

Comparative Perspectives on the Link Between News Media Consumption and Attitudes Toward Immigrants: Evidence From Europe, the United States, and Colombia

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In recent years, attitudes toward immigrants have been negative among the populations in Europe and the Americas. One of the forces shaping these attitudes is exposure to news media. Public and commercial news media, operating in different media systems, frame immigrants in different ways and influence attitudes toward immigrants. In this study, we analyzed how news media consumption is associated with individuals’ attitudes toward immigrants in a large sample of the adult population in seven European countries, the United States, and Colombia (N = 13,645). Findings indicate that consumers of predominantly public television and websites of quality news outlets tend to hold positive attitudes, whereas viewers of predominantly commercial television hold negative attitudes in several countries. Heavy television viewing is linked to more negative attitudes, whereas heavy (digital) newspaper consumption is linked to positive attitudes. These findings are discussed in light of the countries’ media systems and recent migration patterns.

Keywords: anti-immigrant attitudes, Colombia, cultivation theory, Europe, media audiences, news media consumption, United States

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Recent studies have shown that a substantial number of North Americans and Europeans appear to hold (rather) negative attitudes toward immigrants (e.g., De Coninck et al., 2018; Meltzer et al., 2017). Overall, these attitudes are “stable, hard-to-change, and value-based” (e.g., Huddleston & Sharif, 2019, p. 10). These attitudes are associated with various individual-level and country-level factors. Research focusing on individual explanations often employs sociodemographic predictors such as age, gender, political affiliation, and education (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018). At the country level, studies have focused on structural societal attributes such as the presence and size of the migrant population (e.g., De Coninck, Ogan, & d’Haenens, 2021; Messing & Ságvári, 2021), the country’s level of economic development (e.g., Dennison & Dražanová, 2018), news media coverage and the salience of migration as an issue (e.g., De Coninck, Ogan, Willnat, & d’Haenens, 2021), national migration and integration policies (e.g., Callens, Meuleman, & Valentova, 2015; Messing & Ságvári, 2021), or major crises such as the 2015–2016 refugee crisis or increasing levels of immigration (e.g., Schlueter, Masso, & Davidov, 2020).

Since the European migration crisis of 2015–2016 and the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, the role of (news) media portrayals of immigrants in the development of (anti-)immigrant attitudes among the population has become the subject of considerable research. News media are an important source of information on topics with which people are not familiar in everyday life (Livingstone & Markham, 2008). Because many individuals—particularly in Europe—have limited real-life contact with immigrants, they base their opinions and attitudes toward immigrants on the representations of immigrants in the news media they consume (e.g., Bleich, Bloemraad, & de Graauw, 2015). Previous studies suggest that even individuals who rarely follow the news often hold worldviews that align with the media’s (biased) representations. Moreover, cultivation studies by Shrum (2017) indicate that attitudes of individuals with regular intergroup contact are also affected by news media coverage, and sometimes even more so than those of individuals with little intergroup contact.

As the portrayal of immigrants in news media coverage is one of the main factors shaping attitudes toward immigrants, this article will focus on the association of news media consumption with individuals’ attitudes toward immigrants. Despite the growing literature on this topic, there continue to be significant knowledge gaps. More importantly, many of these studies are limited to a few countries, which makes a truly comparative perspective on the role of news media consumption difficult to obtain (Eberl et al., 2018). Furthermore, these studies have also been predominantly conducted in (Western) Europe. Research on perspectives from countries in other parts of the world—even the United States—is scarce, although there are exceptions (see Hoewe, Peacock, Kim, & Barnidge, 2020). Finally, news media consumption is often operationalized in a relatively rudimentary way by asking, for example, about television or newspaper consumption in general. However, news media are diverse: Different television networks or newspaper types report on immigrants in different ways, which may in turn influence people’s attitudes (Eberl et al., 2018; Meltzer et al., 2017). In our study, we measure news media consumption by asking about different television networks (public/commercial) and newspaper types (quality/popular).

To answer our main research question, we administered an online questionnaire among the adult population in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Spain, and Sweden), the United States, and Colombia (N = 13,645).

Literature Review

From the Cultivation of Views on Migration . . .

Cultivation theory posits a central theoretical perspective of media effects. Developed by Gerbner and Gross (1976), it states that people who spend a lot of time watching television are more likely to perceive society in ways that reflect the lessons of the “television world,” as compared with those who spend less time watching television. The term “cultivation”

thus refers to the independent contribution television viewing makes to audience members’ conceptions of social reality . . . [t]elevision viewing cultivates ways of seeing the world—those who spend more time “living” in the world of television are more likely to see the “real world” in terms of the images, values, portrayals, and ideologies that emerge through the lens of television. (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2008, p. 35)

The cultivation differential is then defined as the observed difference in conceptions of reality (e.g., outgroup attitudes) between lighter and heavier viewers within a given population or subgroup. Following this theory, it should follow that exposure to stereotypical narratives or negative framing about migration or migrants on television exerts a greater impact on attitudes among heavy viewers than among light viewers (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999).

Sometime after its initial conception, Gerbner (1998) and Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, and Morgan (1980) expanded this theory after receiving criticism about the application of statistical controls in initial cultivation studies. Two new concepts were introduced: mainstreaming and resonance (Shrum, 2017). Mainstreaming refers to a sharing or convergence of world views among heavy viewers in otherwise disparate groups (gender, education, income). People in these different groups tend to hold different views of the world. Gerbner and colleagues found that heavy television viewing should cause the outlooks of disparate groups (high vs. low income, higher educated vs. lower educated) to move closer to one another (hence the term mainstreaming; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980). Resonance suggests that those audience members with life experiences that are congruent with television portrayals will be most affected by media consumption, essentially providing a “double dose” of the television message and thus boosting cultivation (Gerbner et al., 1980). For example, viewing portrayals of refugees should resonate particularly strongly with audience members who have had direct experiences with refugees (Shrum, 2017).

To the Salience of the Migration Issue in the News Media

In line with agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), increasing attention of the news media to migration-related issues is expected to raise awareness of these issues among the public. Van Gorp (2005) found that media play a critical role in generating public support for, or condemnation of, migration policies. Not only do news media select the topics they cover, but they also define the way they report on these issues in terms of news angles, tone, voice, and more. The shaping of news items has an impact on the way people form their views and opinions on an issue (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011). Additionally, the perspectives or news frames that journalists select shape public understanding of policy themes (Brewer & Gross, 2010). The way a topic is

portrayed in the news may affect both the importance attached to it (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) and its public perception—such as specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. By selecting perspectives in their coverage, media can prevent or contribute to the categorizing of groups and, by doing so, influence public opinion (e.g., De Coninck, 2022).

Given that many people still have limited face-to-face contact with immigrants across countries, news media shoulder a large responsibility in accurately framing immigration issues in their coverage (Ogan, Pennington, Venger, & Metz, 2018). News frames can generally be described as schemes of interpretation that enable the efficient contextualization, classification, and understanding of information. Framing tends to stress specific aspects of reality while pushing others into the background (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011). By emphasizing and selecting certain aspects of reality (and, thus, making them more salient), media outlets include the chances that recipients will adopt the interpretations, judgments, and decisions that have been put forward (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Van Gorp (2005) identified two main frames related to news coverage on immigrants: the victim frame and the intruder frame. The victim frame emphasizes the life-threatening conditions faced by immigrants, who are mostly depicted as passive actors in need of help. Such coverage is intended to evoke sentiments such as innocence and compassion. In contrast, the intruder frame is often used to refer to refugees, who are assumed to migrate illegally or apply for international protection illegitimately. Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) examined the dominant frames of refugee issues in Austrian newspapers through computer-assisted content analysis. They identified three dominant news frames: (1) refugees represented as victims; (2) refugees represented as threats to Austrian culture, security, and welfare; and (3) refugees as a dehumanized, anonymous outgroup. Eberl and colleagues (2018) found that frames used in media coverage depend on the specific “type” of migrant on which news stories focus. For example, the terms “migrants” and “immigrants” are closely associated with frames of economic threat (e.g., through increased competition on the labor market), whereas “refugees” and “asylum seekers” are framed more as economic burdens (e.g., by being a burden on a country’s welfare system).

Many studies examining the potential effects of media coverage of migration or migrants on public attitudes have been conducted in Europe. Particularly when the media present threatening views of immigrants, coverage tends to exert significant impacts on audiences. Jacobs, Meeusen, and d’Haenens (2016) found that Flemish (Belgian) news media differ in their representational preferences: Frames within public media are more likely to emphasize the positive consequences of migration, whereas commercial media use more sensational elements referring to negative emotions and conflict. This pattern also holds for newspaper coverage: Broadsheets or quality newspapers adopt more left-leaning, liberal viewpoints toward migration, whereas tabloids or popular newspapers¹ apply more sensationalist news frames (Eberl et al., 2018; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). In their press media content analysis about the framing of the European migration crisis in Central Europe (e.g., Germany and Hungary), Chouliaraki, Georgiou,

¹ Quality newspapers value objectivity and portray multiple (conflicting) perspectives in their coverage. In presenting these conflicting insights, stories are interpreted and analyzed in-depth. They 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 with what they believe audiences are interested in (Boukes & Vliegthart, 2020).

Zaborowski, and Oomen (2017) found that negative consequences of refugee arrivals were strongly emphasized in all newspapers, with refugees portrayed as anonymous and unskilled. In Hungary in particular, press media pushed for physical boundaries between countries (e.g., fences) to stop refugees from entering.

Such distinctions in media coverage can also be found in some studies outside Europe. Research analyzing possible connections between media exposure and public attitudes toward immigrants in the United States also found significant relationships between television news consumption and attitudes toward immigration (De Coninck, Ogan, et al., 2021). Hoewe, Peacock, Kim, and Barnidge (2020) found that this relationship emerged only for consumers of Fox News (a largely conservative network), with the Fox online and television audience preferring stricter immigration policies. Respondents who preferred MSNBC or CNN (largely liberal networks) did not favor less restrictive policies. The researchers' examination of the content of the news sources demonstrated that Fox News stories emphasized authority and subversion while deemphasizing providing care for migrants, such that the news channel "appears influential in reinforcing and shaping its consumers' policy preferences" (Hoewe et al., 2020, p. 2052). No specific relationship was found in the preference for policies and content broadcast by CNN and MSNBC. Similarly, Nassar (2020) found that regular consumers of Fox News reported lower support for resettling Syrian refugees in the United States, whereas no such link was found for those who watched CNN or MSNBC. In Colombia, no content analyses of media coverage about immigration have been conducted to our knowledge, but Casado-Gutiérrez, Sapiezynska, and Sanchez (2014) did find that, out of 23 major Latin American and Anglo-Saxon newspapers, the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* published the highest number of articles on the Venezuelan refugee crisis.

Comparative Perspectives on Media Systems

When taking a step back from the individual perspective, it is also important to note that news media operate within a larger societal system, and the coverage of certain themes or news stories may be (partly) attributed to larger societal influences (e.g., by governmental influence or a lack of journalistic autonomy). Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed a conceptual framework to compare media systems across countries. They based their typology on four dimensions. The first is the structure of (mass) media markets, which is illustrated through newspaper circulation rates, regional or linguistic segmentation of media markets, or the relative importance of newspapers and television as news sources. The second dimension is the degree of political parallelism, which deals with the extent to which mass media reflects political divisions or dimensions in a country. The partisanship of media audiences, journalists' role orientations and practices, and the regulation of public service broadcasting are just a few of the variables used to construct this dimension. The third dimension involves the professionalization of journalism, measured through journalists' degree of autonomy, development of distinct norms and rules, and public service orientation. The fourth and final dimension refers to the role of the state: To what extent does the state have control over the shape and structure of the media system? Although this can vary widely among countries, variables such as censorship, provisions of regulation for the media, and endowment of media with economic subsidies provide indications of the state's role (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). These four dimensions result in three distinct media systems: a Mediterranean/polarized media model (low newspaper circulation, high political parallelism, weak professionalization, and strong state intervention; Italy and Spain are examples), a North/Central democratic corporatist model (high newspaper circulation, strong professionalism, and strong

state intervention, but with protections for press freedom; Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Sweden are examples) and a North Atlantic or liberal model (medium newspaper circulation, neutral commercial press, strong professionalization, and market dominated; United States is an example).

The initial version of this typology was limited to 18 Western democracies, which was also one of its main criticisms (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Montoya-Londoño, 2014). More recently, researchers have expanded this typology by also looking to Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (Herrera, Humprecht, Engesser, Brüggemann, & Büchel, 2017; Polyák, 2015) and to Latin America (Montoya-Londoño, 2014). In CEE countries, press freedom and foreign media ownership—two elements that were not considered in the original typology—were included because of their particular relevance for media systems in these countries. Herrera, Humprecht, Engesser, Brüggemann, and Büchel (2017) found that CEE “does not embody a single media system model, but can actually be segmented into three different types” (p. 4811). Relevant to this study are their findings on Hungary, which they categorize as belonging to an Eastern media system (along with Bulgaria and Romania), with very high levels of political parallelism, very low freedom of press, very low audiences for public television, and high levels of foreign ownership (Herrera et al., 2017; Polyák, 2015). Research on some Latin American countries (e.g., Colombia, Mexico, Brazil) indicates that they share certain characteristics with countries in the Mediterranean/polarized media system (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002). More specifically, they are characterized by partisan journalism, a high degree of instrumentalization of press and public broadcasting, and a fragile regulatory framework vis-à-vis the commercial sector (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Montoya-Londoño, 2014). Colombia is an exception in some regards as transmission facilities were traditionally state owned, and with time, they were allocated to private or commercial production companies. Over the years, this growing commercialization and high degree of government control over commercial airtime has spurred public debate about the need to safeguard independent institutions for broadcasting. Recent research confirms that Colombia’s media system is highly complex, as the relationship between journalists and the government

is based primarily on editorial and financial dependence, where the government is at the same time the source of funding and the main client of public service TV outcomes, which leads producers to direct their creative efforts to coverage that complies with the government’s known preferences. (Castaño-Echeverri, 2017, p. 215)

The Present Study

Our study is aimed to fill a gap in the literature by investigating the link between media consumption and outgroup attitudes across a wide range of countries, including countries in Western Europe and the United States (e.g., Colombia, Hungary), using large-scale survey research. Building on insights from cultivation and framing theories, we expected that both the type of news media consumed (De Coninck, Ogan, & d’Haenens, 2021; De Coninck, Ogan, et al., 2021) and the amount of news media consumption (Shrum, 2017) are associated with attitudes toward immigrants. Building on framing theory, literature indicates that individuals who mainly consume public television or quality newspapers tend to hold more favorable views of immigrants, whereas individuals who consume more commercial television or popular newspapers hold less favorable views (De Coninck et al., 2018; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). However, such associations may differ depending

on a country's media system, for example by considering the degree of state intervention in a country's public broadcasting system. Following cultivation theory, we expected that heavy media consumers would hold more negative attitudes, as the televised reality that they are exposed to often represents immigrants in a negative light. Because it clearly matters which media content is viewed, we make a distinction between the public and commercial news media and hypothesize that exposure to mainly public media would entail more positive attitudes toward migrants than exposure to mainly commercial media.

Data and Methodology

Data were collected through an online questionnaire to adults aged 25–65 in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and Sweden) and to adults aged 18–65 in the United States and Colombia. The survey was fielded for four weeks in May and June of 2021, at which point a sample size of 13,645 respondents (about 1,500 per country) was reached. We selected various countries to represent a diversity of national characteristics, such as “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, p. 222). Bilendi, the survey firm that collected the data, has a strong presence in the various countries under study, allowing us to limit the cost of the study and still gather a large data set. The polling agency drew a quota sample out of its available panels, with heterogeneity in terms of age and gender. The cooperation rate ranged from 12% to 31% across countries. Respondents were contacted through e-mail with the request to participate in a study. The survey itself was distributed through Bilendi'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, ensuring that the terminology used in the questions is considered “everyday language” by the respondents. Respondents were unable to skip questions, but some did have a “no answer” option. For more information on the data set, see De Coninck, Duque, Schwartz, & d'Haenens (2021).

Measures

Attitudes Toward Immigrants

To assess sentiments toward immigrants in each country, we presented a feeling thermometer question. Here, respondents were asked to indicate how they felt toward immigrants, with a score of 0 representing very cold or negative feelings and a score of 10 indicating very warm or positive feelings. To ensure that all respondents had a uniform understanding of whom we considered to be an immigrant, we also presented a definition of this group: “The term migrant is usually understood as covering all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reasons of ‘personal convenience’ and without intervention of an external compelling reason (e.g., war, natural disaster, . . .)” (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2004, p. 40).

Traditional and Digital News Media Consumption

To assess traditional and digital 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. Television news consumption was split into two groups: public and commercial networks. In the United States, previous research has shown that the commercial network landscape is ideologically fragmented, as Fox News and CNN/MSNBC vary widely in their framing of migrants (Haynes, Merolla, & Ramakrishnan, 2016). As a result, we measured U.S. respondents' consumption of each major commercial network: Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN. For newspaper and online news consumption, the most commonly read newspapers and commonly visited news webpages in each country were included separately (about 10 per country). To aggregate this information per type of newspaper and website, we calculated the mean score of the included broadsheets (quality) and tabloid (popular) newspapers/websites. We based ourselves on expert analyses of Media Landscapes² to assess which news sources were considered quality versus tabloid news.

In a next step, we calculated the "media audience condition" in which each respondent could be categorized. To do so, we used a two-step approach. First, we used a median split on the (composite) news media measures to create high/low categorical variables for public network, commercial network, quality newspaper/website, and popular newspaper/website consumption. Second, we constructed a 2×2 matrix with these binary news media variables per media type (television, newspapers, websites), which enables the creation of four distinct groups: (1) low public/quality and low commercial/popular news consumption, (2) high public/quality and low commercial/popular news consumption, (3) low public/quality and high commercial/popular news consumption, and (4) high public/quality and high commercial/popular news consumption.

Control Variables

Respondents were asked to indicate their sex (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); full-time employment (0 = not full-time employed, 1 = full-time employed); educational attainment was measured by the highest level of education (no or primary education, lower secondary, higher secondary, tertiary—short form [college], tertiary—long form [university]), and political ideology (0 = far left, 10 = extreme right). An overview of the sample per country can be found in Table 1.

Analytic Strategy

To answer our research questions, we conducted two sets of analyses. First, we used linear regression analyses³ to assess the association between consumption of different news media types (public television, commercial television, quality newspapers, et cetera) and attitudes toward immigrants in each

² "Media Landscapes (<https://medialandscapes.org/>) involves close to 40 expert writers who have mapped the entire journalism ecosystem of over 30 countries. Each country features details on the historical evolution of its media scene and major players. Print, broadcast, and digital outlets are covered, as are all relevant associations, professional bodies, unions, and educational institutions." (Media Landscapes, 2021, para. 3).

³ Although the data were nested within nine countries, multilevel modeling was not possible because the number of countries was too low. Most studies consider 20 to 30 groups to be an absolute minimum to avoid parameter and standard error bias (Meuleman & Billiet, 2009).

country. As previously mentioned, the U.S. analysis differs somewhat from the other countries given their ideologically fragmented commercial television landscape. We included Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC (all commercial television news media) separately in the regression analysis. In a second linear regression analysis, we replaced the news media consumption indicators with the media audience conditions within each country. We included as predictors the high/low consumption indicators for television, newspaper, and news websites. Respondents who were low news media consumers (i.e., those who with low scores on each type of news media consumption) were selected as the reference category. We also controlled for age, political ideology, educational attainment (continuous), work status, gender, and religious denomination (dummy-coded). Standardized coefficients are presented with standard errors in brackets.

Table 1. Descriptive Overview of the Sample (N = 13,645).

	Austria	Belgium	Colombia	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Sweden	United States
In %									
Sex									
Male	50.6	48.1	43.3	49.0	46.5	48.8	50.5	50.3	51.8
Female	49.4	51.9	56.7	51.0	53.5	51.2	49.5	49.7	48.2
Age									
Under 30 years	12.2	9.0	33.8	9.7	8.9	6.6	8.7	10.1	13.1
Between 30 and 45 years	42.1	39.0	41.3	41.2	45.8	40.6	44.6	41.9	43.3
Between 45 and 60 years	35.7	40.4	19.8	38.4	34.4	42.2	37.2	38.7	22.0
Over 60 years	10.0	11.6	5.1	10.7	10.9	10.6	9.5	9.4	21.6
Religious denomination									
Roman Catholic	57.9	45.3	61.8	27.2	48.3	72.4	51.7	6.5	34.8
Protestant	5.7	2.1	7.9	27.9	6.9	1.0	1.2	27.4	22.3
Muslim	2.5	1.3	0.4	2.0	0.2	0.7	0.4	3.8	6.1
Jewish	0.5	0.4	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.2	5.1
Agnostic/Atheist	25.7	46.5	4.9	36.8	24.9	20.1	39.2	51.5	10.0
Other	7.7	4.5	24.0	5.6	19.2	5.6	7.1	10.7	21.6
Full-time job	56.8	63.5	45.9	58.6	65.6	55.5	62.2	63.7	59.7
Television consumption									
Low public, low commercial	26.6	20.4	17.2	17.5	36.1	18.3	14.9	26.2	-
High public, low commercial	14.9	25.0	16.1	25.0	8.4	14.6	8.9	10.2	-
Low public, high commercial	16.0	12.4	14.8	13.8	26.6	12.2	17.1	12.1	-
High public, high commercial	42.6	42.2	51.8	43.7	28.9	54.9	59.1	51.5	-
Newspaper consumption									
Low quality, low popular	68.9	76.2	72.2	86.8	87.7	73.5	74.8	51.9	-
High quality, low popular	9.9	8.7	7.0	4.3	2.7	7.8	3.9	1.2	-
Low quality, high popular	13.0	6.1	5.0	1.7	4.3	4.8	9.2	30.9	-
High quality, high popular	8.1	8.9	15.8	7.2	5.4	13.9	12.0	16.0	-

News website consumption									
Low quality, low popular	75.6	63.8	52.0	72.0	64.2	60.6	84.0	39.8	49.8
High quality, low popular	11.7	15.0	4.0	7.5	10.3	7.3	2.4	5.7	5.3
Low quality, high popular	5.1	9.1	21.1	10.5	8.4	11.9	6.7	30.9	8.5
High quality, high popular	7.5	12.1	23.0	10.1	17.1	20.2	6.9	23.6	36.4
Mean scores (standard error in brackets)	Austria	Belgium	Colombia	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Sweden	United States
Educational attainment	3.37 (0.85)	3.81 (1.01)	3.09 (1.15)	3.24 (1.05)	3.52 (0.76)	3.53 (1.00)	3.56 (1.12)	3.53 (0.84)	4.09 (1.30)
Political ideology	4.79 (2.11)	5.32 (2.21)	5.10 (1.81)	4.77 (1.97)	5.39 (2.35)	5.21 (2.53)	4.47 (2.24)	5.37 (2.59)	6.46 (2.87)
Attitudes toward immigrants	5.20 (2.44)	5.16 (2.50)	6.52 (2.33)	5.42 (2.41)	4.07 (2.48)	5.59 (2.59)	6.17 (2.45)	5.07 (2.73)	6.81 (2.67)
Public television consumption	3.96 (2.20)	4.46 (2.13)	4.53 (2.14)	4.47 (2.09)	3.01 (2.06)	4.51 (2.03)	4.49 (2.15)	4.11 (2.01)	3.39 (2.31)
Commercial television consumption	3.89 (1.94)	3.83 (2.17)	4.65 (2.30)	3.88 (2.05)	3.93 (2.15)	4.38 (2.03)	4.94 (2.03)	4.13 (1.97)	-
CNN (United States only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.67 (2.35)
Fox News (United States only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.69 (2.32)
MSNBC (United States only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.36 (2.28)
Quality newspaper consumption	2.16 (1.37)	2.09 (1.42)	2.58 (1.50)	1.82 (1.26)	1.64 (1.11)	2.37 (1.46)	2.05 (1.39)	2.15 (1.39)	-
Popular newspaper consumption	2.43 (1.32)	2.22 (1.25)	2.37 (1.39)	1.70 (1.17)	1.79 (1.18)	2.04 (1.60)	2.38 (1.42)	3.37 (1.93)	-
Newspaper consumption (United States only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.09 (2.15)
Quality news website consumption	2.35 (1.38)	2.59 (1.53)	2.68 (1.55)	2.23 (1.38)	2.75 (1.52)	2.59 (1.52)	1.80 (1.17)	2.72 (1.51)	3.16 (2.17)
Popular news website consumption	2.00 (1.23)	2.47 (1.36)	3.31 (1.81)	2.18 (1.51)	2.74 (1.39)	2.80 (1.59)	1.92 (1.37)	3.69 (1.95)	3.27 (2.33)
<i>N</i>	1,520	1,505	1,543	1,521	1,514	1,510	1,512	1,517	1,503
<i>Cooperation rate (in %)</i>	23	22	19	22	31	19	16	12	17

Results

The results of the first linear regression analysis in Table 2 indicate that news media consumption was associated with attitudes among respondents of most countries under study. Among respondents from Belgium ($\beta = .06, p = .012$), Germany ($\beta = .06, p = .022$), Spain ($\beta = .06, p = .015$), and the United States ($\beta = .15, p < .001$), public television consumption was associated with positive attitudes. However, consuming Hungarian public television was associated with negative attitudes ($\beta = -.11, p < .001$). In various countries, the opposite pattern was found for commercial television consumption: in Austria ($\beta = -.08, p = .007$), Germany ($\beta = -.08, p = .004$), and Italy ($\beta = -.09, p = .004$), commercial television consumption was associated with negative attitudes. In the United States, the picture on the role of commercial television consumption was mixed. Consuming Fox News was associated with negative attitudes ($\beta = -.10, p = .006$), whereas consuming CNN was strongly associated with positive attitudes ($\beta = .22, p < .001$). Newspaper consumption was not strongly associated with attitudes, although some exceptions were noted. For example, in Colombia ($\beta = .09, p = .037$) and Hungary ($\beta = .14, p < .001$), quality newspaper consumption was associated with positive attitudes, whereas popular newspaper consumption was associated with positive attitudes in Spain only ($\beta = .10, p = .020$). Findings on the role of news website consumption were significant in several countries. Consuming quality news websites was associated with positive attitudes among Austrian ($\beta = .13, p = .003$), German ($\beta = .11, p = .002$), Hungarian ($\beta = .10, p = .009$), Italian ($\beta = .10, p = .007$), Swedish ($\beta = .13, p = .007$), and American respondents ($\beta = .21, p = .008$). Popular news websites were associated with attitudes only among Spanish participants ($\beta = .09, p = .041$).

Table 2. Linear Regression Results for Attitudes Toward Immigrants on Traditional and Digital News Media Consumption (N = 13,645).

	Austria	Belgium	Colombia	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Sweden	United States
Public television consumption	.04 (.03)	.06* (.03)	.01 (.03)	.06* (.03)	-.11** * (.04)	.04 (.04)	.06* (.03)	-.01 (.05)	.15*** (.06)
Commercial television consumption	-.08** (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	-.08** (.03)	-.04 (.03)	-.09* * (.04)	-.02 (.04)	-.03 (.05)	-
CNN (United States only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.22*** (.07)
Fox News (United States only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.10** (.06)
MSNBC (United States only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.02 (.08)
Quality newspaper consumption	.01 (.07)	.06 (.07)	.09* (.08)	.08 (.09)	.14*** (.09)	.07 (.08)	-.06 (.07)	-.04 (.08)	-
Popular newspaper consumption	-.05 (.06)	.02 (.07)	.01 (.08)	-.01 (.09)	.05 (.09)	-.01 (.06)	.10* (.07)	.01 (.07)	-
Newspaper consumption (United States only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.07 (.09)
Quality news website consumption	.13** (.07)	.01 (.07)	-.06 (.08)	.11** (.07)	.10** (.06)	.10* (.08)	.00 (.09)	.13** (.07)	.21** (.08)
Popular news website consumption	-.03 (.07)	.03 (.07)	.06 (.06)	.04 (.06)	-.03 (.07)	.06 (.05)	.09* (.07)	-.04 (.06)	-.05 (.05)
Sex									
Male (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Female	.04 (.13)	.03 (.14)	-.01 (.13)	.06* (.12)	-.01 (.13)	.05 (.13)	.02 (.13)	.07** (.15)	-.04 (.13)
Age									
Under 30 years (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Between 30 and 45 years	-.03 (.19)	.01 (.25)	-.06 (.16)	-.06 (.21)	-.04 (.23)	-.06 (.27)	-.06 (.24)	-.06 (.26)	-.07 (.21)
Between 45 and 60 years	-.02 (.20)	-.03 (.26)	-.03 (.19)	-.07 (.22)	-.05 (.24)	-.06 (.27)	-.05 (.25)	-.08 (.27)	-.16*** (.23)
Over 60 years	.01 (.27)	-.00 (.31)	-.00 (.30)	-.04 (.28)	-.03 (.30)	.05 (.32)	.01 (.31)	-.03 (.34)	-.18*** (.24)

Religious denomination									
Roman Catholic (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protestant	.04 (.26)	.05 (.47)	.06* (.24)	-.04 (.16)	.04 (.26)	-.03 (.62)	.07** (.59)	-.17** (.32)	-.01 (.16)
Muslim	.05 (.39)	-.00 (.60)	.01 (1.04)	.03 (.43)	.01 (.37)	.07** (.75)	.04 (.18)	.04 (.47)	.02 (.26)
Jewish	.04 (.86)	.07** (1.11)	.03 (.68)	.06 (.85)	.06* (.97)	-.00 (.67)	-.00 (.65)	-.02 (1.53)	.03 (.28)
Agnostic/Atheist	-.03 (.14)	.02 (.14)	.02 (.30)	-.10** (.15)	.04 (.16)	-.05 (.17)	.03 (.15)	-.21** * (.31)	.01 (.22)
Other	.06* (.23)	.06* (.33)	.10*** (.16)	-.01 (.27)	.02 (.17)	.00 (.28)	.00 (.30)	-.04 (.36)	.01 (.18)
Full-time job									
	.04 (.13)	.03 (.16)	-.03 (.14)	.02 (.13)	-.03 (.15)	-.02 (.14)	-.02 (.14)	.01 (.16)	-.02 (.15)
Educational attainment									
	.02 (.07)	.01 (.07)	.02 (.06)	.12*** (.06)	.08** (.09)	-.02 (.07)	.10** * (.06)	.07* (.09)	.04 (.05)
Political ideology									
	-.31*** (.03)	-.17*** (.03)	.06* (.04)	-.28*** (.03)	-.19** * (.03)	-.37* **	-.26* **	-.26** * (.03)	.04 (.03)
<i>R</i> ²	.16	.05	.02	.16	.10	.19	.10	.12	.37

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

Effects of individual control variables indicate that women held more positive attitudes than men in Germany ($\beta = .06, p = .027$) and Sweden ($\beta = .07, p = .003$). Age played a significant role in the United States only, as respondents in older-age categories (45–60 years old and 60+) held more negative attitudes compared with the youngest-age categories. Higher educational attainment appeared to be associated with more positive attitudes, an association that was significant among German, Hungarian, Spanish, and Swedish respondents. As for political ideology, findings indicate that a right-leaning political ideology was strongly associated with negative attitudes toward immigrants among respondents in all European countries under study. However, in Colombia, this association was positive ($\beta = .06, p = .011$), and it was not significant in the United States ($\beta = .04, p = .061$).

When we consider the results in Table 3, in which we replaced the media consumption variables with the media audience conditions, findings offer a different perspective on the role of media consumption on attitudes. When compared with low public and commercial television news consumers, those who had high commercial consumption held negative attitudes: Those in the low public and high commercial consumption category held more negative attitudes in Belgium and Germany, whereas high public and commercial consumers in Germany also held more negative attitudes than did overall low consumers. In Hungary, high consumption of public broadcasting drove negative attitudes—mirroring the results in Table 2. When we look at newspaper consumption, high-quality and popular newspaper consumption (as opposed to low-quality/popular newspaper consumption) was associated with positive attitudes among Austrians, Belgians, Germans, Hungarians, and Italians. These findings thus indicate that, rather than the type of newspaper consumption (see the lack of significant results in Table 2), the frequency of newspapers consumed emerged as a stronger driver of attitudes. The same pattern can be found for news website consumption: High consumption of both quality and popular websites, but also high consumption of quality/low consumption of popular websites, was associated with positive attitudes in many countries.

Table 3. Linear Regression Results for Attitudes Toward Immigrants on Heavy/Light Media Users (N = 13,645).

	Austria	Belgium	Colombia	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Sweden	United States
Television consumption									
Low public, low commercial (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
High public, low commercial	.02 (.20)	.03 (.21)	-.01 (.24)	-.01 (.20)	-.09** (.26)	.04 (.25)	.05 (.28)	.05 (.29)	-
Low public, high commercial	-.08* (.20)	-.05 (.25)	-.02 (.25)	-.10** (.22)	-.03 (.17)	-.05 (.26)	-.01 (.24)	.02 (.27)	-
High public, high commercial	-.05 (.16)	-.02 (.19)	-.00 (.21)	-.07* (.18)	-.08* (.18)	-.04 (.20)	.03 (.20)	.00 (.20)	-
Newspaper consumption									
Low quality, low popular (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
High quality, low popular	.02 (.24)	.01 (.27)	-.01 (.31)	.01 (.35)	.06* (.43)	-.00 (.31)	.02 (.35)	.00 (.74)	-
Low quality, high popular	-.02 (.20)	-.01 (.30)	.00 (.32)	-.00 (.52)	.04 (.36)	-.05 (.34)	.09** (.23)	-.01 (.25)	-
High quality, high popular	.06* (.28)	.08* (.33)	.07 (.26)	.15*** (.34)	.13*** (.32)	.10* * (.27)	-.05 (.27)	-.01 (.34)	-
News website consumption									
Low quality, low popular (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
High quality, low popular	.06* (.22)	.05 (.22)	.01 (.39)	.06* (.26)	.09** (.22)	.07* (.31)	.02 (.43)	.10** (.35)	.07** (.30)
Low quality, high popular	-.02 (.29)	.01 (.27)	.01 (.19)	.02 (.21)	-.01 (.25)	.02 (.22)	.03 (.29)	.04 (.26)	-.10*** (.24)
High quality, high popular	.11*** (.29)	.02 (.29)	.03 (.25)	.05 (.30)	.05 (.22)	.08* (.25)	.12*** (.33)	.04 (.31)	.31*** (.19)
Sex									
Male (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Female	.04 (.13)	.03 (.14)	-.01 (.13)	.06* (.12)	-.01 (.13)	.05 (.13)	.02 (.13)	.07** (.15)	-.04 (.13)

Age

Under 30 years (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Between 30 and 45 years	-.03 (.19)	.01 (.25)	-.06 (.16)	-.06 (.21)	-.04 (.23)	-.06 (.27)	-.06 (.24)	-.06 (.26)	-.07 (.21)
Between 45 and 60 years	-.02 (.20)	-.03 (.26)	-.03 (.19)	-.07 (.22)	-.05 (.24)	-.06 (.27)	-.05 (.25)	-.08 (.27)	-.16*** (.23)
Over 60 years	.01 (.27)	-.00 (.31)	-.00 (.30)	-.04 (.28)	-.03 (.30)	.05 (.32)	.01 (.31)	-.03 (.34)	-.18*** (.24)

Religious denomination

Roman Catholic (ref. cat.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protestant	.04 (.26)	.05 (.47)	.06* (.24)	-.04 (.16)	.04 (.26)	-.03 (.62)	.07** (.59)	-.17** (.32)	-.01 (.16)
Muslim	.05 (.39)	-.00 (.60)	.01 (.04)	.03 (.43)	.01 (.37)	.07* * (.75)	.04 (.18)	.04 (.47)	.02 (.26)
Jewish	.04 (.86)	.07** (1.11)	.03 (.68)	.06 (.85)	.06* (.97)	-.00 (.67)	-.00 (.65)	-.02 (.53)	.03 (.28)
Agnostic/Atheist	-.03 (.14)	.02 (.14)	.02 (.30)	-.10** (.15)	.04 (.16)	-.05 (.17)	.03 (.15)	-.21** * (.31)	.01 (.22)
Other	.06* (.23)	.06* (.33)	.10*** (.16)	-.01 (.27)	.02 (.17)	.00 (.28)	.00 (.30)	-.04 (.36)	.01 (.18)

Full-time job

	.04 (.13)	.03 (.16)	-.03 (.14)	.02 (.13)	-.03 (.15)	-.02 (.14)	-.02 (.14)	.01 (.16)	-.02 (.15)
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Educational attainment

	.02 (.07)	.01 (.07)	.02 (.06)	.12*** (.06)	.08** (.09)	-.02 (.07)	.10*** (.06)	.07* (.09)	.04 (.05)
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Political ideology

	-.31*** (.03)	-.17*** (.03)	.06* (.04)	-.28*** (.03)	-.19** * (.03)	-.37 ***	-.26* **	-.26** * (.03)	.04 (.03)
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<i>R</i> ²	.16	.05	.02	.16	.10	.19	.10	.12	.37
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Note.* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

In the present study, we investigated the extent to which attitudes toward immigrants among the adult population are associated with news media consumption in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and Sweden), the United States, and Colombia. Four main findings emerged. First, the descriptive overview of news media consumption suggests interesting differences in consumption patterns across countries. Austrians, Belgians, and Germans—citizens of countries in the North/Central democratic corporatist media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004)—tend to consume more public than commercial television news. Colombians and Spaniards—countries with Mediterranean media systems—report the opposite pattern, namely higher consumption of commercial than public television news. Television consumption of Hungarians and Americans, whose countries are classified in systems with weak public service media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Montoya-Londoño, 2014), is in line with this pattern: Not only do they consume more commercial than public television (as Colombians and Spaniards do), but exposure to public television consumption is much lower in Hungary and the United States than in Colombia and Spain. Italy and Sweden represent diverging cases. Italians report slightly higher public than commercial consumption (despite its classification as a Mediterranean media system), but news consumption of both types appears to be high. In Sweden, consumption of the two media types is nearly identical. Similar findings emerge for news website consumption—except that Italians’ news consumption now aligns with that of Spanish and Colombian respondents, in line with the Mediterranean model—and news website consumption is overall lower than television consumption in these countries. However, the pattern of news website consumption aligns with the media systems in the same way that television consumption does. This set of findings suggests that cross-country variation in media consumption patterns is not random, but may be explained by the political, societal, and media contexts in which individuals operate.

Second, and in line with framing theory (De Coninck et al., 2018; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017), public television consumption was predominantly positively associated with attitudes, whereas commercial television consumption was negatively associated with attitudes. The exception here can be found among Hungarians, for whom public news consumption was negatively associated with attitudes. This may be explained by the growing control of the (anti-immigrant) Hungarian government vis-à-vis public service media (Polyák, 2015), combined with the country’s high number of refugees because of its role as a transit country in the Western Balkan route during the European migration crisis (Bender, 2020). Although not all relationships between television media use and attitudes were significant, the pattern for commercial media use is particularly interesting. This link is significant among Austrians, Germans, and Italians—also citizens of countries located on another popular route through Europe among refugees during the 2015–2016 migration crisis. The situation in the United States is somewhat different: Although effects of public service media on attitudes mirror those in Europe, commercial media is highly fragmented. As a result, consumers of CNN—which adopts humanitarian frames and emphasizes individual stories—tend to hold positive views of immigrants, whereas consumers of Fox News—where framing is traditionally more negative (Ogan et al., 2018)—hold negative views.

Third, the role of traditional newspaper consumption appears to be limited. Only in Hungary did we find a (positive) link between quality newspaper consumption and attitudes toward immigrants. There is a stronger effect of online news consumption, indicating the growing effect of digitized mainstream media on

public perceptions. In most countries, exposure to quality news websites was—as expected—positively associated with attitudes.

Fourth, the link between media audience conditions and attitudes largely follows the logic of cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), at least as far as television consumption is concerned. Here, we saw that heavy consumption of any type of news media—public, commercial, or both—is associated with more negative attitudes when compared with individuals who are classified as light public and commercial television news users. However, this is the case only among Austrians, Germans, and Hungarians—again, residents of countries that were heavily affected by the European migration crisis in 2015–2016 and saw many refugees either pass through or settle in their country. The relationship of heavy (digital) newspaper consumption with attitudes is very different, as heavy consumption of quality and/or popular news, as opposed to light consumption of press media (e.g., newspapers), is nearly always positively associated with attitudes toward immigrants. This pattern signals an interesting divergence between newspaper and television audiences. Although cultivation theory was initially developed based on television exposure (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), later studies have found that this theory also applies to newspaper exposure (Vergeer, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2000). Further research is required to investigate what drives this divergence between heavy television and (digital) newspaper effects.

Before moving on to enumerating limitations and recommendations for future research, we should discuss some nuances in our findings: The results for Belgium and Colombia must be interpreted with caution given their low R^2 values when compared with other countries in the data set. This disparity in percentages of variability explained indicates that traditional news consumption—regardless of the direction of the effects—is not a strong predictor for anti-immigrant sentiments in these two countries (when controlling for sociodemographic characteristics). Speaking of these sociodemographic characteristics, political ideology jumps out as being strongly linked to anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe. This is not surprising: Individuals who identify as conservative or right-wing have traditionally reported more negative views on migration and diversity than those who identify as liberal or left-wing (Messing & Ságvári, 2021). In Colombia and the United States, however, this link is much weaker or even nonexistent. For Americans, the role ideology plays may be mediated by age or exposure effects. Further research is required to investigate why this is the case for Colombians as well.

Limitations

Although the present study has made several contributions to the existing literature on the role of media in outgroup attitudes, some limitations must be noted. A key limitation lies in the methodology used. Although online surveys enable researchers to collect data on large (cross-country) samples in a short timeframe, individuals from low-socioeconomic and migrant backgrounds are often underrepresented in these samples, which may result in biased outcomes. We must therefore be careful not to generalize these results to entire populations. Furthermore, given that the current data are cross-sectional, we cannot make any causal claims about the relationship between news media exposure and attitudes. This important shortcoming may be addressed by conducting longitudinal or experimental studies on this topic in the future. Although we have tried to expand our view of the link between media use and outgroup attitudes beyond Europe, we acknowledge that views from other countries/regions

(e.g., Asia, Africa, and the Middle East) would add important insights to the literature. A final limitation concerns a lack of information about social media use. Although we included digital news consumption through news websites, a growing number of individuals consume news through social media channels as well (with much of that news also originating from traditional news sources). A deeper insight of the way in which news exposure through social media in combination with traditional news media exposure affects outgroup attitudes may yield more fine-tuned results.

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