

The Proliferation of the “News Finds Me” Perception Across Societies

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Today, people are exposed to vast information flows while online or on social media. This abundance has led some people to believe that they no longer have to actively seek the news to be well informed about public affairs and that important news will find them through social media or other online channels. Recently, academics have offered a first theoretical account, capturing this belief as the “news finds me” perception (NFM). Initial studies have been conducted in the U.S. and Austria, indicating deleterious effects between NFM and both traditional news use and political predispositions and behaviors. This study seeks to expand this line of research, exploring the proliferation of NFM in 10 societies around the world. Findings give further insights into the degree of NFM proliferation in diverse contexts. Across societies, NFM is associated with age, social media news use, and other meaningful democratic variables such as political interest, political knowledge, and voting behavior.

Keywords: news finds me perception, social media news use, political interest, political knowledge, voting, comparative research

There is a common understanding among political scientists and communication scholars that well-informed citizens form the pillar of healthy democracies (e.g., Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012; Habermas, 1984; Mill, 1972; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Having “well-informed citizens” entails an active information-seeking effort to acquire social, political, and cultural issues that cover civic life and democratic processes (McLeod, Becker, & Byrnes, 1974; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). Hence, it is theorized that only comprehensively informed citizens can make elaborated decisions in democratic processes (Chambers, 2003; Cho et al., 2009; Dalton, 2008).

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Date submitted: 2019–04–11

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Today, people are ostensibly exposed to a flow of information through social media channels, smartphones, websites, and other online tools (e.g., e-mails), seemingly conveying information about daily news on a constant basis. The latest Digital News Reports by the Reuters Institute have shown that whereas news consumption via traditional news media has slowed down, the use of social media (also via smartphone) as a news source has increased tremendously over the past few years (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017, 2018; Nielsen, Newman, Fletcher, & Kalogeropoulos, 2019). This abundance of information online may increase the feeling that one no longer has to actively seek the news to stay abreast of current affairs; one can rely on what is made available through networks online or on social media to be on top of public affairs issues in society. This phenomenon recently has been identified by scholars as the “news finds me” perception (NFM) (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017).

However, research has shown that this perception might actually be a fallacy and that NFM might be detrimental for democratic societies in some ways. For instance, research drawing from U.S. data has shown that NFM is associated with lower consumption of traditional news (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017); NFM also has been shown to negatively influence people’s interest in politics, lower their political knowledge, and indirectly affect their voting turnout (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019). Based on Korean panel data, Park and Kaye (2020) found similar deleterious associations between NFM and people’s political interest level and abridged traditional news consumption. In addition, NFM has been linked to influence on individuals’ levels of cynicism toward politics (Song, Gil de Zúñiga, & Boomgaarden, 2019).

These findings, as well as surprising turnouts for recent elections (e.g., Italian general elections in 2018), are cause for concern because people might not be entirely well informed about politics and current affairs, particularly when citizens rely mostly on information they receive from their social media networks. At this point, little is known about NFM and its prevalence in various societies around the world. Hence, by using survey data from 10 societies worldwide, the pursuit of this article is to exploratively gain more insights into the manifestations of NFM across countries. More specifically, to what extent does NFM take place beyond the U.S.? Does NFM differ across age groups? Is NFM related to social media news use? And, following the findings in the U.S., are the negative associations between NFM and political interest, political knowledge, and voting also present in various societies around the world? In short, this study seeks to situate NFM as a global phenomenon.

The News-Finds-Me Perception

Incidental exposure to news as a phenomenon is not a novel concept in academia. It was first introduced in the 20th century, when the media environment was mainly characterized by print media, TV, and radio (Erdelez, 1995). Yet, societal and academic interest in incidental news exposure was rapidly fueled with the proliferation of the Internet (Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001) and social media around the world (e.g., Feezell, 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018a; Kim, Chen, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Kümpel, 2019). While previous research has defined reported incidental exposure to news as the way “people encounter current affairs information when they had not been actively seeking it” (Tewksbury et al., 2001, p. 534), another, more recent stream of research has focused on the perceived level of being informed without actively seeking the news (Hermida, 2016; Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012; Toff & Nielsen, 2018).

Regarding the latter stream, Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues (2017) have argued that people have developed NFM as a result of today's high-choice media environment. NFM implies that "individuals believe they can indirectly stay informed about public affairs through general Internet use, information received from peers, and connections within online social networks" (p. 3). More specifically, the concept is described by means of three dimensions. First, it comprises being overly reliant on peers and networks to receive what can be considered important public affairs news. Second, the concept implies the assumption that important public affairs "information 'finds them' anyway, through their general media use, peers, and social connections" (p. 2). And third, NFM entails people's perception that they are "well informed about current events and political information despite not purposely following the news" (p. 2).

Generally, people who are characterized by a passive style of news consumption are, compared with active news consumers, less willing to invest information resources such as time, effort, or money to stay informed on current news and political affairs (cf. Downs, 1957; Kim et al., 2013). Research shows that the majority of visitors to online news sites in the U.S. are casual users who visit only once or twice per month and spend only a few minutes at a site (Pew Research Center, 2011). Social media increasingly blurs the line between reading and conversing about news; at the same time, the sources and quality of information become harder to distinguish (McNeill, 2018). So, perhaps more than ever, political interest seems to be one of the main factors influencing public affairs information-seeking behavior and proactive news consumption patterns (Hopmann, Wonneberger, Shehata, & Höijer, 2016; Prior, 2007a, 2007b; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013). For instance, Fletcher and Nielsen (2018b) have shown, based on a mixed-methods design, that people with a stronger interest in soft news (compared with "hard" news topics) are more likely to accept that their news is selected by means of an algorithm based on their friends' news consumption behavior.

However, NFM does not imply conscious news avoidance (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). A key distinction is made between people who generally show no interest in learning about the news (i.e., news avoiders; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013), and those who lack the interest to actively seek the news, but are receptive to new information when online or using social media. The latter applies to individuals who score high on NFM. Yet, given that so far, NFM has only been researched in the U.S. (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017), Austria (Song et al., 2019), Korea (Park & Kaye, 2020), and, to a limited extent, Madrid, Spain (Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo, & Quevedo-Redondo, 2019), less is known about the proliferation of NFM in other societies. Accordingly, we pose the following research question:

RQ1: Is the news-finds-me perception prevalent across different societies?

News-Finds-Me Perception and Social Media News Use

Previous research has shown that although NFM is negatively related to traditional news use (cf. TV news, print news), there is a positive circular but asymmetrical relationship with social media news use (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Thus, NFM appears to be an online phenomenon that is most prevalent among those who spend more time online, particularly on social media. In fact, the percentage of people who report getting their news from social media has increased steadily in recent years. For example, the Reuters Institute Digital News Report from 2018 stated that across all countries investigated, more than half (53%)

indicated that they prefer to get their news through search engines, social media, or news aggregators—gateways that can only be accessed online (Newman et al., 2018). Furthermore, in 2017, 47% of people around the world indicated that they use Facebook as a news source (Newman et al., 2017). Given these recent trends, we assume:

H1: Individuals who use social media for news more often will report higher levels of NFM than individuals with lower levels of social media news use across societies.

News-Finds-Me Perception and Age

Online news use and news consumption via social media seems to be more widespread among the younger generation, although the age gap has narrowed in recent years (Costera, 2007; Swart, Peters, & Broersma, 2019). In 2017, for example, 64% of people between 18 and 24 years of age indicated that they consume news via online/social media sources, whereas only 28% of people older than 55 years indicated that they do so (Newman et al., 2017). In 2018, the methodological distinction between gateways was different, but the age gap was very similar: Whereas 53% of the those 18–24 years old indicated that they use social media as a gateway to get news, only 34% of those older than 55 years indicated that they do so (Newman et al., 2018). As such, it stands to reason that these age differences might also apply for NFM, such that younger people should evince a higher development of the perception than older individuals. Although no study so far has shown how individuals differ in their NFM depending on their age, we hypothesize, based on the findings regarding social media news use, that:

H2: Younger individuals will score higher on NFM than older individuals across societies.

News-Finds-Me Perception and Political Interest

As stated earlier, previous research has shown that NFM is negatively related to political interest (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Park & Kaye, 2020). Hence, relying on news that comes through social networks in place of actively seeking information, and perceiving oneself be well informed by doing so, is more pronounced among individuals who score low in political interest. In fact, researchers who have investigated reasons why people actively seek the news to learn about politics argue that individual characteristics and motivations are important factors in explaining news consumption behavior (e.g., Prior, 2007a; Wonneberger, Schoenbach, & Van Meurs, 2009). For example, cumulative research spanning more than four decades has repeatedly shown that interest in a topic at stake is one of the main drivers for people to actively read news articles about that topic (Graber, 1988; Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013; Strömbäck et al., 2013). Correspondingly, *political interest* has been identified as one of the main factors that accounts for people's engagement with news about politics and current affairs (Luskin, 1990; Min, 2010; Prior, 2007a).

The relationship between political interest and news use is grounded in the uses and gratification theory (Lasswell, 1948; McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). People who consider knowledge about politics and current affairs to be important to their personal identity (e.g., for having conversations with friends and peers) might be more likely to actively seek news than those who show a lower level of interest in politics.

However, previous research implies that there might be differences regarding the effect of political interest on news consumption, with regard to different news outlets or platforms. To be more specific, the relation between political interest and news use was stronger when people watched news on TV/public TV and service radio than when they consumed news online or through print outlets (Boulianne, 2011; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010). Similarly, studies have shown that the relationship between political interest and news use on social media is rather low (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017), as is the resulting recall of information shown on social media (Bode, 2016). At the same time, researchers have more recently warned, among other concerns, of the declining supply of political information, increasing relativism, and increasing inequality of political knowledge overall (Van Aelst et al., 2017). Hence, given that NFM is associated with less traditional news consumption and high social media news use, we hypothesize that:

H3: Individuals who score high on NFM will report lower levels of political interest than individuals who score low on NFM across societies.

News-Finds-Me Perception and Political Knowledge

Another line of research has consistently argued that the consumption of news media becomes a necessary antecedent to educating citizens about political matters and generating an informed public opinion (e.g., Barabas & Jerit, 2009; Price & Neijens, 1998). Especially in today's highly rich news and media environment, it seems that people have more opportunities to seek information about politics and current affairs than ever before (Bright, 2016; Prior, 2007a, 2007b). Yet, scholars have mixed views on the extent to which the pervasive informational possibilities (i.e., digital media, social media, and on-demand information programs) stimulate people's political knowledge.

On the pessimistic side, scholars have asserted that a high-choice media environment is widening the gap in political knowledge between citizens because of greater opportunities to select content and information that correspond to one's own needs and interests (Feezell, 2018; Hopmann et al., 2016). Given the ubiquitous flow and high supply of entertainment information such as soft news, sports, or porn, pessimists have argued that those who have less interest in politics or public affairs news are less likely to seek news on the Internet (David, 2009; Prior, 2007a). Even more so, Prior (2007b) contends that although the Internet offers "a feast for news junkies" (p. 49), individuals not interested in politics have a remarkably wide range of alternative options to satisfy their entertainment needs. More recently, Boukes (2019) showed that the use of Facebook can have a negative effect on knowledge, particularly if those citizens are less interested in politics.

Nevertheless, there are also optimistic voices that assume that the sheer ubiquity and reiteration of information may support a more indirect or passive learning (Graber, 1988; Krugman & Hartley, 1970; Zukin & Snyder, 1984). As such, incidental news exposure on social media, for example, has been shown to lead to increased political knowledge among citizens (Bode, 2016; Feezell, 2018; Shehata, 2013). Furthermore, it is argued that the variety of presentation forms and narratives that one encounters online enhances the cognitive processing of information (e.g., videos, pictures, infographics) and thus makes it more likely that people will engage with news and thereby learn from it (cf. Kalogeropoulos, 2018). Finally, strands of the literature have identified few or "null effects" of Internet and social media use, and

consumption of information digitally on people's political knowledge levels (see, for instance, Richey & Zhu, 2015).

However, research on the relationship between NFM and political knowledge is scarce, but all point in one direction. Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues (2017) have shown in their seminal study that NFM leads to decreased political knowledge over time. Similarly, and more recently, Gil de Zúñiga and Diehl (2019) have found that NFM is associated with lower political knowledge not only when investigating cross-sectional data, but also when testing the relationship in time. Up to today, no research has tested the relationship between NFM and political knowledge in different societies. Thus, this study hypothesizes the following:

H4: Individuals with higher levels of NFM are less knowledgeable about politics and public affairs than individuals with lower levels of NFM.

News-Finds-Me Perception and Voting Behavior

As noted earlier, informed citizens are fundamental for healthy democratic societies (Dalton, 2006; Mill, 1972; Wattenberg, 2006). Being well informed about politics and issues within the public sphere has various benefits for democracy: Citizens become well positioned to enact their role as responsible and dutiful citizens (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011), they become more politically efficacious (Ardèvol-Abreu, Diehl, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2019; Jung, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2011), and they even gain more confidence in casting a vote for a party or candidate in upcoming elections (e.g., Andersen, Tilley, & Heath, 2005; Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Huckfeldt, 2001). In fact, it has been shown that people who are more knowledgeable about politics are simply more likely to participate in elections or politics, broadly speaking (Kim et al., 2013; Prior, 2007a).

However, political knowledge does not necessarily have to lead to higher voting turnout or political efficacy (Rasmussen & Nørgaard, 2018). We know from political science literature that the decision to vote in elections is contingent on many contextual, demographic, and social variables, as well as available resources and the cultivation of civic norms (Campbell, 2006; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Yet, acknowledging that people's socialization—probably also in terms of political behavior and democratic principles—has been increasingly shifting to the online sphere in the past years, research has focused on how online news use and social media news use relate to political behavior of citizens (e.g., Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Valenzuela & Rojas, 2019).

Kim and colleagues (2013) have shown that people who are incidentally exposed to news are more likely to become politically engaged. Similarly, Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) surveyed college students and found a significant relationship between online expression and situational political involvement. Yet, there is also evidence that social media does not make too much of a difference in voting turnout (Aldrich, Gibson, Cantijoch, & Konitzer, 2016; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Given these findings, the relationship between NFM and voting behavior is understudied. Only recently did Gil de Zúñiga and Diehl (2019) find no significant direct relationship between NFM and voting, but instead a mediated negative effect. Accordingly, we pose the following:

RQ2: *Is there a relationship between NFM perception and people's voting behavior across societies?*

Method

Sample and Data

This study uses data collected in 10 countries that differ in their media and political contexts: Germany, Italy, Japan, (South) Korea, New Zealand, Spain, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, and the United States. The data were gathered during the period September 14–24, 2015. All items were translated by a group of scholars in each respective country, and responses were back-translated into English by research teams (see Behling & Law, 2000; Cha, Kim, & Erlen, 2007). The online survey was distributed by Nielsen, an international polling organization. Stratified quota sampling techniques were used to create samples that are similar in their demographics to those reported by official census agencies (see Callegaro et al., 2014). The total sample size is $N = 10,644$. The largest sample size was collected in Ukraine ($n = 1,223$), and the smallest in Korea ($n = 943$). Overall cooperation rate was relatively high, averaging 77% across the panels (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2016; Cooperation Rate 3 [CR3]).

Measures

News-finds-me perception. Based on previous work (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017), we asked respondents how much they agree or disagree with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*): "I rely on my friends to tell me what's important when news happens," "I rely on information from my friends based on what they like or follow through social media," "I can be well informed even when I don't actively follow the news," and "I don't worry about keeping up with the news because I know news will find me." The four items were averaged to form a reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$, $M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.19$; see Table 1 for alphas for each country).

Social media news use. Building on prior research (see Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012), we used four items to measure individuals' use of social media to obtain news. We asked respondents how often (1 = *never*; 7 = *all the time*) they use social media to (a) get news, (b) stay informed about current events and public affairs, (c) get news about their local communities, and (d) get news about current events from mainstream media (e.g., professional news services). The four items were averaged ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.53$).

Political interest. Measuring political interest is well documented (see, for instance, Glynn, 2018). Hence, we asked respondents *how closely they pay attention to*, and *how interested they are in*, information about what is going on in politics and public affairs. The two items were averaged (Spearman–Brown $\rho = .94$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.52$).

Political knowledge. Respondents' political knowledge was measured by using the following three factual questions that applied across all countries investigated (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993): (1) "Do you happen to know who the current Secretary-General of the United Nations is?" (2) "What international organization is in charge of monitoring the use of nuclear energy throughout the world?" (3) "You might

have heard some people talking about global warming. In your mind, global warming is. . .” For each question, respondents were asked to choose one of four possible answers or to indicate “don’t know.” The answers were recoded (0 = *incorrect or don’t know*; 1 = *correct*) and averaged. Because political knowledge items were drawn on composite tasks rather than randomly equivalent measures, Kuder–Richardson 20 test of reliability was checked, and Gutmann’s Lambda-2 was calculated ($\lambda-2 = .53$, $M = 0.65$, $SD = .31$).

Voting. We asked respondents how often they vote (a) in local or statewide elections and (b) in national or presidential elections (1 = *never*; 7 = *all the time*). The two items were averaged (Spearman–Brown $\rho = .95$, $M = 5.19$, $SD = 2.10$).

Analysis

First, we used descriptive statistics to study the proliferation of NFM across the countries. Second, we used *t* tests to assess whether younger people tend to show a higher NFM perception than older people. For this purpose, the age variable ($M = 43.41$, $SD = 14.99$) was recoded: The first group comprises respondents 18–35 years of age (34.7%), and the second group consists of respondents 36 years of age or older (65.3%). Third, we calculated another set of *t* tests to examine whether people with higher versus lower NFM differ in terms of social media news use, political interest, political knowledge, and voting. To do so, NFM variable was recoded as the following: First, we computed the grand mean of NFM across all 10 countries ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.19$). Second, we built the *low-NFM group* with those individuals who scored below the grand mean (45.9%). Third, we constructed the *high-NFM group* with those who scored above the grand mean (54.1%). To achieve robust results, we bootstrapped all *t* tests with 1,000 iterations (Mooney & Duval, 1993). Furthermore, in those countries where the Leven’s test for equality of variances yielded unequal variances, the assumption violation was corrected by adjusting the degrees of freedom using the Welch–Satterthwaite method (Willink, 2007).

Results

The aim of the study was to explore the manifestation of NFM across diverse societies. Table 1 gives an overview of the items used to measure the perception and the reliability index of NFM as a construct. Descriptive analyses indicate that across all countries, more than half of respondents (54.1%) hold the perception that they may remain well informed without actively following the news. RQ1 asked whether NFM differs across countries. As shown in Figure 1, there are indeed vast differences: Whereas people in Spain (84.9%), Taiwan (71.9%), Ukraine (71.4%), and Italy (58.7%) hold a high NFM perception, people in Germany (49.1%), Japan (39.2%), New Zealand (41.6%), the UK (38.9%), and the U.S. (35.9%) are less likely to believe that news will find them (i.e., without actively seeking it).

Our initial explorative findings also revealed a positive association between NFM and social media use for news. This not only is consistent with prior research in the U.S., Austria, Korea, and Spain (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Park & Kaye, 2020; Segado-Boj et al., 2019; Song et al., 2019), but also shows that this relationship is consistent across several countries around the world. What is more, prior two-wave panel research using cross-lagged Pearson’s correlation suggests a cyclical but

asymmetrical spiral of associations between those who are exposed to information flows when on social media, and the proliferation of NFM (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017).

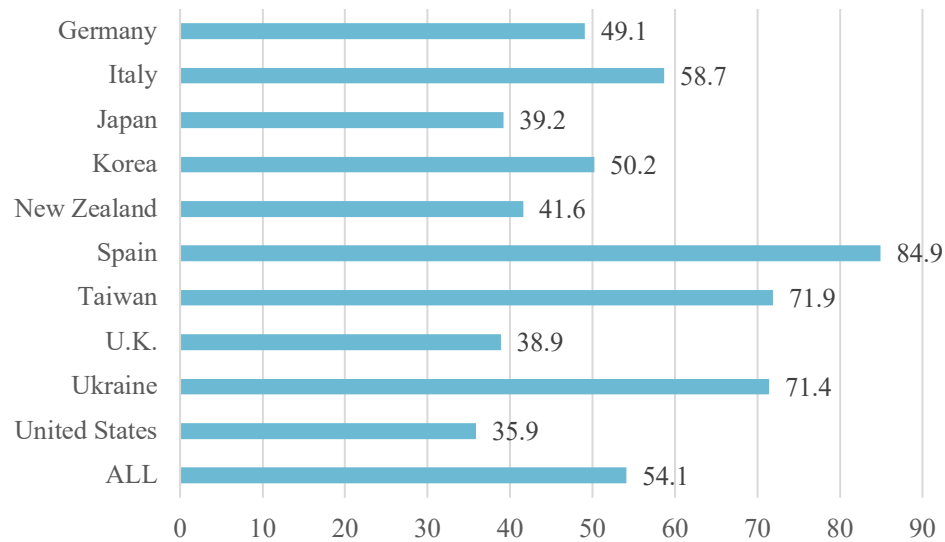


Figure 1. Percentage of people with the news-finds-me perception by country. The 10-country grand mean for NFM was used to compute two groups ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.19$). Those below the mean were selected for the low-NFM group (45.9%), and those above the mean were computed as the high-NFM group (54.1%).

In H1, we posed that individuals with higher levels of NFM will use social media for news more often than individuals with lower levels of NFM. Results in Table 2 suggest that the high-NFM group is in fact more likely to use social media for news ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.34$) than the low-NFM group ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.55$, t value = 32.74, $df = 1,0241.9$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent across countries (see also Figure 2). Thus, H1 is supported.

Table 1. Statistics for the News-Finds-Me Perception Items Across 10 Countries.

Country	Item 1 <i>I rely on my friends to tell me what's important when news happens</i>		Item 2 <i>I rely on information from my friends based on what they like or follow through social media</i>		Item 3 <i>I can be well informed even when I don't actively follow the news</i>		Item 4 <i>I don't worry about keeping up with the news because I know news will find me</i>		Scale		Reliability Index	People With NFM	Country Samples
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	%	<i>N</i>
All	3.56	1.62	3.15	1.63	4.14	1.42	3.67	1.55	3.63	1.19	.76	54.1	10,528
Germany	3.77	1.78	2.55	1.61	4.23	1.56	3.45	1.67	3.50-	1.23	.72	49.1	1,044
Italy	3.81	1.60	3.42	1.64	4.32	1.40	3.69	1.60	3.81+	1.20	.77	58.7	1,031
Japan	2.96	1.27	2.54	1.40	3.82	1.23	3.48	1.23	3.20-	.96	.74	39.2	968
Korea	3.97	1.32	2.89	1.50	3.76	1.40	3.68	1.43	3.57	1.08	.76	50.2	921
New Zealand	3.05	1.54	2.67	1.49	4.06	1.46	3.45	1.58	3.31-	1.13	.73	41.6	1,149
Spain	4.97	1.30	4.39	1.30	4.77	1.26	4.03	1.52	4.54+	.97	.70	84.9	1,009
Taiwan	3.63	1.26	4.11	1.21	4.22	1.13	4.05	1.27	4.00+	.91	.74	71.9	994
UK	2.84	1.64	2.47	1.55	4.07	1.52	3.41	1.65	3.20-	1.24	.78	38.9	1,058
Ukraine	3.89	1.37	3.97	1.33	4.21	1.27	4.19	1.43	4.07+	.98	.70	71.4	1,202
United States	2.86	1.65	2.52	1.56	3.95	1.63	3.25	1.66	3.15-	1.27	.79	35.9	1,152

Note. All items measured on 7-point scales, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

+ Country M difference with respect to all countries grand *M* is positive for second screening scale at $p < .001$.

- Country M difference with respect to all countries grand *M* is negative for second screening scale at $p < .001$.

Table 2. Comparison of Social Media News Use and News-Finds-Me Perception Groups Across 10 Countries.

Country	High-NFM Group		Low-NFM Group		Levene's Test for Homoscedasticity		Comparison <i>t</i> Statistics			Group Samples <i>N</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p value</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p value</i>	High NFM	Low NFM
All	4.29	1.34	3.36	1.55	250.75	.001	32.74	10,241.9	.001	4,787	5,458
Germany	3.93	1.59	3.24	1.63	2.53	.112	6.72	1,014	.001	430	586
Italy	4.64	1.17	3.95	1.33	11.11	.001	8.65	970.7	.001	528	487
Japan	3.42	1.34	3.09	1.46	6.44	.011	3.39	604.2	.001	292	650
Korea	4.43	1.12	3.52	1.37	23.00	.001	10.96	871.5	.001	368	530
New Zealand	4.16	1.30	3.40	1.57	38.71	.001	8.52	876.997	.001	370	732
Spain	4.48	1.43	3.68	1.59	7.72	.006	6.37	274.1	.001	794/	194
Taiwan	4.68	.98	4.12	1.06	1.55	.214	8.44	972	.001	612	362
UK	4.05	1.51	2.58	1.59	10.08	.002	14.37	680.4	.001	331	704
Ukraine	4.30	1.13	3.88	1.16	1.23	.267	6.04	1,144	.001	709	437
United States	4.05	1.54	3.12	1.67	13.89	.001	9.19	733.2	.001	353	776

Note. Where Levene's test for equality of variances yielded unequal variance in the groups, the assumption violation was corrected by adjusting the degrees of freedom using the Welch-Satterthwaite method. Also, *t* test statistical analysis has been bootstrapped (1,000 times)

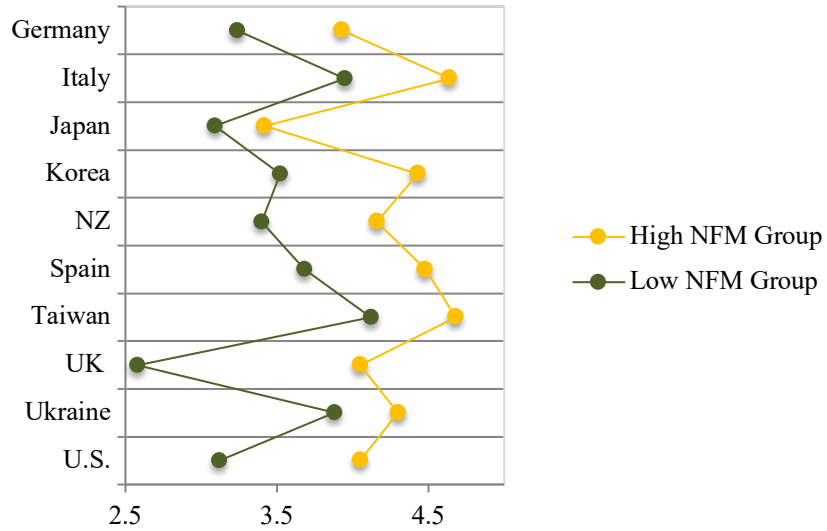


Figure 2. Social media news use by NFM group (high/low).

H2 assumed that the younger individuals are, the higher their NFM. Results reveal that younger people are more likely than older people to believe that news will find them ($M = 3.93, SD = 1.09; M = 3.47, SD = 1.21, t \text{ value} = 19.60, df = 8,089.5, p < .001$). Statistically significant differences can be found in all countries except Japan, Korea, Spain, and Ukraine (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

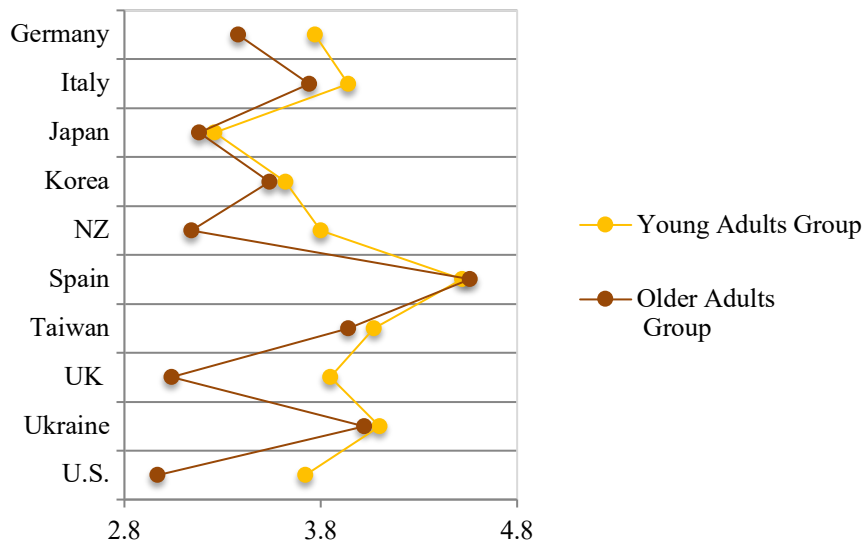


Figure 3. NFM means by age group (young/older).

Table 3. Comparison Between Age Groups (Young/Older) and the News-Finds-Me Perception Across 10 Countries.

Country	Young Adults Group		Older Adults Group		Levene's Test for Homoscedasticity		Comparison <i>t</i> Statistics			Group Samples <i>N</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p value</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p value</i>	Young	Older
All	3.93	1.09	3.47	1.21	114.38	.001	19.60	8,089.5	.001	3,612	6,796
Germany	3.77	1.13	3.38	1.24	10.22	.001	4.99	677.7	.001	321	710
Italy	3.94	1.13	3.74	1.23	3.18	.075	2.66	1,024	.008	362	664
Japan	3.26	1.04	3.18	.94	3.68	.056	1.05	949	.295	190	761
Korea	3.62	1.05	3.54	1.10	.56	.453	1.16	912	.249	417	497
New Zealand	3.80	.98	3.14	1.13	12.52	.001	9.63	572.8	.001	291	851
Spain	4.52	.98	4.56	.97	.27	.603	-.57	995	.570	369	628
Taiwan	4.07	.91	3.94	.92	.03	.862	2.26	981	.024	488	495
UK	3.85	1.17	3.04	1.21	3.55	.060	8.64	1,046	.001	203	845
Ukraine	4.10	.99	4.02	.95	2.26	.133	1.31	1,173	.189	708	467
United States	3.72	1.27	2.97	1.23	.03	.862	8.61	1,139	.001	263	878

Note. Where Levene's test for equality of variances yielded unequal variance in the groups, the assumption violation was corrected by adjusting the degrees of freedom using the Welch-Satterthwaite method. Also, *t* test statistical analysis has been bootstrapped (1,000 times).

H3 presumed that individuals who score high on NFM would have lower levels of political interest than individuals who score low on NFM. Figure 4 shows support for H3. People who score high on NFM ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.48$) report lower levels of political interest than people who score low on NFM ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.54$, t value = -8.23 , $df = 10,220.3$, $p < .001$). These differences are significant for all countries except Korea, Spain, and Ukraine (see Table 4).

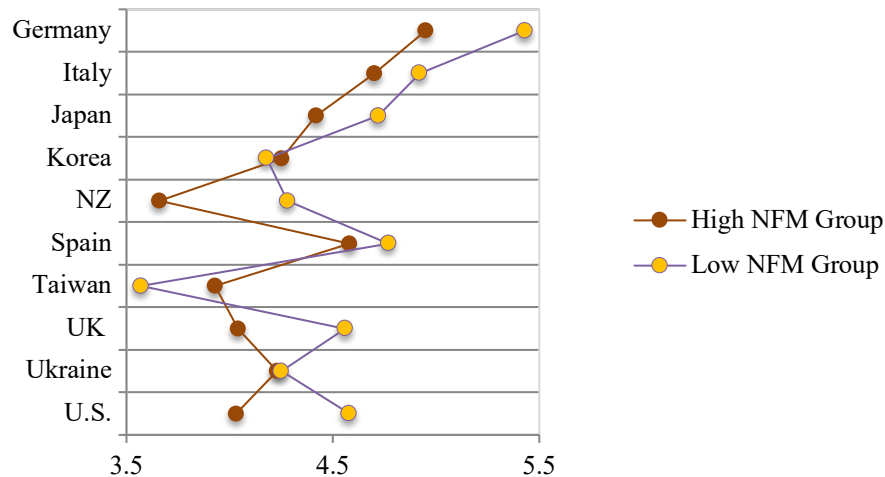


Figure 4. Political interest by NFM groups (high/low).

Similarly, H4 predicted that those who score high on NFM are less knowledgeable about politics than individuals with lower levels of NFM. Results in Figure 5 support H4 for all countries. People with higher NFM are less knowledgeable about politics ($M = .57$, $SD = .32$) than people with lower NFM ($M = .66$, $SD = .31$, t value = -13.95 , $df = 9,957.4$, $p < .001$). The statistically significant differences apply for all countries, except for Taiwan (see Table 5).

Finally, RQ2 asked whether there are differences in voting behavior between people who score high and people who score low on NFM. Results suggest that those in the group with higher levels of NFM ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 2.08$) are less likely to vote than those in the group with lower NFM ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 2.10$, t value = -11.21 , $df = 10,370$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent across all countries except Italy, Spain, Taiwan, and Ukraine (see Table 6 and Figure 6 for details).

Table 4. Comparison Between Political Interest and News-Finds-Me Perception Groups Across 10 Countries.

Country	High-NFM Group		Low-NFM Group		Levene's Test for Homoscedasticity		Comparison <i>t</i> Statistics			Group Samples <i>N</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p value</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p value</i>	High NFM	Low NFM
All	4.30	1.48	4.55	1.54	12.81	.001	-8.23	3	.001	4,816	5,484
Germany	4.95	1.47	5.43	1.44	1.27	.260	-5.21	1,018	.001	426	594
Italy	4.70	1.48	4.92	1.41	1.89	.170	-2.42	994	.016	515	481
Japan	4.42	1.23	4.72	1.31	1.24	.266	-3.28	944	.001	299	647
Korea	4.25	1.26	4.18	1.29	.552	.458	.86	904	.338	372	534
New Zealand	3.66	1.48	4.28	1.51	.021	.884	-6.55	1,127	.001	377	752
Spain	4.58	1.40	4.77	1.36	.068	.794	-1.65	981	.099	791	192
Taiwan	3.93	1.40	3.57	1.42	6.03	.014	3.87	738.6	.001	614	359
UK	4.04	1.69	4.56	1.62	1.81	.179	-4.79	1,042	.001	337	707
Ukraine	4.23	1.38	4.25	1.55	9.90	.002	-.24	840.3	.812	727	440
United States	4.03	1.55	4.58	1.62	.71	.400	-5.37	1,134	.001	358	778

Note. Where Levene's test for equality of variances yielded unequal variance in the groups, the assumption violation was corrected by adjusting the degrees of freedom using the Welch-Satterthwaite method. Also, *t* test statistical analysis has been bootstrapped (1,000 times).

Table 5. Comparison Between Political Knowledge and News-Finds-Me Perception Groups Across 10 Countries.

Country	High-NFM Group		Low-NFM Group		Levene's Test for Homoscedasticity		Comparison <i>t</i> Statistics			Group Samples <i>N</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p value</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p value</i>	High NFM	Low NFM
All	.57	.32	.66	.31	45.08	.001	-13.95	4	.001	4,782	5,393
Germany	.57	.33	.68	.30	11.14	.001	-5.36	868.2	.001	421	573
Italy	.62	.28	.67	.27	5.05	.025	-3.19	1,009.	.001	528	485
Japan	.64	.36	.76	.31	13.18	.001	-5.10	512.2	.001	300	636
Korea	.84	.22	.89	.18	34.95	.001	-3.67	666.95	.001	362	504
New Zealand	.47	.29	.60	.29	.75	.386	-6.79	1,126	.001	379	749
Spain	.55	.28	.61	.26	4.08	.044	-2.64	317.3	.009	805	198
Taiwan	.53	.28	.56	.27	.95	.329	-1.73	940	.084	590	352
UK	.46	.31	.62	.31	.06	.801	-7.77	1,018	.001	329	691
Ukraine	.61	.34	.67	.34	1.26	.261	-2.88	1,160	.004	721	441
United States	.40	.29	.53	.30	18.34	.001	-6.76	691.2	.001	347	764

Note. Where Levene's test for equality of variances yielded unequal variance in the groups, the assumption violation was corrected by adjusting the degrees of freedom using the Welch-Satterthwaite method. Also, *t* test statistical analysis has been bootstrapped (1,000 times).

Table 6. Comparison Between Voting and News-Finds-Me Perception Groups Across 10 Countries.

Country	High-NFM Group		Low-NFM Group		Levene's Test for Homoscedasticity		Comparison <i>t</i> Statistics			Group Samples <i>N</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p value</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p value</i>	High NFM	Low NFM
All	4.95	2.08	5.41	2.10	.02	.881	-11.21	10,370	.001	4,846	5,526
Germany	5.19	2.02	5.62	2.06	.10	.749	-3.33	1,026	.001	432	596
Italy	5.68	1.67	5.80	1.89	4.02	.045	-1.07	978.4	.284	525	491
Japan	4.37	2.26	4.95	2.30	.55	.459	-3.57	939	.001	295	646
Korea	4.97	2.06	5.29	2.06	.46	.498	-2.28	902	.023	368	536
New Zealand	5.17	2.06	5.93	1.76	31.08	.001	-6.11	662.9	.001	379	751
Spain	5.43	1.90	5.63	1.86	.62	.431	-1.31	991	.192	799	194
Taiwan	4.76	1.97	4.86	2.14	8.94	.003	-.72	708.2	.474	614	362
UK	4.75	2.19	5.69	2.06	8.84	.003	-6.65	621.5	.001	336	713
Ukraine	4.16	2.19	4.13	2.22	1.03	.310	.22	1,194	.824	742	454
United States	4.82	2.13	5.64	2.02	8.33	.004	-6.11	655.2	.001	356	783

Note. Where Levene's test for equality of variances yielded unequal variance in the groups, the assumption violation was corrected by adjusting the degrees of freedom using the Welch-Satterthwaite method. Also, *t* test statistical analysis has been bootstrapped (1,000 times).

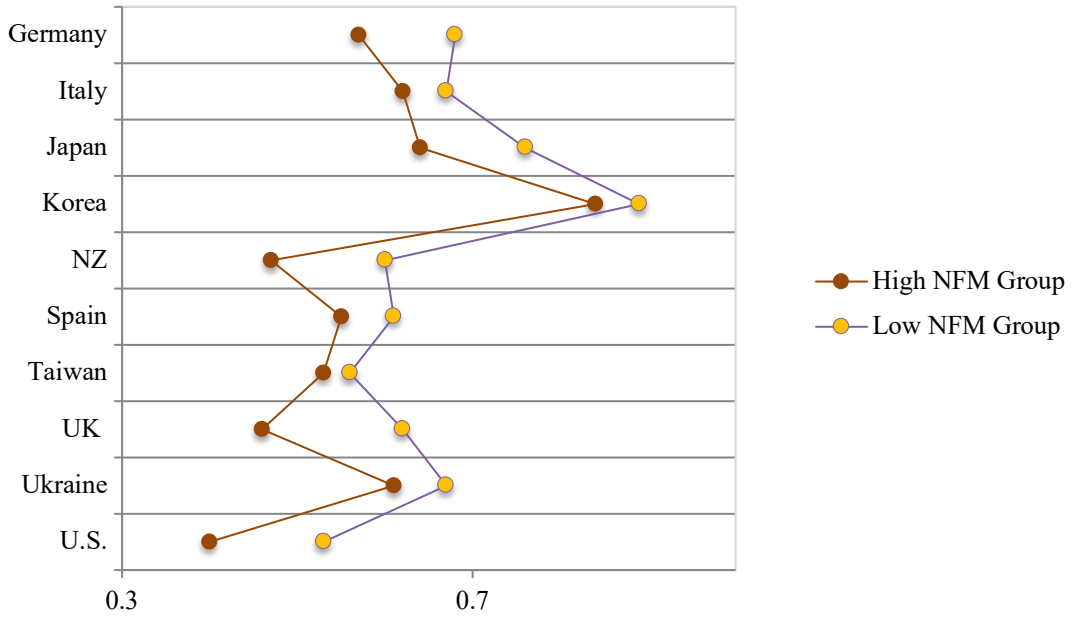


Figure 5. Political knowledge by NFM group (high/low).

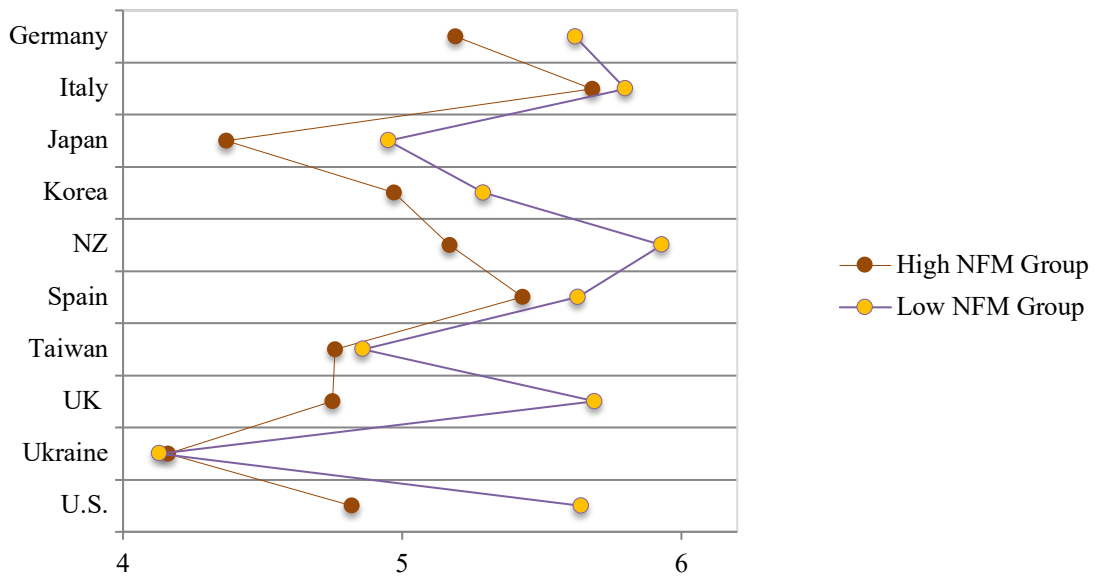


Figure 6. Voting by NFM group (high/low).

Discussion

Given the ubiquity of information and news flows in today's media environment, previous research has shown that people in the U.S. increasingly believe that "news will find" them. Building on recent studies conducted in the U.S., Korea, and Austria that have shown detrimental effects of NFM on democratic behavior (e.g., traditional news use, political interest, voting, and political cynicism; Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Park & Kaye, 2020; Song et al., 2019), the present study aimed at advancing the limited understandings of the proliferation of NFM across different societies around the world. In so doing, we investigated whether NFM is simply a U.S. phenomenon or whether it is also prevalent in other parts of the world. Given initial worrisome findings about NFM in the U.S. and its adverse effects on democratic behavior, we focused on whether individuals who report high levels of NFM tend to report lower levels of political interest, political knowledge, and voting turnout elsewhere.

Using cross-country survey data, results indicate that NFM is flourishing around the world, surpassing the U.S. (about 40%) by far and reaching even larger proportions of spread (i.e., more than 80% in Spain and more than 70% in Taiwan and Ukraine). These findings are in line with the recent Reuters Digital News Report from 2019, which showed that about 80% of respondents in Spain retrieve news from online sources, including social media (Nielsen et al., 2019). Similarly, 89% of Taiwanese and 76% of Italian respondents indicated that they retrieve news via online sources, including social media. Thus, the strong reliance on online and social media sources to stay informed about the news suggests a direct link to the prevalence of NFM in those countries.

In addition, and consistent with the findings from the U.S., we found that in 6 of 10 countries, the association with high levels of NFM comes along with low levels of political interest. That is, those who believe that the news will find them tend to be less interested in political topics and public affairs issues. Likewise, the results regarding the relationship between NFM and political knowledge appear to be rather gloomy. In 9 of 10 countries, individuals who perceive that the news will find them also tend to know less about politics.

These results showcase some deleterious effects for democracies; previous studies have outlined that maintaining healthy levels of political interest and being knowledgeable about politics are indispensable for dynamic and democratic societies (Bekkers, 2005; Bimber et al., 2012). Additionally, the findings directly relate to research that has shown that news consumers are mainly casual users—that is, those who visit a news website merely once or twice a month (Pew Research Center, 2011). In other words, the strong prevalence of NFM around the world might also reflect the low interest in active and regular news consumption as proved by actual news tracking data. Conversely, the active and diverse news consumption among individuals who are interested in the news has also been shown by the Digital News Report 2019: "Almost half of those who are interested in news (49%) consume more than four different online sources each week" (Nielsen et al., 2019, p. 12). Interest in news and interest in education have been shown to be the strongest drivers for news subscription and direct news access across countries (Nielsen et al., 2019). However, most people prefer spending their limited budget on entertainment content (e.g., for Netflix or Spotify) rather than on news. Accordingly, it makes sense that alternative ways of getting news, such as through WhatsApp groups or private and public Facebook groups where people share and discuss news,

have become increasingly popular (Gil de Zúñiga, Ardèvol-Abreu, & Casero-Ripollés, 2019; Valenzuela, Bachmann, & Bargsted, 2019).

Furthermore, the analyses have provided an indication that younger people (18–35 years of age) evidence much higher levels of NFM than do their older counterparts (older than 35 years). This finding may, once more, be distressing in light of the age gap witnessed by previous scholarly work regarding political participation. As such, young people historically have been shown to be less engaged with political information and activities (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Bennett et al., 2011). Thus, it seems that the prevalence of NFM not only may have a direct effect on democratic detachment through weakened levels of political interest and political knowledge (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019), but also might widen an age gap with regard to informed citizens. In fact, an age gap between those using new media, such as smartphones and social media, for news and those who use more traditional and direct channels, such as TV and radio, has also been identified in the past Digital News Report (Nielsen et al., 2019).

However, it should be noted that highly educated young people might be less likely to develop NFM as compared with their peers who have lower levels of education. For instance, prior research has already established that those who are educated are less prone to being politically persuaded (Diehl, Weeks, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2016; Mutz, Sniderman, & Brody, 1996) and less affected by misleading messages, misinformation, or “fake news” (Peters, Rider, Hyvönen, & Besley, 2018). Similarly, recent research has shown that people with higher education are more likely to have a positive opinion about the news media (Nielsen et al., 2019). Future research should thus investigate whether these suggestions also apply for young adults with high/low levels of NFM and high/low levels of trust in the news media (see the Appendix for an initial effort: [Online Supplement](#)).

Findings also revealed a positive association between NFM and social media use for news. This not only is consistent with prior research in the U.S. (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017, 2019; Park & Kaye, 2020; Song et al., 2019), but also shows that this relationship is consistent across diverse countries around the world, and it is even stronger in some countries (e.g., Italy, Korea, Spain, and Taiwan) than in the U.S. In short, there seems to be a cyclical and incremental spiral of associations between those who are exposed to information flows when online and when using social media, and the proliferation of NFM. This abundance of news, or “ambient journalism” (Burns, 2010; Hermida, 2010), has led individuals to believe that they no longer have to actively seek out the news and that important news will find them through social media or other online channels. This study investigated the relationship between NFM perception and social media news use; future studies should have a closer look at the implications of different media diets for the development of NFM, or lack thereof. It should also be taken into account that lower levels of traditional news use might not necessarily be due only to lower levels of individuals’ interest in that news; the nature of traditional news could also be part of the cause. For instance, research has called into question some basic assumptions about journalism’s legitimacy (Broersma & Peters, 2012) and has criticized mainstream journalism’s complicity with colonialism (Anderson & Robertson, 2011), as well as the media’s role in reproducing the logic of racialized culture (Stabile, 2006).

Finally, this study tested the relationship between NFM and people’s voting behaviors. Once again, the findings point in similar directions to those for the political interest and political knowledge

variables, yet were not found to be significant across all countries. Although it appears that those with higher levels of NFM are less likely to vote when compared with individuals who scored lower on NFM, the *t* tests could not support these differences per se. A priori, this may elicit some optimism, implying that NFM might not be relevant for voting behavior. However, it may well be that although there are only few negative direct relationships between NFM and voting behavior across the countries investigated, other, additional mechanisms might be at play. Based on previous research (Diehl & Gil de Zúñiga, 2016), the relationship of NFM and voting behavior could be mediated by decreased levels of political interest or political knowledge, or other intervening variables (e.g., political efficacy, political attitude, political frustration). In a different context, for example, populists, as compared with nonpopulists, have been found to both share and comment on news on social media more often in Europe and the U.S. (Nielsen et al., 2019). Investigating these mechanisms across countries might be a route for future research.

Considering that we have investigated countries characterized by different journalistic contexts, norms, and reporting habits (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), the findings suggest that these differences may not be meaningful with regard to the proliferation of NFM across countries. That is, although media systemic and journalistic differences are present within those countries, they do not elicit diverse effects on the proliferation of NFM among the audience. In fact, we find similar results across countries despite the differing political systems implemented. Some societies may be currently experiencing political turmoil in less established democracies (Chambers, 2003; Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002); other countries enjoy long-settled and well-structured political institutions and democratic foundations. For example, while the U.S. has suffered from declining levels of media trust since Donald Trump took office, more than a third of the British (35%) say that they often or sometimes avoid the news because of Brexit (Nielsen et al., 2019). On the other side of the world, Japan is losing its traditionally strong newspaper readership, Koreans are increasingly attracted to video content on YouTube, and even in Taiwan, one of the freest media environments in Asia, a conservative populist named Han Kuo-yo has become a national media story. Despite these differences in political and media systems, NFM is prevalent in all 10 countries. However, there are some differences across countries when it comes to the effects of NFM on political interest, knowledge, and voting behavior. Further research is needed to unveil nuances (i.e., political interest). Similarly, additional attention must be paid to contextual variables that could help explain why no significant relationship between NFM and voting has been found for Italy, Spain, Taiwan, and Ukraine.

As much as this study seeks to expand our understanding of the NFM phenomenon, there are also some limitations. One major drawback of this study is that the analyses lack power in making predictions and do not specify a causal order. Future studies may seek further models to investigate more stringent causal relationships. Furthermore, the voting measurement might be considered too broad when compared with other studies that usually gauge voting behavior with respect to a specific election (i.e. "Did you vote in the last general election?"). However, given the nature of cross-national surveys, we aimed to minimize the measurement error by posing more general voting questions (see the method section). This way, we were able to control for differences across countries, such as different electoral contexts or election periods. Finally, there is one limitation regarding the age variable: Additional analyses (see the Appendix: [Online Supplement](#)) revealed that when looking only at individuals with high social media use, the two age groups (younger vs. older) did not differ significantly regarding their perception.

Hence, future studies should include age and social media news use variables in more stringent regression models.

Despite its limitations, this study is the first of its kind to investigate the manifestation of NFM across various societies throughout the world. In so doing, the study offers a much-needed overview on whether NFM is present across societies and how it relates to key political variables (i.e., political interest, political knowledge, and voting behavior) across varying political and media contexts. The findings across diverse societies, however, have confirmed the adverse relationships between NFM and democratic behavior that have previously been shown with U.S., Austrian, and Korean data (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Park & Kaye, 2020; Song et al., 2019). Across most countries, those scoring high on NFM seem to be young, less politically interested, and less politically knowledgeable; cast their vote in general or local elections less frequently than those who score low on NFM; and rely heavily on social media for their news diet. Overall, this study presents a step forward in developing a more contextualized and integrated theory with regard to NFM.

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