

Chapter 6

Comparing news media reach

Exploring effects of asymmetric news media consumption

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the topic of whether news media in different countries are still able to reach the general public and generate a shared public sphere as a prerequisite of democratic countries. The empirical part of the chapter focuses on the extent to which the different segments of society use news media like newspapers, radio, television, and social media, comparing the results from 18 countries participating in the 2021 Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) research project. We conclude that most people in most countries still use the news media regularly, although country-specific gaps exist related to sociodemographic factors like age, gender, and especially education and income. Most conspicuous is an intergenerational gap insofar as young people are increasingly using social media as their main news source.

Keywords: news media use, news consumption, audience research, intergenerational gap, comparative research

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the extent to which news media in different countries manage to reach the public. News media penetration in society is considered to be crucial for democracy and for the population to be informed about and mobilised in current political debates. At the same time, the expanding digital media landscape offers new possibilities for participation and deliberation. In this chapter, news media reach for newspapers, radio, television, and online media is compared across time and between the 18 countries participating in the 2021 Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) research project (Trappel et al., 2011; Trappel & Tomaz, 2021c, 2021d).

Bonfadelli, H., Jóhannsdóttir, V., Nord, L., & Vandenberghe, H. (2022). Comparing news media reach: Exploring effects of asymmetric news media consumption. In J. Trappel, & T. Tomaz (Eds.), *Success and failure in news media performance: Comparative analysis in the Media for Democracy Monitor 2021* (pp. 129–146). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855589-6>

MDM Indicator and related research question addressed in this chapter:

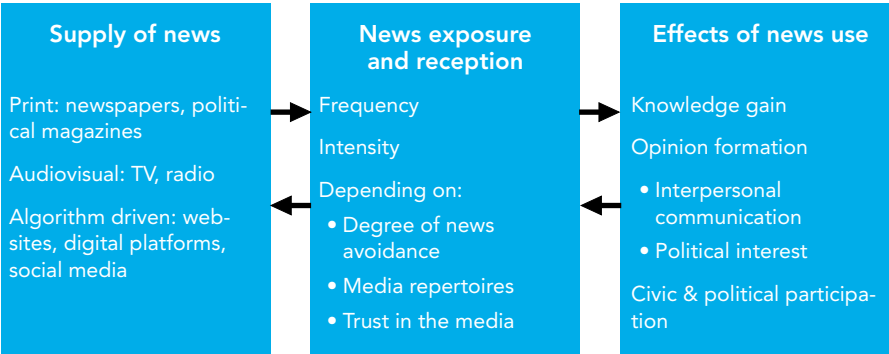
(F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news)

How well do news media in general reach the population? [...] What is the reach of the main news broadcasts? (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 20)

Our analysis is based on the MDM indicator addressing the patterns of news media use and consumption of news, which investigated patterns of news media use in the 18 countries, with a particular focus on how well news media in general reached the population. The 2021 results for single countries were published in two volumes (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021c, 2021d), whereas this chapter makes a cross-country comparative analysis of one indicator. We supplement this chapter with additional empirical data from the Eurobarometer and the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*. Possible effects of widening media use gaps related to age, gender, and socioeconomic factors are discussed as well as the increasing number of “news avoiders” and the role of social media as a substitute for or complement to news media. With our comparative analyses, we intend to shed light on important factors that influence news media reach and gaps in news media use.

Figure 6.1 displays the dimensions of news media use and the circular nature of how supply, consumption, and effects of news influence each other. The figure illustrates the process-oriented relationship between exposure and reception of news with the supply of news by traditional media like printed newspapers,

Figure 6.1 The cycle of supply, consumption, and effects of news



audiovisual media like television and radio, or news mostly selected by hidden algorithms from, for example, social media platforms (Napoli, 2015). Furthermore, the figure highlights the asymmetric effects of news use on knowledge gain, opinion formation, and civic and political participation. Although the supply might be rather similar within a media context, the exposure and reception of news, both in terms of frequency and intensity, will vary substantially within the population, as will the effects of news use, such as knowledge gained and

opinions and activity generated by consuming news. The resulting effects of news use in turn influence consumers' practices such as news avoidance and trust in the media, and these practices and choices affect which supply channels media organisations prioritise. Moreover, factors such as age, gender, level of education, and socioeconomic status further influence the consumption and effects of news.

Media and news consumption: Review of literature

Historically, there is an “inseparable connection between democracy and the media” (Nieminen & Trappel, 2011: 138). In 1787, Thomas Jefferson, one of the founders of the American Constitution and former president, wrote in a letter to Edward Carrington about how important a free press is for keeping the government in check:

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.

Thomas Jefferson (Ford, 1786–1789/1904–1905)

The former sentence in this quote has been cited frequently to this day – but the latter much less so. Yet, the relevance of the news media for democracy hinges on the extent to which it actually reaches people. Digital technology, in particular, has profoundly changed the ways people access and interact with the media in general and news in particular.

Research has shown that what the media report has a profound impact on people's knowledge and perceptions of the world and consequently has an impact on the shaping of public debate (Curran et al., 2010; Jensen & Mortensen, 2016b; Mellado, 2015; Strömbäck & Karlsson, 2011). In a well-functioning democracy, people should have access to – and moreover receive a diverse range of – opinions about political and societal issues (Helberger, 2015), which the literature refers to as exposure diversity. This term “is used to refer to the content that the audience actually selects, as opposed to all the content that is available” (Helberger et al., 2018: 193).

As Jensen and Mortensen (2016) remark, legacy media no longer enjoy the privileged position of attention it once did. In 2020, the frequency of news sources on a weekly basis was ranked as follows within the 79 countries of the Reuters Institute sample (Newman et al., 2020): 82 per cent online (not including social media); 65 per cent television; 52 per cent social media; 30 per cent radio; and 20 per cent print. Although television news is still the second-most important news source, it has become less popular over time. For instance, the

British, Danes, and Germans used television as a news source less in 2020 in a given week compared with 2013 (24%, 23%, and 12% less, respectively) (Newman et al., 2020). Bergström and colleagues (2019) similarly note that the environment in most Western countries has been transformed into high-choice media environments, and that this transformation of the media environment “has triggered increasing interest in the antecedents of and mechanisms explaining news media use” (Bergström et al., 2019: 177).

People’s news consumption differs according to demographic factors such as age, sex, education, and socioeconomic status, as demonstrated by a long line of research (e.g., Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Blekesaune et al., 2012; Boulianne, 2015; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Holt et al., 2013; Newman et al., 2017). Especially higher educated people use political news, as well as men in comparison with women. Empirical studies also indicate that media use is influenced by the structural and institutional context in which it takes place, as well as individual factors and technological affordances (Adoni et al., 2017; Boomgaarden & Song, 2019; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Helles et al., 2015; Horowitz & Napoli, 2014; Meilán & Wu, 2017; Peruško, 2017). One of the general findings is that youth worldwide are shifting to social and online news media as primary news sources. Asked about their news sources, 76 per cent of individuals aged 18 to 24 used online and social media, whereas only 30 per cent used legacy media (radio, television, and print) (Newman et al., 2020).

In the last two decades, researchers have paid attention to the possible democratic implications of this shift in news consumption patterns and caution that the way people use news media are likely to widen gaps in political knowledge, participation, and interest (Aalberg et al., 2010; Bergström et al., 2019; Blekesaune et al., 2012; Jensen et al., 2016; Napoli, 2011; Prior, 2007; Strömbäck et al., 2013; Wolf & Schnauber, 2015). There is no consensus in the literature of whether narrowing media use to mainly online and social media has overall positive or negative effects (Bonfadelli, 2002; Helberger, 2015; Horowitz & Napoli, 2014; Jerit et al., 2006; Ksiazek et al., 2010; Newman et al., 2020; Prior, 2007; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013; van Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Webster & Nelson, 2016; Yang & Grabe, 2011). On the one hand, in today’s news context people have access to news from many different points of view and have opportunities to widely discuss news via online platforms and social media. On the other hand, a main concern is that narrowing media use to mainly online and social media could have negative effects on democracy, namely by filtering crucial information and creating echo chambers or filter bubbles, and having a severe impact on the quality of the public discourse. Such tendencies may contribute to fragmentation by pushing communities apart or creating and increasing information disparities.

Ksiazek and colleagues (2010: 552) note that as people have more platforms and content to choose from, “they also have more non-news media competing for their attention [and] as a result, they are free to seek out large amounts

of news, or avoid it entirely”. This “has triggered a concern that people are increasingly turning away from news and news media to other, less informative, genres and types of media”, which, according to Bergström and colleagues (2019: 175–176), will have negative consequences for democracy.

And indeed, empirical evidence suggests that news avoidance is growing. An early comparative analysis by Blekesaune and colleagues (2012) shows an increase of news-disconnected citizens across Europe, but large differences between the three analysed countries. And a longitudinal study between 1995 and 2012 comparing Norway and the US found that over time, more respondents disconnected altogether from news in both countries. This was more noticeable in the US; the authors argue that this could be because Norway is in an earlier phase of the transition towards news avoidance or, alternatively, it could be ascribable to the different media systems (Elvestad & Shaker, 2017). In 2017, on average, 26.6 per cent of the respondents within 17 countries of the MDM sample (only Iceland was not included) said they often or sometimes avoided news, ranging from 14 per cent of Danes to 57 per cent of Greeks (Newman et al., 2017). Studying news consumption in Sweden, Strömbäck and colleagues (2013) concluded that over time, differences in news consumption had become more accentuated “and that political interest has become a more important determinant of news consumption in today’s high-choice media environment” (Strömbäck et al., 2013: 414).

A literature review by Van Aelst and colleagues (2017: 3) identifies six concerns of the changing media environment in advanced post-industrial democracies: “(1) declining supply of political information, (2) declining quality of news, (3) increasing media concentration and declining diversity of news, (4) increasing fragmentation and polarization, (5) increasing relativism and (6) increasing inequality in political knowledge”. The authors find that some trends represent “a serious challenge for democracy” and conclude the following:

[Although] direct warnings are not warranted, [...] several political communication trends in high-choice media environments do represent a challenge for democracy. [...] And] the most important seems to be increasing fragmentation and polarization, epistemic relativism and growing inequalities in political knowledge. (Van Aelst et al., 2017: 19)

However, research findings have also indicated that people not inclined to seek out news often come across news content through their use of social media (deSilver, 2014; Westlund, 2016). Holt and colleagues (2013) also found that younger people use social media for political purposes more than older generations, which may compensate for less attention paid to news in legacy media. The findings “suggest that there are perhaps fewer reasons to worry than suggested by many accounts lamenting the declining use of traditional news media” (Holt et al., 2013: 32).

Not all trends affect all countries to the same extent, and there seems to be little evidence to support the notion of polarisation or that people are increasingly self-selecting into echo chambers of the like-minded. Most people still get news from a number of different sources and platforms. Newman and colleagues (2017) posit that although filter bubbles and echo chambers may be a reality for some, social media users on average experience more diversity than those who do not use social media. Webster and Nelson (2016) note that while partisans do spend time reading news from outlets they agree with, they also use mainstream media, and are hence exposed to opposing views and ideas. The findings of a study in Austria points in the same direction, and the authors concluded that “despite all possible fragmentation in the long tail, the use of mainstream news media is largely independent from people’s attitudes and hardly polarized” (Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013: 948; see also, e.g., Tammi, 2016; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012).

In addition, trust in news media still seems to be quite high: 38 per cent said in the January poll of *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* that they trust most news most of the time, and 46 per cent trust the news they use themselves. And in April 2020, trust in the media’s coverage of Covid-19 was also relatively high in all countries, and about 60 per cent agreed, that “media has helped me understand the crisis” (Newman et al., 2020).

The *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2020) analysed people’s preferences for news sources that share or challenge their views or are neutral in nine countries (Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Spain, Italy, the US, France, and Brazil). The majority in each country preferred news with no particular point of view or “objective news”, with only small differences between the age groups. In Germany, the preference for neutral news was the highest (80%) and in Brazil the lowest (51%). In the US, although politics and media have become increasingly partisan over the years, 60 per cent of Americans still prefer news reported without a particular point of view, although 30 per cent prefer news sharing their point of view, which is an increase of 6 per cent compared with 2013. Moreover, younger people are more interested in news challenging their point of view than older people, disproving the assumption that younger people tend to live in filter bubbles. However, there is some evidence for polarisation: People with extreme political views are significantly less attracted to objective news, which are the same people who distrust legacy media. Although the polarised news coverage in European media seems to have increased, an up-to-date literature review of the effects of news use on polarisation across Europe concludes the following:

Across Europe there is as yet little evidence to support the idea that increased exposure to news featuring like-minded or opposing views leads to the widespread polarisation of attitudes. However, given that only a handful of

studies have addressed this issue directly, there are large gaps in our knowledge concerning the situation in different European countries. (Fletcher & Jenkins, 2019: 1)

Scholars have noted that the increasing media offer “increases the importance of individual-level motivations [which could] result in increasing inequalities in news media use” (Bergström et al., 2019: 176). Research also indicates that the “interplay between technological affordances and cultural, political, and social factors in part reinforce existing participatory inequalities” (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017: 8; see also Trappel, 2019). Kalogeropoulos and colleagues (2017: 8) also find that the participatory possibilities of digital media give the already engaged “more opportunities to engage”. At the same time, “digital media also helps counter long-standing inequalities as younger people are more engaged here than elsewhere” (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017: 8).

In their cross-national comparative analysis, Kalogeropoulos and colleagues (2017: 9) explain the following:

Our results do indicate that sharing and commenting on news online may be characterized by two different self-reinforcing spirals, one positive (in the sense of leading to more participation) and the other negative. The positive spiral consists of the interplay between ideological strength (people who are more partisan participate more), interest (those who are more interested in news comment and share more), and social media use (those who use social media more, both for news and generally across sites, participate more). Digital media make it easier for the already motivated to engage more, and they do just that. The negative spiral that one can infer from this is between political moderates (who participate less), the less interested (who share and comment less), and those who are less active online. Thus, the less motivated have equal access to the potential for participation, but in practice use it less.

Since use of news media is a necessary precondition and requirement for well-functioning democratic societies, the widening gap raises several subsequent questions. From the uses and gratifications perspective: What are the underlying needs and motives like information and entertainment or social utility for the selection and use of news media? And from media effects theory: How will differential news media use result in varying levels of political knowledge and political participation as forms of civic engagement?

In general, news consumption tends to have positive effects on political knowledge and participation or civic engagement (Aalberg & Curran, 2011; Bergström et al., 2019; Kobbernagel & Schröder, 2016; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021). But empirical studies add nuance: There are differences between media used, insofar as newspapers enhance knowledge levels, whereas most studies show no correlation between use of television news and knowledge (Jenssen,

2012; Yang & Grabe, 2011). In addition, Tichenor and colleagues (1970: 159–160) formulated their so-called knowledge gap hypothesis:

As the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease.

They identified five underlying factors driving this development: communication skills, prior knowledge, relevant social contacts, selective use and learning of information, and structure of the media system. Later, the knowledge gap hypothesis was applied to the new medium of the Internet in the form of the so-called digital divide hypothesis, stating that better educated people adopted the new medium at a faster rate and used the Internet for more information-oriented purposes (Bonfadelli, 2002).

Empirical evidence of news media consumption

In the 2021 MDM research project, the indicator addressing the patterns of news media use and consumption of news (F2) investigated patterns of news media use in each of the 18 participating countries, with a particular focus on whether news media in general reached the entire population. The country teams analysed the reach of different news media outlets such as newspapers, radio, television, and generic online media, paying specific attention to differences in news consumption between younger and older generations. The calculations were based on existing data sources as international comparisons and national statistics and were scored on a 0–3-point scale.

All countries participating in the 2021 MDM scored 2 or 3 points on this indicator (mean score = 2.44). The common observation of news media use was that it reached most people in the given country or the entire population. No case was reported where news media only reached minor segments of the population (1 point) or were of minor importance compared with other forms of media content (0 points). The following countries scored 2 points (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021b), meaning that “a considerable majority of the population is reached by news media; some gaps between young and old” (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 20):

- | | |
|-------------|------------------|
| • Australia | • Portugal |
| • Austria | • South Korea |
| • Chile | • Sweden |
| • Finland | • Switzerland |
| • Greece | • United Kingdom |

Scoring 3 points (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021b), meaning that the “entire population, young and old, watches, reads, listens to, or uses news regularly” (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 20), were the following countries:

- Belgium (Flanders)
- Canada
- Denmark
- Germany
- Hong Kong
- Iceland
- Italy
- Netherlands

Despite the fact that media supply has increased in every country and that competition for audiences has become even tougher, news media are in most cases still very important in peoples’ media diets. Countries like Canada, Italy, and the Netherlands report that about 80 per cent of the entire population follow news media every day and that television remains an important source of information for most people. For example, on average, eight out of ten Dutch people follow the news on a daily basis: 69 per cent of 18–34-year-olds use news on a daily basis, whereas this is the case for 80 per cent of 35–54-year-olds and as high as 91 per cent of the 55+ age group (Vandenberghe & d’Haenens, 2021). In Germany, news consumers are supplied with information from several sources (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021), and Iceland reports a high general consumption of news among people, irrespective of age, gender, and education (Jóhannsdóttir et al., 2021). Denmark reports a widening gap between age groups, but notes that most people still use different news platforms every day (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2021). In Italy, twice as many young people are uninformed compared with the general population (Padovani et al., 2021).

There are no large differences between countries when comparing the data for indicator F2 on patterns of news media use, but in some cases, there are observations of a slight decrease in news media use, at least among younger generations. Austria, Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom are countries with a relatively high general level of news media reach. Simultaneously, there is a trend everywhere that a younger generation migrates to digital platforms of different kinds, in particular to social media. Printed newspapers generally face major problems with declining revenues and market penetration, and they hardly function as classical mass media anymore in any country participating in the MDM research project.

In the United Kingdom, the above-mentioned age divide is pronounced within traditional platforms such as television evening news bulletins. Demographic breakdowns of audience profiles for the respective timeslots show that younger viewers only account for a tiny percentage of the audience (3% of BBC One audience between 17:30 and 20:00; 3% of ITV audience; and 6% and 3% of Channel 4 and Channel 5 audiences, respectively). Radio news continues to reach significant audiences, with 72 per cent of British adults using BBC radio

and 59 per cent using commercial radio for news; younger audiences obtained news from BBC Radio 1 (53% of adults 16–24) and commercial stations Heart (28%) and Capital (38%) (Moore & Ramsay, 2021).

In Sweden, an increasing generational difference in media use is noted as young people aged 16–29 have social media as their main news source – 69 per cent in this age group regularly consume news on social media platforms, compared with 16 per cent of media users among senior citizens (Nord & von Krogh, 2021).

In Austria, there is a widening gap between those following news on quality channels, such as newspapers, television newscasts, and websites thereof, and those who watch news online, preferring short news or even headlines, or soft news provided by free-sheets, on- and offline (Grünangerl et al., 2021). South Korea reports polarised patterns in news media use habits across different age groups. Most of the news audience in their twenties, namely 77.7 per cent, obtain news predominantly from the Internet, but 89.5 per cent of those older than 60 years get news from television. In this age group, only 4.6 per cent use the Internet to access news. Use of television for news in South Korea is significantly lower in the younger groups, with only 10.1 per cent of those in their twenties and 25.4 per cent in their thirties watching television news (Kim & Lee, 2021).

Half of the countries participating in the 2021 MDM project also took part in the 2011 MDM project (see Table 6.1; see also Trappel et al. 2011; Trappel & Tomaz, 2021c). The comparison across time of the two editions show small differences in perceived news media reach, but four out of nine countries report that news media do not reach the entire population as well as they did ten years ago.

Table 6.1 *Patterns of news media reach, 2011 and 2021*

Country	2011	2021
Australia	3	2
Austria	2	2
Finland	2	2
Germany	2	3
Netherlands	3	3
Portugal	2	2
Sweden	3	2
Switzerland	3	2
United Kingdom	3	2
Mean score	2.6	2.2

Source: Trappel et al. 2011; Trappel & Tomaz, 2021b

Australia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom are countries where news media were perceived to reach the entire population in 2011. Ten years

later, a considerable majority of people are still reached by news media, but some gaps do exist, particularly between younger and older people. Germany reports an opposite development, but the overall impression is that news media's reach is gradually decreasing.

The 2021 MDM findings on news media use patterns are to a large extent confirmed by other data sources. For example, news media use is regularly analysed in the Eurobarometer survey (EU, 2019), where the respondents are asked where they get most news about national political matters.

The Eurobarometer from 2019 clearly indicates that television is still the single most important news source for national political matters in European Union countries (see Table 6.2). Three out of four respondents in the survey consume television news in order to get information about current affairs in their country. Traditional media such as radio and printed press are followed by slightly more than one-third of the respondents. 22 per cent say that online social media networks are used as news sources for national political matters.

The results also confirm large differences in the use of news sources between generations. Age correlates with television consumption, as television becomes more important as a news source the older people become. The same pattern can be observed for radio and printed press. On the other hand, younger generations are more frequent users of digital platforms such as websites and social media networks when they want to be informed about national political matters.

Table 6.2 *Main news sources of information about national political matters (by category)*

	TV	Internet	Web-sites	Radio	Printed press	Social net-works online	Other	None
Men	74	52	45	42	38	22	5	5
Women	77	46	37	38	33	21	8	7
15–24 years	54	76	61	19	19	47	4	11
25–39 years	65	69	58	33	26	34	5	7
40–54 years	78	55	46	45	35	20	5	5
55+ years	88	24	21	46	46	7	9	4
Low-level education	85	19	15	38	34	8	15	8
Mid-level education	80	46	36	41	33	21	6	6
High-level education	73	60	53	44	43	22	4	3
Still studying	52	77	65	21	22	45	4	10
EU28	76	49	41	40	35	21	6	6

Comments: Question asked (multiple answers possible): "Where do you get most of your news on national political matters? Firstly? And then?"

Source: EU, 2019

Similar patterns as above are noted when people with different educational backgrounds are compared. Respondents with a higher level of education more often use Internet websites and social media networks as news sources, while people with lower education more often follow television news, other sources, or do not follow any news about national political matters at all. The Eurobarometer 92 survey does not confirm any significant gender gap in news consumption patterns. Men and women seem to follow both legacy media and digital media in rather similar patterns.

Finally, the data in the Eurobarometer survey provide little support for the idea of a growing number of news avoiders in European Union countries. In general, only 6 per cent of the respondents say they do not follow any news about national political matters at all. The share of news avoiders among younger people and people with a low level of education is slightly higher than in other groups, but the overall picture confirms that an overwhelming majority of people in European Union countries consume news – offline, online, or both.

Based on the observations from the 2021 MDM research project and the Eurobarometer survey from 2019, it may be possible to draw some general conclusions about recent developments. First, news media still seem to fulfil their democratic function by informing most people about what is going on in society. Despite the digital transformation during recent decades, news media hold their position as a main source of information in all countries analysed, partly because news media have successfully managed to expand their activities to new platforms. Even though increasing time spent on online services and social media platforms may have changed media use patterns, basic media habits seem to remain largely the same.

Second, it is important to note that at the same time, signs of increased gaps in news consumption are observed in many countries. Younger generations are migrating to digital media, and older generations are the heaviest consumers of legacy media.

These gaps have not yet dramatically influenced overall news media use patterns, but the trend may become a possible threat to the democratic function of the media in the future, if accelerating. If news media only reach specific groups within the population, and some other groups almost never consume news, knowledge gaps and filter bubbles are likely to occur and bring negative implications for democracy.

However, increasing gaps in news consumption patterns is not necessarily a democratic problem. All kinds of media offer different mixtures of informative and non-informative content, as well as varying options for participation and deliberation. Legacy media have no monopoly on democratic functions, and newer media outlets may contribute to democracy by engaging citizens who were previously less interested in politics. But if already well-informed and less well-informed groups in society continue to deviate in terms of news media use,

there is definitely a risk that increasing knowledge gaps and selective exposure trends will result in less sustainable and more vulnerable democracies.

Summary and conclusions

Legacy news media like television, newspapers, radio, and magazines have long filled important functions in the everyday life of most people, and for society as well – and they continue to do so. Since 2000, the Internet has become more important as a source of news, especially with social media becoming an increasingly popular source of news. In addition to their role as advertising channels, mass media perform a variety of functions for their audiences, who use them not only for information, but additionally for entertainment or interpersonal communication.

So, it is not surprising that the reach of news media has been and continues to be an important topic within communication research. This is particularly true with regard to patterns of information diffusion and formation of opinions by news media in pluralistic democratic societies. In addition to posing questions about general news media usage (Who uses the news media how often and how intensively? Who is acquiring how much and what kind of knowledge from which news media channel? How is this information influencing opinions and political engagement?), many studies have analysed the diffusion of media stories such as the Kennedy assassination or, today, the reception and knowledge acquisition of media stories about Covid-19. In addition, scholars have studied how the various media complement each other or how the Internet and social media compete with legacy media. The possible dysfunctional effects of social media in the form of filter bubbles, echo chambers, and mistrust in news media are still discussed (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Flaxman et al., 2016). Such questions on the micro level of individual media users are often complemented by comparing the media offerings, uses, and functions on the micro and macro levels in different societies, like the liberal market-oriented media systems in the US compared with democratic corporatist media systems in the Nordics or Germany, Switzerland, and Austria (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). As a consequence, there are still many questions to be answered.

In the empirical part of this chapter, we analysed the extent to which news media in different countries manage to reach the public, comparing the country data available in the 2021 MDM country reports (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021c, 2021d). The analysis is also complemented with data from other sources, such as the Standard Eurobarometer 92 from 2019. The data do show various gaps in news media use related to sociodemographic factors like age, gender, and income. These differences exist in all of the analysed countries, and the differences between countries are not big. Most disturbing is an intergenerational

gap insofar as young people are using more and more social media as their main news source. As a consequence, the age gap between the generations is increasing, not least since the most-used media for news by older people are still television, radio, and printed press.

The existing gaps in use of old and new media raise the question, especially for younger media users, of how to achieve more exposure diversity in today's high-choice media environment; to enhance young people's communication skills (e.g., through media education at school); to achieve a more critical handling of especially social media as consistently misleading news sources; and to appreciate news from quality sources as the basis for civic engagement. Here, particularly, public service media should promote and stimulate more proactively diverse exposure. And it is the task of media policy to promote and support pluralism and diversity of media content (Helberger, 2015), and "to create conditions under which users can actually find and choose between diverse content" (Helberger et al., 2018: 199; see also Napoli, 2015).

To conclude, more comparative research across both time and space is needed, since most existing studies are still single-country studies (Van Aelst et al., 2017). And future research should differentiate between media pluralism and diversity in different media systems, together with the plurality of media types like public service versus commercial media, and different media genres like online journalism versus user-generated content (Gálik & Vogl, 2015).

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