutions in transmitting adapted messages to the target audience (similar to Google Ads) in order to counter the impact of the information warfare.

Keywords: information warfare, prebunking, strategic communication

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## **Mapping the Disinformation Ecosystem in Indonesia's Digital Politics, Panel VI, Session A**

*Masduki, Associate Professor, Department of Communication, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, INDONESIA*

This paper examines the growth of disinformation practices as means of digital political communication by taking Indonesia's post-authoritarian as its case study. Indonesia offers an excellent example of how globally and domestically sourced disinformation is used in recent electoral contestations. It particularly explores forms, actors, and motives of disinformation and identifies public responses—i.e the development of fact-checking units by several news media organizations. It thus assesses media policies for tackling disinformation and providing ways forward for policymakers.

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world. In its transition from thirty years of authoritarianism (the 1960s–1990s) to twenty years under liberal political and media systems, it has become home to one of the world's largest social media bases. The massive use of social media, with diverse interests and practices, shows how digital media has brought about risks and opportunities. Today, Indonesia's media as having moved "from the darkness of autocracy into the light" and Indonesians are living in a period of greater media freedom than in the Suharto era (1966–1998). Yet, the recent country's politics has been seen as sliding back to authoritarianism, and its digital media is seen as vulnerable to disinformation practices, hoaxes, etc.

To confront the massive manipulation of information that threatens the freedom of expression and quality of internet political communication, NGOs, media houses, and journalists have created fact-checking initiatives to verify the content of publicly shared news. Indonesian social activists and media newsrooms have created fact-checking units such as Masyarakat Anti Fitnah Indonesia (MAFINDO), Tempo. co, Liputan6.com. These ongoing projects contribute to the growing volume of publications considering how disinformation influences the structures and discourses of political communication.

This study utilizes qualitative methods. Empirical materials were collected through document collection, semi-structured interviews, and field observations. Four questions were answered through this research: what forms of disinformation are created, by whom, and with what motivation; what initiatives have Indonesian media and civil society used to counter political disinformation; what limitations and challenges have fact-checkers faced when tackling disinformation; and to what extent do current media policies provide room for disinformation and its counteraction.

This paper offers academia, media advocates, and policymakers a map of disinformation and its responses in the Indonesian digital political communication landscape. It identifies these responses as a struggle to reclaim digital constitutionalism as a reaction to state-sponsored attempts to control the online political conversation.

## **The ineffectiveness political campaign in the algorithmic self's era, Panel VI, Session B**

*Giovanni Boccia Artieri, Valeria Donato, University of Urbino*

TikTok's algorithmic innovation significantly impacts political communication through temporal collision and internalized decision-making in content and relationship building (Bhandari Bimo, 2022). Because of the frequent association between TikTok and disinformation, the platform revised Italian Guidelines during the 2022 election campaign, aiming to be an innovative and safe political discussion space (TikTok, 2022). Although the impossibility of sponsoring political content, as of September 01, 2022, TikTok establishes an ad hoc label to group together content - verified - related to Italian political elections (#elezioni2022; #elezionipolitiche2022). The label was, in fact, meant to serve as a vehicle for information about how to vote as well as to recontextualize campaign-related content. Therefore, it was intended to investigate how the innovation promoted by TikTok may have impacted on the September 25th, 2022, Italian political elections. In particular, we wanted to understand whether and how TikTok has shaped the political agenda and participation in the election campaign. The research was conducted following a digital ethnographic approach (Hine, 2020) on the platform by observing and analysing the production of categorized content through the use of the hashtags #elezioni2022 and #elezionipolitiche2022. The analysis consisted of studying posts produced from July 01, 2022, to September 26, 2022, in order to answer to three research questions: RQ1) what algorithmic practices users put in place, on TikTok, to generate engagement during the election campaign. RQ2) by whom and how the main themes discussed during the election were declined on TikTok. RQ3) to what extent the platform's algorithmic logic shaped the construction and flow of content related to the election campaign.

Through the use of Bellingcat TikTok Analysis Tool, data and metadata related to the posts published with the two recognized hashtags were extrapolated and analysed (n= 872).

The analysis performed allowed us to understand how the platform has declined its participation in campaigning through a new relationship between users and technicalities, ending up depowering and, at the same time, reinterpreting electoral issues in favour of its own algorithmic dominance.

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### **Informing, mobilizing and interacting – A cross-platform study of parties on social media during the 2021 Norwegian elections, Panel VI, Session B**

*Anders Olof Larsson, Kristiania University College; Hedvig Tønnesen, Melanie Magin, NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Eli Skogerbø, University of Oslo*

Complementing a series of offline activities, political campaigns are undertaken on a series of different online platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Each of these platforms have different characteristics or affordances, supposedly making them more or less attractive to different groups of users. In order to fit with the varying logics of each platform, political actors need to adapt their messages to each platform. Drawing on this, the paper at hand draws a quantitative content analysis of Norwegian political party and party leader use of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter during the month-long period before the 2021 national elections to the Stortinget. By complementing the many previous studies into the political uses of Twitter (Jungheer, 2015), our platform comparative efforts broadens our knowledge regarding the online activities of politicians and parties (as suggested by e.g. Farkas et al., 2022; Karpf, 2020; Matassi and Boczkowski, 2021).

Specifically, we focus on the degree to which political actors make use of the three mentioned platforms to urge their followers to inform themselves in different ways, mobilize themselves in relation to the election or to interact with parties and politicians in some way. Based on previous research we code parties' and politicians' posts for indicators of these three types of functions. In total, 1109 Facebook posts, 576 Instagram posts and 515 tweets were manually content analyzed (including images and videos). Reliability was satisfying (Brennan's Prediger's kappa > .83). Beyond assessing the presence of informing, mobilizing and interacting functions across the three platforms, we also detail the degree to which these different types of functions are interacted with on the three platforms. Preliminary results suggest that while Facebook emerges as the preferred platform for informing activities, Instagram is preferred for attempting to mobilize voters. For interacting, the results suggest a tie between Facebook and Instagram. With regards to Twitter, this platform was the least preferred across all three functions.

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### **A digital election campaign in a highly digitalised country: Where are we heading? , Panel VI, Session B**

*Jón Gunnar Ólafsson, University of Iceland*

The small state of Iceland is understudied in terms of its political communication environment compared to most European countries (Ólafsson, 2020). With a population of under 400,000

inhabitants, Iceland's media ecology is very small when matched up against most other states, including the other four Nordic countries. Iceland has close to 100% internet penetration, and with over 90% of its adult population using social media regularly, most commonly Facebook, Icelanders even outperform the other highly digitalised Nordic countries when it comes to activity on social media platforms (Ólafsson, forthcoming). Studying Iceland presents us with an interesting case study of a state that is very far along in digital developments, including digital news consumption. One area of investigation that has been sorely lacking in research concerns how voters in Iceland follow election campaigns. The Icelandic Election Study (ICENES) has been conducted in relation to every parliamentary election in Iceland since 1983 and has studied election behaviour and Icelanders' attitudes towards politics and political parties. ICENES has not had a media component and has not studied how voters follow election campaigns, until the parliamentary election of 2021. In this paper, I present findings from ICENES on the election campaign of 2021. For this, I use results from two different surveys. The first is the election campaign study, which was collected over the final 30 days leading up to the election on 25 September 2021. To accomplish this, we (the ICENES steering committee) used a rolling cross-section design (Johnston Brady, 2002) which makes it possible to detect changes in peoples' perceptions on a daily basis during the election campaign. The second survey is the post-election questionnaire. Findings illustrate that online news sites and social media feature prominently. Results will be analysed in relation to demographic and attitudinal variables and compared to existing studies from larger and less digitalised democracies. What can the Icelandic case potentially tell us about where we are heading in terms of digital political communication?

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## **Prioritizing Voter Groups: How political parties target voters in multi-party systems., Panel VI, Session B**

*Mads Fuglsang Hove, University of Amsterdam / University of Southern Denmark*

How do political elites prioritize certain groups of voters over others in a multi-party context during election campaigns? The prioritization of certain voter groups has important democratic implications, as it affects how political parties communicate, who they interact with, and their policy agendas once they are in office. It is thus important to investigate whether political parties prioritize certain groups, and who they target, during campaigns. We argue that parties in multiparty systems can opt for one of two alternative strategies: coalition maintenance or coalition expansion. Where the first strategy appeals to core voters often on owned or ideological issues, the latter is aimed at persuading other voter groups and independents. Empirically, we can examine the extent to which political parties target voters who previously supported them (coalition maintenance) or rather target voters who they hope will shift parties in the election. We also introduce the concept of 'ad desert', building on the notion of the 'news desert', to denote the part of the electorate who receive the least attention from any party. To examine the strategies employed by parties, we use data on political actors' use of ad targeting on Facebook and Instagram during the Danish 2022 general election. Using the Danish multi-party system as a case, which has publicly funded political parties, low-spending campaigns, and very high turnout, this study adds to the current literature on political microtargeting and targeting strategies by examining the question in a very different context from where it is usually studied, primarily the US. The targeting data enables us to examine how each unique ad has been targeted and who has received it. The targeting information includes demographic, regional, and behavior-based targeting, such as interests, education, and internet browsing information. Meanwhile, the ad impressions are broken down into gender, age, and regional groups. Our findings indicate firstly that political parties in a multi-party context primarily make use of a coalition maintenance strategy. However, traditional major government coalition parties have a higher tendency for incongruity in rhetorical responsiveness, indicating the perceived necessity of engaging in persuasion efforts for parties with government coalition goals. Secondly, we observe significant differences between targeted audiences, with younger people and voters in mid-sized towns receiving outsized attention across most parties.

## **Election campaigns and political knowledge about game and substance: Informed, uninformed or misinformed electorate?, Panel VI, Session B**

*Rune Karlsen, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo; Toril Aalberg, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Atle Haugsgjerd, Institute for Social Research, Oslo*

Election campaigns are claimed not to inform voters in meaningful ways, still, previous research has shown that election campaigns have cognitive effects on individuals, and contribute to an informed electorate (e.g. Hansen and Pedersen, 2014; Nadeau et al., 2008). We contribute to this literature based on the 2021 Norwegian Election Campaign Study and make three main contributions to the literature. First, the literature on media's coverage of politics distinguish between a strategic game frame and issue frames, and show that campaign coverage is dominated by game frames (Aalberg, Strömbäck og de Vreese 2012). We therefore investigate how campaign learning differs between game knowledge and knowledge about issues. Second, we approach political knowledge as a two-dimensional concept, and investigate both factual knowledge and confidence in this knowledge. The latter dimension is crucial because confident knowledge inform political preferences (Kuklinski et al., 2000). Third, we study factors that increase learning from campaigns, and zoom in on news consumption patterns, distinguishing between traditional and social media (Amsalem and Zoizner 2022), as well as motivational and ability factors (Luskin 1990). The results show that voters are more knowledgeable about the game than about issues. The mismatch between factual knowledge and confidence in knowledge is also greater for knowledge about issues. Moreover, while paying attention to the campaign is related to higher levels of knowledge and confidence, the relationship between motivational and ability factors and political knowledge is much stronger. Hence, the already interested and knowledgeable learn more, suggesting that campaigns contribute to upholding existing gaps in political knowledge.

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## **Political Targeting on Social Media: A Study of Tailored Messages and Ad Success in the German 2021 General Election, Panel VI, Session C**

*Christina Gahn, Universität Wien; Simon Kruschinski, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität; Jörg Haßler, LMU München*

The academic literature about political targeting argues that parties adapt their messages to specific voter groups to maximise electoral support (e.g. Strömbäck et al 2013; Stückelberger, 2022). Social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram are ideally suited for political targeting as parties can draw on personal data and targeting options to send tailored messages only to selected users. However, we know little about how parties tailor the content of their targeted social media ads and how this tailoring is influencing the ads' success in terms of how many people see an ad (ad impressions).

Based on theoretical expectations derived from the literature about group appeals in electoral campaigning (Thau 2021, Huber 2022), and party competition (Downs 1957, De Sio and Weber 2020), we will provide empirical answers to the following two research questions:

RQ1: Do parties tailor their ads by using different group appeals for targeted voter groups?

RQ2: Are tailored ads which are targeted at specific voter groups more successful in terms of ad impressions?

We tackle these questions by analysing all Facebook and Instagram Ads (N = 4200) bought by the five biggest German parties in the last four weeks of the 2021 general election: First, we conducted a



content analysis using targeting categories to identify different group appeals and issue content in the ads. Second, we merged the content data with the novel Meta Ad Targeting Dataset, which was released in the summer of 2022, to find out what target groups parties selected for their ads, as well as how many impressions and how much spending each ad received.

We match the strategic selection of target groups with the targeting criteria age, gender, family status, region and interests to the content analysis coding if the ad was tailored to these criteria. This gives us the opportunity to explore which target groups the parties wanted to reach, and how they adapted the message content to these target groups. To measure the success of a tailored ad, we conducted a multi-level regression models with ads' impressions (Cost-per-Mille; CPM) as the dependent variable.

We show that only few targeted ads were tailored. But those which were tailored for geographic and demographic target groups were more successful than non-tailored ads targeted at these target groups. These findings provide novel insights about the strategic use of targeting tailored messages on social media and how effective this strategy is.

### **Campaigning in the Age of Platforms: A Longitudinal Analysis of German Parties Politicians, Panel VI, Session C**

*Mike Cowburn, Ulrike Klinger, European New School of Digital Studies, European University Viadrina; Anders Olof Larsson, Kristiania University College*

Analyses of political communication on social media have largely focused on election campaigning, often restricted to a single election or platform. We instead analyze elite political communication on Facebook and Twitter over a thirteen-year timespan which covers forty in-country elections (thirty-eight Bundesland elections, three national elections) plus two European elections. We analyze posts by the seven largest parties at both the federal and state levels, Bundestagsfraktionen, and Bundestag members over twelve years (2010 to 2021) including 3,467,471 tweets gathered through the Twitter academic API and 960,974 Facebook posts collected using Crowdtangle. Our objective is to better understand how election campaigning structures political communication on these platforms over time. These data allow us to sequence and analyze the communication of political elites in a coherent and systematic way using descriptive statistics and cross-sectional time-series analyses. On the supply side, we find a steady increase in the quantity of social media posting by parties between 2010 and early 2019, followed by a sharp decline, potentially indicating that parties became more targeted in their use of social media, more conscious of the limitations of these 'traditional' platforms, or more concerned about saturation or contamination of messages. This decline is not present for individual politicians. We also demonstrate that strategies adopted during campaign periods have a long-lasting effect, influencing how the parties continue to communicate well beyond the election. For example, we find that parties are greater adopters of new affordances (including videos, hashtags, mentions, and quotes) during campaign periods, the use of which do not then subside after the election.

On the demand side, we find that parties and politicians receive more attention and interaction with their social media posts in the two months prior to election day, suggesting that an important (though likely small) sub-section of German voters are engaging with political social media content when they perceive it is their time to 'do politics'. Campaign periods therefore provide parties with the opportunity to increase their ongoing interactions beyond the election.

We discuss these results using current theories of campaigning, including 'permanent campaigning' and the personalization of campaigning, considering how campaign experiences and election outcomes affect future communication. For democratic societies, our study contributes a much-needed comparative focus on the impact of platforms on election campaigns, beyond case studies of individual elections, and makes transparent how political communication changed over the course of a decade.

### **Shaped by gender stereotypes? Comparing the election campaigns on Facebook and Instagram by female and male top politicians in Norway and Germany, Panel VI, Session C**

*Jörg Haßler, LMU Munich; Melanie Magin, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU); Anders Olof Larsson, Kristiania University College; Eli Skogerbø, University of Oslo*

Female politicians have long since ceased to be the exception, but there is still a gender bias in politics (Teele et al., 2018). They are confronted with stereotypical ideas about «typical»

characteristics and behaviors of politicians that correspond with the traditional image of masculinity and contradict the image of femininity (Winfrey/Schnoebelen, 2019). At the heart of such gender stereotypes – widely shared cognitive structures «about the way men and women think and behave (...), suggesting a kernel of truth» (Ellemers, 2018: 275) – lies the association of men with publicity, women with privacy, and a resulting hierarchical superiority of men over women. Gender stereotypes find expression, e.g., in the association of female and male politicians with different social spheres and a larger focus on the private life of females (Winfrey/Schnoebelen, 2019).

While gender stereotypes are present in political news coverage (Van der Paas/Aaldering, 2020), on social media, politicians can decide independently on their self-presentation (Ekman/Widholm, 2017). By means of a standardized content analysis, we investigate politicians' self-presentation on Facebook and Instagram during the 2021 national elections in Norway and Germany. We analyzed all 4,265 posts published on the accounts of all party leaders/frontrunners (Norway: 4 female, 5 male; Germany: 3 female, 6 male) during four weeks before election day. We answer three research questions.

First, how far does the self-presentation on Facebook and Instagram differ between female and male politicians (RQ1)?

Second, having in mind that gender equality is higher in Norway than in Germany (Becker, 2021; World Bank, 2023), we wonder if this affects the politicians' self-presentation: Does the self-presentation of female and male politicians on Facebook and Instagram differ between Norway and Germany (RQ2)?

Third, also citizen perceptions of politicians are shaped by gender stereotypes, which might affect user engagement (Yarchi Samuel-Azran, 2018), but it is unclear how: How far do stereotypical and counter-stereotypical self-presentations of female and male politicians affect user engagement (RQ3)?

Our preliminary results suggest clear gender differences regardless of country. Specifically, we find that female candidates tend to be more oriented towards Instagram than their male counterparts when it comes to mentions of professional competence, professional activities, home/family, and personal preferences. Female candidates tend to mention home/family and personal preferences more often than their male competitors, but they are also more adamant than males at presenting professional activities (both regardless of platform).

## **Hope and Outrage in Eastern Europe: A Textual Analysis of Emotionality and Framing in the Romanian Online Media in the Context of the 2022 Schengen Area Expansion, Panel VI, Session C**

*Radu-Mihai MEZA, Babeş-Bolyai University*

In the context of a looming European and global crisis, the Schengen Area enlargement was intensely covered by the Romanian media in the last quarter of 2022 as national political leaders sought opportunities to gain visibility and Romanians sought reassurance of a European integration trajectory. Romanian President Klaus Iohannis warned of potential Euroscepticism amongst Romanians in a public declaration in mid-October 2022. The latest Eurobarometer data (Summer 2022) shows Romanians tend to trust the EU and favor EU enlargement but show below average support for common defense and security, common energy policy or foreign policy, indicating perhaps still perceiving themselves as outsiders as research on the Romanian media's framing of the EU refugee crisis suggests. Other previous research covers the „spiral of Euroscepticism”, impact of mediated politics and negative biases of media coverage as well as various issue-specific frames. Previous research on framing of Romania's accession to the Schengen Area (2010-2011) identified generic frames and use of metaphor categories such as “war”, “family” and “sports” as framing devices in news headlines. The most recent debate over Schengen Area expansion sparked heated media coverage of the issue in the Romanian national media, fueled by internal politics and contextualized by new economic and geopolitical factors. New contextual factors contribute to the emergence of new issue specific frames and new metaphors.

In the aftermath of the decision not to accept Romania and Bulgaria, this research investigates shifts in media framing of the Schengen issue and EU (from aspirational to antagonistic) over the course of 2 months (from October 15 to December 15 2022) in the 14 most accessed Romanian online news sites (over 10 million visits/month). Discursive patterns in the sample of news headlines (N=3362) are

explored using frequency analysis, co-occurrence networks, lexicon-based coding and n-gram analysis to identify linguistic indicators of emotionality, generic frames and issue-specific framing, as well as key actor roles attributed to national and international political actors. In-depth analysis looks at narratives denouncing European integration and emergent blaming and antagonistic discourses directed at either foreign or domestic political actors.

### **From migration representations to attitudes and emotions: a meta-analysis on framing effects, Panel VI, Session D**

*Isabella Gonçalves, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz*

The topic of migration has been a prominent issue in politics and media in recent years. A growing body of research has been attempting to examine media framing of migrants and their effects. Usually, media portray migrants as threats to the host society, victims of humanitarian disasters, or contributing to the receiving country's economy and cultural diversity. Results on migration framing effects vary, and further research is essential for evaluating to what extent different frames affect human behavior.

There is a lack of meta-analytical evidence concerning the effects of migration frames on attitudes and emotions toward migrants. To fill this gap, this study aims at conducting a meta-analysis of the effects of migration frames on attitudes and emotions toward migrants. This study's research questions are as follows: (RQ1) the extent to which media frames affect attitudes; (RQ2) the extent to which media frames affect emotions; (RQ3) the extent to which studies are heterogeneous, and (RQ4) which covariates explain the heterogeneity. This meta-analysis can pave the way in examining studies' findings and gaps and better point future research paths for scholars examining frames effects of migration issues. It focuses on experimental studies examining the effects of migration framing on attitudes and emotions.

Findings show heterogeneity across studies included in the meta-analysis. Studies adopt different designs, varying in media materials (news items, photographs, and TV reports), and media frames used for stimuli (such as positive vs. negative frames; mass photographs vs. individual photographs). On average, the meta-analysis showed migration framing has a significant direct effect on positive and negative emotions and positive attitudes but no significant direct effect on negative attitudes toward migrants. It contributes to academic literature by showing that media representation of migrants has a significant effect on the ways individuals perceive these groups, shaping attitudes and emotions.

Through this study, it was shown that studies on migration media framings are diverse. Yet, as past systematic literature reviews have shown, this study has also demonstrated that studies on migration frame effects remain concentrated in the global north. Future studies could expand the sample population to produce studies capable of drawing more general conclusions. This study contributes to the literature by meta-analyzing previous studies on migration framing effects and showing that media framing has a significant effect on the ways citizens perceive migrants.

### **The Potentially Dangerous Connection Between Populist Parties, Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric and Angry Reactions, Panel VI, Session D**

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Right-wing populist parties intensively use social media for mobilization, particularly Facebook (e.g., Lilleker Balaban, 2021). They aim to engage their voters and bypass traditional news media, which they consider to be biased (AfD, 2019). On Facebook, they rely on populist communication features that generate more user interactions: Anti-elitism and exclusivist populism have been identified to increase the number of 'angry' reactions (Bobba, 2018), which in turn algorithmically drives visibility (Merill Oremus, 2021).

Various studies provide insights into how populists attract 'angry' reactions, gain visibility, and mobilize on Facebook. These studies either focus on the message characteristics of parties and politicians in a single country (Mazzoleni Bracchiale, 2018) or do not consider message characteristics (Muraoka et al., 2022). We address this gap by taking both message and party level into account. We ask whether

populist parties are more likely to attract more 'angry' reactions per se (RQ1/party level), whether it is the populist communication style that increases the number of 'angry' reactions (RQ2/message level), or whether these features align with the populist parties' political stance and thus increase their followers' willingness to react with anger (RQ3/party\*message).

Our study adds to the existing literature by answering these questions using data from a manual quantitative content analysis of more than 11,000 messages from 78 parties in 12 countries four weeks before the EP election 2019. To analyze the effects of the party level, we rely on CHES expert survey data (Bakker et al., 2019) on party stances (anti-elitism, immigration). At the level of message content, we analyze whether posts contain a populist communication style (i.e., anti-elitism, people-centrism, exclusion of 'dangerous others').

The hierarchical negative binomial regression models (varying intercepts for parties) show that the reactions increase the more the parties score on anti-elitism and the more they favor a restrictive immigration policy (RQ1). At the message level, both anti-elitism and exclusion of 'dangerous others' significantly increased angry reactions (RQ2). This is especially true for the messages of political parties with an anti-immigration stance (RQ3). Thus, our results suggest that both party-level and message-level factors and their interactions influence 'angry' reactions and thus contribute to the virality of populism on Facebook. The specific combination of anti-immigrant parties' populist messaging, and the multiplier function of 'angry' reactions potentially contributes to the aggravation of public political discourse.

### **Transnational flows in networked misogyny: exploring links between Sweden, Germany and Russia , Panel VI, Session D**

*Maria Brock, Tina Askanius, Malmö University*

Social media has elevated misogyny to new levels of violence, amplifying and spreading these attitudes on a larger scale, with technology allowing for transnational synergies between actors in different countries. Networked misogyny (Banet-Weiser Miltner, 2016), or coordinated efforts of individuals or groups to harass, threaten, or intimidate women online, often with the goal of silencing or discrediting their voices, has now become commonplace, often targeting women who publicly take up feminist positions (Massanari Chess, 2018, Marwick Caplan, 2018). Blatantly misogynist influencers such as Andrew Tate have risen to internet fame on TikTok, lately attracting the attention of a concerned public including educators and parents who report on his ideas infiltrating classrooms.

However, predominant scholarly attention has been paid to male perpetrators, and women are primarily seen as the targets and victims of misogynist ideas. And while the ultimate threat is to the safety of women and non-masculine identified persons, the role of women in perpetuating, legitimizing and 'making palatable' misogynist ideas remains under-researched, including how misogyny works in conjunction with racist, anti- feminist and ethnonationalist ideas. A cooptation of networked misogyny by women not only shows how women can become successful co-producers of oppressive ideas affecting them, but also lends credibility to these ideas, thereby expanding their reach.

In this exploratory paper, we treat misogyny as an intersectional, transnational and digital phenomenon in order to investigate the role of women in abetting its spread. Premised on recent developments in two areas of research, namely work on contemporary instantiations of networked misogyny and on gender and far-right movements, we take a mixed-method approach to data from Sweden, Germany and Russia, which includes both official 'propagandistic' texts i.e., sanctioned, strategic messages emerging from actors operating from within political organisations, groups and campaigns, along with individual female actors operating as 'influencers' on social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram.

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## Reaching a Deadlock – or Breaking It? Effects of Explicit and Implicit (De-)Polarization Depictions in the Debate on Gender-Inclusive Language in Germany, **Panel VI, Session D**

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News articles covering polarized or potentially polarizing topics can significantly impact the public's perception of the climate of opinion, their attitudes towards opposing views, and their stance on the matter (e.g., Levendusky Malhotra, 2016). However, media coverage cannot only foster polarization. Emphasizing commonalities between opposing positions and exposure to personal accounts of the opposing group can drive depolarization (e.g., Abeles, 2021; Beam et al., 2018). But this far, (de-)polarization research has widely neglected the influence of explicit (base-rate information) and implicit (exemplars) media cues on actual and perceived (de-)polarization. According to exemplification theory, exemplars exude more authenticity than statistically valid base-rate information, and thus have a greater impact on individuals' judgments (Peter Zerback, 2017). What we do not know, however, is how the depiction of the degree of polarization interacts with the means that are used to convey it. To address this question, we conducted a preregistered 2x2 online experiment (N = 314). Using the heated debate between proponents and opponents of gender-inclusive language in Germany as an example, we developed four alternative news articles, varying the depicted climate of opinion (factor 1: depolarized/polarized) and applied media cues (factor 2: explicit/implicit). At the issue level, depictions of (de-)polarization triggered corresponding perceptions of the climate of opinion, with explicit media cues proving more effective than implicit cues. Conversely, on the affective level, exemplars stimulated affective (de-)polarization between the opposing group more strongly. On the persuasive level, only the variation of (de-)polarization via explicit media cues influenced opinion mitigation. These results question the significance of the exemplification effect at the issue level but point to a previously unrecognized relevance at the affective level. Our study provides initial insights into the various paths by which media cues can either solidify or help overcome social divisions. Limitations and implications will be discussed in the presentation.

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