



Trust in alternative and professional media: The case of the youth news audiences in three European countries

Jakub Macek^a , Alena Macková^a, Vassilis Pavlopoulos^b, Veronika Kalmus^c, C. Michael Elavsky^{a,d} and Jan Šerek^a

^aFaculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic; ^bDepartment of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece; ^cInstitute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia; ^dCollege of Communications, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, USA

ABSTRACT

This exploratory paper applying cross-cultural and developmental perspective analyses and discusses trust in alternative media and its relation to trust in professional media, seeking to identify the national specifics of media trust and its developmental patterns. Employing 2016 survey data of Czech, Estonian and Greek youth (aged 14–25, $N = 3654$) collected as part of the international CATCH-EyoU project (Horizon 2020), the study outlines the typology of media trust, comprising trust in alternative and professional media, and compares social and political predictors influencing media trust in the three countries. The study illustrates the diversity of relations between the two types of media trust, concluding that differences in selected predictors of media trust and the distribution of media trust types across national sub-samples illuminate the strong role national context plays, illustrating the varying pathways development of media trust follows in these varied contexts along socioeconomic and cultural lines.

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Introduction

In 2003, John D. H. Downing (Downing, 2003) critically noted that there was a significant gap between scholarly interest in alternative media (and its production) and the related study of its audiences. The further proliferation of the Internet since that time – rendering non-mainstream media sources evermore-readily accessible as alternative sources of news and information – has consequently led to an expansion of theory and research seeking to address the transitional nature of alternative media (e.g., Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008; Couldry

CONTACT Jakub Macek  jmacek@mail.muni.cz

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& Curran, 2003; Coyer et al., 2007; Kenix, 2011; Lievrouw, 2011; Waltz, 2006). Yet this gap noted by Downing remains, in that number of rigorous studies that examine alternative media audiences is notably limited in current scholarship (Rauch, 2015). However, the recent series of seismic European events – e.g., the Greek crisis, the refugee crisis, Brexit, Russia's disinformation campaigns, etc. – suggests that alternative media potentially play a significant role in fomenting these contradictory dynamics within European political and public spaces in ways that are as politically and culturally diverse as Europe itself.

In this exploratory paper, we seek to contribute insights towards redressing some of the aforementioned absences. Utilizing a selected part of the data-set obtained from the 2016 CATCH-EyoU comparative survey on European youth attitudes to political and civic engagement, we compare trust in media within younger Czech, Estonian and Greek news audiences (aged 14–25) as it pertains to those outlets they perceive as alternative in nature to professional media institutions. Employing cluster analysis and a multinomial regression, we seek to identify a typology of trust in alternative and professional media within this cross-cultural sample, and consider it further in light of both the developmental differences across age differentials as well as the respondents' selected political attitudes as they link to the contextualized specificities of the three countries.

Theory

The conceptual accuracy of the definitional category *alternative media* has been problematized within recent critical scholarship. Professional and alternative media have come to be recognized as symbiotic and intertwined phenomena, leading to a replacement of their simple binary depiction with a more nuanced notion of them as a fluid continuum (cf. Harcup, 2005; Jakob, 2010; Kenix, 2011). However, Jennifer Rauch – when talking about research into alternative media audiences – argues that 'the alternative–mainstream dialectic remains useful in a converged media environment where it helps users to make sense of the world and relate themselves to the larger cultural order' (Rauch, 2015, p. 126), adding that media perceived as alternative are linked with 'a distinct system of values and practices' (Rauch, 2015, p. 138). Following Rauch's argument, we assume that media consumers tend to make distinction between 'the media' (mainstream, professional news media) and 'other sources' or 'alternative media'. Such distinction – though individual notions of 'alternative media' and 'professional media' held by the audience members are probably as variable and changeable over time and socio-political contexts as individual notions of categories such as 'democracy', 'immigrant' or 'political news' – refers to classification order the audiences apply on media and the public and political sphere in general. In other words, we assume that though audiences' notions of alternative media represent a broad, heterogeneous (and in relation to professional media residual) category representing various non-mainstream types of information sources (cf. Jakob,

2010), the existence of the category reflects audiences' classification of the public space and, along with that, distinct types of their attitudes to mainstream media (representing the larger cultural order) and to the broader political and public sphere. On the one hand, this relational conceptualization of alternative media might be considered limited for being too unspecific regarding what actual media are labelled as alternative by certain audience members in a certain time; on the other hand, we find this notion – acknowledging alternative media as category with floating, across-contexts-changeable content but defined by its opposition to category of professional media – well appropriate for exploratory study aiming to study differences in audiences' attitudes to the phenomenon across different national contexts.

Drawing on Anthony Giddens' notion of trust (Giddens, 1990), we conceive trust in alternative media – central to this study – as a form of social trust, i.e., as confidence in the reliability of alternative media. As such, it is expected to be linked with trust in professional media and with other forms of social and interpersonal trust. However, existing research provides rather limited and indirect insight into trust in alternative media, having primarily focused on the relation between exposure to alternative media and the formation of political opinions (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006; Jones, 2004; Tsfati, 2010; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Importantly, audiences' use of alternative media has been suggested to be antinomial to trust in professional media – or as Yariv Tsfati puts it, '[w]hen they mistrust the media, they seek alternatives' (Tsfati, 2010, p. 22) – implying that trust in alternative media is linked with mistrust of professional media. In contrast, it has been suggested that trust in alternative and professional media are not mutually exclusive and that variations of their co-existence indicate distinct types of expectations linked with alternative media (Macková, Šerek, & Macek, 2017). Consequently, the first research question considered is:

RQ1: What types of media trust comprising trust in alternative and professional media can be identified?

Moreover, we assume that trust in alternative media is – similar to general trust in media (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014) – linked with respondents' political attitudes conditioned by the contextual specifics of their given national state. Furthermore, different forms of trust are unevenly distributed across different countries (Delhey & Newton, 2005). In post-socialist countries – including the Czech Republic – the levels of generalized trust in other people, in institutions and in media are relatively low (Beilmann & Lilleoja, 2015; Kõuts, Vihaelemm, & Lauristin, 2013). In contrast, generalized social trust levels are rather high in Estonia, resembling more the patterns found in many 'old' EU countries (Beilmann & Lilleoja, 2015). However, the unprecedented economic crisis in Greece has severely undermined the credibility of political institutions there. Between 2007 and 2011, Greece witnessed the most striking decline in levels of political and general media trust among 26 EU countries (Armington & Guthmann, 2014; Fisher, 2016). In exploring this variability, this study employs

a cross-cultural comparative perspective, seeking to delineate differences in trust in alternative media in two different post-socialist countries – the Czech Republic and Estonia – and in Greece. The second research question therefore is:

RQ2: Do the distribution of the types of media trust and the political and social predictors of the types differ across the three states in a way that can be interpreted as resulting from their specific national political contexts and national media environments?

Lastly, we employ a developmental perspective to explore whether trust in alternative media is associated with an individual's developmental stage. Two competing hypotheses can be formulated in this respect. If one adopts a more traditional view of adolescence as a turbulent period of identity exploration, eroding adults' influence and increasing adolescents' orientation towards their peer culture (e.g., Dubas, Miller, & Petersen, 2003), then lower levels of trust in mainstream media are universally expected within younger individuals, as compared to adults. Alternatively, researchers focusing on development in context warn that macro-level societal phenomena, such as economic recessions, have the potential to disrupt adolescents' adaptation as they filter through family and other proximal environments of youth development (Motti-Stefanidi, Papathanasiou, Mastrotheodoros, & Pavlopoulos, 2017). Socialization processes, which are expected to foment internalizing the norms and ideologies of society (Clausen, 1968), will subsequently have a more pronounced impact in early adulthood, as compared to adolescence, thus reflecting more accurately and specifically the tendencies and ongoing transitions to be found in a given social context. This implies that different developmental trends may be identified across the countries under study, regarding their respective historical, cultural, and socio-economic profiles. The third research question is therefore:

RQ3: Do the distribution of the types of media trust between adolescents and young adults and the dichotomy of 'adolescents/young adults' as a predictor of the types of media trust suggest a presence of a developmental pattern independent of national contexts?

Methods

Participants

The study employs a data-set ($N = 3654$) collected concurrently – in November–December 2016 – in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Greece.¹ In each country, we conducted fully comparable survey with some questions (e.g., educational path) respectively tailored for adolescents (aged 14–18) and young adults (aged 19–25). Therefore, we may treat the sample as consisting of six sub-samples. Due

¹Data used in this study are publicly available from University of Tartu Repository (Estonia; <https://doi.org/10.15155/repos-6>), Zenodo (Greece; <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1013870>), and Masaryk University Repository (Czech Republic; <https://is.muni.cz/repo/1392845?lang=en>).

to the specifics of each country's educational system, the sub-samples differ in applied sampling procedures:

- *Czechia, older* ($N = 814$): Data were collected in five Czech regions (Prague, Pardubice, Vysočina, South Moravia, Moravian-Silesian Region), using CAPI and CAWI interviewing (ratio 43:57) and applying quota sampling for each region (residency, gender, age, economic activity).
- *Czechia, younger* ($N = 514$): All participants were high school students. Schools were randomly sampled in the five aforementioned regions. In these schools, all available 11th and 12th grade classes were tested. Overall, 54% of participants attended academically-oriented schools, while 46% attended vocationally-oriented schools. Students completed written questionnaires in their classrooms.
- *Estonia, older* ($N = 460$): respondents were recruited in different educational institutions (universities, colleges and vocational schools), army recruits' units, and local youth organizations across Estonia.
- *Estonia, younger* ($N = 564$): respondents were recruited in various locations across Estonia (the capital city of Tallinn, the cities of Tartu and Narva, and six smaller towns) in different educational institutions (primarily gymnasiums but also vocational schools). Respondents in both age groups completed an online questionnaire (in Estonian or Russian, according to their choice).
- *Greece, older* ($N = 715$): respondents were invited to participate via announcements posted in state-wide university campuses, youth organizations, workplaces, and social media. 68% of respondents were in school or training, while 52% were working full-time or part-time. All completed the written version of the questionnaire.
- *Greece, younger* ($N = 587$): all respondents were students in the first grade of Lyceum (10th year of education) enrolled in 11 schools from the Athens metropolitan area (49%) and three neighbouring regions (51%). Questionnaire were completed in class on a voluntary basis after informed consent was obtained by their parents. Permission to enter the schools was granted by the Educational Policy Institute of the Greek Ministry of Education.

Measures

The dependent variables *trust in professional media* ('I consider most "professional media" – TV, online, radio or print – as trustworthy sources of news and information') and *trust in alternative media* ('I consider alternative online media as more trustworthy sources of news and information than professional media') were recorded through a scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). These two variables are explicitly related in a way outlined above: in line with Rauch (2015) and Jakob (2010), we assume they refer to a dichotomy

the participants employ to draw a line between 'the institutional media' and the other news and information sources.

The independent variables include socio-demographic variables of *gender*, *age* and *income* indicating SES of the respondents' family, a variable labelled *political news* indicating the participants' interest in political information, and a set of variables indicating the participants' general *trust* and their attitudes to politics and political institutions (*democracy*, *authoritarianism*, and *alienation*). Moreover, since the data collection was conducted shortly after the 2015–2016 migration crisis and during the ongoing crisis of the European Union (at the time marked by Brexit), we have decided to include two attitude variables referring to these polarizing topics that were expected to have a potential to affect the participants' relation both to professional and alternative media: namely *tolerance* to refugees and immigrants, and *EU view*, i.e., the participants' attitude to the European Union.

For purpose of the analysis, *age* was dichotomized so it differentiates the participants as adolescents (i.e., aged 14–18) or young adults (i.e., aged 19–25).

Income was assessed by asking: 'Does the income of your household cover everything that its members need?', with responses ranging from 'not at all' (1) to 'completely' (4). The variable of *political news* was assessed by the question: 'What are the topics you follow?', and by ticking 'political issues' on a list.

All of the following variables indicating attitudes used a response scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5):

Trust comprises two items, one indicating interpersonal trust ('I feel that most people can be trusted') and one indicating institutional trust ('I trust the national government.') The final score was computed with averaged items (Greece: $\alpha = .52$; Czechia: $\alpha = .53$; Estonia: $\alpha = .48$) (Table 1).

Democracy. Support for a democracy was measured by an item 'Democracy is the best system of government that I know'. Originally, two items were used but due to their low consistency only this one was chosen, considered as more comprehensible for our participants.

Authoritarianism was measured using two items: 'Instead of needing "civil rights and freedoms" our country needs one thing only: law and order' and 'Obeying and respecting authority are the most important values that we should teach our children'. The score was computed with averaged items (Greece: $\alpha = .64$; Czechia: $\alpha = .62$; Estonia: $\alpha = .61$).

Alienation was measured by four items. Two of them addressed the EU level of government, the other two the national level – on both levels, one item addressed personal and one item institutional alienation, with higher scoring referring to a higher level of alienation. The score was computed with averaged items (Greece: $\alpha = .81$; Czechia: $\alpha = .85$; Estonia: $\alpha = .88$).

Tolerance measured by 6 items was indicated by support for helping refugees and support for refugee and immigrant rights. The score was computed with averaged items (Greece: $\alpha = .7$; Czechia: $\alpha = .72$; Estonia: $\alpha = .75$).

Table 1. Distribution of variables in the sub-samples.

	Greece		Czech Republic		Estonia	
	Younger	Older	Younger	Older	Younger	Older
	Mean/SD	Mean/SD	Mean/SD	Mean/SD	Mean/SD	Mean/SD
Trust in prof. media	3.18/1.23	2.57/1.06	2.93/1.08	3.14/1.01	3.29/0.96	3.43/0.98
Trust in alt. media	3.02/0.99	3.17/0.99	2.78/0.88	2.89/0.93	2.84/0.89	2.36/0.97
Females	60.2%	51.5%	55.8%	55.2%	61.6%	65.3%
Age	15.1/0.40	22.03/1.85	16.76/0.72	22.74/1.75	16.71/0.74	20.52/1.71
Income	3.23/0.68	3.13/0.73	3.61/0.65	3.33/0.81	3.27/0.79	3.32/0.81
Parents' education	3.72/1.26	3.9/1.20	4.12/1.04	4.01/1.01	4.18/0.94	4.67/0.93
Political news	67.2%	43.2%	59.5%	49.9%	58.2%	28.0%
Institutional trust	2.05/0.94	2.12/0.90	2.55/0.87	2.53/1.04	2.93/0.96	2.66/0.98
Social trust	2.25/0.97	1.66/0.82	2.33/0.97	2.49/0.98	2.55/1.02	3.04/0.96
Democracy	4.03/1.01	4.07/1.09	3.53/1.00	3.69/1.04	3.73/0.97	4.10/1.00
EU view	3.23/0.88	3.07/1.03	3.47/0.96	3.27/1.02	3.63/0.86	4.02/0.81
Tolerance	3.10/0.77	3.50/0.83	2.56/0.75	2.64/0.85	2.80/0.69	3.18/0.79
Authoritarianism	3.06/1.10	2.46/1.16	3.47/0.87	3.40/0.99	2.76/0.89	2.09/0.85
Alienation	3.37/0.98	3.61/1.00	3.45/0.88	3.44/1.03	3.36/0.94	2.86/1.04

EU view used two items: 'Life in my country would be better if there were no European Union' and 'We should be happy that the European Union exists'. The latter scale was reversed, with higher scoring referring to a more positive view of the EU. The score was computed with averaged items (Greece: $\alpha = .75$; Czechia: $\alpha = .79$; Estonia: $\alpha = .72$).

Data analyses

In the first step, we ran a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's criterion based on identifying the pairs of clusters that lead to a minimum increase of total within-cluster variance after merging (Borgen & Barnett, 1987; Ketchen & Shook, 1996). The initial macro-cluster analysis considered the variables *trust in alternative media* and *trust in professional media*. After drawing the profiles of 2–7 clusters, we opted to work further with the 5-clusters solution as best fitting the aims of the study – being detailed enough to describe compelling relations between the two variables and yet offering a robust numbers of cases in each cluster for further analysis.

In the second step, we used multinomial logistic regression aiming to test the aforementioned independent variables as predictors of the five identified types of media trust across the three national sub-samples.

Results

Regarding RQ1: The cluster solution based on the interaction of trust in professional media and trust in alternative media suggests outcomes in the following five clusters:

- *Professional media trust* ('Trust PROF') includes respondents trusting professional media (scoring >3 on the scale of trust in professional media) but distrusting alternative media (scoring <3 on the scale of trust in alternative media).
- *General media trust* ('Trust all') includes respondents expressing trust in professional media along with indifference or trust in alternative media (scoring >3 on the scale of trust in professional media and >2 on the scale of trust in alternative media).
- *Alternative media trust* ('Trust ALT') includes respondents expressing indifference or distrust to professional media (scoring <4 on the scale of trust in professional media) and, at the same time, indifference or trust in alternative media (scoring >2 on the scale of trust in alternative media).
- *General media distrust* ('Distrust all') included respondents expressing indifference or distrust in professional media (scoring <4 on the scale of trust in professional media) and, simultaneously, distrust in alternative media (scoring <3 on the scale of trust in alternative media).
- *General media indifference* ('Indifferent') included respondents expressing neither trust nor distrust both in professional media and alternative media (scoring 3 on both scales).

These clusters are distributed unevenly in the three national samples – *general media trust* and, especially, *professional media trust* are more frequent in Estonia, *alternative media trust* is more pronounced in Greece, and the Czech participants lie in between ($p < .001$) (Figure 1).

These differences between countries in the distribution of the clusters are significant when we focus on the younger and older sub-samples: in Greece, a shift is observed from *general media trust* among adolescents to *alternative media trust* among young adults; in Estonia, the initial point is similar (i.e., *general media trust* or even *general media indifference* in adolescence) with it moving however towards *professional media trust* in adulthood; the Czech Republic stands in opposition to Greece, with more adolescents trusting alternative media and more young adults trusting all media.

For a more detailed analysis of the differences, we interpret the results of the multinomial regression (using the cluster solution as the dependent variable and *Alternative media trust* as the reference category; see Tables 2–4).

The three models suggest that age plays a substantial role only in Greece where *age group* is significant in the case of all clusters, increasing the odds for moving to *trust in alternative media* for older respondents. *Regarding RQ3:* The

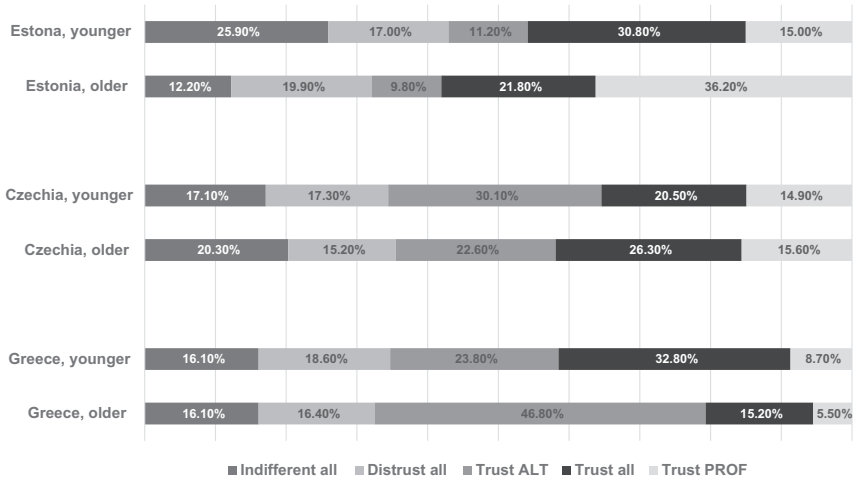


Figure 1. Distribution of the clusters in the sub-samples.

Note: Differences are statistically significant in Estonian and Greek sub-samples at $p < .001$, in the Czech sub-sample at $p < .05$.

Table 2. Nominal regression – parameter estimates, Greece ($N = 1302$).

Ref. category: trust in alterna- tive media	Trust in profes- sional media		Trust all		Distrust all		Indifferent	
	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR
Intercept	-6.14 (1.30)***		-4.03 (0.83)***		-1.07 (0.83)		-2.72 (0.87)**	
Gender (Ref. males)	0.19 (0.25)	1.21	0.42 (0.71)*	1.52	0.21 (0.18)	1.08	0.18 (0.18)	1.19
Income	0.24 (0.18)	1.27	0.18 (0.12)	1.20	0.26 (0.12)*	1.29	0.16 (0.12)	1.18
Age groups (Ref. older)	1.06 (0.26)***	2.90	0.91 (0.18)***	1.15	0.66 (0.18)***	1.94	0.47 (0.19)*	1.60
Political news	0.91 (0.18)***	1.15	0.07 (0.18)	1.07	0.07 (0.18)	1.07	0.14 (0.18)	1.16
Trust	0.40 (0.17)*	1.21	0.65 (0.11)***	1.92	-0.03 (0.12)	0.97	0.24 (0.12)*	1.27
Democracy	0.14 (0.13)	1.16	-0.08 (0.08)	0.93	-0.05 (0.08)	0.95	0.04 (0.08)	1.04
Authoritarianism	0.12 (0.12)	1.13	0.48 (0.08)***	1.61	0.10 (0.08)	1.10	0.23 (0.09)**	1.26
Alienation	-0.04 (0.13)	0.96	-0.09 (0.09)	0.91	-0.21 (0.09)*	0.82	-0.11 (0.09)	0.90
Tolerance	-0.11 (0.17)	0.90	-0.15 (0.12)	0.86	-0.12 (0.11)	0.89	0.03 (0.12)	1.03
EU view	0.60 (0.15)***	1.83	0.22 (0.10)*	1.25	0.06 (0.10)	1.07	0.03 (0.10)	1.03
Model c2 (df)					3470.174 (40)			
R ² (Nagelkerke)					0.198			
R ² (Cox & Snell)					0.188			

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient. SE = Standard error. OR = Odds ratio.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 3. Nominal regression – parameter estimates, Czech Republic (*N* = 1328).

Ref. category: trust in alterna- tive media	Trust in profes- sional media		Trust all		Distrust all		Indifferent	
	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR
Intercept	-4.94 (1.02)***		-4.24 (0.85)***		-2.20 (0.91)		-2.18 (0.87)*	
Gender (Ref. males)	0.12 (0.20)	1.12	0.09 (0.17)	1.10	-0.04 (0.19)	0.96	0.35 (0.18)*	1.42
Income	-0.34 (0.20)	0.71	-0.54 (0.18)**	0.58	-0.27 (0.19)	0.76	-0.45 (0.19)*	0.64
Age groups (Ref. older)	0.11 (0.14)	1.11	-0.22 (0.11)	0.81	0.06 (0.13)	1.06	-0.11 (0.12)	0.90
Political news	-0.47 (0.20)*	0.63	0.10 (0.17)	1.10	0.18 (0.19)	1.20	0.38 (0.18)*	1.46
Trust	0.20 (0.13)	1.22	0.56 (0.11)***	1.75	-0.09 (0.13)	0.91	0.41 (0.12)***	1.50
Democracy	0.38 (0.10)***	1.46	0.19 (0.09)*	1.20	0.09 (0.09)	1.09	0.09 (0.09)	1.09
Authoritarianism	0.01 (0.11)	1.01	0.13 (0.10)	1.14	0.00 (0.11)	1.00	0.02 (0.10)	1.02
Alienation	-0.10 (0.11)	0.91	0.18 (0.10)	1.20	-0.01 (0.11)	0.99	-0.03 (0.11)	0.97
Tolerance	0.23 (0.14)	1.26	0.11 (0.12)	1.11	0.29 (0.13)*	1.33	0.16 (0.13)	1.18
EU view	0.64 (0.12)***	1.89	0.49 (0.10)***	1.63	0.24 (0.11)*	1.27	0.12 (0.10)	1.13
Model c2 (df)				4023.098 (40)				
R ² (Nagelkerke)				0.180				
R ² (Cox & Snell)				0.172				

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient. SE = Standard error. OR = Odds ratio.

****p* < .001; ***p* < .01; **p* < .05.

mere distribution of media trust types between adolescents and young adults implies that the development of media trust differs across the three-analyzed countries, i.e., suggesting the impact of the socioeconomic and cultural context. However, the dichotomy of ‘adolescents/young adults’ as a significant predictor demonstrably influencing the overall dynamics of the identified typology of media trust was observed in Greece only.

In general, the models show obvious differences between the countries, indicating that media trust is – as expected – highly dependent on contexts. According to the models, the only predictors playing more a substantial role in all three states, and therefore establishing some common patterns for *trust in alternative media*, are the respondents’ *view of the European Union* and *gender*. Relative to *trust in alternative media*, higher scoring in *EU view* predicts higher odds for *professional media trust* in Estonia and Czechia (Estonia: OR = 2.45, Czechia: OR = 1.89), *general media trust* (Estonia: OR = 1.59, Czechia: OR = 1.63) and *general media distrust* (Estonia: OR = 1.41, Czechia: OR = 1.27), and for *professional media trust* (OR = 1.83) and *general media trust* in Greece (OR = 1.25). *Gender* increases in Estonia females’ odds for *trust in professional media* (OR = 2.56) and for *general media trust* (OR = 2.3), in Greece for *general media trust* (OR = 1.52) and in Czechia for *general media indifference* (OR = 1.42).

Table 4. Nominal regression – parameter estimates, Estonia ($N = 1024$).

Ref. category: trust in alterna- tive media	Trust in profes- sional media		Trust all		Distrust all		Indifferent	
	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR	B (SE)	OR
Intercept	-2.48 (1.26)*		-3.18 (1.18)**		-0.51 (1.19)		-0.25 (1.17)	
Gender (Ref. males)	0.94 (0.27)***	2.56	0.83 (0.25)**	2.3	0.37 (0.26)	1.44	0.30 (0.26)	1.35
Income	-0.26 (0.28)	0.77	0.34 (0.27)	1.40	-0.04 (0.28)	0.96	0.49 (0.28)	1.63
Age groups (Ref. older)	0.07 (0.17)	1.07	-0.21 (0.15)	0.81	0.00 (0.16)	1.00	-0.19 (0.16)	0.83
Political news	-0.40 (0.27)	2.56	-0.26 (0.25)	0.77	-0.23 (0.26)	0.80	0.23 (0.26)	1.25
Trust	0.18 (0.17)	1.12	0.54 (0.17)**	1.71	-0.10 (0.17)	0.90	0.21 (0.17)	1.23
Democracy	0.19 (0.13)	1.21	0.14 (0.13)	1.15	0.02 (0.13)	1.02	-0.10 (0.13)	0.91
Authoritarianism	-0.42 (0.16)**	0.66	0.30 (0.15)*	1.35	-0.29 (0.15)	0.75	0.29 (0.15)	1.33
Alienation	-0.17 (0.14)	0.85	-0.00 (0.14)	1.00	0.16 (0.14)	1.17	-0.09 (0.14)	0.91
Tolerance	-0.16 (0.18)	0.85	-0.10 (0.18)	0.91	0.04 (0.18)	1.05	-0.11 (0.18)	0.89
EU view	0.90 (0.17)***	2.45	0.46 (0.15)**	1.59	0.34 (0.16)*	1.41	0.16 (0.15)	1.17
Model c2 (df)				2773.700 (40)				
R ² (Nagelkerke)				0.282				
R ² (Cox & Snell)				0.270				

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient. SE = Standard error. OR = Odds ratio.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Moreover, partial patterns are linked with *trust*, *authoritarianism* and *income*: In Czechia, higher scoring in *trust* increases odds for *general media trust* (OR = 1.75) and *general media indifference* (OR = 1.5), and in Greece for *trust in professional media* (OR = 1.21), *general media trust* (OR = 1.92) and *general media indifference* (OR = 1.27). Higher *income* decreases in Czechia *general media trust* (OR = .58) and *general media indifference* (OR: .64); in Greece it increases *general media distrust* (OR = 1.29). And, in Estonia, higher scores of *authoritarianism* decrease the odds for *trust in professional media* (OR = .66) and increase the odds for *general media trust* (OR = 1.35), while in Greece they increase the odds for *general media trust* (OR = 1.61) and *general media indifference* (OR = 1.26).

Other significant predictors underline national specificities. While in Czechia exposure to *political news* decreases the odds for *trust in professional media* (OR: 0.63) and increases the odds for *general media indifference* (OR = 1.46), in Greece it slightly increases chances for *trust in professional media* (OR = 1.15). In Czechia, higher scores in *democracy* increase the odds for *trust in professional media* (OR = 1.46), and *tolerance* increases the odds for *general media distrust* (OR = 1.33). And in Greece, *alienation* decreases the odds for *general media distrust* (OR = .86).

However, wholly coherent and strong relationship patterns across all countries were not observed. Both the differences in distribution of media trust types across the sub-samples and in the selected predictors of media trust imply observed differences emerging from specific political and media contexts, in line with RQ2.

Discussion

Generally, with the exception of the participants' gender and relation to the EU, wholly coherent, strong relationship patterns across all countries were not observed. Importantly for the focus of the study, the EU represents a crucial topic in all three countries, with links between trust in alternative media and negative attitudes toward the EU, suggesting the interpretation of alternative media as alternative in a political sense.

The absence of other stronger patterns suggests several interpretations: that trust in alternative media is rather context-dependent; that current broadly available alternative media represent a very diverse terrain consisting of various and antithetic outlets and channels; that alternative media is still quite a new and culturally unstable phenomenon; and that young people do not have fully crystallized understandings of it.

The latter two interpretations must be considered as possible yet speculative here as the study's design provides no direct supporting evidence.

The interpretation of the differences as context-dependent – corroborating the thesis regarding the influence of macro-level societal phenomena on the process of development (cf. Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2017) – is supported by the developmental pathways differing in the three countries and by the nationally specific predictors of media trust. The negative relationship between authoritarianism and trust in professional media in Estonia and the positive relationship between authoritarianism and general media trust in Estonia and Greece may indicate higher tension between mainstream media expressing anti-authoritarian ideology and (some) right-wing alternative media channels. In Czechia, in contrast, the positive relationship between tolerance and general media distrust might be seen as symptomatic of tolerant participants' dissatisfaction with the intolerant tone of professional media (cf. Tkaczyk, 2017).

Lastly, interpreting the absence of stronger patterns as resulting from the diversity of alternative media finds its support in the typology of media trust. The typology depicts trust in alternative and professional media as intertwined phenomena and suggests that the terrain of alternative media and their youth audiences is quite diverse. Quite possibly, more sub-groups of young audiences represent a broader spectrum of views and dispositions including different reasoning and various expectations towards the media, both professional and alternative. Complementarily, the very existence of the general media trust cluster

may indicate young audiences' use of alternative media as not simply opposing professional media but rather as broadening their agenda.

Limitations

Several limitations within this exploratory study should be considered. First, the results might be affected by differences in sampling procedures applied across the sub-samples. Secondly, the study employs – as explained above in the theoretical chapter – a relational notion of alternative media as of a category defined not by its particular content but by its position towards the category of professional media. Therefore, the study uses indication of trust in alternative media relying on the item identifying trust in media *perceived* by the respondents as alternative (instead of an item based on definition provided in the questionnaire), and the participants were expected to respond – and responded, as the results imply – with different respective conceptualizations. This enables us to employ comparative perspective as this approach brackets the particular differences between the media environments in the three countries. However, the study – as a collateral outcome from the broader CATCH-EyoU survey – never directly sought details of these conceptualizations, either for the participants' reasons for (dis)trust in alternative media or their exposure to alternative media that might provide a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

Thirdly, trust in alternative media, trust in professional media and support for democracy were measured by one item each, which may have affected the reliability of the items. As the topic of trust in media is rather unambiguous and plays usually only ancillary role in the questionnaires, and as consensus on standardized measures is missing so far, single-item measures are, nevertheless, common in research of trust in media (cf. Edelman, 2015; Jones, 2004; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & De Zúniga, 2010; Lee, 2010; PEW, 2016; Watkins et al., 2015).

Conclusions and future directions

This study offers comparative insights into relations between trust in alternative and professional media. Despite its limitations, the findings nonetheless illustrate a diversity of relations between the two types of media trust, creating thus an important basis for further inquiry. Future research into alternative media and their audiences should explicitly consider the variability of the phenomena across/within particular states. However, a more thorough understanding will require addressing the specific audience proclivities related to alternative media and the broader scope and definition of information sources that nowadays constitute an important part of public and political spheres.

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ORCID

Jakub Macek  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5479-5852>

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