

## The Trust Factor: Investigating the Triple Role of News Media Trust on Perceived Migrant Threat

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The goal of this study was to compare the role of news media trust as predictor, mediator, and moderator of news media consumption, and to find out how this relates to perceived refugee threat. We shed new light on the different associations between these indicators using online survey data from seven European countries ( $N = 10,599$ ). Findings indicate that consuming quality newspapers is negatively related to migrant threat perceptions, while consuming commercial television news has a positive relationship. Neither relationships were conditioned by different levels of media trust. Furthermore, trust appeared as a strong moderator for tabloid consumption effects. We also found that consumption of public broadcasting television news had a slightly positive relationship with refugee threat, particularly for those with low trust in public broadcasters. This study provides new insights into the role of trust in media effects and the importance of considering trust as a mediator and moderator in media effects models.

*Keywords: media trust, media use, media effects, perceived migrant threat*

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Date submitted: 2023-03-07

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 870661 (HumMingBird) and Grant Agreement No. 101004945 (OPPORTUNITIES).

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Since the European migration crisis of 2014–2016, the role of (news) media in the development of ethnic prejudice among European publics has attracted academic interest. News media are known to be important sources of information on unfamiliar topics in people's daily lives (d'Haenens, Joris, & Heinderyckx, 2019; Livingstone & Markham, 2008). Because many individuals have limited real-life contact with immigrants (Bleich, Bloemraad, & de Graauw, 2015), they are likely to base their opinions and attitudes toward immigration on the representations of immigrants in the (news) media that they consume (e.g., De Coninck, Ogan, Willnat, & d'Haenens, 2021; Jacobs, Hooghe, & de Vroome, 2017). The consumption of (news) media takes a central role in media effects studies on ethnic prejudice (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; see Eberl et al., 2018, for a comprehensive review). Generally, heavy consumption of news media that overall tend to represent migrants negatively is linked to greater prejudice, while heavy consumption of news media that tend to represent migrants positively is linked to lower prejudice (De Coninck et al., 2021; Meltzer et al., 2017). These consumption effects on prejudice are not uniform: they differ by media type—which is likely related to the differential framing of migration on different news media (e.g., public versus commercial television networks). Experimental studies have shown that the representation of migrants and migration issues in news content is associated with public attitudes toward migration (Beckers, Van Aelst, Verhoest, & d'Haenens, 2020).

Regardless of how heavily news media are consumed, the effects on prejudice or other social or political attitudes have been strongly linked to media trust—subjective perceptions of the trustworthiness of news institutions or content (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Whether people trust the information they are receiving from news media is paramount in determining the extent to which it influences their thinking. For news media to fulfill their core function of informing and convincing citizens in democratic societies, it is therefore important that people not only consume but also trust the news (Strömbäck et al., 2020). Trust in news representations of a topic or group with which people have fairly limited personal experiences—as is the case with migration—should play an even more pronounced role when it comes to media effects.

In recent years, trust in news media has become fragile. With the rise of digital and alternative news media that challenge or sometimes directly contradict claims made by traditional media outlets (Rich, 2018), media trust has become somewhat eroded in various countries. Yet, while most studies cite a clear negative trend in media trust (Stubenvoll, Heiss, & Matthes, 2021), some yield a more nuanced view or suggest that trust is not rapidly decreasing (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018). Recent data from the Eurobarometer in 2022 support the latter: Traditional media outlets continue to enjoy a high degree of trust among European audiences, especially when compared with social or digital media outlets (European Commission, 2022).

Media trust matters as it is related with how users engage with news in general or turn to a news outlet in particular (Beckers et al., 2020; Slaets, Verhoest, d'Haenens, Minnen, & Glorieux, 2020). However, the way in which it is linked with media consumption and the effects of media consumption on attitudes is less clear (Strömbäck et al., 2020). Some argue that media trust shapes consumption, which in turn affects attitudes (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2022); others assume consumption shapes trust in media (and their content) and affects attitudes (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014); yet again, others would consider that media trust conditions the strength of media effects (Kalogeropoulos, Suiter, Udris, & Eisenegger, 2019; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2022). While empirical evidence exists for each of these pathways (Hopmann, Shehata, & Strömbäck, 2015; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019), to our knowledge, no studies have comparatively looked at them. So how should we actually conceive of the role of media trust in models of media effects? Do people rather consume the outlets they trust, or do

they trust the outlets they consume? Does trust lead to differential magnitudes or directions of the effects of the news they consume? The lack of research in this area can be attributed to two methodological factors. Firstly, there is often either a scarcity of appropriate indicators for measuring media trust or a lack of consensus on its operationalization (Engelke, Hase, & Wintterlin, 2019). Secondly, the use of cross-sectional research designs makes it challenging to determine the directionality of media effects on public views. Cross-sectional studies are unable to definitively establish whether media trust predicts media consumption, or vice versa. As pointed out by Lecheler and de Vreese (2016), a longitudinal research agenda is essential for unraveling the complex relationship and duration of framing effects on public views.

As a result, very few studies have looked at how media trust and media consumption are linked to out-group attitudes. This is somewhat surprising given the important role assigned to media trust in shaping audience perceptions, particularly with regards to out-groups (Debrael, Joris, & d'Haenens, 2022). Since members of the majority group in many countries have limited real-life experiences and interactions with immigrants, they largely rely on (news) media representations—and in turn, their trust in these media—to shape views on these groups (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014).

In this study, we aim to contribute to the literature by studying the three pathways outlined above: news media trust either as a predictor, mediator, or moderator between/of news media consumption, in relation to perceived migrant threat. We will use fine-grained measurements on both media consumption and media trust and analyze the degree to which individuals watch or read specific types of media and to what extent they trust the information from each of these types. The data used here originate from a large-scale online survey study in 2021 among adults aged 25 to 65 in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden;  $N = 10,599$ ). We selected countries that represent a diversity of relevant national characteristics: coastal and non-coastal border countries, large and small economies, countries with major and minor political influence, and countries with varying degrees of popularity as asylum-seeker destinations (Bansak, Hainmueller, & Hangartner, 2016). Aside from these characteristics, we specifically selected countries that either received a large number of asylum seekers during various phases of the European migration crisis (Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden) or that have known considerable political turmoil because of this crisis (Austria, Belgium, Hungary). Looking at our research interest in such different settings will allow us to estimate the robustness of our findings.

### **Media Trust, Media Use, and Views on Migration**

A key concept in media effects studies is media trust, which can be broadly defined as “the relationship between citizens (the trustors) and the news media (the trustees) where citizens, however tacit or habitual, in situations of uncertainty expect that interactions with the news media will lead to gains rather than losses” (Strömbäck et al., 2020, p. 142). It is often considered to be closely correlated to media consumption, although there is no consensus regarding its role in relation to media consumption. In recent years, reports have emerged that trust in traditional media is eroding, in part due to the many attacks of populist politicians and the popularization of digital (news) media in which traditional messages are sometimes refuted. Despite this, the level of loss in media trust is unclear: trust in traditional media remains greater than trust in social or digital media among Europeans (European Commission, 2022). To investigate the role of media trust in the media effects process, the present study draws on the differential susceptibility to media effects model (DSMM;

Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), which was initially developed to conceptualize conditional (i.e., moderation) and indirect (i.e., mediation) media effects. Previous models (e.g., Bandura's, Social Cognition Theory (2001); McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy's Communication Mediation Model (1999)) often consider only one of these two types of effects, but only if both are investigated, can we genuinely understand "(a) which individuals are more highly susceptible to media effects than others, (b) how and why media use influences those individuals, and (c) how media effects can be enhanced or counteracted" (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013, p. 225). The DSMM focuses on differential susceptibility variables: factors that may influence individuals' media use (as predictors), but may also affect the direction and/or strength of media effects (as moderators) or provide the link to explain media effects (as mediators; Baron & Kenny, 1986). This susceptibility can be dispositional (individual-level dimensions that predispose the use of or responsiveness to media), developmental (selective use of or responsiveness to media because of cognitive, emotional, social development), or social (context-level dimensions that predispose the use of or responsiveness to media; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). In this study, we focus lies on explaining the dispositional susceptibility.

Studying the multifaceted effects of media trust, particularly in relation to media consumption, within the context of the perceived migrant threat offers several important reasons for investigation. Firstly, the perception of migrants as a potential threat is a salient issue in public discourse (De Coninck, Joris, Duque, Schwartz, & d'Haenens, 2022). Media plays a crucial role in shaping these perceptions by framing the narrative around migration (Eberl et al., 2018). Secondly, the topic of perceived migrant threat often receives significant media attention (Meltzer et al., 2017). News coverage and public debates frequently focus on issues related to security, economic impact, cultural integration, and social cohesion. Thirdly, media trust and consumption can act as influential factors in shaping views on the perceived threat of migrants (De Coninck et al., 2022). Investigating the relationship between trust in different media sources, patterns of media consumption, and the perceived threat of migrants can uncover nuanced dynamics and shed light on the factors that contribute to either positive or negative perceptions.

### **Modeling the Effects of Media Trust and Media Consumption**

#### ***Media Trust as a Predictor of Media Consumption***

Media trust as a predictor of media consumption can be interpreted as a dispositional different susceptibility dynamic, particularly in high-choice media environments. Tsfaty and Cappella (2003) echo this idea by suggesting that, in a model of rational choice decision making, it makes most sense for people to consume the media they trust the most—despite a number of structural and situational intervening factors (Webster, 2014). Furthermore, selecting which media to consume based on the level of media trust may be a strategy to reduce the complexity associated with media selection in high-choice media environments (Webster, 2014). In addition, one of the key functions of media is to satisfy individual needs (see Blumler & Katz, 1974). While media can satisfy a host of needs (i.e., entertainment), it can also satisfy cognitive needs when trusted by its consumers (Tsfaty & Cappella, 2003). This view is also supported by Shehata and Strömbäck (2022) who found that media trust is an important predictor for news consumption, with general media trust positively predicting the use of public service media, yet negatively predicting the use of right-wing alternative media. Given that some literature argues and demonstrates that people tend to consume the media outlets they trust more regularly

(Strömbäck et al., 2020), we consider media trust as a predictor of media consumption, with the latter then technically functioning as a mediator between media trust and perceived migrant threat:

*H1a: Media trust affects media consumption, which in turn influences perceived migrant threat.*

### **Media Trust as a Mediator of Media Consumption**

From another perspective, it is also possible that media consumption acts as a predictor of media trust. In their study on predictors of media trust in 44 countries, Tsfaty and Ariely (2014) found that media consumption represents a reliable predictor of media trust; television and newspaper consumption were linked to greater media trust, while digital news consumption—broadly operationalized as news consumption through “Internet or email use” in this study—was negatively linked to media trust. It may appear counterintuitive that people would purposely expose themselves to news they do not trust. Tsfaty (2002) has shown that habitual news exposure increases trust in these media because news media strongly emphasize that they should be trusted. The DSMM also acknowledges this possibility: Media effects (in this case: trust) can start during media use, but may last beyond the duration of the media use situation (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). This has become even more pronounced in the age of disinformation, with traditional news media taking important initiatives regarding fact-checking potentially false information from social media or alternative news sources. According to this literature, trust thus mediates the effects of media consumption:

*H1b: Media consumption affects media trust, which in turn influences perceived migrant threat.*

### **Media Trust as a Moderator of Media Consumption**

A final area of the literature studies media trust as a moderator of media consumption effects, suggesting that media trust may modify the direction and/or strength of media consumption on an outcome (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). In other words, the effect of media consumption may be different for users with higher media trust than for those with lower media trust. Findings from Shehata and Strömbäck (2022) suggest that media effects may be partly conditioned by media trust. Those with low media trust who view right-wing alternative media show a stronger negative impact on their perceptions of social problems than those with higher and medium trust—a conditional pattern that did not continue for the other two media studied, the left-wing alternative and public service media. Ladd (2012) found that people who distrust certain media are less likely to update their beliefs about societal conditions, instead relying on their previous political beliefs. In another study focusing on social media trust as a moderator in studying the influence of social media news consumption on conspiracy beliefs, Xiao, Borah, and Su (2021) stated that trust significantly moderates consumption effects of social media. Frequent users of social media news with greater trust in the news showed higher overall conspiracy belief, while those who did not consume as much news on social media showed negligible influence of trust. Therefore, it can be generally said that media trust acts as a moderator of media consumption in some studies, sometimes only partially, and findings rather support the strong role of media trust as a predictor rather than its role as a moderator (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2022). Acknowledging that people in the current media environment might consume different

media, some of which they trust more and others less, it is conceivable that the effect of consuming a certain type of medium on perceived migrant threat depends on peoples' trust in these media:

*H1c: The effect of media consumption on perceived migrant threat is conditioned by media trust, with higher levels of trust related to stronger effects.*

### **Modeling Media Consumption Effects**

When focusing on the attitudinal outcomes of media use, communication scholars generally agree that exposure to news does not produce uniform media effects (Potter, 2012). Rather, media effects are considered to be conditional depending on systemic factors (e.g., frequency and framing of media content) and individual-level factors (e.g., political ideology, age). When reviewing media effects studies on migration attitudes, media consumption often takes a central position. Particularly when media present threatening views of immigrants, coverage tends to exert significant impact on audiences. Various studies have shown that news media differ in their representational preferences: public service television (i.e., state-funded networks) is more likely to also emphasize the positive consequences of migration, whereas commercial television (i.e., privately owned networks) tends to use more sensational elements referring to negative emotions and intergroup conflict (Jacobs, Meeusen, & d'Haenens, 2016; Meltzer et al., 2017). This differential pattern also holds for newspaper coverage: broadsheets or quality newspapers adopt more left-leaning, liberal viewpoints toward migration, whereas tabloids or popular newspapers favor sensationalist news frames<sup>2</sup> (Blinder, 2015; Eberl et al., 2018; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). Quality newspapers highly value objectivity and therefore portray multiple (conflicting) perspectives in their coverage. In presenting these conflicting insights, stories are interpreted and analyzed in depth. They tend to focus on issues from a political perspective and emphasize a topic's impact on society. Popular newspapers are mainly event- and market-driven and concentrate on commercial news values (e.g., competition with other outlets, profit). As such, their coverage aligns closely with what they believe audiences are most interested in (Boukes & Vliegthart, 2020). These representational differences in coverage are reflected in their audiences' anti-immigrant sentiments: Consuming public service media or quality newspapers has been linked to lower perceived migrant threat and positive sentiments toward migrants, while the consumption of commercial news media or popular newspapers relates to greater perceived migrant threat and negative sentiments toward migrants (De Coninck et al., 2018, 2022; Jacobs et al., 2016). Based on this literature, we formulate the following hypothesis:

*H2: Audiences who consume public service media or quality newspapers are likely to have lower perceived threat toward migrants, while the consumption of commercial news media or popular newspapers is associated with greater perceived threat toward migrants.*

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<sup>2</sup> Quality newspapers prioritize objectivity and strive to present multiple perspectives, even if they conflict with each other. They delve into stories by providing in-depth interpretation and analysis. Their coverage revolves around political matters and highlights the societal implications of various topics. On the other hand, popular newspapers are primarily driven by events and market forces, focusing on commercial news values, such as competition with other outlets and profitability. Their coverage is tailored to what they believe their audiences are interested in (Boukes & Vliegthart, 2020).

### **Data and Methodology**

Data were collected through an online questionnaire among adults aged 25 to 65 in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden). The survey was fielded for about four weeks in May and June 2021, at which point a sample size of 10,599 respondents (about 1,500 per country) was reached. We selected European countries that represent a diversity of relevant national characteristics: coastal and non-coastal border countries, large and small economies, countries with major and minor political influence, and countries with varying degrees of popularity as asylum-seeker destinations (Bansak et al., 2016; De Coninck, Duque, Schwartz, & d'Haenens, 2021).

Bilendi, the survey company that collected the data, drew a quota sample out of its available panels in the different countries, with quotas set to represent the populations in terms of age and gender. The required quotas were reached in all countries. The share of individuals who participated after receiving an invitation ranged from 12% to 31% across countries. Respondents were contacted through e-mail with the request to participate in a study, without specifying the subject of the study. The survey itself was distributed through the survey agency's own survey tool, and in the official language of the country or region where respondents resided. Translations of the survey were carried out by professional translators. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the KU Leuven Social and Societal Ethics Committee (case number G-2020-2590).

### **Measures**

#### *Perceived Refugee Threat*

To measure perceived refugee threat, we presented respondents with six items from the European Social Survey (wave 7). Four items assessed realistic or economic threat perceptions, asking whether refugees increase the country's crime problems, if they take away or help create new jobs, if they take out more than they put into the economy, and if their presence is generally good or bad for the economy. Two items assessed symbolic or cultural threat perceptions and asked whether the country's cultural life is undermined or enriched by refugees and if values of the country are compatible with those of refugees. All items were answered on an 11-point scale, with scores ranging from 0 to 10. The items were recoded so that high scores corresponded with high threat perceptions. An exploratory factor analysis with oblimin rotation indicated that all six items loaded on a single factor with high internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .86).

#### *Traditional and Digital News Media Consumption*

To assess news media consumption, respondents were asked about their consumption of different types of news media over the past month, with answer categories ranging from 1 (= never) to 7 (= every day). We split television news consumption into two categories: public and commercial networks. For each network, country-relevant examples were included between brackets, and respondents were asked to rate how often they consumed news on each network over the past month. For newspaper and digital news consumption, the most commonly read newspapers and digital news outlets in each country were included as separate options (about 10 per country). Respondents had to indicate how often during the past month they read each of these newspapers and digital outlets. As common in media effect models (Eberl et al.,

2018), we aggregated this information into two categories: quality and popular newspapers. We based ourselves on expert analyses of Media Landscapes (2021) to assess which newspapers were considered quality and which tabloid news. We calculated the mean score of the newspapers included in the quality and popular categories. As for digital news consumption, we presented the 10 most highly consumed digital news outlets per country and calculated the mean score.

#### *Traditional and Digital News Media Trust*

Trust in each of the aforementioned groups of news media was measured through a five-point scale (1 = no trust at all, 5 = a lot of trust). We asked to what extent respondents trusted news content from the following media: public television, commercial television, quality newspapers, popular newspapers, and digital news outlets. Country-specific examples for each media outlet were included between brackets.

#### *Control Variables*

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender (0 = male, 1 = female); age (recoded into four categories: under 30 years old, from 30 to 45 years old, from 46 to 60 years old, over 60 years old); religious denomination (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, agnostic/atheist, other); educational attainment was measured by the highest level of education (no or primary education, lower secondary, higher secondary, tertiary—short form, tertiary—long form), and political ideology (0 = far left, 10 = extreme right). An overview of the sample per country can be found in Table A1.

### **Analytical Strategy**

To provide an answer to our research interests regarding the role of news media trust and to set our hypotheses, we estimated structural equation models (SEMs) and interaction models. In the first model, we used trust in a specific type of news medium as a predictor of consumption of that same medium, with threat as the main dependent variable (H1a). In the second model, using the same dependent variable, we used consumption of a specific type of news medium as a predictor of trust in that same type of medium, that is, trust as a mediator (H1b). Finally, we ran five moderation models, each model analyzing the degree to which trust in a news medium moderated the effect of consumption of that same news medium on perceived threat (H1c). In all models (SEMs and moderation), we controlled for several individual-level characteristics (age, gender, educational attainment, political orientation, migration background) and included country-fixed effects through dummy indicators (reference country = Austria). For an overview of the analyses per country, see Table A2 to Table A4.

### **Results**

The results of the first analysis, with news media consumption as a mediator between news media trust and perceived threat, showed a positive link between trust and consumption for all news media types (see Table 1). Trust in public service television news ( $\beta = .472, p < .001$ ) and commercial television news ( $\beta = .379, p < .001$ ) were particularly strong predictors of consuming these media. Direct effects of trust on perceived threat indicate that news media trust was a protective factor against immigrant threat for most media types under study: Trust in public service television news ( $\beta = -.099, p < .001$ ), commercial television news ( $\beta =$

-.047,  $p < .001$ ), quality newspapers ( $\beta = -.039, p < .01$ ), and digital news ( $\beta = -.063, p < .001$ ) were linked to lower perceived threat. The direct effects of news media consumption tell a different story: commercial television news consumption ( $\beta = .088, p < .001$ ) and—to a lesser extent—public service television news consumption ( $\beta = .022, p < .05$ ) were linked to greater perceived threat, while consumption of quality newspapers ( $\beta = -.069, p < .001$ ) and digital news ( $\beta = .071, p < .001$ ) were linked to lower perceived threat.

When reviewing the indirect effects of news media trust, this analysis revealed a positive indirect link of trust in public service news ( $\beta = .011, p < .05$ ) and commercial television news ( $\beta = .033, p < .001$ ) on perceived threat, with a negative indirect link between trust in quality newspapers ( $b = -.016, p < .001$ ) and digital news ( $\beta = -.021, p < .001$ ) with perceived threat. To provide an answer to H1a, we turn to the total effects of trust on perceived migrant threat. Here, we observe that—with the respective consumption measures as mediators—trust in public television news ( $\beta = -.088, p < .001$ ), quality newspapers ( $\beta = -.056, p < .001$ ), and digital news ( $\beta = -.084, p < .001$ ) were negatively linked to reduced migrant threat, providing partial support for H1a. For trust in commercial television news and popular newspapers, this hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

**Table 1. SEM of News Media Trust, News Media Consumption as Mediator, and Perceived Threat.**

	News media consumption <sup>1</sup>	Perceived threat
<b>Direct effect of trust</b>		
Public service television news	.472***	-.099***
Commercial television news	.379***	-.047***
Quality newspapers	.237***	-.039**
Popular newspapers	.288***	.015
Digital	.292***	-.063***
<b>News media consumption</b>		
Public service television news		.022*
Commercial television news		.088***
Quality newspapers		-.069***
Popular newspapers		.018
Digital		-.071***
<b>Indirect effect of trust</b>		
Public service television news		.011*
Commercial television news		.033***
Quality newspapers		-.016***
Popular newspapers		.005
Digital		-.021***
<b>Total effect of trust</b>		
Public service television news		-.088***
Commercial television news		-.013
Quality newspapers		-.056***
Popular newspapers		.02

Digital

-.084\*\*\*

*Note.* \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ . <sup>1</sup>Standardized coefficients reported were between trust and corresponding type of consumption (e.g., .472 represents direct effect of trust in public service television news on public service television news consumption). For model parsimony, nonsignificant paths were removed. Model controlled for age, gender, educational attainment, political orientation, migration background, and country of residence. RMSEA = .091; CFI = .903; GFI = .950;  $\chi^2 = 6,563.418$ .

The second model, with news media trust mediating the relationship between news media consumption and perceived threat, —yielded a better model fit than the first model (see Table 2). This may indicate that media trust is somewhat better suited as a mediator rather than a predictor of media consumption.

Mirroring the previous findings, there is a positive link between consumption and trust for all media types. However, the effect sizes are considerably smaller for all media types, except popular newspaper consumption. As such, media trust generally appeared to be a stronger predictor of media consumption rather than the other way around. Direct effects of consumption on perceived threat showed the same differential pattern as shown in the first model: commercial news consumption ( $\beta = .087, p < .001$ ) and—to a lesser extent—public service news consumption ( $\beta = .023, p < .05$ ) were linked to greater perceived threat, while consumption of quality newspapers ( $\beta = -.070, p < .001$ ) and digital news ( $\beta = -.021, p < .001$ ) were linked to lower perceived threat. The indirect effects of news media consumption indicate that media trust mediates the positive direct effects of television consumption on threat: consumption of public service television news ( $\beta = -.028, p < .001$ ) and commercial television news ( $\beta = -.015, p < .001$ ). We also found a negative indirect effect for digital news consumption ( $\beta = -.012, p < .001$ ) and a very small indirect effect of quality newspaper consumption ( $\beta = -.006, p < .01$ ).

To provide an answer to H1b, we observe that—with the respective trust measures as mediators—consumption of commercial television news ( $\beta = .073, p < .001$ ) was linked to greater perceived threat, while consumption of quality newspapers ( $\beta = -.076, p < .001$ ), and digital news ( $\beta = -.084, p < .001$ ) were negatively linked to reduced migrant threat, providing partial support for H1b. For consumption of public television news and popular newspapers, this hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

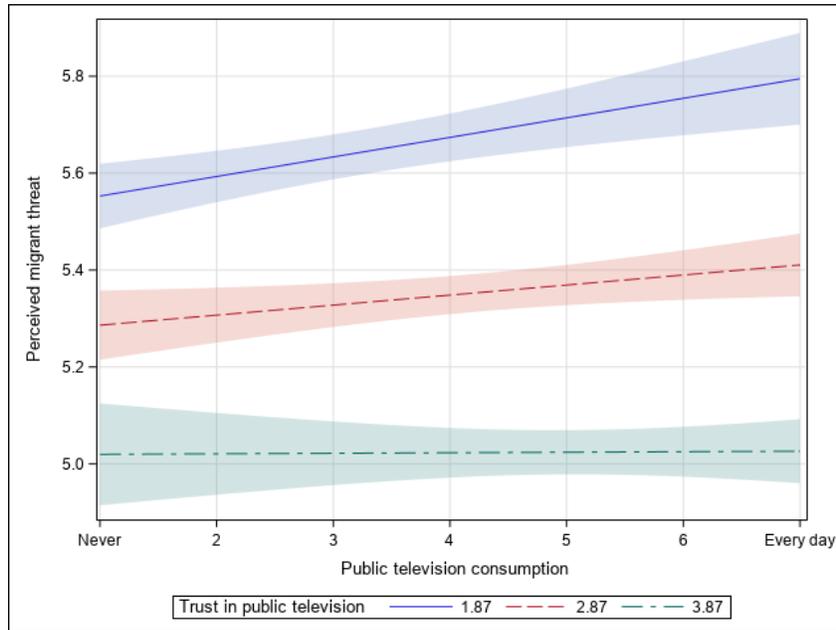
**Table 2. SEM of News Media Consumption, News Media Trust as Mediator, and Perceived Threat.**

	News media trust <sup>2</sup>	Perceived threat
<b>Direct effect of consumption</b>		
Public service television news	.293***	.023*
Commercial television news	.315***	.087***
Quality newspapers	.163***	-.070***
Popular newspapers	.306***	.018
Digital	.195***	-.072***
<b>News media trust</b>		
Public service television news		-.095***
Commercial television news		-.046***

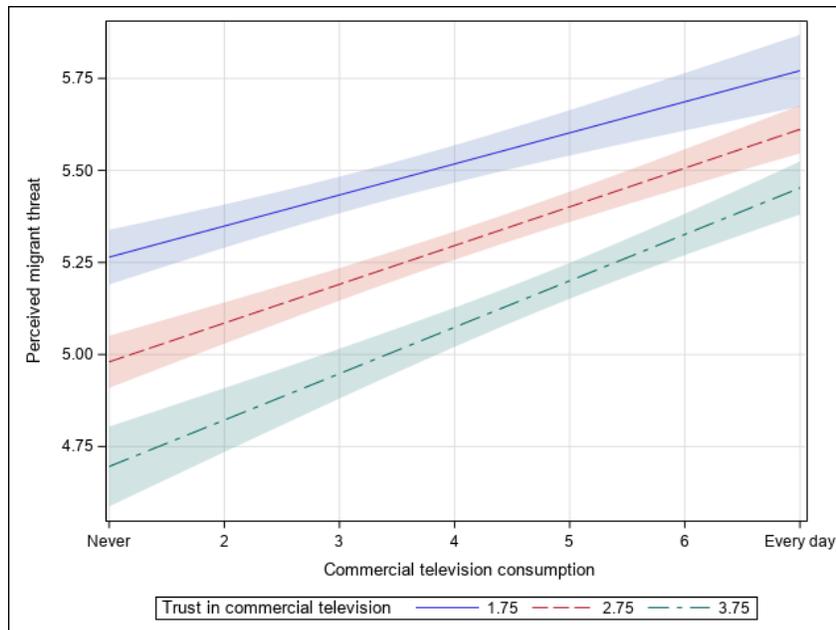
Quality newspapers	-.039**
Popular newspapers	.015
Digital	-.062***
<b>Indirect effect of consumption</b>	
Public television service news	-.028***
Commercial news	-.015***
Quality newspapers	-.006**
Popular newspapers	.005
Digital	-.012***
<b>Total effect of consumption</b>	
Public television service news	-.005
Commercial television news	.073***
Quality newspapers	-.076***
Popular newspapers	.023
Digital	-.084***

*Note.* \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .<sup>2</sup> Standardized coefficients reported were between consumption and corresponding type of trust (e.g., .293 represents direct effect of public service television news consumption on trust in public service television news). For model parsimony, nonsignificant paths were removed. Model controlled for age, gender, educational attainment, political orientation, migration background, and country of residence. RMSEA = .077; CFI = .930; GFI = .963;  $\chi^2 = 4,755.512$ .

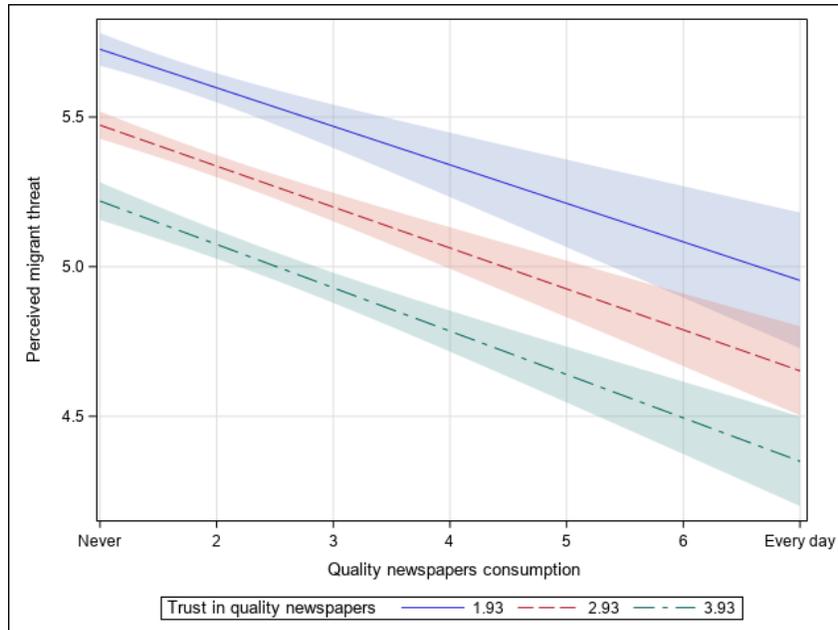
To test whether media trust moderated the effects of media consumption on threat, we ran five separate interaction models (one per media type) to provide an answer to H1c. Three models yielded a statistically significant moderation effect: for public television (see Figure 1), popular newspapers (see Figure 4), and digital news (see Figure 5). The pattern for these media types differed slightly. For public service television, threat levels appeared independent of consumption for those with high trust. However, for those with lower trust in public service news, perceived threat increased as consumption also increased. For popular newspapers, the interaction yielded the largest effect. While threat levels were similar across trust levels when consumption was low, those with low trust in popular newspapers developed greater threat as consumption increased, while perceived threat for those with low trust in popular newspapers decreased as consumption increased. For digital news, consumption was linked with lower perceived threat. This effect was stronger for those with greater trust in digital news, while it was smaller for those with low trust in digital news. For commercial television (Figure 2) and quality newspapers (Figure 3), media trust did not moderate the effects of media consumption on perceived threat.



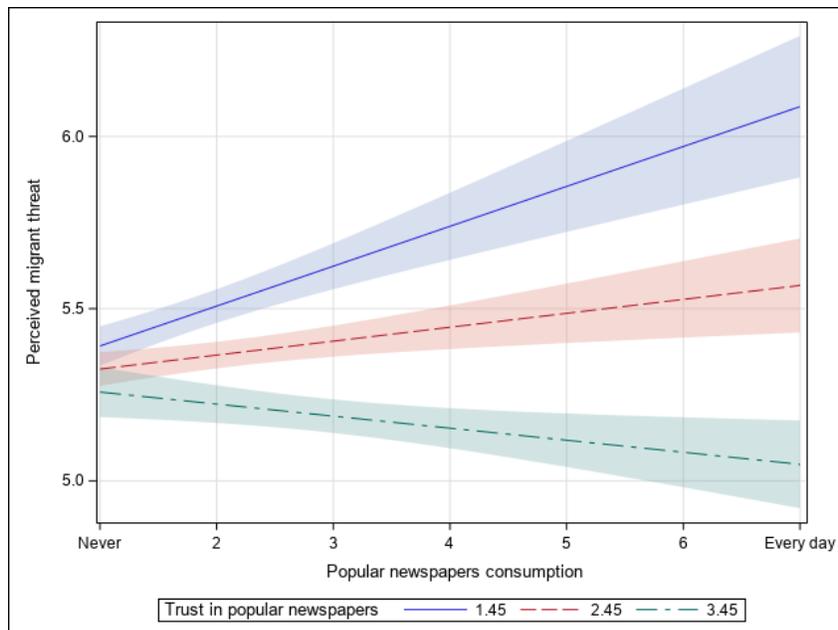
**Figure 1. Interaction between public television consumption and trust on perceived migrant threat.**



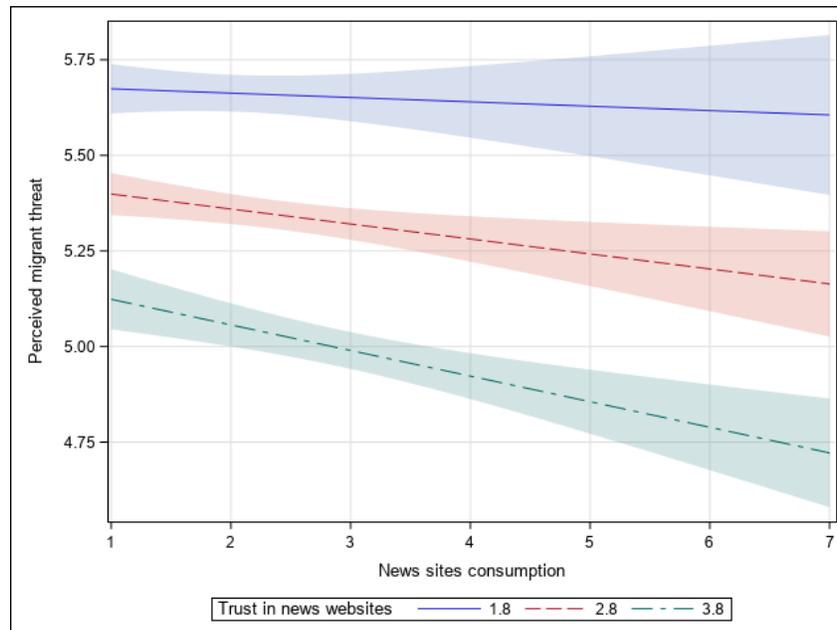
**Figure 2. Interaction between commercial television consumption and trust on perceived migrant threat.**



**Figure 3. Interaction between quality newspaper consumption and trust on perceived migrant threat.**



**Figure 4. Interaction between popular newspaper consumption and trust on perceived migrant threat.**



**Figure 5. Interaction between digital news consumption and trust on perceived migrant threat.**

### Discussion

In their concluding remarks regarding the development of the DSMM, Valkenburg and Peter (2013) write that “[they] hope that future researchers elaborate on our insights even if they use only parts of the DSMM as their theoretical basis” (p. 236). In this study, we aimed to compare the triple role of news media trust in relation to news media consumption and to find out how these were related to perceived migrant threat—using the DSMM as a theoretical point of departure. While many researchers acknowledge the role of trust in media effects in one way or another, we thought a systematic comparison would shed new light on the most likely or useful conceptualization of media trust. Before discussing what we learned about the role of trust, we briefly summarize the results regarding main, direct, or total effects of differential news consumption on perceived migration threat. The relationships as shown in the two SEMs partially confirm our expectations in that consuming quality newspapers is consistently negatively related to migration threat perceptions, and consuming commercial television news shows consistently a positive relationship. Both relationships were also not conditioned by different levels of media trust. It appears that indeed, as argued by previous literature (De Coninck et al., 2022), commercial television, through its focus on sensation, dramatic events, and negativity, does fuel negative migration sentiments, while quality newspapers, through nuanced, rather liberal coverage, do contribute to more positive views. Interestingly, there is no overall effect of consuming tabloid newspapers, as was often found in previous studies (d’Haenens et al., 2019). Yet, the fact that trust appeared as a strong moderator for tabloid consumption effects explains the absence of an overall effect. Another aspect in which our findings deviate from the expectations concerns the role of public broadcasting television news consumption. While prior research would lead to expect a negative relationship with migration threat perceptions (Jacobs et al., 2016), our findings rather speak for a slightly positive one, which appears to be particularly true for those

with little trust in public broadcasters. The latter might suggest that some people watch public service news more habitually and not necessarily because they trust them. Hence, they may only selectively respond to the information offered. For the rather mixed category of digital news consumption, we overall see a negative relationship with migration threat perceptions. As in many countries the most favorite news websites belong to public broadcasters and quality print outlets (Newman, Fletcher, Robertson, Eddy, & Kleis Nielsen, 2022), these findings seem to make sense at face value.

So, what do our results tell us about the role of news media trust in media effects models? First, by comparing media trust as a predictor vs. mediator, we see that the model with trust as mediator has a superior model fit compared with the trust as predictor model. As expected, there is a consistent positive relationship between trusting a medium and consuming it, but of course, our cross-sectional data do not allow us to conclusively speak about the direction of influence. Yet the SEM fit rather suggests a model in which regular consumption would lead to more trust, in line with the arguments brought forward by Tsfaty (2002), and trust would basically mediate the expected consumption effect patterns. Hence, the mediation only holds for those outlet types for which we see consistent overall relationships throughout all models, but not for public television and popular newspapers. This leads us to consider the moderating function of media trust.

Our results show that trust as a moderator is only relevant for public broadcasting television, popular newspapers, and digital news consumption. Interestingly, these are the most popular outlets, with the highest usage patterns in most cases (Newman et al., 2022). We see a similar pattern in our data: public and commercial television channels are consumed about equally across most countries, while popular newspapers are used considerably more regularly than quality newspapers. Digital news media also appear considerably more popular than print media (see Table A1). Again, it is reasonable to assume that in these media outlets, exposure to news is either most habitual or most incidental than in other categories. This in turn might suggest that whether someone is affected depends to a lesser degree on mere exposure, but on trust (or mistrust for that matter) in what one is exposed to. In sum, we thus see trust working either as a mediator for those outlets where we found the most consistent relationships between exposure and migration threat, whereas trust worked as a moderator for those outlets, which initially showed less of a clear, direct effect. Only the mixed category of digital news falls somewhat out of this pattern, possibly because it is unclear what that category would actually contain. Based on our results, we could hypothesize that for outlet types with a more consistent type of coverage of the issue at hand and thus rather clear direct effects, trust is likely to further mediate the initial relationships, at least partially. By contrast, for outlet with less consistent issue coverage or with diverse types of audiences, it is more likely that content effects will only occur depending on audience members' trust in the outlets in question.

Of course, this study is not without limitations and can only offer some very preliminary insights into the question of the role of media trust in media effects models. First, it is hard to compare the mediation and moderation models and come to a conclusive assessment of which model better fits our data. Therefore, we thus far rely only on qualitative inspection of the results. More importantly, we rely on cross-sectional data and do not have data on the contents of the actual news outlets. The cross-sectional nature of our data makes it particularly difficult to assess the causal order of the mediation. Our interpretation of the results and their directions relies on prior studies in the domain of media and migration that inform us about different types of coverage in different types of media. Whether these insights apply to our time periods and to our country selection remains somewhat open. To address this limitation, future research should consider

incorporating a longitudinal design, which would allow for the examination of temporal relationships and provide stronger evidence for causal pathways (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016). A longitudinal approach would facilitate tracking changes in trust and consumption patterns over time, enabling a more nuanced understanding of their interplay. Additionally, our comparative cross-country design has not been optimized, as in this study we aimed at providing general insights. Yet, while the country-specific model does show a lot of consistency, clear differences between countries are also shown. Thus, it appears that Hungary often deviates from the general picture, which does make sense, given the country's far-right government, tough stances on migration, and restrictions on media freedom. Finally, we want to highlight our measurement of news media trust as a final shortcoming. News media trust is a complex construct that encompasses various dimensions, such as credibility, reliability, fairness, and accuracy (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). By relying on a single-item measure, we may overlook important nuances and variations in trust perceptions. To address this, future research could employ multi-item scales or measures that encompass different dimensions of media trust. Multi-item scales allow for a more comprehensive assessment of trust by capturing the diverse facets of the construct. These scales can be developed through rigorous psychometric procedures, including factor analysis and reliability testing, to ensure their validity and robustness. Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe we provided some first important insights into more systematically assessing the role of media trust in media effects research and encourage more research of this kind.

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