

Abstract

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**Trust in Media in Polarised Times:
An Experimental Study**

The paper presents an original experimental study (online survey experiment, N = 377) about the relationship between political polarization and the way readers assess political news. The study examines in what way polarization – as a contextual environment for consumption of political news – influences people's trust in news from different media sources.

Our study supposes that perception and experience of existing polarization influences the way people attend to information environment. In the current information environment typical for its fragmentation and diversity, trust in sources of information plays significant role. Our main hypothesis states that for polarizing issues, exposure to news delivered by a trusted source will lead to acceptance of the message. *Ceteris paribus*, exposure to news presented by a distrusted source will lead to rejection of the message.

We conceive polarization and trust in media as two-dimensional constructs. Perceived polarization refers to perception of others as polarized; practiced polarization refers to rejection and disrespect for opposing opinions. Trust in media includes reflexive trust stemming from a notion that media should act as impartial expert system, and affective trust referring to an expectation that media should represent "us" and defend "our" values.

The proposed study contributes to research on impacts of polarization on the way people process political information. It also proposes an innovative approach to

conceptualization and measurement of polarization and media trust as more complex, two-dimensional concepts.