

# THREATPIE

## **A qualitative examination of citizens' (political) media diets across generations in five countries**

David N. Hopmann , Agnieszka Stępińska, **James Stanyer**, Denis Halagiera, Ludovic Terren, Luisa Gehle, Christine Meltzer, Raluca Buturoiu, Nicoleta Corbu, Ana S. Cardenal & Christian Schemer

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NETWORK



- Concerns about citizens and young citizens: avoiding news; being undiscerning in the news they consume or selecting information that confirms their prejudices (e.g., Van Aelst et al. 2017)
- Research on these topics has grown, BUT rarely discusses these matters with citizens – what do they think? What do they do? What differences are there across generations?
- Such an investigation is vital for getting an in-depth understanding of citizen engagement

# Citizens' Media Diets

- Examine citizens' media use and normative perceptions of media use using the analogy of diets.
- The diet analogy is an effective way for citizens to make sense of their existing practices
- Three fold aim: *First*, we identify citizens' perceptions of 'healthy' media diet. *Second*, we explore how citizens, in their own words, consume various types of media content. *Third*, we are interested in mapping *perceptions* of the main types of media content citizens consume
- This study is comparative and based on focus groups conducted in five European countries (Germany, Poland, Romania, Spain, and the UK) with younger adults (18-25 years old) and older adults (above 55)
- Expectations that there will be a contrast between generations and this will hold across countries – linked findings to wider survey in the project. Do norms vary or are they shared? Do their perceptions differ or not? And to what extent?

## *What do citizens perceive as a 'healthy' media diet?*

- Clear awareness among the younger adults of what a healthy media diet should include: a balance of sources (DE, RO, UK); absence of selective news use unless it means the avoidance of 'superficial' news (PL); use of quality news (PL); public service news (DE, UK); and a careful selection of sources (ES).
- Young citizens also claimed that they should take responsibility for the information they consume and check the facts (PL, RO; two countries with lower press freedom, see Table 1); exercise healthy scepticism (UK); and take the time to read as opposed to skim through
- Difference in emphasis placed on political news and information between generations

- Older generation emphasized the quality of the ingredients (ES, PL, RO). The importance of knowing who produces and writes the information
- Selective diets were also seen as unhealthy by the oldest media users
- The diversity of the media diet was also mentioned as being important (ES, PL)

## *How do people describe their media diets within the current media landscape*

- Social media is the main source of political information for young citizens, TV news channels were the primary source of news for the older citizens
- Young citizens gain news in a fragmented fashion from a wide range of sources, rather than a specific news channel. Older people seemed to be interested in an in-depth coverage of the issues, for which newspapers were praised.
- Young peoples consumption seems somewhat accidental and/or interest driven, older more deliberate and measured

## *How do citizens perceive of media diets across generations?*

- Participants extensively focused on differences between younger and older generations. Citizens **were critical** of the media diets of both their own and the other generation
- Young saw - **older citizens as less savvy news consumers**, more vulnerable and more likely to stick to a single source compared to young people (DE, PL, ES).
- Young participants saw the diet of young people generally as **unhealthy**, 'toxic' even
- Older perception that the younger generations' news consumption and interests were fundamentally different – **not interested in politics**

# Conclusion

- The metaphor of “food consumption” proved to be a good trigger in making people reflect critically about their own news consumption habits.
- **1, There was a clear normative awareness across groups.** Our study suggests that people of all ages are quite aware about the discrepancies between a healthy media diet and their own diet. Though **the dietary requirements were not the same**, there was **some normative overlap** in what should be present in citizens’ information intake.
- **2, There was a clear awareness their own consumption.** The young are mainly ‘social media news users’, perhaps ‘online news seekers’ but only if of interest to them, while the older generation could be classified as ‘traditionalists’.
- **3, There was a clear normative awareness of what others do.** Young participants saw the diet of young people generally as unhealthy, ‘toxic’ even - they saw older citizens as ‘less savvy’ consumers, possibly more gullible
- The older citizens saw the diets of young and old as different. While older citizens were presented as consuming news via conventional media at fixed times during the day