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CAN GENERALIZED TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA CHANGE MEDIA EXPOSURE PATTERNS?

A case study of Sweden

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Abstract

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Keyword:	*Trust in news media, media trust, media exposure, selective exposure, intentional news avoidance, mainstream news media, online or social media, alternative political media, attitude-consistent media, counter-attitudinal media.*

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between trust in news media and (1) exposure to mainstream news media, (2) exposure to online or social media for news, (3) intentional news avoidance and (4) exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media.

Theory: Media trust, uses and gratifications, alternative media, selective exposure and motivated reasoning theories.

Method: Principal components analysis, correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis

Result: Generalized trust in news media positively associates with the exposure to some of mainstream news media sources (quality newspapers and public broadcasting service TV news programs), but it does not significantly associate with the exposure to tabloids or commercial channel's TV news. Generalized trust in news media negatively associates with the exposure to online or social media for news and with the intent to avoid the news, while the intent to avoid the news relates to lower exposure to PBS TV news. Generalized trust in news media negatively associates with exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media among right-wing respondents but does not correlate to exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media among left-wing respondents. Finally, generalized trust in news media significantly negatively relates to exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media among both left-wing and right-wing respondents' groups.

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Executive summary

The question of how trust in news media relates to news media exposure patterns attracts considerable attention from both scholars and society in general. Many previous studies have found that trust in news media positively relates to mainstream media exposure and negatively relates to non-mainstream media exposure, including online and social media news. Current empirical studies have also reported that some intentional news avoiders express distrust of news media. Finally, there is some compelling evidence that people tend to show observable preferences for attitude-consistent versus counter-attitudinal information. Taking all of these research streams into account, the warnings that low trust in news media can lead to news avoidance, insufficient preparedness for elections or referendums, increased belief of misinformation in the online environment, incompatible knowledge about political issues and more radical, one-sided opinions appear plausible.

This study provides insights to further address three research problems connected to the investigation of the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure patterns. First of all, previous studies have suggested that there is a positive relationship between trust in news media and exposure to mainstream news media and a negative relationship between trust in news media and exposure to mainstream news media alternatives, including online or social media. However, they have not investigated or shown whether some mainstream news media sources suffer more from low trust in news media than others and what the differences are among mainstream news media alternatives. Secondly, previous studies have not paid much attention to news avoidance as a possible consequence of low trust in news media. Thirdly, ideological selective exposure has been insufficiently investigated in different media systems. Thus, it is unclear whether trust in news media relates only to exposure to attitude-consistent

alternative political media or exposure to both attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media.

Against this background, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between trust in news media and (1) exposure to mainstream news media, (2) exposure to online or social media for news, (3) intentional news avoidance and (4) exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media. It aims to address the relationships theoretically by reviewing the literature connected to trust, trust in news media, uses and gratifications, alternative media, selective exposure and motivated reasoning. Generalized trust in news media is picked as the most suitable level of media trust analysis in this empirical research.

Empirically, this study focuses on the case of Sweden and relies on the analysis of a survey conducted within the research program "Knowledge Resistance: Causes, consequences, cures" (N=3433). It departs from the assumption that people use news sources that they trust. Through descriptive analyses, principal components analysis, bivariate correlation analyses and multiple regression analyses this quantitative study tests the findings of the previous research in the current high-choice media environment, extends the knowledge about the focal relationships by separating different mainstream news media and alternative political media types from each other, and separating alternative political media from online or social media. It also applies more precise media trust and media exposure measurements.

Taken together, the key finding of this thesis is that the relationships between generalized trust in news media and media exposure patterns are more complex than previously thought. In Sweden generalized trust in news media positively associates with the exposure to quality newspapers and public broadcasting service TV news programs, but it does not relate to exposure to tabloids and commercial channel's TV news. In line with previous research, this

empirical study confirms that generalized trust in news media negatively associates with exposure to online or social media for news. It also hints that generalized trust in news media negatively associates with the intent to avoid the news and that this intent significantly relates to lower exposure to TV news programs. Moreover, in Sweden, generalized trust in news media associates with attitude-consistent alternative political media exposure among right-wing respondents but it does not significantly associate to attitude-consistent alternative political media exposure among left-wing respondents. Finally, this study suggests that generalized trust in news media associates with higher exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media among both left-wing and right-wing respondents' groups.

These results call for the revision of the theoretical assumptions and the methodologies, which had been adopted to investigate the relationship between generalized trust in news media and media exposure patterns. The first revision should relate to the question what citizens evaluate when they report their level of generalized trust in news media. Secondly, mainstream news media and alternative political media should not be investigated as homogenous entities. Thirdly, intent to avoid the news should be further monitored because in current high choice media environment, citizens may feel less obligated to follow the news. Fourthly, online or social media should be analysed separately from alternative political media in further empirical studies. Finally, the reasons of both attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media consumption should be more thoroughly investigated, possibly, further employing the arguments of motivated reasoning theory.

Number of words in executive summary: 824

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

1. Introduction

1.1.   Low trust in news media: is there something to be afraid of?

Reports about citizens' trust in news media (e.g., Flash Eurobarometer 464, 2018; Newman et al., 2019) attract considerable attention from media and communication scholars. This is unsurprising because news media are the primary providers of factual knowledge about political events (Mitchell et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2018). Their principal democratic function is to equip citizens to participate in political processes, self-govern, and hold powerful figures accountable (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 12; Newman & Fletcher, 2017, p. 7). Thus, it matters whether the citizens trust the news media.

Many societal concerns derive from the lack of knowledge about what citizens might do if their trust in news media decreases. For instance, those, who have observed distrust in news media among news avoiders, warn that news avoidance may lead to insufficient preparedness for elections or referendums (e.g., Kalogeropoulos, 2017). Others may be concerned that media skeptics may supplement mainstream news with alternative political media or social media. In online platforms, facts, opinions, and inaccurate information coexist (Metzger & Flanagin, 2015, p. 448). Thus, if such platforms became the first sources for news, some citizens would risk being misinformed (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013, p. 219; Moody, 2011; Rapp & Salovich, 2018).

On the other hand, it may also be that low trust in news media signals that citizens have become critical towards all the information they receive (e.g., Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019). Hence, they might not abandon mainstream news media but rather compare news from various sources to "verify" the information (Szostek, 2018). However, it is doubtful whether people can objectively pick the sources to compare because their predispositions and political preferences may influence their media exposure (see Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009).

The concerns, summarized above, have already been present in academic discourse for some time. However, their relevance has not decreased. On the contrary, the ever-expanding and ever-changing media environment we live in rather strengthens it.

The first reason why these warnings are relevant is because nowadays citizens have access to almost limitless choices of news providers (Prior, 2007, pp. 11-13). Thus, if people feel the need for news information but do not want to rely on mainstream news media, they can reach alternative political media or social media with a few clicks.

Some may argue that exposure to mainstream news media alternatives itself is not problematic. Nevertheless, the information citizens base their decisions on matters. First of all, it signals to what extent society can still have compatible knowledge about political issues and current affairs (Dahlgren, 2018). Secondly, information intakes that balance attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal stances prevent citizens from forming radical, one-sided opinions (see Stroud, 2011).

The second reason why currently the concerns about the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure are becoming even more important is that in a high-choice media environment it is easy to disengage from the news. The share between news seekers and news avoiders has increased over time (Prior, 2007; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2013). Some citizens get back to news only when they perceive it as necessary (see Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Prior, 2007, p. 10; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2013; Toff & Nielsen, 2018; Van Aelst et al., 2017).

Thus, to see this thesis will present the studies investigating the relationship between media trust and media exposure patterns. Consequently, selective exposure research can enrich the knowledge about this issue by specifying which alternative political media citizens prefer

and why. It can help to estimate how much skeptical citizens supplement mainstream news media with attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal mainstream media alternatives.

Previous research

1.1.1. *Trust in news media and media exposure*

The relations between trust in news media and media exposure have already received some researchers' attention. First of all, in general, empirical studies have suggested that trust in news media positively associates with mainstream media exposure while media scepticism relates to various non-mainstream media exposure (Jacob, 2010; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005; but see Kalogeropoulos et al. 2019b, p. 3685), including exposure to online or social media (2014 Fletcher & Park; 2017, Kalogeropoulos et al. 2019b; Tsfati & Ariely). However, the direction and the significance of the association between trust in news media and online media exposure differs based on the sources analysed in the studies (see Tsfati, 2010), and on the national contexts (Elvestad et al., 2018).

Secondly, empirical studies doubt whether sceptical citizens could completely substitute mainstream news media with alternative political media, online media or social media. For instance, in their examination of how mainstream media scepticism affects Americans' media diets, Tsfati & Cappella (2003) have concluded that media sceptics do not abandon mainstream news media or news overall. "Although sceptics are somewhat less exposed to [these] channels on average, they still get much of their current affairs information from the media sources they mistrust" (p. 518). Subsequent studies have also suggested that media sceptics tend to diversify their media diets, but still use mainstream news media (Szostek, 2018; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005; Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019).

However, there are also some limitations regarding this accumulated knowledge on the subject. For example, mainstream news media sources have been too often analysed as one

entity (Moody, 2011), although citizens may have different quality expectations for them (Johansson, 2007, p. 121; Kaufman et al., 1999). Moreover, the differences between media alternatives (such as alternative political media, online media or social media) have been insufficiently analysed.

Furthermore, trust theory emphasized another plausible outcome of low trust – unwillingness to engage into relationship with untrustworthy actors (Coleman, 1990). In case of news media, such an unwillingness could be called news avoidance, risen as the result of the intent to avoid the news. However, this hypothetical option has not received enough researchers' attention. The association between news media trust and news avoidance has been almost entirely under-investigated. Only a few studies (e.g., Kalogeropoulos, 2017; Toff & Nielsen, 2018) hint that such a relationship exists.

Besides underestimating news avoidance as a possible consequence of low trust in news media, much of previous quantitative research has suffered from simplified trust and media exposure measurements. Moreover, some fundamental studies on media trust and media exposure were conducted in the early 2000s (e.g., Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005), before online and social media became as widespread as they are today. Thus, it is unclear whether previously found associations hold in the current media environment.

1.1.2. Trust in news media and preferences for attitude-consistent information

The question of how citizens' preferences for attitude-consistent information drive their media exposure, has also been investigated. Many studies throughout the years have suggested that attitude-consistent information is preferred to counter-attitudinal (e.g., Johnson et al. 2020; Knobloch-Westerwick, Johnson & Westerwick, 2015; Rodriguez et al. 2017). However, a preference for attitude-consistent news does not necessarily mean that people avoid counter-attitudinal media (Bakshy, Messing & Adamic, 2015; Garrett, Carnahan & Lynch, 2013, p.

128; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2015; Masip, Suau-Martinez & Ruiz-Caballero, 2018, p. 314; Szostek, 2018; Winter, Metzger & Flanagin, 2016).

Nevertheless, research about selective exposure has some noticeable limitations. First of all, selective exposure has not yet been analysed directly in relation to trust in news media. Thus, it is not clear whether low trust in news media associates only to higher exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media or both attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media. Secondly, most empirical studies have been conducted in the United States of America, where society, political system, and the media are highly polarized (Boxell, Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2020; Jurkowitz et al., 2020). Moreover, most of the significant findings came from the research on partisan selective exposure (Johnson, et al., 2020; Kim, 2010; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2015; Lau et al., 2016; Wicks, Wicks & Morimoto, 2013).

These limitations are relevant because in many other countries both media and social contexts are dissimilar to the U.S. For example, the United States "has much higher levels of partisan news production, consumption and polarisation" (Fletcher & Joy, 2019, p. 3). On the European level, ideological leaning towards left or right is a more relevant predictor of selective exposure than partisan affiliation (although the importance of ideological leaning also differs from country to country) (Fletcher & Joy, 2019, p. 4). If we look into Northern countries, they feature different media systems than the United States (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). They have robust public broadcasting services (Skovsgaard et al., 2016) and, arguably, more of the impartial commercial mainstream news media. Here selective access to news is based more on a political interest than ideological differences (Fletcher & Joy, 2019, p. 4; Skovsgaard, Shehata & Strömbäck, 2016).

1.2. Research problems and aims

Against this background, the main problems with extant research on news media trust and media exposure can be summarized in the following way:

1. Previous studies have suggested that there is a positive relationship between trust in news media and exposure to mainstream news media and a negative relationship between trust in news media and exposure to mainstream news media alternatives, including online or social media. However, they have not investigated or shown whether some mainstream news media sources suffer more from low trust in news media than others and what the differences are among mainstream news media alternatives.

2. Previous studies have not paid much attention to news avoidance as a possible consequence of low trust in news media.

3. Ideological selective exposure has been insufficiently investigated in different media systems. Thus, it is unclear whether trust in news media relates only to exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media or exposure to both attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media.

Against this background, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between trust in news media and (1) exposure to mainstream news media, (2) exposure to online or social media for news, (3) intentional news avoidance and (4) exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media.

Outline of the following sections

The first chapter of this thesis includes recent theoretical developments in the respective areas of interest to obtain more comprehensive knowledge about the expected associations between trust in news media and media exposure. It takes into account the importance of the

levels of media trust (Strömbäck et al., 2020), types of news avoidance (Skovsgaard and Andersen, 2020) and dimensions of alternative media (Holt et al., 2019). It also reviews the findings from previous studies.

The first section (2.1.) contains a summary of the basic concepts of trust, news media trust, adaptive rationality, media credibility, and levels of media trust. Subsequently, it introduces the reader to the rationale of focusing on generalized trust in news media as a comprehensive predictor of media exposure patterns.

Following the assumption that trust in news media is a predictor of media exposure, the second section (2.2.) reviews the associations between generalized trust in news media and different media exposure patterns separately. First of all, uses and gratifications theory is employed to explain why some mainstream news media sources may not suffer much from the low trust in news media. This section highlights the need to operationalize exposure to mainstream news media as a few different variables instead of one. Secondly, higher exposure to mainstream news media alternatives is discussed. The review focuses on conceptual differences between alternative political media and online or social media. It also introduces some answers to the commonly addressed question, whether low trust in news media triggers mainstream media's substitution or supplementation with alternative news sources. Finally, the intent to avoid the news, which is an often-overlooked consequence of low trust in news media, is discussed.

The third section (2.3.) reviews whether the level of trust in news media can predict citizens' exposure to ideologically-slanted alternative political media sources. It introduces selective exposure theory and research related to the notion that people prefer attitude-consistent information to counter-attitudinal information. It then explains how ideological

leaning might influence selective exposure and discusses how low trust in news media can alter this behavioural pattern's relevance.

The final section (2.4.) summarizes knowledge gained from the theory and research about the topic, suggests some corrections, and synthesizes them into this thesis's empirical research framework.

Hypothesized associations are put into test in a cross-sectional study of Sweden, which relies on an analysis of survey data collected within the research program "Knowledge Resistance: Causes, consequences, cures."

Sweden is a typical example of a democratic-corporatist media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Although other representatives of democratic-corporatist media system have already been analysed in the research about the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure (see Elvestad et al., 2018; Jacob, 2010), this is the first time such type of research is conducted in Sweden.

There are some characteristics, which make the Swedish case interesting. First of all, an advanced digital development allows Swedes to live in a high-choice media environment where they can selectively access news from online or social media. In terms of alternative political media, right-wing and left-wing alternative political media outlets exist. Thus, Swedes can access all the various news media types that are in the interest of this study and have opportunities to engage in ideological selective exposure. However, previous research suggests that Swedes trust mainstream news media more than the European average (Flash Eurobarometer 464, 2018), and are more sceptical of news in social media (Westlund, 2019, p. 111). Thus, in Sweden, it is more common than in other countries to go to specific news media sources directly rather than search for the news via social media platforms (Newman et al., 2017, p. 14).

Therefore, with this study it can be investigated if the Swedish media system, contextual factors, and societal differences would twist the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure differently from those countries, where similar empirical studies were conducted (e.g., Elvestad et al., 2018). Moreover, if attitude-consistent alternative media were found to be preferred to counter-attitudinal alternative media in Sweden, then this study would suggest that citizens' ideology can predict confirmation bias and, subsequently, the patterns of alternative political media exposure.

Furthermore, Swedish citizens are more interested in politics and public affairs than citizens of the U.K. (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004), where Toff and Nielsen (2018) has conducted a qualitative study about news avoiders. Due to higher interest in current affairs on the aggregate level and the lower number of news avoidance (Kalogeropoulos, 2017, Nielsen et al., 2019), the relationship between trust in news media and news avoidance may be less visible in Sweden. Therefore, if such association existed, it would strengthen the argument that there is a relationship between trust in news media and news avoidance.

2. Theory and background

2.1. Trust in news media

A theoretical point of departure for most of the trust studies is a relation drawn from the trustor (who feels the trust) towards the trustee (the one who is trusted), defined by some extent of uncertainty.

In the broadest terms, "trust is a special way of dealing with social uncertainty and imperfect information" (Rompf, 2015, p. 38). Thus, each trustor faces the so-called "primary trust problem" – to trust or not to trust (Coleman, 1990, p. 96; Rompf, 2015, p. 272). Based on this problem, the principal reason why a trustor interacts with a trustee is an expectation that the chance of him gaining more than losing is greater than the other way around (Coleman, 1990). Subsequently, low trust means the absence of such expectation, while distrust signals that the risk of losses is perceived to be higher than the gains. Finally, trust becomes significant via a trusting act – a willingness to risk and rely on the trustee (Coleman, 1990; Hardin, 2002, p. 11).

At least from the first sight, in democratic countries, the relationship between citizens and news media seems to be a perfect example of trust-driven interaction. First of all, citizens cannot be sure of news providers' real intentions, and they cannot thoroughly verify them. Secondly, at least from the normative competitive democracy perspective, citizens should expect to form well-guided opinions and make correct decisions based on the news information they receive (Strömbäck, 2005). Thirdly, citizens risk forming misleading opinions and making misguided decisions if news information is unreliable. Finally, citizens are free to choose from different sources to get information about current affairs.

2.1.1. Adaptive rationality: how do we trust?

The secondary trust problem (Rompf, 2015, p. 264) is that the trustees have to be successful in convincing trustors of their trustworthiness. However, this does not mean that people always count the risks of interactions with the trustees.

Scholars too often "assume that individuals work in isolation to form credibility opinions and that people must assess information credibility in an effortful and time-consuming manner" (Metzger, Flanagin & Medders, 2010, p. 413). Sometimes trust can be adopted relatively early in the cognitive process and remain unquestioned if there are not enough of well-weighted reasons to lower the degree of trust (Rompf, 2015, p. 170).

The main theoretical premise behind such an argument is that people use two cognitive information processing modes: 1) a controlled bottom-up integration of relevant information to form a decision or 2) a top-down approach that employs "cognitive shortcuts as a basis for a leap of faith" (Rompf, 2015, p. 165). If the latter approach is followed, perception formations do not involve much cognitive effort and full attention to the situation (e.g., Kim, 2015; Metzger et al. 2010; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013; Sundar, 2008; Tod & Gigerenzer, 2000). Instead, they rely on various cues and heuristics, which, when automatically processed, "prevent a conscious elaboration of the trust problem" (Rompf, 2015, p. 40). To sum up, if both of these cognitive routes are acknowledged, then the concept of trust is more than "a matter of cold expectations" (Rompf, 2015, p. 40). It is also an affective state where "subjective perception of risk or ambiguity is effectively suppressed and replaced by a feeling of certainty and security that lasts until trust is failed" (Rompf, 2015, p. 184).

2.1.2. Constituents of media trust: why do we trust?

As Hardin (2002, p. 1) noticed, "to ask any question about trust is implicitly to ask about the reasons for thinking the relevant party to be trustworthy." Therefore, the relationship

between a trustor and a trustee can also be analysed as a three-way relation instead of a two-way link: "A trusts B with respect to X" (Hardin, 2002, p. 58). Here X refers to one factor-specific reason to trust a particular actor.

In practice, trust in news media is still too often measured in one item scale (e.g., Flash Eurobarometer 464, 2018; Newman et al., 2019). However, such measurement is imprecise because "respondents have different semantic understandings of "trust" and "confidence" (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2018, p. 29). Thus, most scholars, who study media trust (or media credibility), agree that trust measurements should include multi-item scales.

Nevertheless, predicting the reasons to trust a particular actor is not an easy task. There is little consensus on what citizens evaluate when they report the level of trust in news media. Hence, even when researchers operationalize media trust as a composition of different aspects, the indicators they choose to count on vary from study to study (see Gaziano & McGrath, 1986, p. 452; Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 232; Strömbäck et al., 2020, pp. 3-4; Winter & Kramer, 2014, p. 436).

For instance, some researchers emphasize the importance of shared understanding that news is an interpretation of reality, and the media is not capable of covering all the stories fully. Following this approach, trust in news media refers not to objectivity or truth, but to specific selectivity of topics and facts as well as perceptions that media is accurate in events depiction and their journalistic assessment (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 239).

Other researchers notice that media trust often interconnects with the concept of news media credibility, which is a more tangible measurement unit of the otherwise complex and diverse concept of trust. Therefore, to measure citizens' trust in news media some researchers (e.g., Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005; Tsfati & Peri, 2006; Tsfati, 2010) adopt media credibility measurement scale created by Gaziano and McGrath (1986, pp. 454–455). If

such approach is taken, then the concept of media trust equals media credibility and consists of assessing the media's fairness, accuracy, trustworthiness, and similar qualities.

2.1.3. Levels of media trust analysis: what do we trust?

Not only the reasons for trusting news media vary, but also what people have in mind when they think about news media. Thus, when asked to report how much they trust news media, citizens may evaluate different subjects referred to as "the media" (Williams, 2012; Winter & Kramer, 2014). For instance, they can assess media content, journalists, specific news sources, media types, media as institutions, and, finally, news media in general (Strömbäck et al., 2020, p. 10-11). What people refer to as news media matters because it may change how the levels of trust are evaluated (e.g., Daniller et al., 2017) and how trust in news media relates to media exposure (e.g., Williams, 2012).

For instance, following the same line of thinking, Williams (2012) has suggested that trust in the news information, trust in those who deliver the news, and trust in media corporations relate to audience's news attention in different ways.

Furthermore, Daniller and colleagues (2017) have found that trust evaluations are different when people assess unspecified trust in news media and when they are asked more specific questions, such as how much they trust mainstream news media, the media they use themselves or the media, used by others. According to the authors, the unspecified trust in news media tends to be lower than specified, and the media, which respondents use, is usually evaluated higher than the "other's media" or "mainstream media" (pp. 81-82). Similar findings have been further reiterated in subsequent research (e.g., Flash Eurobarometer 464, 2018, Nielsen et al., 2020).

However, besides a few empirical studies, up until now there hasn't been much attention given to this issue. Only recently Strömbäck et al. (2020) have focused on the topic

more: authors have proposed a media trust conceptualization at different levels of analysis and suggested that researchers should be clear which trust in news media they analyse.

Finally, Strömbäck and colleagues (2020, p. 10-11) have also suggested that besides other aspects selected for the analysis, the most essential news media attribute researchers should always take into account is *news information*. News information more than anything else reflects (1) the essential democratic function of news media (to provide reliable news information), (2) the most crucial role of journalism, (3) the risks citizens take when they consume news, (4) the critical expectation society sets to news media and (5) the main reasons why researchers study this subject.

2.1.4. Generalized trust in news media

Most of the studies, which looked into the associations between news media trust and media exposure, have investigated generalized trust in news media (although the ways how different researchers specified, measured, and operationalized it varied) (e.g., Jacob, 2010; Fletcher & Park, 2017; Elvestad et al. 2018). There are not enough well-weighted reasons to go against such practice: although analysis of generalized trust in news media may have some weaknesses, compared to other types of trust in news media, it is still the most relevant subject of interest.

To start with, generalized trust in news media resembles a "standard estimate of the probability of trustworthiness," described by Coleman (1990, p. 104). It appears even prior exposure to more specific media sources. Therefore, if citizens' generalized trust in news media is low, all mainstream news media sources should be doubted.

Likewise, generalized trust in news media closely resembles what Rompf (2015) refers to as a system trust. It is "sustained by the continual, ongoing, confirmatory experience of the system's functioning" (Rompf, 2015, p. 67). This means that the level of generalized

trust in news media may not be re-evaluated until trust is significantly failed. That would explain why the generalized trust in news media does not fall suddenly but is relatively stable over time (Nielsen et al., 2017; Nielsen et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2020).

The findings from a qualitative cross-national study by Newman and Fletcher (2017, p. 10-11) illustrate the argument that people rarely re-evaluate media credibility. An inherent trust ("I just do" (Newman & Fletcher, 2017, p. 11)) is the most often mentioned reason for trusting mainstream news media, regardless of the country. Other factors, such as trust in journalistic processes, storytelling, or credibility of specific news brands, are much less frequently prioritized and more likely to vary depending on the national context.

Furthermore, Prochazka and Schweiger (2018) have argued that generalized trust in news media measures attitudes towards "news media as an institution in society" (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2018, p. 26) and "a collective entity of news media" (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2018, p. 27). Finally, previous research (Kiousis, 2001, p. 396; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, 2005; Tsfati & Peri, 2006) has emphasized that generalized trust in news media should entail the assessments of all mainstream news media sources, regardless of the medium, the sources are accessed through.

However, one weakness of this latest argument is that the transition to a high-choice media environment may have broadened the scope of the media sources citizens think about as the "news media". Only a few studies have investigated what citizens refer to when they report their trust in news media (e.g., Tsfati & Cappella, 2003) and this was done when media environment was different than it is now.

Having discussed the generalized trust in news media as the probable level of media trust analysis in this empirical study, the further section will look into more specific levels of trust in news media.

A problematic aspect of analysing trust in specific sources, journalists, or mediums in relation to media exposure patterns is that they do not refer to media as a collective institution. Therefore, it is less plausible to expect that they could influence all the media exposure patterns (mainstream news media exposure, alternative political media exposure, online or social media exposure, and news avoidance), chosen to study in this particular thesis. For example, if citizens do not trust one specific source or medium, they can go to other mainstream news media sources or choose another type of medium to access the same news brand.

Subsequently, issue-specific trust in news media may have some effects on media exposure patterns. However, the strength of such association also depends on the personal involvement in the issue and the amount of media coverage, which specific news sources dedicate to the particular problem. The comparison of such findings would be broader than this thesis's scope because it would require knowledge about the particular issue and an in-depth understanding of its media coverage.

Against this background, for this particular study, generalized trust in news media is picked as the most suitable level to investigate media exposure patterns on a large scale. Therefore, from now on, generalized trust in news media and trust in news media will be used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

2.2.   Generalized trust in news media and media exposure

This section focuses on media exposure for news: the differences between news sources, the reasons people use them, and the links between the perceptions and behavioural patterns. Throughout the thesis, media exposure patterns refer to regular citizens' exposure to mainstream news media, alternative political media, and online or social media for news. Although people sometimes consume media which they do not actively select (Fiske, 1992, p. 121; Freedman & Sears 1965, p. 91; Hermida, 2016, p. 84; Jang, 2014, p. 669), digitalization

has allowed them to be more active in their media choices. Hence, it can be expected that regular news exposure is a matter of choice. By now, scholars mostly agree that when people can, they show observable, loyal preferences for specific media sources (e.g., McGuire, 1973, p. 168; Stroud, 2011, p. 31). Furthermore, in the current high choice media environment, citizens do not feel obligated to keep up with the news anymore (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Toff & Nielsen, 2018). Hence, if they do not want to, they do not need to follow media channels because they believe that "news will find them" (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017).

In this thesis, the investigation of the focal relationships between trust in news media and media exposure patterns departs from the idea that people use what they trust (Fletcher & Park, 2017, p. 1283; Tien-Tsung, 2018; Tsfati, 2010, p. 22). It is assumed that in the case of news media exposure, "attribution of credibility is a prerequisite for the selection of information" (Winter & Kramer, 2014, p. 437). However, it is also taken into account that the empirical studies about the associations between trust in news media and media exposure almost exclusively rely on cross-sectional data. Thus, it is not possible to reject the option of the relationship going the opposite or both ways. (see Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019b, p. 3685; Tsfati & Ariely, 2013).

Let us now look more into the directions of the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure patterns. Previous empirical studies report 1) significant positive association between trust in news media and exposure to mainstream news media (Jacob, 2010; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019b; Tsfati & Ariely, 2013; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003) as well as 2) significant negative association between trust in news media and exposure to non-mainstream media (Jacob, 2010; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005; but see Kalogeropoulos et al. 2019b, p. 3685), including exposure to online or social media (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Fletcher & Park, 2017; Kalogeropoulos et al. 2019b). However, an

option that instead of turning to alternatives, sceptic people may also decide to avoid news is almost entirely under-investigated. Just as well, not all of the studies report that trust in news media indeed negatively associates with exposure to online or social media for news.

The direction and the significance of the association between trust in news media and online news media exposure may differ because some studies analyse online exposure to mainstream news media while others only look into online alternative media consumption (see Tsfati, 2010). Alternatively, the direction of the relationship may vary because of the national contexts (Elvestad et al., 2018).

Against this background, although the findings regarding the focal relationship are mixed, the majority of studies reiterate the idea that the more people trust news media, the more they use mainstream news. When they trust news media less, they consume more of various non-mainstream media sources.

In the following sections (2.2.1. – 2.2.3.), three outcomes of trust in news media are analysed more in-depth. First of all, it is discussed how and why trust in news media should relate to exposure to mainstream news media (section 2.2.1.). Secondly, a turn towards mainstream news media alternatives is analysed, and the question of whether mainstream media is substituted or supplemented with alternatives is reviewed (section 2.2.2.) Finally, intentional news avoidance is introduced (section 2.2.3.), and a way to address the investigation of this behavioural pattern is suggested.

2.2.1. Exposure to mainstream news media

From a theoretical perspective (see subchapter 2.1.) and based on the empirical findings mentioned above, it seems plausible that citizens do not use the media they do not trust. However, previous research implies that trust in news media and mainstream news media exposure is only moderately related (Moody, 2011; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, 2005; Tsfati and

Peri, 2006). As Moody (2011) notices, "people regularly use media they do not trust to find out about politics, calling into question the previously assumed centrality of trust to informed choices" (p. 35).

To explain why it is so, uses and gratifications theory is helpful. It emphasizes active audience role in choosing what to consume "rather than simply absorbing media messages in a passive way" (Harcup, 2014).

One of the most known arguments of uses and gratifications theory is that each media competes with various possibilities "of need satisfaction" (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973, p. 511). Another key argument is that the same set of media can serve multiple needs and functions (Blumler, 1979, p. 14; Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973, p. 517; McLeod & Becker, 1973, p. 139). Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) have divided these into five different sections: 1) cognitive (information, knowledge, understanding), 2) affective (emotional pleasure and aesthetics) 3) personal-integrative (status, self-esteem) 4) social-integrative (to strengthen contacts) and/or 5) escapism (to release tension). McGuire (1973) has structured human motives for certain media use even more in detail (pp. 173-190). He did so by dividing sections based on cognitive and affective needs and then noticing that each set of the motives can also be oriented to preserve one's stability or develop.

Against this background, it is probable that even if people doubt news media, it may not be enough to stop them from using it. The audience may want to turn to some of mainstream news media sources because of a developed habit to release the tension or to be entertained in such a way (Moody, 2011).

Uses and gratifications theory helps to reveal one problematic aspect regarding previous research about the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure: mainstream news media are too often referred to as a homogenous entity (Moody, 2011). Such a choice

may hide significant dissimilarities among different mainstream media sources. Also, some of the categories of mainstream news media, such as tabloids, remain largely understudied in relation to trust in news media (but see Moody, 2011).

Although tabloids belong to mainstream news media, they differ from other mainstream media sources, such as TV news or quality newspapers. That is so because people do not expect tabloids to be particularly credible in the first place (Kaufman et al., 1999). For instance, in an empirical study of British tabloids audiences, Johansson (2007, p. 122) has noticed that readers are well aware of the differences between "low" and "high" quality news, yet, they still use the sources which may not be the most trustworthy. Subsequently, if trustworthiness is not expected, exposure to these sources should not suffer much from low trust in news media.

Moreover, the primary reasons people choose to read tabloids may differ from the reasons why they read "quality press." In the same British tabloid study, conducted by Johansson (2007, pp. 133-141), entertainment and tension release have been distinguished as the main reasons people read tabloids. Getting news information hasn't been prioritized.

Furthermore, tabloids include more "soft news" and information that does not relate to current affairs (such as celebrity gossip). If tabloids are habitually "flicked through" (Johansson, 2007, p. 121) primarily because of such reasons, then obtaining knowledge about political events is an additional gratification. Thus, it can be doubted whether a significant association between trust in news media and exposure to tabloids could exist.

Against this background, quality newspapers and TV news programs are recognized providers of factual information about the news and current affairs. For these sources, credibility should be a crucial feature. Therefore, a positive association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to quality newspapers and TV news programs can be expected. However, it is not known whether generalized trust in news media significantly

positively associates with exposure to tabloid newspapers. Tabloids are a part of mainstream news media; however, they are often used primarily to obtain various other gratifications than only getting the facts about politics and current affairs (e.g., entertainment and tension release). Arguably, citizens may not read less of tabloid news when their trust in news media is low, because they do not expect tabloids to be very credible in the first place. Based on this rationale, the following hypotheses are raised:

H$_1$: Generalized trust in news media positively associates with the exposure to quality newspapers and TV news programs.

H$_2$: Generalized trust in news media does not significantly associate with the exposure to tabloids.

2.2.2. A turn towards alternatives

One of the key findings of research on trust in news and news media exposure is that lower trust in news media relates to higher use of non-mainstream media, such as alternative media, and online or social media (Fletcher & Park, 2017; Newman & Fletcher, 2017; Tsfati & Capella, 2003; Tsfati & Peri, 2006). However, these findings are not without limitations. Besides the simplified measurement of trust in news media (see section 2.1.2.), which some of the studies feature, quantitative research too often relies on the vague measurement of media exposure. For instance, if during data collection, respondents answer just how much time they spend in specific media sources, during the analysis phase, researchers can only assume what purposes those sources are used for. Spending time on a particular platform does not mean that people used specifically to acquire news information (Hermida, 2016, p. 84). They can also go there to release tension or to communicate with friends.

Another weakness of the previous research is that researchers have not treated "non-mainstream media," "alternative media," and "online or social media" much in detail, even though all of these are "umbrella" concepts (Holt et al., 2019). Thus, they refer to various news sources, such as community, underground press (Chandler & Munday, 2016), participatory media (Rodriguez, 2001), activist media (Lievrouw, 2011), partisan media, et cetera. Simultaneously, online or social media is not necessarily always "non-mainstream" or "alternative" media.

An underlying reason for this issue can be the problem of categorization. What is considered mainstream and what is alternative varies a lot depending on the country and the context. For instance, Holt and colleagues (2019, pp. 865-866) exemplify how over time, based on the circumstances, alternative media sources can become a part of mainstream media (and the other way around). Even if only one specific context is studied in a particular period of time, the perceptions of what sources belong to alternative media and what sources belong to mainstream news media can still differ. For example, some media sources can proclaim themselves "alternative," but they are not perceived as "alternatives" by society or third parties, and vice versa (Holt et al., 2019, p. 863).

Against this background, although the concepts overlap (see Harcup, 2005; Rauch, 2014; Rauch, 2016), research would benefit from aiming to specify the differences between (1) mainstream and alternative media as well as between (2) alternative media and online or social media. Otherwise, over time it might become even more challenging to compare the findings of empirical studies systematically.

2.2.2.1. Alternative political media: an opposition to mainstream news

The dichotomy between mainstream news media ("traditional media," "news media," "mass media" or "professional media" (Reese et al., 2007, p. 238) and alternative media is not

new within the academia (see Atton, 2002; Holt et al., 2019; Kenix, 2011; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). However, as of yet, there is no consensus what criteria researchers should rely on to categorize what is mainstream and what is the alternative.

Notably, up until now alternative media conceptualization has been highly normative (Holt et al., 2019). The more structuralist the approach, the more emphasis has been put on mainstream media as dominant, hierarchical (e.g., Becker & Tudor, 2009, p. 59; Rodriguez, 2001), dehumanized (e.g., Atton, 2002, Becker & Tudor, 2009, p. 59), discriminatory, monopolized, or commercialized (see Fiske, 1992), comparing to alternative media. In contrast, alternative media has been treated as the one, which challenged "dominant hegemonic discourse of traditional news media" (Pinçon, 2017) and existing journalistic norms and practices (Atton, 2009, p. 268; Berkowitz, 2009, p. 110; , Chadwick, 2017; Hermida, 2018, p. 499; O'Neill & Harcup, 2009, p. 161).

However, such conceptualizations are not very useful anymore. During the last decade, in democratic states, discourse about alternative news media began to spin around rising populist alternative political media (see Holt et al., 2019, p. 866; Nygaard, 2019; Westlund, 2019) as well as fake news and propaganda (see Pamment et al., 2018). These changes imply that alternative media do not belong to loosely organized, unheard citizens' groups anymore but to all sorts of various actors. Moreover, since alternative media tends to "borrow" mainstream news media practices and the other way around (Chadwick, 2017; Hermida, 2018; Holt et al., 2019; Kenix 2011), in the hybrid media system(s), more emphasis has to be put on the definitions' flexibility.

Such context signals a need to give up normative approach to mainstream and alternative media and look into them as standing on the same media spectrum (Kenix, 2011).Thus, Pinçon (2017) defines alternative media as a "heterogeneous range of media and

journalistic practices identified by how alternative news media structures, functions, and processes differ from traditional news media." Subsequently, Holt and colleagues (2019) suggest another non-normative alternative media definition. They have conceptualized levels, on which the spectrum between mainstream news media on one side and alternative media on the other side, can be drawn. According to Holt and colleagues (2019), mainstream news media is a "societal system that is formed by specific legacy news media organizations which themselves are characterized by certain, often hierarchical, organizational structures and traditional publishing routines" (p. 861) By contrast, "alternative news media position themselves as correctives of the mainstream news media, as expressed in editorial agendas or statements and are perceived as such by their audiences or third-parties" (Holt et al. 2019, p. 861). This counter-hegemonic alternativeness can emerge on "the macrolevel of societal function, the meso-level of organizations, and the micro-level of news content and producers" (Holt et al., 2019, p. 860). Authors' definition is not strictly diagnostic, but it goes along with current alternative political media development in democratic countries.

Following these definitions, it can be argued that when citizens' trust in mainstream news media is low, alternative political media might attract attention because they correct or oppose mainstream news media in their news coverage (Holt et al., 2019). Moreover, alternative media do not neglect the agenda of mainstream news media. Thus, its' users can still get the most relevant news of what is happening and stay informed about the issue's society is interested in even if they give up mainstream news and only follow alternative political media. However, the information they get may emphasize different aspects of the same news than the ones, covered by mainstream news media, because alternative media "point to the lacking or tilted reporting of mainstream media and offer alternative accounts of the same topics" (Meyers, 2008, p. 376).

What is also important to notice, is that mainstream news media more often than alternative media stress professional objectivity to guide their news reporting (Berkowitz, 2009, Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2007). Alternative media, in comparison, often offer information that is serving one side of the argument more than the other.

Professional objectivity is not an equivalent of objective "truth." However, it acts "as both solidarity enhancing and distinction-creating norm and as a group claim to possess a unique kind of professional knowledge, articulated via work" (Schudson & Anderson, 2009, p. 77). Thus, most of the time in mainstream news construction, journalists follow norms of professional objectivity and impartiality, which is an embedded expectation from the society, organization itself, and colleagues (Berkowitz, 2009, p. 103). Journalistic watchdog function, story selectivity, and gatekeeping reflect professional objectivity through decisions oriented to "solve practical problems, rather than on individual subjectivity" (Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2007, p. 74).

Although the selective exposure argument is more thoroughly discussed in section 2.3., in a nutshell, alternative political media feature more radical, opinion-driven takes on issues. This information is either more attitude-consistent or more counter-attitudinal than relatively balanced mainstream news media information . In comparison, mainstream news media express "general," often homogenous, opinion(s), which are understandable to large audiences (Downing, 2003, p. 626; Fletcher & Joy, 2019; Harcup, 2003; Pinçon, 2017).

Because of opinionated alternative political media content, these news sources may look attractive for some people because they do not produce much of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957, p. 126). Theory and empirical research suggest that people show higher preferences for attitude-consistent information than for counter-attitudinal stances (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Lau et al., 2016; Stroud, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2017). Thus, even

when trust in news media is not an issue, people occasionally use attitude-consistent alternative political media outlets. Those, whose trust in news media is low, may turn into alternative political media content for yet another reason: the media, which resembles their attitudes, may seem more valuable and high-quality to them (Stroud, 2011, p. 21).

2.2.2.2. *Online or social media: a plethora of information*

Some citizens use online or social media as an alternative to mainstream news media to reach the information that is either insufficiently covered by mainstream news sources or reported emphasizing different aspects (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). Online or social media can also provide new perspectives on societal issues (Elvestad et al., 2018; Newman & Fletcher, 2017) and allow people to engage with attitude-consistent information (see Bakshy et al., 2015). However, in this section, it is argued that online and social media are separate from the dichotomy of mainstream-alternative media. They are rather hybrid spaces (see Chadwick, 2017), where media and non-media information is equally accessible.

In the early 2000s, online and social media theorists tended to assign these information sources to alternative media (see Gehl, 2015; Hermida, 2016). However, this approach was problematic from the very beginning because, in online platforms and social media networks, mainstream news content was just as accessible as alternative political media content or non-media content.

Lately, online media and social media became more independent concepts. For instance, Burgess, Marwick, and Poell (2018, p. 1) now specify social media as technologies consisting of "digital platforms, services, and apps built around the convergence of content sharing, public communication, and interpersonal connection." Furthermore, Hermida (2018) defines social media as the "middle ground," which broke down journalistic boundaries "with facts and fiction, and observations, and opinions, in the mix" (p. 504).

A characteristic of online and, especially, social media is that they distort usual news exposure patterns as well as cues, and heuristics for information credibility assessment (Masip et al., 2018, p. 300; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013; Metzger & Flanagin, 2015; Sundar; 2008).

To begin with, social media platforms draw less "committed" audiences than alternative political media, which attract smaller but more source-loyal groups, who often share similar ideological attitudes with the media they use (Newman et al., 2019). In comparison, some social media users cannot remember what sources they read (Kalogeropoulos, Fletcher & Nielsen, 2019a; pp. 583-584; Toff & Nielsen, 2018, pp. 638-639).

Moreover, social media platforms are rarely accessed only to find political news. They are primarily communication tools designed for social-integrative or tension release gratifications (Hermida, 2016; Karimi et al., 2014, p. 63).

Furthermore, although online and social media enable relatively effortless yet, "pervasive, persistent and perpetual awareness of news" (Hermida, 2016, p. 83), they do not entirely resemble the news media agenda.

Finally, a significant feature of social media is networked gatekeeping (individuals assign credibility and authority to others through conversational social practices). Because of this feature, some researchers doubt whether traditional trust assessment criteria even apply in social media (Hermida, 2016, p. 87; Winter, Metzger & Flanagin, 2016).

In summary, it is expected that online or social media platforms are used to acquire additional political news. Online or social media platforms can be useful for those who form their opinions by checking various sources, and alternative takes on societal issues. Online and social media can also provide a more thorough representation of "unheard" opinions and a more "authentic" approach to the news. These features are assumed to be advantageous for citizens who have low trust in news media. However, online or social media are not necessarily as

attitude-consistent or responsive to mainstream news media agendas as specific alternative political media sources. In online and social media, news from alternative political media, other alternative media information, other mainstream media news, and "non-media" opinions (such as citizens' comments) appear in the mix. Therefore, exposure to online or social media has to be analyzed separately from exposure to alternative political media. Based on this, with respect to online and social media, it can be hypothesized that:

H₃: There is a negative association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to online or social media for news.

2.2.2.3. Substitution or supplementation?

Before moving further, one more recurring question, often raised in the research of media exposure (e.g., Elvestad et al., 2018; Jacob, 2010; Moody, 2011; Szostek, 2018; Tsfati and Cappella, 2003; Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019), should be discussed. That is whether people use alternatives to traditional news media as a supplement or as a substitution for traditional news media (see Gaskins & Jerit, 2012).

This question has been addressed empirically in various ways. For instance, Tsfati & Cappella (2003) sought to answer the question by regressing the difference between self-reported exposure to mainstream news media and non-mainstream news media with trust in mainstream news media as the regressor. They found that media sceptics were still more exposed to mainstream media than the alternatives. Hence, it indicated that mainstream media exposure does not suffer much from perceived low credibility.

Later, Jacob (2010) employed the media dependency theory to explain why alternatives could not entirely substitute mainstream news media. Furthermore, Papathanassoupolos et al. (2013, p. 701) study looked into citizens' media diets and reported that they were diverse. Such

results implied that people do not jump from one media to the other entirely but use various media sources.

Although trust in news media was not discussed in this particular study, Gaskins and Jerit (2012) shed new light on explaining media diets changes by employing niche theory. They explained that over the years, the "new" media replaced the "old" media (traditional media) when two conditions were satisfied: (1) when the needs both media fulfilled overlapped and (2) when the new media was perceived to be superior to the old one. In their quantitative study, Gaskins and Jerit (2012) found some signs of online media replacing traditional one, but this trend was not widespread and appeared only among subsets within the population.

Notably, when these studies were conducted, fewer people used online or social media daily than nowadays. Thus, not many could perceive these sources as a full-fledged substitutes of mainstream news media. Now, most of the citizens are used to spending time online. Social media usage has grown. Moreover, some people think they can be well-informed without following the news (Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2017; Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Kalogeropoulos, 2017; Toff & Nielsen, 2018). Does it mean that the situation shifted to the other side?

On the contrary, recent research (mostly qualitative) still reiterates that fears of people abandoning mainstream news media because of low trust in it are exaggerated. Low trust in news media instead triggers processes related to the distribution of exposure to various sources to compare news information and "verify" it (Elvestad et al., 2018; Newman and Fletcher, 2017, p. 16, Szostek, 2018; Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019). Thus, most studies conclude that even when trust in established news media is lower, instead of shifting from mainstream news to alternative media entirely, citizens use both types of media.

2.2.3. Intentional news avoidance

The trust relationship violation places trustor in a worse situation than if he chose not to trust (Coleman, 1990, pp. 98-99). Thus, when the risk of relying on the trustee is too high, the relationship between the two parties should not happen. Considering citizens' exposure to news, a recurring question is where media sceptics obtain the information if they don't trust news media. In the previous section, a relatively well-developed research stream investigating how trust in news media relates to non-mainstream media (alternative media, online or social media) exposure was discussed. Following the idea that people feel the need to get the news about politics and current events, it was suggested that generalized trust in news media should be negatively related to exposure to various mainstream media alternatives.

This section suggests that a turn towards alternatives is far from the only option: not all the people want to supplement the news they do not trust with other media information. Some may instead decide to start withdrawing from the news overall. Such an outcome could then be called intentional news avoidance.

2.2.3.1.   Intentional and unintentional news avoidance

Although there are scholars, who have investigated the reasons and the consequences of news avoidance as media exposure pattern (e.g., Woodstock, 2013), as well as some studies, which have distinguished different types of news avoidance (or "news resistance") (e.g., Van den Bulck, 2006, Woodstock, 2013), in general, both the empirical studies and the theory, which focus on news avoidance, are still rather scarce. Subsequently, there are not many definitions of news avoidance available and the existing ones are rather intuitive. For instance, Shehata (2016) has defined news avoiders as "citizens who take the opportunity to tune out from news about politics and current affairs altogether—not necessarily because they have a strong aversion toward politics but because the current media environment enables them to select other

types of content that match their preferences more closely" (p. 761). Toff and Nielsen (2018) have referred to "individuals who said they rarely engaged with conventional news sources" and who "opt not to use the types of sources that dominated most 20th century media environments" as "news avoiders" (p. 640). The later definition suggests that the implicit use of online or social media does not signal about the absence of news avoidance.

Only recently have Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020, p. 463) have tried to reduce the conceptual uncertainty by proposing a shorter definition of news avoidance as "low news consumption over a continuous-time caused either by a dislike for news (intentional) or a higher preference for other content (unintentional)." The main contribution these authors make to contemporary research is that they aim to distinguish unintentional low news consumption from low news exposure driven by the intent to avoid the news.

According to Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020), unintentional news avoidance arises from information overload and preference for entertainment over news exposure while intentional news avoidance appears because of news negativity or low credibility. The intentional news avoidance is what this thesis is interested in because it is perceived as the consequence of low trust in news media.

Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020, p. 465) suggest that low credibility is a prerequisite for people's voluntary disengagement from the news. Such implication is based on empirical research, conducted by Kalogeropoulos (2017) and Toff and Nielsen (2018), who have observed low trust in news media among some news avoiders.

There are also some other empirical studies, which suggest that the connection between low trust in news media and news avoidance is not accidental (Elvestad et al. 2018; Toff & Nielsen, 2018 and, to some extent, Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017, p. 114; Kalogeropoulos, 2017, p.

41; Woodstock, 2013). Thus far, there are however no studies investigating this linkage in-depth, implying that it is still uncertain if low media trust contributes to news avoidance.

2.2.3.2.   Intent to avoid the news and intentional news avoidance

There are at least two underlying reasons why intentional news avoidance, as a possible outcome of low trust in news media, has not received enough attention in the previous research.

First of all, most studies, which investigated the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure (e.g., Jacob, 2010, p. 592; Tsfati & Peri, 2006, p. 184), relied on the assumption that citizens feel the need to get the news about politics and current affairs. Thus, scholars supposed that if individuals wanted to avoid mainstream media altogether, they needed to possess specific individual characteristics for information gathering, such as acquiring direct access to primary news sources or having enough skills and time to analyze information themselves. Since most people do not have or choose such options, they have to keep using established news media sources (mainstream or alternative).

Although this argument still might hold true, some recent studies of media exposure patterns have provided evidence against it. More specifically, several studies suggested that many people in different countries feel that they can do without regular news updates (Kalogeropoulos, 2017, p. 40). Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues (2017) commented current changes the following way: "with social media at the forefront of today's media context, citizens may perceive they do not need to actively seek news because they will be exposed to news and remain well-informed through their peers and social networks" (p. 105).

For example, a qualitative study by Toff and Nielsen (2018) in the U.K. implied that many news avoiders believe essential news "will find them" (Toff & Nielsen, 2018, p. 643). Unlimited access to information raises the perception that people can reach the news whenever they need, and that they therefore do not need to follow news media (Toff & Nielsen, 2018, p.

646). Although this study only investigated a particular group of digitally-skilled news avoiders, the growth of online and social media use and familiarity with the platforms may have affected the prevalence of such perceptions. Therefore, not only the intent to avoid the news but even intentional news avoidance as it's consequence may already be visible among digitally-skilled populations.

The second reason why intentional news avoidance has been insufficiently investigated is methodological. A way to measure whether intentional news avoidance is related to trust in news media, would be to examine both the behavioral pattern (news avoidance as low news consumption) and the intent, which drives it (intentional news avoidance). However, such a thorough empirical investigation of news avoidance has not yet been conducted. In contrast, scholars most often look either into the behavioral patterns (lower media exposure) or into the perception (the intent to avoid the news, which was also called news avoidance), but not both. Respondents are rarely asked whether they try to avoid the news. People are more often assigned to the group of news avoiders after data collection, based on the extent of their media exposure. In turn, most news avoidance research operationalizes news avoidance only as low news consumption (Schroeder & Blach-Orsten, 2016). It's prerequisite (the intent to decrease news consumption) often remains uninvestigated or investigated separately from low news consumption (e.g., Kalogeropoulos, 2017).

Considering the topic of this thesis, such a methodological approach is problematic because it does not distinguish the groups of people who use less news intentionally (because they do not like it) from those who do it unintentionally (because they trade news to other free time possibilities) (Skovsgaard and Andersen, 2020). Deliberate news avoiders can report some media exposure levels despite their wish to avoid the news. Similarly, some people, who are not exposed to media often, thus, are assigned to the group of news avoiders, may have no intent

to avoid the news. Finally, it remains unclear whether the intent to avoid news correlates with the actual lower media exposure.

Thus, one way to look into this issue differently would be to investigate 1) how the independent factor (in the case of this study – generalized trust in news media) associates with the intent to avoid the news and then 2) whether the intent to avoid the news correlates to media exposure patterns.

Against this background, it can be expected that when generalized trust in news media is low, some individuals may decide to avoid the news. As a result, those who trust news media less should more frequently intend to avoid the news. Hence, the next hypothesis is:

H_4: **There is a negative association between generalized trust in news media and the intent to avoid the news.**

However, as emphasized in this section, it is unclear whether the intent to avoid the news correlates to actual lower news media exposure (in this case, mainstream and alternative political media exposure) in the current high-choice media environment.

It may be that the intent to avoid the news does not equal intentional news avoidance as the behavioural pattern: many media and communication researchers before have argued that people cannot avoid the news entirely. On the other hand, the familiarity with online or social media may have altered the perceptions that citizens do not need to follow the news ("news will find me" approach) and may have prepared the ground for a more widespread disengagement from the news. Thus, the following research question is raised to fill the knowledge gap:

RQ_1: **Is there a relation between the intent to avoid the news on the one hand, and exposure to mainstream news media, alternative political media and online or social media, on the other hand?**

2.3.   Trust in news media and exposure to alternative political media

Section 2.2.2. briefly described, how alternative political media differ from mainstream news media in terms of more one-sided issues representation. This alternative media feature leads the question to what extent generalized trust in news media can predict selective exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media and counter-attitudinal alternative political media. Do those who lack trust in news media use more of attitude-consistent alternative political media or balance attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal news?

This question can be divided into two parts. First of all, to what extent do citizens prefer attitude-consistent information over counter-attitudinal? Secondly, does trust in news media associate with selective exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media?

This section begins with a brief overview of selective exposure argument that people prefer attitude-consistent information over counter-attitudinal. Then it introduces ideological leaning as a plausible predictor of attitude-consistent media exposure. Subsequently, it describes how low level of generalized trust in news media may amplify confirmation bias and exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media. Finally, motivated reasoning theory is employed to explain why it is also essential to test how generalized trust in news media associates to exposure to counter-attitudinal political media.

2.3.1. Selective exposure

Selective exposure research emphasizes that one's prior attitudes and beliefs influence media exposure (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). To be more precise, it derives from observations that people tend to display a confirmation bias: a tendency to prefer attitude-consistent information to counter-attitudinal information (Nickerson, 1998, p. 175). Some topics, such as religion and politics, are more prone to confirmation bias and selective exposure

than others (Stroud, 2011). Therefore, some predispositions (like strength of attitudes towards specific political issues, partisanship, or ideological leaning) often influence exposure to political information. However, selective exposure to attitude-consistent information does not equal selective avoidance. There is much less evidence to support the assumption that people avoid counter-attitudinal information the same way they prefer attitude-consistent news (Bakshy et al. 2015; Dahlgren et al., 2019; Garrett et al. 2013, p. 128; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2015; Masip et al., 2018, p. 314; Winter et al., 2016).

Having said that, it is also important to mention that most of the studies about selective exposure come from the U.S. There extensive discussions how partisanship leads to a preference for attitude-consistent political information, often overshadow the significance of ideological leaning (Johnson et al., 2020; Kim, 2010; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2015; Lau et al., 2016; Rodriguez, Moskowitz & Salem, 2017; Wicks, Wicks & Morimoto, 2013). Although in the U.S. the difference between the partisanship and ideological leaning is not fundamental, in other countries, where political systems differ, these concepts do not overlap and relate to selective exposure in different ways. For example, in Sweden, the importance of ideological leaning towards left or right is stronger than partisanship (Dahlgren et al., 2019; Wike et al., 2018). According to Skovsgaard, Shehata, and Strömbäck (2016, p. 528), ideological leaning is one of the crucial motivations to select media content. Therefore, this factor is chosen as a predictor of selective exposure for this thesis.

2.3.2. Ideological leaning as a predictor of selective exposure

Jost and colleagues (2009, p. 309) defined ideological leaning as a "set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved." There are multiple ways to conceptualize such a "set of beliefs." However, ideological leaning is most often investigated as one's self-placement in the left-right ideological continuum.

There are also multiple interconnecting approaches to explain why ideological leaning lead to preferences for attitude-consistent information versus counter-attitudinal information. Two (the most recognized) of the plausible explanations are summarized below.

2.3.2.1.   The salience of political social identity

Ideological leaning can provoke in-group favouritism, out-group discrimination, and categorical attributions of trustworthiness in the form of stereotyping (Rompf, 2015, p. 236; Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1999). Thus, when it is salient, ideological leaning may distort judgments of media credibility in a way that attitude-consistent alternative media information would be seen as more valuable and high-quality then counter-attitudinal. As a result, people would show confirmation bias (Knobloch-Westerwick, Johnson & Westerwick, 2015; Nickerson, 1998: 175; Winter et al., 2016) and selective exposure to like-minded media sources (Rodriguez et al., 2017). On the other hand, this argument does not mean that one's social identity always lead to in-group favouritism or out-group discrimination (see Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1999, p. 127). For instance, the salience of multiple identities at the same time may limit the effects of one particular identity (Xin, Xin & Lin, 2015).

2.3.2.2.   Hostile media effect

Moving further, Baum and Gussin (2008) have noticed that "not only do citizens disproportionately counterargue dissonant information while accepting consonant information but they sometimes also create consonance and dissonance even where none exists" (p. 26). Thus, people with firmly held beliefs can engage in selective exposure because they perceive counter-attitudinal media as biased (Hwang, Pan & Sun, 2008). This perception is called the hostile media effect (Vallone et al., 1985).

The hostile media effect is a recognized predictor for citizens' confirmation bias (Morris, 2007; Kim, 2011; Borah et al., 2015). However, it is most often studied among partisans (Arceneaux et al., 2012; Clavio & Vooris, 2018; Dunn, 2011; Kim, 2011; Morris,

2007; Vallone et al., 1985) and minority groups (Aryanto, Hornsey & Gallois, 2007; Tsfati, 2007) but not among citizens with different ideological leanings. The studies, which investigate hostile media effect, are most often conducted in experimental conditions when exposure to specific news is forced (e.g., Arceneaux et al., 2012; Ariyanto, Hornsey & Gallois, 2007; Baum & Gussin, 2008; Dunn, 2011) and the exposure to media outlets is strictly attitude-consistent or counter-attitudinal (Baum & Gussin, 2008; Dunn, 2011; Hansen & Kim, 2011; Morris, 2007; Tsfati, 2007). Nevertheless, some studies suggest that the effect holds regardless of the study design (Hansen & Kim, 2011; Kim, 2011), even when relatively balanced information is evaluated (Kim, 2011; Vallone et al., 1985).

2.3.3. Trust in news media and selective exposure to alternative political media

In the previous section, two explanations, why ideological leaning can provoke confirmation bias and ideological selective exposure, were mentioned. This section focuses on the following question, why ideological selective exposure is relevant to take into account in the investigation of the relationship between trust in news media and exposure to alternative political media.

Just as mainstream news media, alternative political media is not a homogenous entity. Different sources stand for various ideologies, which often oppose each other. Alternative political media can be attitude-consistent (e.g., right-wing alternative media for right-wing citizens) or counter-attitudinal (e.g., right-wing alternative media source for left-wing citizens). This feature is vital to consider because those, who hold strong political and ideological attitudes and beliefs, can think of counter-attitudinal media as biased. Subsequently, attitude-consistent alternative political media can look more credible than counter-attitudinal because it goes along with one's social identity and values. Finally, even if attitude-consistent alternative

political media sources are not perceived to be more credible among mainstream media sceptics, they can be preferred because advocacy-oriented content produces less cognitive dissonance. Therefore, there is a basis to expect that lower trust in news media should relate to higher exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media compared to counter-attitudinal media. Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

H5: There is a negative association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media.

On the other hand, the assumption that lower trust in news media accelerates exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent alternative media does not necessarily mean that it cannot amplify counter-attitudinal media exposure to some extent too.

In their research on partisan/ideological selective exposure in the U.S., Nelson and Webster (2017) found that differently ideologically slanted websites shared the same audiences. Other empirical studies have also reported that some citizens used both attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal media sources (Garrett, Carnahan & Lynch, 2013; Winter & Kramer, 2012). In Sweden, cross-cutting media exposure was also noticed, particularly in the online environment (Dahlgren et al., 2019). Thus, it happens that citizens, who frequently select news from one ideological spectrum, also tend to use ideologically counter-attitudinal news.

Such findings could appear because information selection and credibility assessment depend on the variance of underlying motivations, which predict different information selection and processing strategies. Kunda (1990, pp. 480-481) distinguished two motivations categories: motives for accuracy and motives for the directional conclusion. According to Kunda (1990), directional motivations drive people to both pick and process information selectively, favouring bits, which would help reach desired goals. If such motivations are employed, the probability that information is selected because of prior-predispositions is higher

(Winter & Kramer, 2012). However, it may not be enough to prevent counter-attitudinal media exposure: directional motivations can lead people to consume counter-attitudinal media when they wish to learn what opponents think and prepare counter-arguments (Stroud, 2010). Alternatively, exposure to counter-attitudinal information can be "emotionally rewarding" to argue and reject (Skovsgaard et al., 2016, p. 533).

The motivations for accuracy enhance the use of strategies that require careful attention and cognitive effort for more complex, comparison-based, issue related reasoning. Then people perceive information from both attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal sources to be valuable. For instance, counter-attitudinal information is valuable when cognitive dissonance regarding specific issues is extreme (Kunda, 1990) – citizens have conflicting arguments, which they want to make sense of to clarify the "truth". Alternatively, citizens can also turn to counter-attitudinal media to verify mainstream media information, of which they are sceptical. For example, if they want to learn whether mainstream media reports about the opponents were fair and unbiased (e.g., Szostek, 2018).

Therefore, to check how trust in news media associates with counter-attitudinal alternative political media sources, the following research question is raised:

RQ$_2$: Is there a significant association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media?

To sum up, if ideologically attitude-consistent alternative political media is preferred to counter-attitudinal, citizens will acquire more information, which resembles or even strengthens their predispositions (Dahlgren et al., 2019, p. 171; Stroud, 2011). If generalized trust in news media associates to both attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal media exposure, this suggests that citizens might try to "balance" their media exposure.

However, there may also be no significant relationship between trust in news media and media exposure to attitude-consistent or counter attitudinal information. That may be so if, contrary to most of the findings in media trust research, trust in mainstream news media does not associate with exposure to alternative political media. This option cannot be ignored because there were cases when the association was not found (e.g., Elvestad et al., 2018).

2.4. Empirical research framework

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between trust in news media and (1) exposure to mainstream news media, (2) exposure to online or social media for news, (3) intentional news avoidance and (4) exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media.

A few knowledge gaps concerning this aim became noticeable after the review of relevant theory and empirical research, which addressed the focal relationship. Thus, this empirical research framework builds on the previous studies with the following adjustments:

1. It gives more attention to the differences among mainstream news media sources, suggesting that some mainstream news media sources should not suffer from low trust in news media, while others do.

2. It adds intentional news avoidance into the analysis and proposes to investigate the relationship between generalized trust in news media and the intent to avoid the news and bivariate correlations between the intent to avoid the news and media exposure patterns.

3. It includes the analysis of ideological selective exposure, thus, separating attitude-consistent alternative political media from counter-attitudinal alternative political media.

Figure 1. Empirical research framework
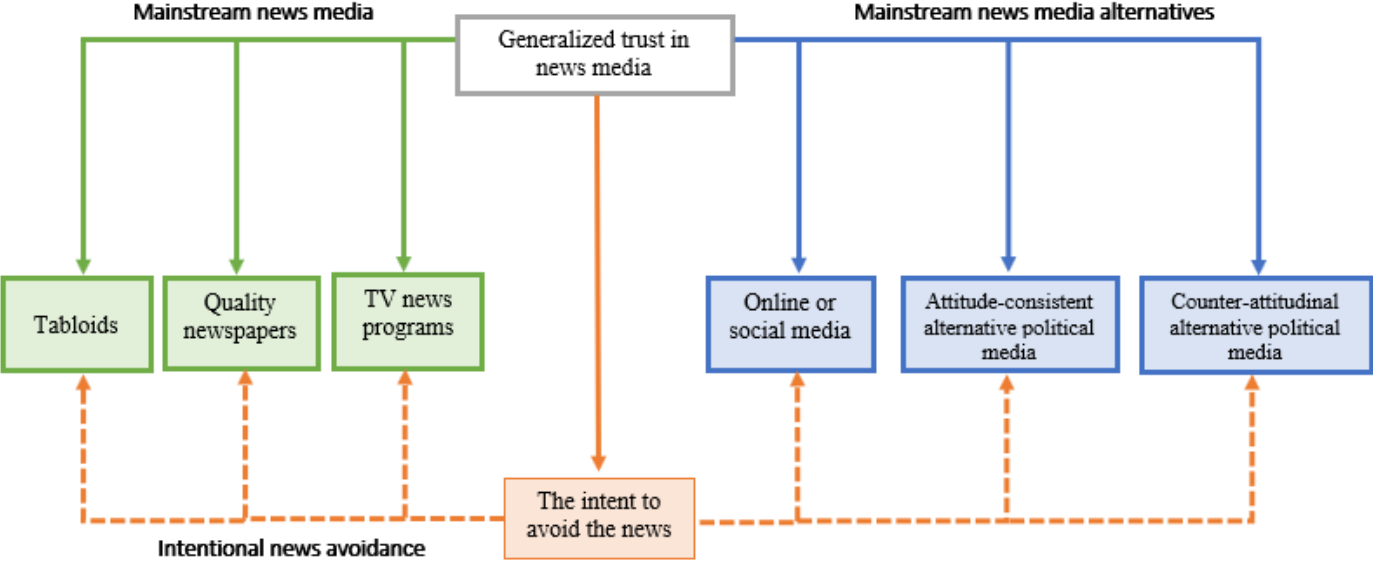
In this empirical research framework, depicted in Figure 1, the "outcomes" of trust in news media cluster into three different categories: 1) exposure to mainstream news media, 2) exposure to mainstream news media alternatives and 3) intentional news avoidance.

The idea that those, who trust news media less, use more alternative sources, is translated the following way: trust in news media should positively relate to mainstream news media exposure and negatively relate to the exposure to mainstream news media alternatives. However, this study assumes that neither mainstream news media nor media alternatives (alternative political media and online or social media) are homogenous entities. Therefore, both mainstream news media and media alternatives categories are further broken down into subcategories.

Following the rationale that tabloids, quality newspapers, and TV news programs satisfy slightly different needs, these mainstream news media types are separated. In mainstream news media alternatives category, alternative political media is separated from online or social media.

Furthermore, in this framework the exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media is separated from the exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media. Such a decision is based on the expectation that there should be a negative association between trust in news media and exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media and a knowledge gap about the relationship between trust in news media and exposure to counter-attitudinal media.

In the case of intentional news avoidance, the relationship between trust in news media and exposure to mainstream news media is seen as mediated through the intent to avoid the news.

3. Method

3.1. Characteristics of Swedish case

The hypotheses and research questions explicated above are further investigated using Sweden as a case. Sweden represents a democratic-corporatist media system and has different "opportunity structures for selective exposure" (Skovsgaard et al., 2016) from most of the countries in which previous research was conducted

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), Sweden is a classic example of the democratic-corporatist media system. Besides relatively impartial commercial legacy news media and established independent advocacy journalism, the country features popular and professionally objective public broadcasting service (Newman et al., 2019, p. 110). Such a stable and strong position of the public broadcasting service (PBS) has thus far "prevented political polarization of the broadcasting system similar to what has emerged in the United States" (Skovsgaard et al., 2016, p. 530).

Like in most other countries, in Sweden the number of people who read newspapers is decreasing (Wadbring & Ohlsson, 2020). However, it is still relatively high compared to other European countries or the U.S. (Westlund, 2019). Since many newspapers have online counterparts, some of the audience consumes them through digital platforms (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2013).

Furthermore, Swedish people live in a highly digitally developed environment (Newman et al., 2019, p. 110), where virtually all citizens have access to online and social media and frequently use them (Newman et al., 2018). Thus, citizens who are not satisfied with mainstream news media discourse have possibilities to access alternative voices via the Internet.

In terms of ideological divide, "the left-right dimension is still a cornerstone of Swedish politics" (Dahlgren et al., 2019, p. 165). Sweden lacks partisan TV channels. In television, "the

opportunity structures provide plenty of scope for selectivity based on political interest but a narrow scope for selectivity based on ideological preferences (Skovsgaard et al., 2016, p. 528)."

A different situation occurs in the online media environment. Fewer citizens read alternative political media sources than mainstream news media sources. Nevertheless, some alternative sources have "left a clear footprint in the Scandinavian public discourse on immigration" (Nygaard, 2019). On the left-right alternative media spectrum, right-wing media have attracted a substantial audience. *Fria Tider, Nyheter Idag*, and *Samhällsnytt* "are the three most widely used right-leaning papers, each reaching around one-tenth of the Swedish online population" weekly (Westlund, 2019). Furthermore, right-wing alternative media position "themselves as alternatives for those who do not find legacy news media credible" (Westlund, 2019, p. 111). In comparison, left-wing alternative political media is less openly oppositional.

In general, Swedes are more interested in politics and public affairs than audiences from other media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, it does not mean that all of the people enjoy reading about politics. The shift from low choice to high-choice media environment allows uninterested citizens to disengage from the news. As a result, the shares of news seekers and news avoiders have increased over time (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2013). However, the number of intentional news avoiders in Sweden is still small compared to other countries (Kalogeropoulos, 2017; Newman et al., 2019).

Finally, in Sweden, citizens trust other society members and their institutions more than the European average (Flash Eurobarometer 464, 2018). Swedes also have higher and relatively stable levels of trust in mainstream news media (Flash Eurobarometer 464, 2018; Westlund, 2019). As stated in *Reuters Institute Digital News report 2020* (Nielsen et al., 2020), "public broadcasters are the most trusted brands along with local newspapers while [right-wing] partisan brands and tabloids have the highest level of mistrust" (p. 82). Trust in the sources

citizens regularly use is higher than trust in overall news media (Newman et al., 2019; Newman et. al., 2020). Finally, Swedes are much more sceptical of news on social media or news found through search engines than mainstream news media (Westlund, 2019, p. 111). They often visit designated news media sites to search for news instead of accessing it through social media (Newman et al., 2017, p. 14).

Against this background, some context-specific factors may influence the focal relationships. First, in Sweden, the strength of the relationship between trust in news media and exposure to online or social media for news may be somewhat weaker than in other countries due to citizens' scepticism of news information circulating in online and social media platforms. Also, established right-wing alternative political media, which position themselves as "alternatives" to mainstream news media, provide more opportunities for right-wing citizens to engage in ideologically attitude-consistent media exposure than left-wing citizens have. Finally, although the percentage of those who do not actively follow mainstream news media, has grown over time, political interest and suspiciousness towards the information accessible via online or social media may prevent some citizens from showing clear signs of intentional news avoidance.

3.2. Method, external and internal validity and ethical considerations

This study employs a quantitative research method and investigates a broad, heterogeneous sample of Swedish citizens because it aims to test if generalized trust in news media can influence media exposure patterns on the aggregate level. Therefore, it follows the pioneering research in the field (Elvestad et al., 2018; Jacob, 2010; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; 2005), and relies on a statistical analysis of survey data. Another reason why this method is chosen is the possibility to replicate similar studies in other countries in the future.

The data set, used for empirical study, comes from the first wave of the panel survey, conducted at the beginning of 2020, within the research program "Knowledge Resistance: Causes, consequences, cures."

Noticeably, reliance on secondary data is often problematic. Researchers face difficulties finding measurements that would accurately define the relationships they want to analyse. Also, a possibility to explain the variance of dependent variables is limited to the accessibility of independent variables provided by the data. However, in this study, these weaknesses are less apparent—the measurements used for data collection tapped into the essence of concepts addressed in the thesis.

However, this study has other limitations. First of all, not only citizens' perceptions but also their media behaviours are self-reported. Thus, it is not known whether the data is entirely representative of their real behaviours. However, alternative ways to track media exposure were not only unavailable in this case, but also intrusive and, arguably, even less accurate (see Andersen et al., 2016).

Furthermore, this study relies on cross-sectional data, meaning that the results cannot provide evidence to claim the relationships' causal direction. In the realm of existing research, this study cannot contribute much to clarification whether the common path to look into media exposure as driven by trust in news media and not the other way around is the right one.

One more overall weakness of this quantitative study versus a more qualitative approach to the problems is that it features a limited possibility to interpret collected data. It only hints about the existence of such behavioural tendencies but does not provide an in-depth understanding of how and why they occur.

From an ethical perspective, respondents were well-aware of their participation in the survey and how their responses would be used. The researchers ensured respondents anonymity. None of the reality-distorting claims were made in data collection or analysis.

3.3. Sample

The participants' recruitment and data collection for Knowledge Resistance panel were managed through The Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE). Data were collected between February 24th and March 25th, 2020, with a response rate of 63,7% (Andreasson & Andersson, 2020).

This particular study relies on a probability sample. Such a random sampling technique provides the necessary framework to make implications about the whole population's perceptions and behaviour (Bergan, 2017; Sheldon, 2017; Willes, 2017). The number of responses (N) is 3433. The sample consists of 50.2 % of women and 49.8 % of men of all age groups. The age range is 18-80 years: 13,9 % of respondents are younger than 30; 13,9 % are in between 30 and 39 years old; 17,7 % in the age range of 40-49 years; 17,2 % are 50-59 years old, 20 % of respondents are in between 60 to 69 years old and 17,3 % are older than 70 years.

3.4. Variables

3.4.1. Generalized trust in news media

Following recent theoretic developments of the conceptualization of news media trust (Strömbäck et al., 2020), in the survey, generalized trust in news media is specified as trust in Swedish news media in general. In line with the studies conducted by Tsfati & Cappella (2003, 2005), the measurement of generalized trust in news media is based on Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) multidimensional media credibility scale.

To measure the levels of generalized trust in news media, respondents were asked to evaluate how much they agree with five statements about Swedish news media on a 7-point

Likert scale. The question sounded as follows: "Generally speaking, to what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Swedish news media?". The statements were the following:

1. "The news media are fair in their news coverage."

2. "The news media are unbiased in their news coverage."

3. "The news media tell the whole story in their news coverage."

4. "The news media are accurate in their news coverage."

5. "The news media separate fact and opinion in their news coverage."

An index variable was a sum of these five media credibility assessments (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.938$, M=14.904 SD=7.102, N=3203). The values varied from 0 (No trust in news media) to 30 (Complete trust in news media).

3.4.2. Ideological leaning

To identify respondents' ideological leaning, the following question was asked: "In politics, people sometimes talk of "left" and "right." Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?" The answers were normally distributed (M=4.99, SD=2.440, N=3185).

Two different strategies were used to divide the respondents according to their ideology.

1. Based on the left-right political spectrum, the respondents were assigned into three different groups: *left-wing* (values 0-4 in the original scale, M=.42, SD=.493), *right-wing* (values 6-10, M=.45, SD=.497) and *the reference group* (neither left nor right (5 in the original scale), M=.1385, SD=.345).

2. *The strength of respondents' ideological leaning* was operationalized the following way. The original 11-point scale was split into two scales. 0-4 values in the original scale represented leaning to the left, and 6-10 represented self-placement to the right.

The first scale was inverted so that it measured the ***strength of ideological leaning to the left*** (1 represented slight leaning towards left, and five equaled far left, M=2.455, SD=1.21, N=1325). The second scale measured ***the strength of leaning towards the right*** side in the ideological continuum (where 1 represented slight leaning towards right and 5 equaled far-right, M=2.261, SD=1.17, N=1419).

3.4.3. Media exposure patterns

3.4.3.1. *Measurements*

Exposure to mainstream news media. A list of 8 Swedish mainstream news media sources was provided during the survey. It included: 1) two national tabloids (*Aftonbladet* (M=5.56, SD=2.832 N=3264)) and *Expressen* (M=6.39, SD=2.479 N=3255)), 2) the two main national quality newspapers (*Dagens Nyheter* (M=6.68, SD=2.635 N=3243)) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (M=7.20, SD=1.846 N=3239)), the two TV news programs on Swedish public service SVT (*Rapport* (M=4.5 SD=2.748, N=3309)) and *Aktuellt* (M=5.02 SD=2.622 N=3291)) and 4) the news program on the commercial channel TV4 (*TV4 Nyheterna* (M=5.37 SD=2.615 N=3285)).

Respondents were asked the following question: "In a typical week, how often do you use the following news media, in their traditional formats or online?" The answers could vary from 1 (7 days a week) to 8 (Less than once a week).

Exposure to alternative political media was measured in two steps: first of all, respondents answered if they read 19 of Swedish alternative media outlets in their traditional or online formats ("Have you ever read the following newspapers and online media? Please tick the boxes for each media you have read"). The list included four right-leaning alternative political media sources (*Fria Tider* (M=.16, SD=.369, N=2744), *Samhällsnytt* (M=.15, SD=.357, N=2744), *Nyheter Idag* (M=.16, SD=.367, N=2744) and *Ledarsidorna.se* (M=.17,

SD=.376, N=2744)) and four left-leaning alternative political media sources (*Dagens arena* (M=.08, SD=.264, N=2744), *Aktuellt I Politiken* (M=.07, SD=.257, N=2744) *Arbetet* (M=.12, SD=.324, N=2744), *ETC* (M=.23, SD=.423, N=2744)).

For each type of selected information channel, a follow-up question asked to clarify an average exposure to a news outlet in a typical week (from 1 (7 days a week) to 8 (less than once a week)). The following question was used to identify the frequency: "In a typical week, how often do you use… [each media ticked yes]".

- *Fria Tider* (M=6.61, SD=2.227 N=445)

- *Samhällsnytt* (M=6.22, SD=2.278, N=401)

- *Nyheter Idag* (M=6.27, SD=2.289, N=432)

- *Ledarsidorna.se* (M=5.25, SD=2.64, N=463)

- *Dagens Arena* (M=7.32, SD=1.292, N=204)

- *Aktuellt I Politiken* (M=194, SD=6.92, N=1.703)

- *Arbetet* (M=317, SD=7.28, N=1.387)

- *ETC* (M=6.93, SD=1.806, N=639).

A different strategy was employed to measure the frequency of **exposure to online media or social media for news.** In this case, it was more important to clarify how often social media was used as a news source to supplement mainstream news media than to identify the exact platforms respondents used.

Respondents were asked the following question "In a typical week, how often do you visit online media or social media in order to …". The answers varied from 1 – A few times a day, 2 – Every day, 3 – 5-6 days a week, 4 – 3-4 days a week to 5 –1-2 days a week, and 6 – More seldom than once a week.

1. "Get news that are not covered by traditional news media." (M=4.91, SD=1.494, N=3233)

2. "Get news that provide other views on societal issues than traditional news media." (M=4.9, SD=1.418, N=3223)

3. "Get news that provide other views on societal issues than traditional news media." (M=4.66, SD=1.531, N=3223)

4. "Get news that provide new perspectives on important societal issues." (M=4.42, SD=1.527, N=3223)

5. "Check facts provided by the news media that I do not fully believe." (M=5.03, SD=1.332, N=3223)

3.4.3.2. Operationalization

First of all, a principal component analysis (OBLIMIN rotation), including all the variables measuring exposure to mainstream news media sources and alternative political media sources, was conducted. As expected, variables clustered into five different groups: tabloids, quality newspapers, TV news programs, right-wing alternative political media sources, and left-wing alternative political media sources. The full results of the principal components analysis are presented in Appendix 1 (Table A1). However, due to theoretical reasons, it was decided to separate public broadcaster's TV news programs from commercial channel's TV news. The rationale for that was the strength of public broadcasting service in Sweden. Not only PBS channels were the most used, but also, they were the most trusted (Newman et al., 2020, p. 82). The strong position of PBS raised a suspicion that generalized trust in news media may be primarily evaluated based on the trust in PBS channels.

The next step was to operationalize media exposure subcategories. Additive indexes were created out of sources, belonging to each subcategory. The numbers of sources differed,

therefore the scales of additive variables also differed. However, each of them went from the lowest exposure to the highest exposure. Also, there were more alternative political media sources than mainstream news media sources in each of the subcategories. Since alternative political media are used less often than mainstream news media, the later additive indexes were highly skewed to the right.

The respondents who have been never or almost never exposed to specific media category (the lowest value in the scale) were excluded from the analysis. The decision could be justified with the findings from the previous research, which suggested that generalized trust in news relates to supplementation but not the substitution of news media sources (see 2.2.2.3.) Since the measurement of exposure to media sources varied, the "zero" group also differed. In terms of mainstream news media exposure, there were no options to report no exposure to mainstream news media, thus, it excluded the people, who reported no regular exposure to none of the sources within the category in a typical week. Regarding online or social media exposure for news, the "zero" group was the people who haven't been exposed to online or social media for neither of the mentioned reasons in a typical week. In case of alternative political media exposure, the "zero" group was those people, who had never been exposed to alternative political media from each subcategory.

The additive indexes are described more in detail in the list below:

1. ***Quality newspapers:*** *Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet* (M=5.288, Min = 1 (Exposure to at least one source once a week), Max = 14 (Daily exposure to both of the sources). SD=3.259, N=1267)

2. ***Tabloids:*** *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen* (M=6.720, Min = 1 (Exposure to at least one source once a week), Max = 14 (Daily exposure to both of the sources), SD=4.06, N=1939)

3. ***Public service news programs:*** *Rapport*, *Aktuellt* (M=8.21, Min = 1 (Exposure to at least one of the sources once a week), Max = 14 (Daily exposure to both of the sources) SD=4.077, N=2572)

4. ***Commercial news:*** *TV4 Nyheterna* (Min=1 (Exposure to the source at least once a week), Max= 7 (Daily exposure), M=4.12, SD=2.13, N=2100).

5. ***Left-wing alternative media:*** *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC* (M=2.61, Min = 1 (Has ever used at least one of the sources), Max = 17 (the highest exposure), SD=2.37, N=753)

6. ***Right-wing alternative media:*** *Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna.se* (M=5.3, Min = 1 (Has ever used at least one of the sources), Max = 32 (daily exposure to all the sources), SD=5.49, N=957)

In this thesis, exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media was operationalized as the exposure to left-wing alternative political media among left-wing respondents and right-wing alternative political media among right-wing respondents. Exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media referred to exposure to the opposite political media than one's ideological leaning.

Exposure to online or social media for news was operationalized as a sum of all values from five variables, which measured online or social media exposure (see section 3.4.2., Cronbach's alpha = 0.850 among variables, M=7.47, Min=1 (exposure to online or social media for news at least once a week), Max=25 (exposure to online or social media for news a few times a day) SD=5.37, N=2567). Principal components (OBLIMIN) analysis was used as an additional instrument to verify one scale construction. The results supported the rationale of creating one index. The number of components that explained more than one eigenvalue,

determined by the Kaiser criterion, was 1. Determinant = .167, KMO = .837, Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (p < 0.001)).

3.4.4. The intent to avoid the news

The intent to avoid the news was measured with the question, "In a typical week, how often do you actively try to avoid news?" The answers varied from 1 – Never, 2 – Less than once a week, 3 – 1-2 times a week, 4 – 3-4 times a week, 5 – 5-6 times a week to 6 – daily and 7 – A few times a day (M=2.42, SD=1.76, N=3279).

3.4.5. Third variables

Generalized trust in news media is not the only reason why people use specific media sources. Therefore, several other factors were controlled for during the analysis.

Previous research had mentioned some sociodemographic factors such as **gender, education**, and, predominantly, **age** as the most influential factors, which contribute to the variance of investigated perceptions and behavior (Fletcher & Park, 2017, p. 1291; Newman & Fletcher, 2017, p. 11; Kalogeropoulos, 2017; Toff & Palmer, 2019; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2012; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Older respondents are more often exposed to mainstream news media and alternative political media than younger respondents. Younger respondents, in comparison, use online or social media for news more often. How age contributes to the intent to avoid the news, is less specified. However, it is expected that those who intentionally try to avoid the news the most should be middle age. In contrast, the younger and the older respondents are expected to less often intentionally avoid the news.

Some of the original variables were recoded into dummy variables:

- **Gender** – woman (M=.502, SD=.500, N=3433)

- ***Education*** – unfinished high school (M=.176, SD=.381, N=3161), university degree (M=.285, SD=.451 N=3161) and the reference group (finished high-school, M=.5375, SD=.498, N=3161)

Age was measured in decades. Here 1 referred to the age between 18 and 29, 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, and 6 – 70-80 (M=3.68, SD=1.664, N=3433).

Previous research has suggested that ***political interest*** associates with higher exposure to mainstream news media, online or social media, alternative political media, and lower news avoidance (Althaus, Cizmar & Gimpel, 2009; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2013; Fletcher & Joy, 2019). Strömbäck & Shehata (2019) have also found reciprocal relationship between political interest and public service TV news (but not commercial TV news) exposure. Those, interested in politics, also tend to have higher trust in mainstream media (e.g., Tsfati & Ariely, 2013, p. 15).

Political interest was measured with the question: "Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?" with answers ranging from 1 – Very interested to 4 – Not at all interested. The values were inverted for readers convenience (M=2.96, SD=0.757, N =3161)

All of the descriptive statistics of the original variables and the indexes used for the statistical analysis can be found in Appendix 2 (Table A2, Descriptive statistics).

3.5. Data analysis

3.5.1. Statistical methods

While the previous section described the measurements and operationalization of the variables, the further section explains the process of investigation.

First of all, the bivariate correlations between generalized trust in news media, on the one hand, and 1) exposure to mainstream news media, 2) exposure to online or social media for

news, 3) exposure to left-wing and right-wing alternative political media, and 4) intent to avoid the news, on the other hand, were investigated.

Since researchers do not agree whether Pearson's correlation tool can be relied on when one of the variables does not follow a normal distribution (see Kowalski, 1972, p. 11; McDonald, 2014), both Pearson's and Spearman's correlation analyses tools were used.

Nevertheless, bivariate correlations analyses are not enough to investigate whether the hypotheses should be accepted or rejected. Therefore, multiple regression methods were used. Multiple regressions allow to control for relationships' spuriousness and provide alternative explanations of why the variance in the dependent variables occur.

3.5.1.2. Regression analyses

Ordinary least squares regression (OLS) is the most common way to address the questions of the strength and significance of hypothetically linear focal relationship (Shaikh, 2017). However, it assumes the normal distribution of the dependent variable.

In this study, the only dependent variables, close to the normal distribution, were the exposure to TV news (commercial and PBS) variables. Although they did not pass Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality, they were still used in linear regression models as the dependent variables for the following reasoning.

Statistics' literature emphasizes that the normality assumption is important for significance testing, but it is only considered an issue when the sample size is small (Statistics Solutions, 2013). Although there are consequences of the violation of normality assumption, they do not result in the inefficient or biased regression models when there are many responses. Li and colleagues (2012) argued that although non-parametric models provide more robust estimates of standard error, large sample sizes requirements and sensitivity to the outliers suggest that linear regression models are more applicable and valid even when normality is

ignored. Many scholars argue that the dependent variable does not have to be normally distributed before linear regression analysis. "Statistically, however, it is more accurate to check that the errors of a linear regression model are distributed normally, or the dependent variable has a conditional normal distribution when evaluating whether the "normality assumption" is fulfilled for linear regression" (Li et al., 2012).

Secondly, appropriate sample sizes and the central limit theorem (Shao, 2008) justify the argument that "ordinary least squares (OLS) estimators in linear regression technique still will be approximately normally distributed around the true parameter values, which implies the estimated parameters and their confidence interval estimates remain robust (Li et al., 2012)." However, although the Central Limit Theorem "depends on the sample size being "large enough," it provides "little guidance on how large a sample might be necessary" (Lumley, et al., 2002, p. 157).

Lumley and colleagues (2002) have provided evidence that even non-normal distributed sample sizes, which are as small as 100 (or 500, in cases where distribution is extremely non-normal), are enough for linear regression to give similarly valid results to its non-parametric substitutes. If this was the case, then all the dependent variables in this empirical study could have been regressed with this technique. However, most of the other scholars are not as optimistic as Lumley and colleagues. For instance, Li and colleagues (2012) have argued that the sample size should be approximate or larger than 3000. Thus, the middle ground approach was taken in this empirical study: only the exposure to TV news programs variables seemed appropriate to be used in the OLS regression models.

Other dependent variables were not normally distributed and over dispersed. These characteristics of variables' distribution satisfied the requirements for the negative binomial regression technique to be chosen as OLS linear regression substitute (see Zwilling, 2013).

A few corrections had to be made to the original negative binomial regression models to adjust the dispersion based on the recommendations by Hilbe (2011, p. 142). He has stated that model correction (an adjustment of an estimated parameter) is needed when the dispersion statistic exceeded 1.05-1.25.

The corrections were made by adding an automatically estimated value parameter in SPSS and then checking that dispersion values divided by degrees of freedom and Pearson chi values divided by degrees of freedom would not exceed Hilbe's recommendation.

3.5.2. The models

Exposure to mainstream news media. Exposure to quality newspapers was not normally distributed, and it had greater variance than the mean; therefore, negative binomial regression with estimated parameter seemed appropriate for such a variable. In case of exposure to PBS TV news programs, OLS linear regression was used. Linear regression models' errors were distributed normally. For each category of sources, belonging to mainstream news media, there were three predictive models created. First model included only generalized trust in news media as the predictor variable. The second model accounted for sociodemographic factors which can influence the focal relationship. The third model included all of the control variables. The results provided by the third model were used for interpretation of the results.

Online or social media use for news. The covariates, which explained the variance of exposure to online or social media for news, were entered in negative binomial regression models in steps. At first, only the association between trust in news media and exposure to online or social media news for news was investigated to see whether the model was appropriate for the investigation. Then sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education) were included. Finally, political interest was added to the third model.

Each of the three models had different estimated parameters produced automatically by running generalized linear regression with a negative binomial regression option of log link. Model III, which was used to analyze the results, included all the sociodemographic factors and political interest. It also had the lowest value of the Akaike and Bayesian information criterion.

The intent to avoid the news. When the relationship between generalized trust in news media and the intent to avoid the news was analyzed, three negative binomial regression models were created. In the first model, the response variable – the frequency of the intent to avoid the news – was explained only with the key independent variable – generalized trust in news media. In all three models, omnibus tests showed that the regressor in the model was statistically significant. Similarly, deviance value divided by degrees of freedom, and Pearson chi-square divided by degrees of freedom implied that all of the models satisfied the interpretation criteria. The last model (III), which featured all of the control variables and the lowest Akaike's (AIC) and Bayesian (BIC) information criteria values, was used in the Results section.

To see whether the intent to avoid the news associated with lower news media consumption, bivariate correlations between the intent to avoid the news and mainstream news media exposure, alternative political media exposure, and online or social media exposure were investigated. Then a negative binomial regression technique was used to check whether the focal relationships remained significant when the third variables were taken into account. Following the same logic as before, OLS regression tool was used when exposure to TV news programs were the dependent variables and negative binomial regression was used when exposure to tabloids, quality newspapers and alternative political media were the dependent variables. There were four different models created to explain the variance of each of the variables. The first one only analyzed the relationship between the focal variables, the second

one included sociodemographic factors into model, the third one also accounted for ideological leaning and political interest and the fourth one also included generalized trust in news media.

Exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media. The correlation analyses have shown that the relation between trust in news media and exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent alternative political media was significant only among right-wing respondents, but not the left-wing. Subsequently, the associations between generalized trust in news media and exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media were significant among both left-wing and right-wing respondents. Negative binomial regression was employed to further test the strength and the direction of the relationship. For each of the test, three models were created: 1) a bivariate regression, 2) a model with trust in news media and sociodemographic factors included, and 3) the last one with all control variables included. The final models, which included all the variables, were presented in the results section.

4. Results

4.1. Generalized trust in news media

The results section of this empirical thesis begins from respondents' assessments of generalized trust in news media, which are presented in Figure 2. Each of the respondent had to evaluate five different statements about the credibility of Swedish news media (how much they think the Swedish news media are fair, unbiased, telling the whole story, accurate, and separating facts from opinions in their media coverage).

Figure 2. Generalized trust in news media among Swedes (%)
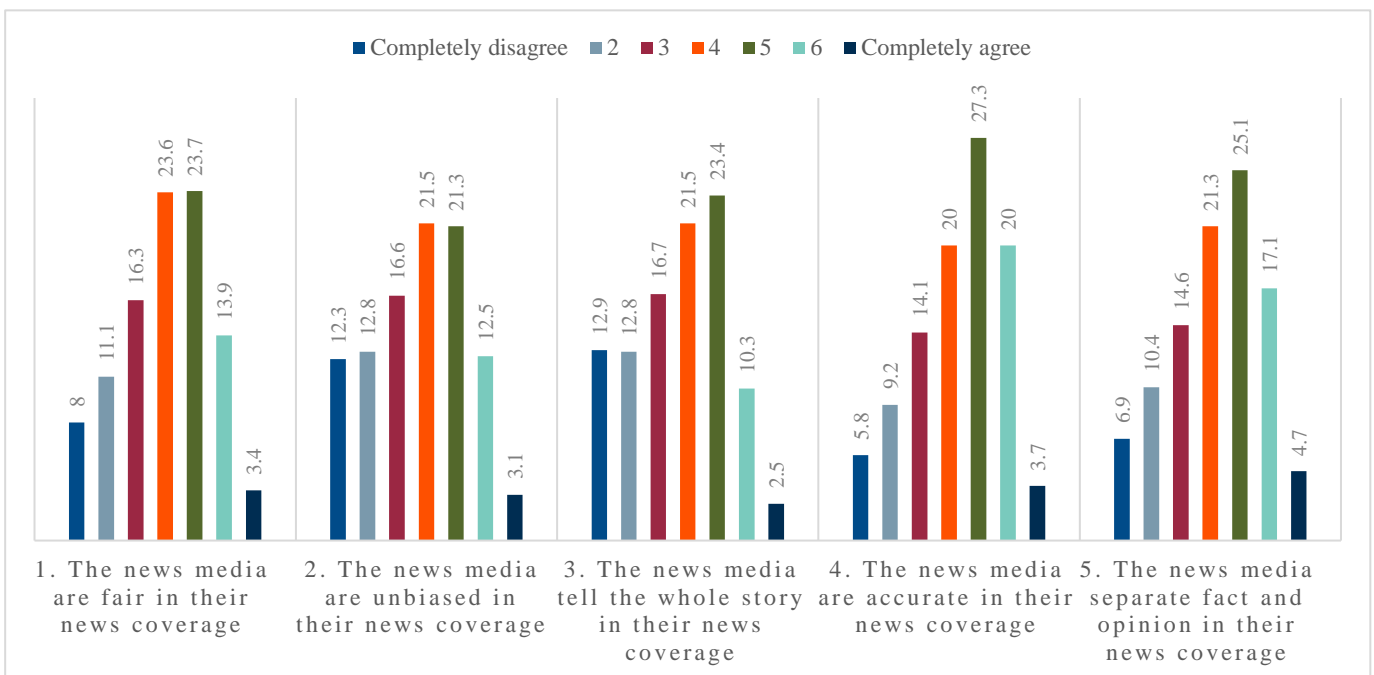
Notes: Generally speaking, to what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Swedish news media? N1=3229, N2=3232, N3=3227, N4=3238, N5=3223. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Among the respondents, there are slightly more people who completely disagree with the statements about news media than completely agree with them. However, in general the answers are normally distributed, with most of the respondents having the average assessment of news media trustworthiness. Thus, in an additive index, created out of all the variables which measure media credibility, the mean of the index is around the middle (M=14.904, Min=1, Max=30).

Moreover, left-wing and right-wing respondents differ in their assessment of trust in news media (as shown in Figure 3). On average, left-wing respondents assess news media credibility positively. In contrast, right-wing respondents trust news media less than the average. The difference between trust in news media among left-wing respondents and right-wing respondents is 4.07 units on a scale from 0 to 30.

Figure 3. Means of trust in news media among left-wing and right-wing respondents

	Trust in news media
■ Right-wing	12.96
■ Left-wing	17.03
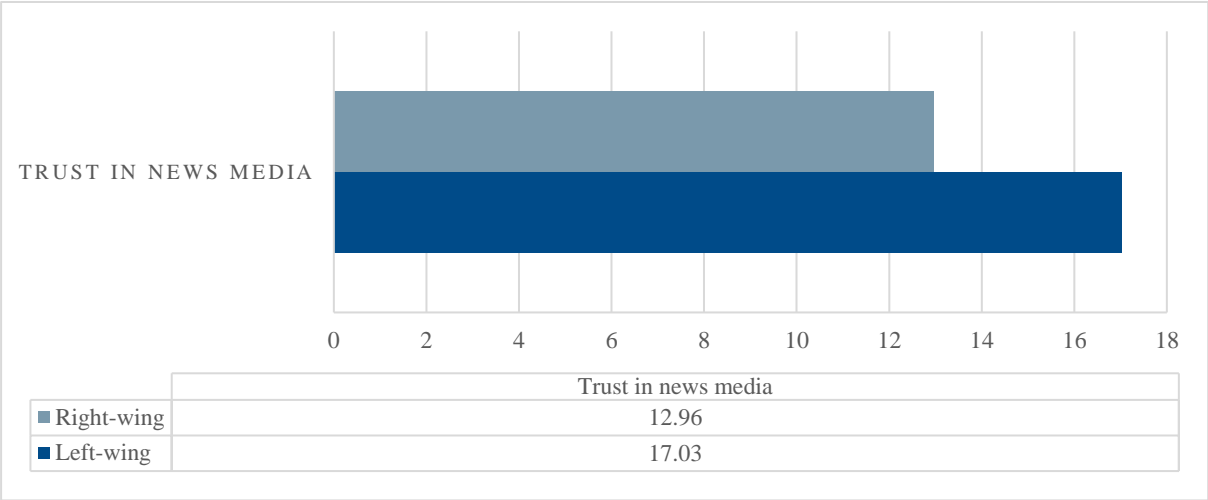
Notes. Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust, 30 – Complete trust). Left-wing respondents (N) = 1301, right-wing respondents (N) = 1398 Difference between left-wing and right-wing respondents: Mean = 4.07, SE =.26. t=15.622, df=2690.706, p < 0.001. Cohen's d = 0.34 (Welch *t* Test). *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

The next step is to address the relationship between generalized trust in news media and ideological leaning (for full table see Appendix 3, Table A3.1.). The bivariate correlations between these variables imply that although leaning towards the left or the right makes a difference in trust assessment, the strength of ideological leaning produces mixed results. The correlation between trust in news media and the strength of ideological leaning towards the far right on a scale from 1 to 5 is negative and significant (Pearson's r = -.239**). But the strength of left-wing ideological identity does not significantly affect the trust in news media among left-leaning respondents (Pearson's r = 0.001, p > 0.1).

To sum up, in general the levels of trust in news media in Sweden are normally distributed, with the most of the respondents having neither no trust in news media nor completely trusting it. However, the assessment of generalized trust in news media depends on the slant towards left or right on the ideological continuum. Left-wing respondents trust news media more than right-wing respondents. Among right-wing respondents, the assessment of trust significantly negatively correlates with the strength of their ideological leaning towards the right.

4.2. Generalized trust in news media and exposure to mainstream news media sources

H_1 predicts a positive association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to quality newspapers and TV news programs. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that people use the media they trust. Following such a rationale, those who trust news media, should be more often exposed to mainstream media, while those who have low trust in news media, should use it less frequently.

H_1 is followed by a H_2F, which predicts that generalized trust in news media does not significantly associate with the exposure to tabloids. A rationale for such a question is built on two arguments. First of all, people use different mainstream news media sources for various gratifications. Some mainstream news media sources feature mostly political information; thus, they are mainly used to learn about politics and current affairs. Therefore, exposure to quality newspapers and TV news programs should respond to the variance of generalized trust in news media.

Other mainstream news media (e.g., tabloids) feature information about non-political actors and events as well. Thus, people may use these sources for entertainment or tension release. Such mainstream news media may not suffer much from the perception of low news credibility.

Secondly, although generalized trust in news media should refer to all the mainstream news media actors, a lack of contemporary empirical research lead to uncertainty, how generalized trust in news media is evaluated in reality. There is some evidence to suggest that people may have different expectations for the trustworthiness of information from different mainstream media sources. If that is the case, then the differences in associations between generalized trust in news media and exposure to tabloids, quality newspapers, and TV news programs may occur.

4.2.1. The differences among mainstream news media sources

Initial descriptive data analysis (Figure 4) focus on the frequencies of exposure to mainstream news media in Sweden.

Figure 4. The frequency of exposure to Swedish mainstream news media (%)
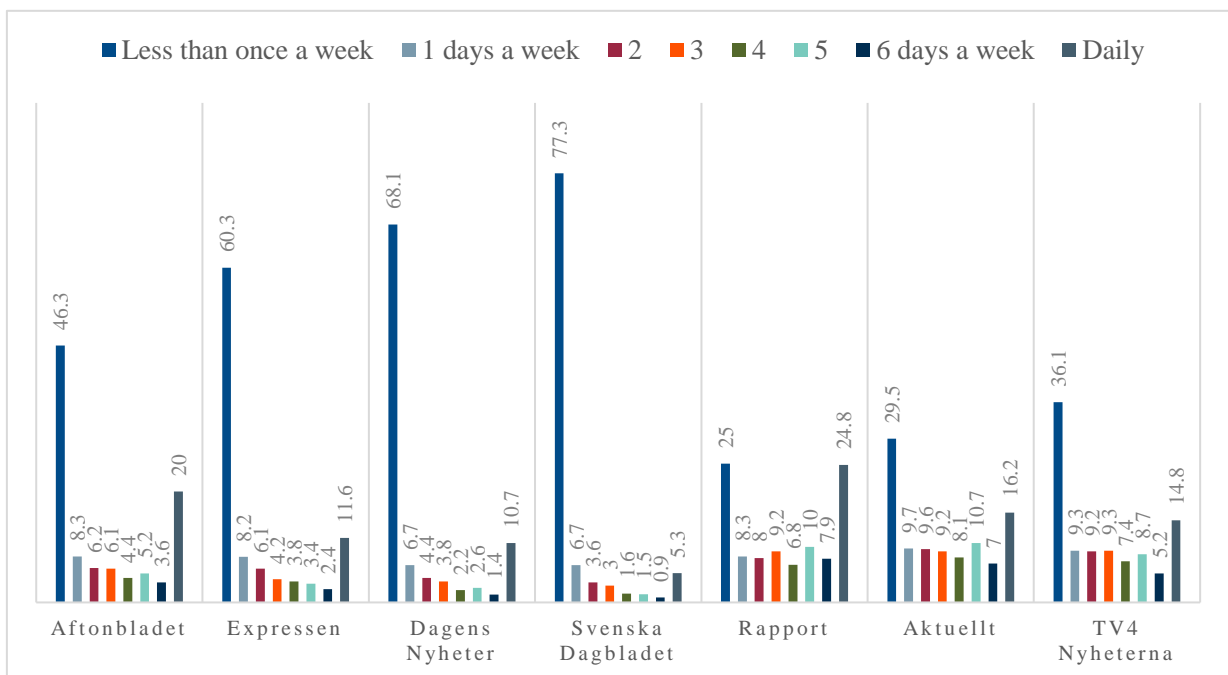
Notes: In a typical week, how often do you use the following news media, in their traditional formats or online? Tabloids: *Aftonbladet* (N=3264), *Expressen (*N=3255). Quality newspapers: *Dagens Nyheter* (N=3249), *Svenska Dagbladet* (N=3239). TV news programs: 1) Public service: *Rapport* (N=3309) *and Aktuellt* (N=3291), 2) Commercial channel: *TV4 Nyheterna* (N=3285*)* Source*:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

It reveals that TV news is the most popular type of mainstream news media among the respondents, while quality newspapers are the least read mainstream media sources.

Rapport is the most often watched TV news program with slightly less than 25 % of respondents viewing it daily. This is almost 5 % more than the most often read tabloid (*Aftonbladet*, 20 % of daily exposure) and over twice more than the most often read quality newspaper (*Dagens Nyheter*, 10.7 % daily exposure). Only 20 % of respondents watch *Rapport* less often than once a week compared to 46.3 % of Swedes, who do not use *Aftonbladet* (46.3 %) or do not read *Dagens Nyheter* (68.1 %) regularly. Other PBS news program – *Aktuellt*– feature a slightly smaller daily exposure (16.2 %). However, it is still higher than the exposure to the majority of other mainstream news media sources, except the tabloid *Aftonbladet*. News program on the commercial channel is less popular: a little more than one third (36.1 %) of respondents' report watching *TV4 Nyheterna* less than once a week. Less than 15 % are exposed to it daily.

Furthermore, exposure to TV news is more equally distributed than the frequencies of exposure to tabloids or quality newspapers. More respondents report watching TV news programs 1-6 times a week compared to reading quality newspapers or tabloids. Considering the later sources, respondents tend to either read them daily or not to read them at all.

When the sources are grouped into subcategories (tabloids, quality newspapers, PBS TV news programs, and the commercial news program), a better overview of the frequency of exposure to mainstream news media can be drawn. Although it appears that Swedes read tabloids more frequently than quality newspapers, this is still quite a sporadic practice compared to watching TV news. Less than 10 % of respondents read one or both of analysed tabloids daily. In contrast, PBS TV news programs are watched much more often. Although around 20

% of respondents do not follow PBS TV news programs regularly, slightly more than 13 %
watch both of them daily.

4.2.2. How generalized trust in news media relates to mainstream news media exposure

To test H_1 and H_2, the bivariate correlations between generalized trust in news media trust and media exposure patterns are investigated. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Bivariate correlations between generalized trust in news media and mainstream media exposure

Variable	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
Tabloids	-.024	-.033
Quality newspapers	.098**	.112**
TV news (PBS)	.132**	.123**
TV news (commercial)	.009	.001

Notes: Frequency of exposure to mainstream news media. Tabloids – *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* (N=1865, 1-14) Quality newspapers – *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* (N=1223, 1-14). TV news programs (PBS) – *Rapport* and *Aktuellt* (N=2484, 1-14). TV news programs (commercial channel) – *TV4 Nyheterna* (N=2020, 1 –7). Frequency of exposure to alternative political media. Respondents who do not use any of the sources within each subcategory at least once a week are excluded from the analysis. Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

First of all, significant positive correlations are found between generalized trust in news media and exposure to quality newspapers (Pearson's r=.098[**], Spearman's rho=.112[**]) and between trust in news media and exposure to PBS TV news programs (Pearson's r=.132**, Spearman's rho = .123**). Secondly, the correlation between generalized trust in news media and exposure to tabloids is insignificant (Pearson' r = -.024, Spearman's rho = -.033) so as the correlation between generalized trust in news media and exposure to commercial TV news program (Pearson's r=.009, Spearman's rho = 0.001).

Dependent variables, which significantly correlate to generalized trust in news media, are regressed to see whether the associations remain when multiple other factors are held

constant. The results of regressions are presented in Table 2 below. Full table can be found in Appendix 4 (Table A4).

Table 2. Associations between exposure to mainstream news media and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning and political interest

	Exposure to quality newspapers				Exposure to TV news programs (PBS)	
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	Unstandardized B	SE
Generalized trust in news media	.008**	.003	9.343	1.008	.072***	.011
Female	-.011	.036	.086	.989	.222	.145
Age	.075***	.010	48.142	1.078	1.168***	.047
Unfinished high school	.047	.060	.598	1.048	-.061	.195
University degree	.116**	.038	9.034	1.123	-.496**	.170
Left-wing	.065	.057	1.248	1.067	-.049	.229
Right-wing	.060	.057	1.076	1.062	-.013	.226
Political interest (1-4)	.112***	.026	17.549	1.118	.897***	.102
Deviance value/df	1.058					
Pearson chi square/df	.987					
χ 2, Log likelihood	97.768***, -2911.366					
AIC, BIC	5842.733, 5893.380					
Estimated parameter	.174				R^2 .268	
N	1170				N 2401	

Notes: Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media). Dependent variables. Exposure to quality newspapers - *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* (1 – Less than once a week, 9 – Daily) Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function, automatically estimated parameter. Exposure to TV news programs (PBS) – *Rapport* and *Aktuellt* (1 – Less than once a week, 9 – Daily). Results of OLS regression. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ 2 – likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** $p > 0.001$, ** $p > 0.01$, * $p > 0.05$, *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Regression results show that the association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to quality newspapers for news remains significant and positive even when other influential factors are controlled. An increase of trust in Swedish news media on the scale from 0 to 30 associates with a higher probability of exposure to quality newspapers (Exp (B) = incident rate ratio = 1.008).

Some third sociodemographic factors also have significant effects on the frequency of exposure to quality newspapers, although they do not influence the strength of the focal relationship much. Older age increases the odds of higher exposure to quality newspapers so as

the political interest and university degree. Furthermore, neither gender, nor ideological towards the left or the right have changed the probability of exposure to quality newspapers.

The distribution of exposure to PBS TV news programs allows to run a slightly more detailed analysis of the relationship between trust in news media and exposure to these mainstream media channels. The model, created for this empirical study, can explain 26.8 % of the variance of exposure to PBS TV news programs.

The analysis reveals that generalized trust in news media significantly positively associates with the frequency of exposure to PBS TV news programs. A one-unit increase in trust in news media can predict 0.072 significant increase in the frequency of exposure to PBS TV news programs on a scale from 1 to 14, when sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning, and political interest are controlled.

Moreover, an increase in age by a decade, significantly positively increases the exposure to PBS TV news programs (Unstandardized B = 1.168). Gender does not significantly contribute to the variance of exposure to PBS TV news programs so as the unfinished high school education. However, those respondents, who have higher education (university degree), are significantly slightly less exposed to PBS TV news programs. As expected, political interest increases the frequency of exposure to PBS TV news programs, however, ideological leaning does not contribute to the explanation of the dependent variable significantly.

To sum up, the assumption that generalized trust in news media should positively associate with exposure to quality newspapers and TV news programs is relevant but not in all of the cases. Generalized trust in news media positively associates with the exposure to quality newspapers and PBS TV news programs; however, it does not correlate to the exposure to commercial TV news program. Therefore, the Swedish survey data analysis implies that H_1 can

only be partially accepted. Regarding H_2, as expected, no significant association between trust in news media and exposure to tabloids could be found.

4.3. Generalized trust in news media and exposure to online media or social media for news

H_3 states a negative association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to online or social media for news. The rationale for such a hypothesis derives from the argument that those citizens who do not trust news media supplement it with media alternatives, such as online or social media (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, 2005; Elvestad et al., 2018).

The results of the hypothesis test are presented in the following way. At first, descriptive statistics, which review the frequency of exposure to online or social media as a supplement of mainstream news media, are discussed. Then the significance and the direction of the association between generalized trust in news media and the frequency of exposure to online or social media for news is investigated based on the results of bivariate correlation and negative binomial regression analysis.

4.3.1. The reasons people turn to online or social media for news

Respondents have provided answers how often they use online or social media to get news. The results, depicted in Figure 5, reveal that Swedes supplement news from mainstream media with additional information, which they acquire through online media or social media.

Among those respondents, who report regular exposure to online or social media for news from once a week to seven days a week, the most common reason to do so regularly is to get the news that provide new perspectives on important societal issues (77.8 %). This reason is followed by a wish to get the news which present societal problems in a way that corresponds to respondent's views (56.1 %). The third most important factor is to get the news that provide other views on societal issues than mainstream ("traditional") news media (51.4 %). Fact-

checking of the news (47.2 %) and seeking for unreported information ("news that are not covered by traditional news media," 46.3 %) are two least often mentioned reasons to use online or social media for news.

Figure 5. In a typical week, how often do you visit online media or social media in order to… (%)
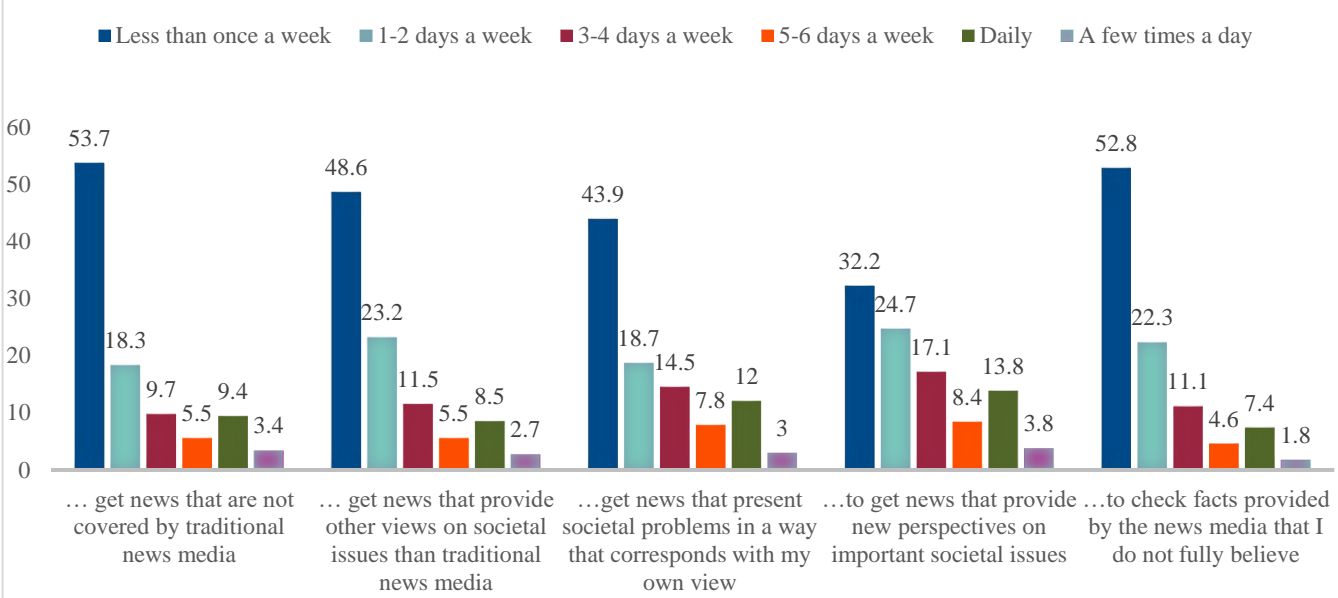
Source: The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

To sum up, descriptive statistics of exposure to online media or social media for news justify a rationale to study the role of trust in news media as the predictor of such mainstream news media supplementation.

4.3.2. How generalized trust in news media relates to exposure to online or social media for news

The bivariate correlation between trust in news media and exposure to online or social media for news was significant and negative (Pearson's r = -.277 Spearman's rho = -.233). Thus, this index variable was regressed, including sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning, and political interest factors as control variables. A full table with three regression

models can be found is in Appendix 5, Table A5. Table 3 below depicts only the results, provided by the final negative binomial regression model.

Table 3. Associations between exposure to online or social media for news and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning and political interest

	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)
Generalized trust in news media	**-.023***	**.002**	**135.732**	**.977**
Female	-.122***	.027	19.163	.885
Age	-.002	.0085	.055	.998
Unfinished high school	.068	.038	3.107	1.071
University degree	-.052	.031	2.651	.950
Left-wing	-.011	.044	.064	.989
Right-wing	.027	.043	.383	1.027
Political interest (1-4)	.270***	.0194	194.151	1.310
Deviance value/df	1.044			
Pearson chi square/df	1.020			
χ^2	411.992***			
Log likelihood	-7012.597			
AIC, BIC	14045.194, 14103.228			
Estimated parameter	.305			
N	2449			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media). Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to online or social media for news (1 –25) Independent variable (X): *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, $\chi 2$ – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020). *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05.

The regression results show that the odds of more frequent exposure to online or social media when generalized trust in news media increases by one unit in a 0-30 units scale, are significantly lower than 1 (Exp (B) = .977). It means that lower trust in news media relates to higher exposure to online or social media for news.

Looking into other control variables, it can be seen that gender and political interest also contribute to explaining the variance of exposure to online and social media for news. However, they do not influence the significance of the focal relationship. Men are slightly more likely to be more frequently exposed to online or social media for news than women. Politically interested respondents, as expected, are also more likely to use online or social media for news.

Respondents' age, education and ideology do not contribute to explaining the variance of exposure to online or social media.

To conclude, the H$_3$, which states that generalized trust in news media negatively associates to online and social media exposure for news, can be confirmed with 95 % confidence. Citizens, who doubted Swedish news media, search for additional information online.

4.4. Generalized trust in news media, the intent to avoid the news and intentional news avoidance

The social theory predicts that the trustor, who doubts the trustee's trustworthiness, will not engage in a risky relationship (Coleman, 1990). Therefore, H$_4$ states that generalized trust in news media is negatively associated with the intent to avoid the news. Although previous media trust studies have not paid sufficient attention to news avoidance as a consequence of low trust in news media, the interest in this hypothetical association arises due to recent developments in news avoidance research, where it is suggested that some intentional news avoiders doubt news media (Toff & Nielsen, 2018).

However, since the qualitative study by Toff and Nielsen (2018) investigated only the groups of digitally-skilled respondents, it is unclear whether the intent to avoid the news would correlate to actual news avoidance (lower media exposure) among the general population. Much of previous empirical research doubts if people can withdraw from news media completely (see section 2.2.3) Thus, the following research question (RQ$_1$) is introduced: "Is there a significant association between the intent to avoid the news on the one hand, and exposure to mainstream news media, alternative political media and online or social media, on the other hand?"

First of all, the frequency of the intent to avoid the news among the general population is discussed. Then the correlations between the intent to avoid the news and self-reported media

exposure are explored. In cases where significant correlations are found, regression techniques are used to see whether the relations hold when other influential factors are considered. Finally, the strength of the relationship between trust in news media and the intent to avoid the news is discussed based on the negative binomial regression model results.

4.4.1. The intent to avoid the news

The frequencies of the intent to avoid the news, depicted in Figure 6, reveal that almost 3/4 of survey respondents (72.6 %) do not actively try to avoid the news or do it more seldom than once a week. Such results reiterate the implication that the intent to avoid the news is still not as widespread in Sweden as it is in other countries (see Kalogeropoulos, 2017, p. 41; Nielsen et al., 2019, p. 25).

Figure 6. Frequencies of the intent to avoid the news among Swedes (%)
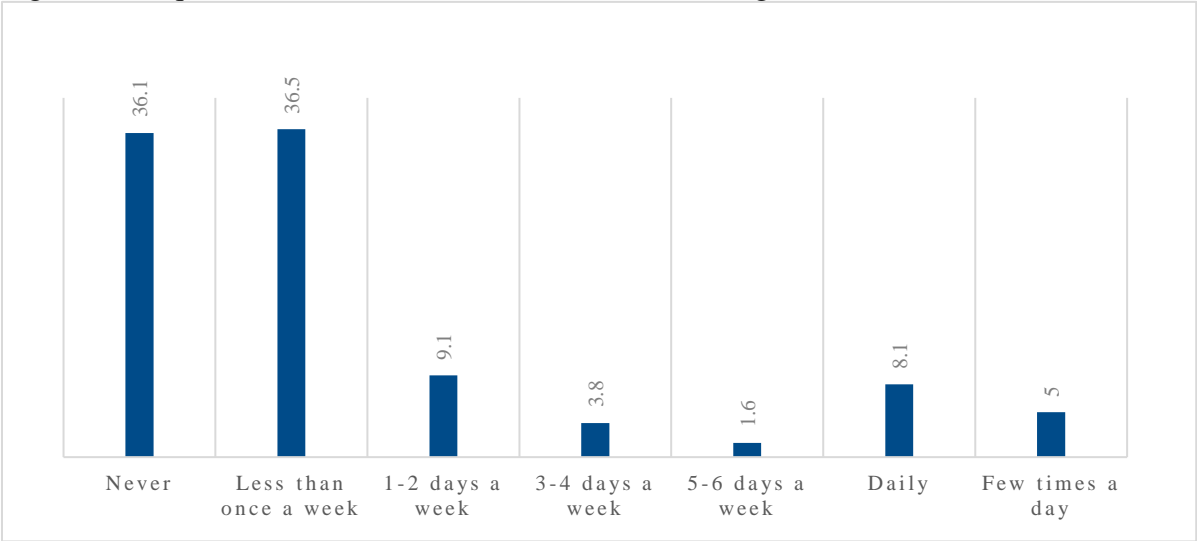
Notes: In a typical week, how often do you actively try to avoid news? N = 3279. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Among those, who avoid news regularly, 9.1 % of respondents do so 1-2 times a week, only 3.8 % avoid news 3-4 times a week, 1.6 % 5-6 times a week. More than 10 % of respondents try to avoid news daily or a few times a day.

4.4.2. The intent to avoid the news and media exposure

Bivariate correlations, presented in Table 4, help to identify if the intent to avoid news associates with media exposure patterns and generalized trust in news media.

Table 4. Bivariate correlations matrix between the intent to avoid news and generalized trust in news media and media exposure patterns

Variable	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
Generalized trust in news media	-.112***	-.094**
Exposure to mainstream news media sources		
Tabloids	-.065**	-.106**
Quality newspapers	-.084**	-.138**
PBS TV news programs	-.150**	-.192**
Commercial TV news	-.104**	-.126**
Mainstream news media alternatives		
Left-wing alternative political media		
Among left-wing respondents	.029	-.051
Among right-wing respondents	-.029	.014
Right-wing alternative political media		
Among left-wing respondents	-.135*	-.155**
Among right-wing respondents	.002	-.047
Online or social media	.035	.006

Notes: Frequency of exposure to mainstream news media. Tabloids – *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* (N=1865, 1-14) Quality newspapers – *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* (N=1223, 1-14). TV news programs (PBS) – *Rapport* and *Aktuellt* (N=2484, 1-14). TV news programs (commercial channel) – *TV4 Nyheterna* (N=2020, 1 –7). Frequency of exposure to alternative political media. Exposure to left-wing alternative media (1 – 17) – *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC* (N=753). Exposure to right-wing alternative media (1 – 32) – *Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna.se* (N=957). Frequency of exposure to online or social media for news (1 – 25), N=2567. Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

The intent to avoid news has been negatively significantly related to exposure to all of mainstream news media subcategories: tabloids, quality newspapers, PBS TV news programs and commercial TV news program. The correlation between the intent to avoid news and exposure to online or social media for news is not significant. Notably, intent to avoid the news does not correlate to the exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media, but significantly negatively correlates to counter-attitudinal alternative media exposure among left-wing respondents. However, similar tendencies are not observed among right-wing respondents.

The relations between the intent to avoid the news and exposure to mainstream news media sources were further tested in regression analyses with control variables (gender, age, education, political leaning and political interest) included. Full tables with all regression models can be found in Appendix 6, Tables A6.1-A6.5. Here only the main findings are summarized.

After controlling for sociodemographic variables, ideological leaning and political interest it appears that the intent to avoid the news does not significantly negatively associate neither to the exposure to tabloids nor to quality newspapers. However, significant negative relationship remains between the intent to avoid the news and exposure to TV news programs, both PBS and commercial news. The results of the analysis imply that the intent to avoid public service news may differ from the intent to avoid commercial news. When trust in news media is included into the model, explaining the variance to public service TV news, the strength of focal relationship weakens, hinting that the intent to avoid the news may be the mediator in this relationship. In the case of commercial news media, generalized trust in news media does not significantly contribute to news media exposure, although the intent to avoid the news does.

When the relationship between the intent to avoid the news and exposure to right-wing alternative political media among left-wing respondents is tested in regression analysis (see Appendix 6, Table A6.5.) with other variables controlled, it appears that although the focal relationship remains negative and significant $(0.05 > p > 0.01)$, inclusion of generalized trust in the model only strengthens the relationship. Thus, it implies that the respondents, who intend to avoid the news and, thus, use alternative media less, do not necessarily do so because of low trust in news media.

4.4.3. Generalized trust in news media ant the intent to avoid the news

Nevertheless, the most important in the scope of this study is how generalized trust in news media relates to the intent to avoid the news. Initial bivariate correlation analysis affirms that the association between key variables (generalized trust in news media and the intent to avoid news) is negative and significant (Pearson's r = -.112**, Spearman's rho = -.094**, N=3186). Thus, the next step is to investigate whether the association remains significant when other covariates are taken into account. In Table 5, the final negative binomial regression model results, where all of the third variables were controlled for, are presented. Full results can be found in Appendix 7, Table A7.

Table 5. Associations between the intent to avoid news and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning and political interest

	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp(B)
Generalized trust in news media	**-.011*****	**.0018**	**38.705**	**.989**
Female	-.024	.0258	.839	.977
18-29 years old	.210***	.0480	19.175	1.234
30-39 years old	.343***	.0465	54.228	1.408
40-49 years old	.265***	.0442	36.111	1.304
50-59-year-old	.254***	.0439	33.635	1.290
60-69 years old	.089*	.0438	4.130	1.093
Unfinished high school	-.008	.0355	.056	.992
University degree	.005	.0299	.024	1.005
Left-wing	.015	.0391	.152	1.015
Right-wing	-.055	.0386	2.018	.947
Political interest (1-4)	-.099***	.0172	33.438	.905
Deviance value/df	.858			
Pearson chi square/df	1.055			
χ^2 *	179.267***			
Log likelihood	-5527.537			
AIC**	11083.074			
BIC**	11167.500			
Estimated parameter	.063			
N	3073			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Intentional news avoidance (1 – Never, 7 – A few times a day). Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media) * Compared to the reference group (above 70). B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ^2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. ***p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

The model reveals that higher generalized trust in news media significantly reduces the probability of more frequent intent to avoid news. When trust in news media is higher by one unit in a 0-30 scale, then the odds ratio to engage into more frequent intentional news avoidance is lower (log odds ratio = .989 < 1).

Some significant associations between the intent to avoid the news and third variables were noticed as well. For instance, young respondents (less than 30 years old) are more likely to actively try to avoid the news than the oldest ones (more than 70 years old), but less likely to have such an intent than middle aged respondents. Also, political interest and older age significantly reduce the probability of more frequent intent to avoid the news.

Some of the other previously found explanatory factors of news avoidance (gender, and lower education) do not significantly associate with the response variable. Ideological leaning towards the left or right also does not affect the intent to avoid the news.

In general, it can be concluded that H_4 receives support. Based on the analysis above, the hypothesis that there is a negative association between generalized trust in news media and the intent to avoid news can be accepted with 95 % confidence. People who do not trust news media are more likely to intentionally try to avoid news. However, an answer to RQ_1 is that the intent to avoid news does not always lead to lower media exposure. In case of Sweden, significant negative correlations between the intent to avoid news and lower media exposure appear only in the case of exposure to TV news programs and counter-attitudinal media among left-wing respondents.

4.5.   Generalized trust in news media and exposure to alternative political media

The last hypothesis (H_5) states a negative association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media. The rationale for such prediction derives from two research findings. First of all, previous studies have found that those who trust news media less, use more non-mainstream media sources. Secondly, previous research has also provided evidence that when people can, they tend to choose to be exposed to attitude-consistent media compared to counter-attitudinal media. When both of these findings are taken into account, it seems plausible that those, who trust news media less, should be more exposed to attitude-consistent alternative political media than those, who in general, trust news media more.

However, some theory and research have questioned the selective exposure argument that people always choose attitude-consistent information (see section 2.3.3.). On some

occasions, media sceptics may want to check whether news media fairly and accurately report on the opponents. Therefore, it remains unknown whether trust in news media associates with exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative-political media. Thus, the following research question (RQ$_2$) has been raised: is there a significant association between generalized trust in news media and exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media on the other hand?

Ideological leaning is the criterion for the division of alternative political media for two main reasons. First of all, this factor is more relevant in the European context than partisan identity. A recent Swedish case study (Dahlgren et al., 2019) has found selective exposure tendencies based on ideological leaning. Secondly, Swedish alternative political media can be quite consistently divided in terms of the political ideology they support.

4.5.1. The relationship between ideological leaning and alternative political media exposure

The frequent exposure to more than one right-wing or left-wing alternative political media source is a relatively rare practice in Sweden compared to mainstream news media exposure.

Figure 7. Respondents, who have ever been exposed to alternative political media (%)
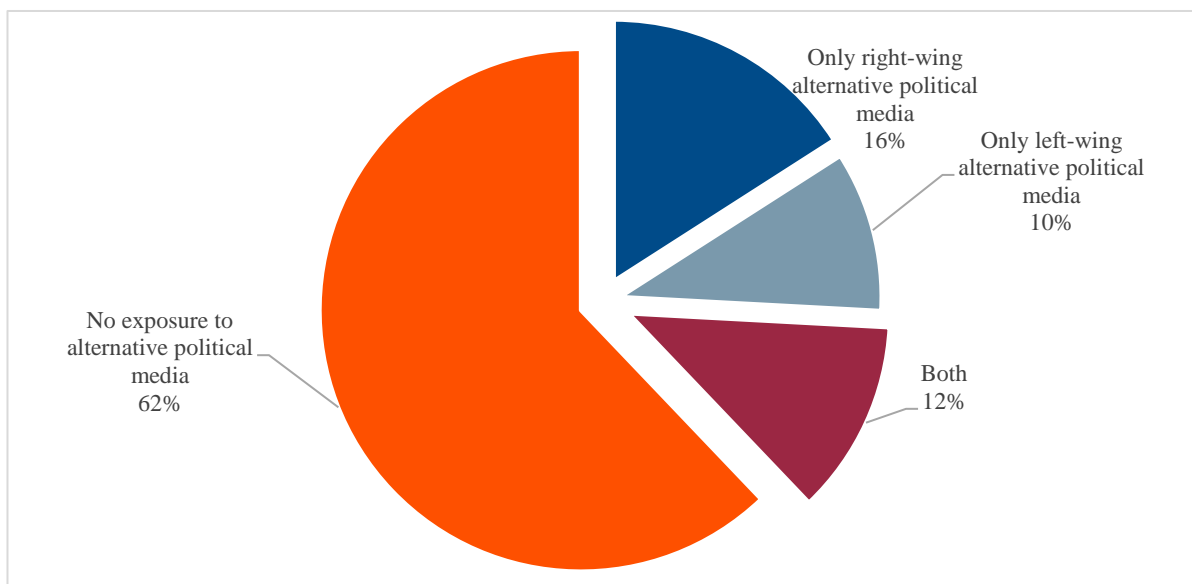
Notes: Exposure to left-wing alternative media (*Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet* and *ETC):* 753. Exposure to right-wing alternative media (*Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag* and *Ledarsidorna*): 957. The number of respondents, who have been exposed to both left-wing and right-wing alternative political media: 413. The number of respondents, who haven't reported any exposure to alternative political media: 2136. N overall = 3433. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

However, almost 2 in 5 respondents report that they have been exposed to at least one of alternative political media sources (see Figure 7).

More than 20 % of respondents have been exposed to left-wing alternative political media and more than 25 % have read at least one of the right-wing alternative media sources. Approximately 1 in 10 survey respondents have only read left-wing alternative political media, but haven't checked right-wing sources. 16 % have only been exposed to right-wing alternative political media. Noticeably, more than 10 % of respondents have used media sources of both ideologies.

Among both right-wing and left-wing respondents, the percentages of people, who do not read any alternative political media (60 %) and who have ever read both left-wing and right-wing alternative media (around 12 %) are compatible to the results from the overall sample. However, as expected, the differences appear regarding the exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal sources (see Appendix 8, Figures A8.1 and A8.2, Table A8.1). Around one third of ideologically slanted respondents have been exposed to attitude-consistent alternative media (30 % of left-wing respondents and 35 % of right-wing respondents). That is much higher than the exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media (22 % among left-wing respondents and 16 % among right-wing respondents). Noticeably, 6 % more of left-wing respondents have been exposed to counter-attitudinal media than the right-wing respondents.

Besides the fact that counter-attitudinal selective exposure is also apparent (exposure to left-wing alternative political media is positively correlated to exposure to right-wing alternative political media (Pearson's r = .286**, Spearman's rho =.347**), the readership of left-wing and right-wing alternative political media further reveals the preferences for attitude-consistent media (as depicted in Figure 8).

More than half of left-wing alternative political media readers lean towards left on the ideological spectrum. Just as well, above 50 % of right-wing alternative media users lean towards the right on the ideological spectrum. 1/3 of respondents, who have ever used alternative political media, are the readers of counter-attitudinal sources. Even the amount of alternative political media readers who do not lean neither left nor right, is compatible (slightly more than 10 %). These results signal that attitude-consistent media similarly attract more readers on both sides of ideological spectrum.

Figure 8. The distribution of respondents, who have ever read alternative political media, according to their ideological leaning. (%)
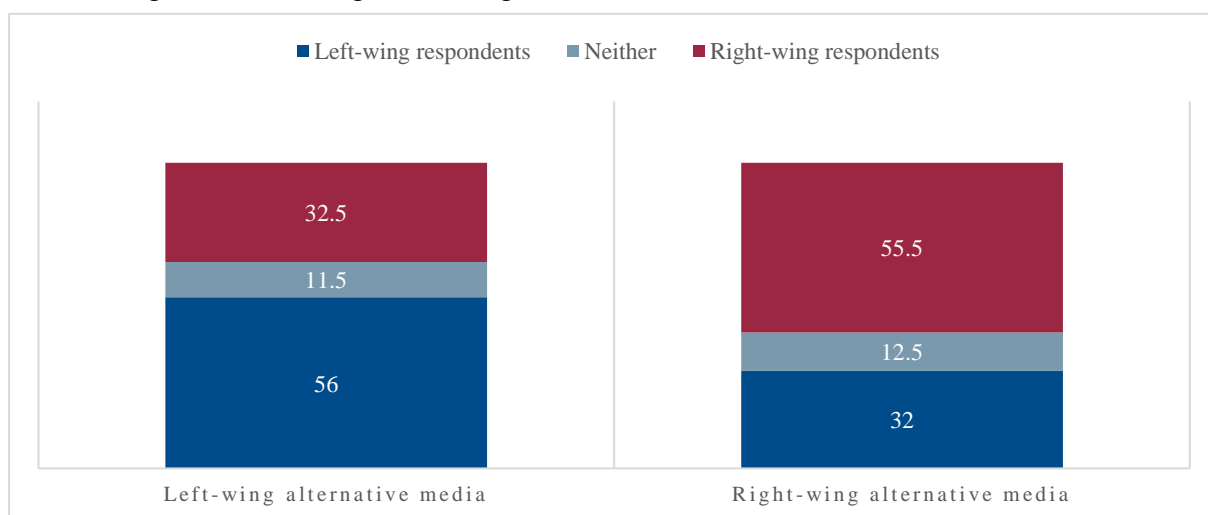
Notes: Left-wing alternative media (*Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet* and *ETC):* 753, out of which left-wing respondents = 406; neither left nor right = 83; right-wing respondents = 236. Right-wing alternative media (*Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag and Ledarsidorna):* 957, out of which left-wing respondents = 295; neither left, nor right = 114; right-wing respondents = 506. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Nevertheless, the size of groups, who have been exposed to different alternative political media is not the only characteristic that needed to be reviewed. The frequency of exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent versus ideologically counter-attitudinal information also matters. Thus, the results provided in Figure 9 allow to compare the means of exposure to attitude-consistent versus counter-attitudinal alternative media among left-wing and right-wing respondents.

Figure 9. The mean of exposure to left-wing and right-wing alternative political media among ideologically slanted Swedish alternative media users

	Left-wing alternative media	Right-wing alternative media
■ Left-wing respondents	2.93	3.79
■ Right-wing respondents	2.18	6.41
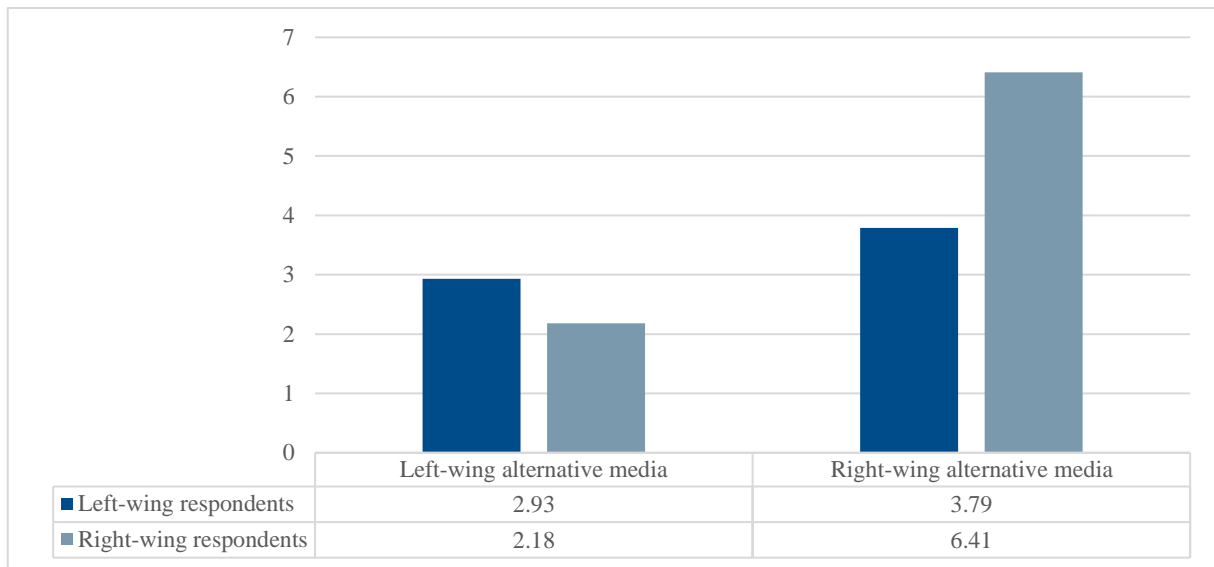
Notes: Ideologically attitude-consistent media exposure among left-wing respondents (M=2.93, Min = 1, Max = 17, SD=2.69, N=406) and among right-wing respondents (M=6.411, Min=1, Max=32, SD=6.44, N=506) Ideologically counter-attitudinal media exposure among left-wing respondents (M=3.79, Min=1, Max=22, SD =3.26, N=295) and among right-wing respondents (M=2.18, Min=1, Max=12, SD=.71, N=236). *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

As expected, left-wing respondents use left-wing alternative political media more often than right-wing respondents (2.93 > 2.18). Right-wing respondents are much more frequently exposed to right-wing alternative media than left wing-respondents (6.41> 3.79). What is also noticeable, is that right-wing alternative political media in general are more frequently used.

Subsequently, the bivariate correlations are run to check whether ideological leaning is a predictor of selective exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media sources (see Table 6, p. 92).

The results reveal that the divide between left and right is a relevant factor, but the strength of ideological leaning does not always predict the exposure to alternative media accurately.

Table 6. Bivariate correlations between ideological leaning and exposure to alternative political media

	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
Left-wing (0-1)		
Exposure to left-wing alternative media	.149**	.136**
Exposure to right-wing alternative media	-.200**	-.164**
Right-wing (0-1)		
Exposure to left-wing alternative media	-.128**	-.112**
Exposure to right-wing alternative media	.203**	.162**
The strength of ideological leaning to the left (1-5)		
Exposure to left-wing alternative media	.089	.058
Exposure to right-wing alternative media	-.110	-.122*
The strength of ideological leaning to the right (1-5)		
Exposure to left-wing alternative media	.150*	.127
Exposure to right-wing alternative media	.130**	.133**

Notes: Exposure to left-wing alternative media $(1 - 17)$ – *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC* (N=753). Exposure to right-wing alternative media $(1 - 32)$ – *Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna* (N=957). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

To be more precise, left-wing ideology correlates to the frequency of exposure to left-wing alternative media (Pearson's r = .149**, Spearman's rho = .136**). Similarly, right-wing ideology significantly positively relates to the exposure to right-wing alternative media (Pearson's r = .203**, Spearman's rho = .162**). Left-wing ideology negatively correlates with the exposure to counter-attitudinal right-wing alternative media (Pearson's r=-.200**, Spearman's rho = -.164**). Similarly, right-wing ideology negatively correlates with the exposure to left-wing alternative media (Pearson's r=-.128**, Spearman's rho = -.112**).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that those who are far-right or far-left, turn to attitude-consistent alternative media more often than those who lean more towards the centre. The bivariate correlation between the strength of ideological leaning towards far-right on a scale from 1 to 5 and the frequency of exposure to attitude-consistent (right-wing) alternative media is significant and positive. However, surprisingly, the strength of ideological leaning towards far right also positively (although borderline significantly in only one of the tests) correlates to

counter-attitudinal (left-wing) alternative exposure. An insignificant correlation between the strength of ideological leaning towards far-left and exposure to attitude-consistent left-wing alternative media is found. On the other hand, there is only a borderline significant negative correlation, found applying one of the methods (Spearman's rho = -.122*), between the strength of ideological leaning towards the left and exposure to attitude counter-attitudinal right-wing alternative media.

To sum up, more respondents have been exposed to ideologically attitude-consistent alternative media than ideologically counter-attitudinal alternative media. Attitude-consistent alternative media is also more frequently read than counter-attitudinal. However, both of these activities are not widespread in the population, implying that the majority of ideologically slanted respondents are not regularly exposed to alternative political media. Moreover, those groups, which read alternative political media, do not differ much in size. Finally, the strength of ideology does not necessarily correlate to higher attitude-consistent and lower counter-attitudinal media exposure, implying that the respondents with the strongest predispositions are not necessarily the ones, who read alternative political media the most.

4.5.2. Generalized trust in news media and exposure to attitude-consistent vs. counter-attitudinal alternative political media

When the respondents are split into two groups according to their ideological leaning, the relationship between trust in news media and alternative political media exposure can be analysed more in detail. First of all, the bivariate correlations are investigated to check which associations between trust in news media and exposure to attitude-consistent or counter-attitudinal alternative media are significant. The results were presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Bivariate correlations between generalized trust in news media and exposure to alternative political media

Variable	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
Overall		
Exposure to left-wing alternative media	-.012	-.02
Exposure to right-wing alternative media	-.347**	-.312**
Among left-wing respondents		
Exposure to left-wing alternative media	-.027	.006
Exposure to right-wing alternative media	-.178**	-.114
Among right-wing respondents		
Exposure to left-wing alternative media	-.166*	-.254**
Exposure to right-wing alternative media	-.347**	-.366**

Notes: Independent variable: Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust at all, 30 – Complete trust). Left-wing respondents (=1) = 1325, Right-wing respondents (=1) = 1419. Left leaning alternative media (1 – 17) – *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC* (N=753). Right leaning alternative media (1 – 32) – *Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna* (N=957). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

A closer look into left-wing and right-wing respondents' groups reveal that generalized trust in news media significantly negatively correlates only with ideologically attitude-consistent media exposure among right-wing respondents (Pearson's r = -.347**, Spearman's rho = -.366**). Trust in news media does not significantly correlate to ideologically attitude-consistent alternative political media exposure among left-wing respondents.

The correlations between generalized trust in news media and exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media are significant and negative regarding both left-wing and right-wing respondents' groups. However, in case of left-wing respondents, the relationship is only borderline significant in one of the tests.

Further in this section the results of regression analyses regarding the relationship between generalized trust in news media and 1) exposure to attitude-consistent (right-wing) alternative media among right-wing respondents 2) exposure to counter-attitudinal (right-wing) alternative media among left-wing respondents and 3) exposure to counter-attitudinal (left-wing) alternative media among right-wing respondents are presented.

4.5.2.1. Generalized trust in news media and exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media

Table 8 shows the results of negative binomial regression regarding right-wing alternative media exposure among right-wing respondents. The full table with all of the models created for the analysis can be found in Appendix 9.

Table 8. The associations between the exposure to Swedish right-wing alternative media among right-wing respondents and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, political interest

	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp(B)
Generalized trust in news media	**-.051***	**.0054**	**89.662**	**.950**
Female	-.099	.0820	1.464	.906
Age*	.110***	.0244	20.330	1.116
Unfinished high school	.097	.1096	.778	1.102
University degree	-.016	.0840	.034	.985
Political interest (1-4)	.335***	.0558	36.163	1.398
Deviance value/df	1.012			
Pearson chi square/df	1.167			
χ^2 *	143.216***			
Log likelihood	-1376.194			
AIC**	2768.683			
BIC**	2802.057			
Estimated parameter	.49			
N	497			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to right-wing alternative political media: (1 – 32) – *Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna* (N=957). Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). Filter: right-wing respondents (=1). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ^2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Negative binomial regression results show that even when sociodemographic factors and political interest are controlled, the negative association between trust in news media and exposure to attitude-consistent right-wing alternative political media remains negative and significant. If right-wing respondents' trust in news media is higher, than the odds that they would engage in more regular exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent media are lower (incident rate ratio (Exp(B)) is .950, which is lower than 1). It means that the lower generalized trust in news media, the higher exposure to alternative political media can be expected.

Young age significantly reduces the probability of exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent alternative political media sources; however, the age does not affect the strength of the focal relationship much. Furthermore, political interest associates with exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media among right-wing respondents positively. Other predictor variables (gender and education) do not significantly affect the variance of exposure to right-wing attitude-consistent alternative media.

In conclusion, the hypothesis (H_5), which states that generalized trust in news media negatively associates with exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent alternative political media, receives only partial support. Trust in news media significantly negatively associates with exposure to right-wing alternative political media among right-wing respondents. However, no such relationship is seen among left-wing respondents.

4.5.2.2. Generalized trust in news media and exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative political media

Table 9 presents the final results of negative binomial regression analysis regarding the relationship between generalized trust in news media and counter-attitudinal alternative political media exposure. Full tables with all of the models created within the scope of investigation can be found in Appendix 10.

Noticeably, significant negative relationship between the focal variables hold even when sociodemographic variables and political interest are included into model. When generalized trust in news media increases by one unit, the log odds of exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative media are negative.

Out of control variables, only age and political interest significantly contribute to the explanation of counter-attitudinal alternative political media exposure. In both cases, age and political interest increase the probability of higher exposure to counter-attitudinal media.

Table 9. The associations between the exposure to counter-attitudinal media among left-wing and right-wing respondents and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, political interest.

	Exposure to right-wing alternative political media among left-wing respondents				Exposure to left-wing alternative political media among right-wing respondents			
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)
Generalized trust in news media	**-.021****	**.006**	**11.050**	**.979**	**-.017****	**.006**	**7.076**	**.983**
Female	-.095	.09	1.096	.909	.063	.104	.365	1.065
Age	.169***	.026	39.315	1.184	.095**	.032	8.512	1.099
Unfinished high school	-.077	.125	.374	.926	.289	.156	3.387	1.335
University degree	-.175	.10	3.012	.839	-.041	.108	.146	.960
Political interest (1-4)	.148*	.068	4.653	1.159	.150*	.076	3.902	1.162
Deviance value/df	.962				.832			
Pearson chi square/df	1.116				1.114			
χ^2	65.685***				27.051***			
Log likelihood	-644.589				-398.867			
AIC	1305.179				813.734			
BIC	1334.482				841.273			
Estimated parameter	.257				.084			
N	288				231			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to left-wing alternative media among right-wing respondents (1 – 17) – *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC*. Exposure to right-wing alternative media (1 – 32) – *Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna*. Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ^2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Based on these results, the research question (RQ2) of whether generalized trust in news media significantly relates to counter-attitudinal alternative political media exposure can be answered with confidence. Regardless if the respondents are left-wing or right-wing, for those, who have ever been exposed to counter-attitudinal alternative political media, the lower levels of generalized trust in news media associate with the higher frequency of exposure to these sources.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Results overview

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between trust in news media and (1) exposure to mainstream news media (2) exposure to online or social media for news, (3) intentional news avoidance, and (4) exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal alternative political media.

It did so by synthesizing the relevant knowledge from uses and gratification theory, media trust studies, news avoidance literature, alternative media literature, selective exposure theory, and motivated reasoning theory. It reviewed the previous research, which was also concerned with the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure patterns and developed a slightly more comprehensive empirical research framework. Finally, it used, arguably, more precise measurement tools of generalized trust in news media and media exposure than some of the previous studies.

This empirical study aimed to see whether previously found associations held in the current high-choice media environment and the different media systems than those studied in the past. The relationships were investigated in a democratic-corporatist media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). A large-scale probability sample allowed generalizing the empirical study results on the level of Sweden.

Previous research has found that trust in news media positively associates with exposure to mainstream news media and negatively relates to the exposure to mainstream media alternatives, including online and social media. The findings from this cross-sectional quantitative study reveal that in some cases, previously observed associations hold; however, the relations are much more complicated than it was assumed.

First of all, this empirical study found that generalized trust in news media does not always relate to exposure to all mainstream news media sources similarly. In the Swedish case, generalized trust in news media significantly associates only with the exposure to quality newspapers and PBS TV news programs. Lower level of generalized trust in news media does not predict lower exposure to commercial channel TV news or the tabloids.

Such results implicate that citizens use mainstream news media for various other uses and gratifications than only cognitive needs (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005). Also, they may have different "trustworthiness" expectations for different sources (see Johansson, 2007, Nielsen et al., 2020). However, such arguments cannot fully explain why PBS TV news programs suffer from citizens' low generalized trust in news media while the commercial channel's TV news program do not.

This thesis implies that treating mainstream news media as one homogenous unity may hide significant dissimilarities among different mainstream media sources. The findings also raise another question worthy of considering in future research: how is generalized trust in news media assessed? What factors and what sources are taken into account first and foremost when people report their generalized trust in the news media?

Secondly, this study goes in line with the previous empirical research by reiterating the argument that generalized trust in news media significantly negatively associates with the exposure to online or social media for news. This finding suggests that exposure to online or social media for news should be analysed separately from the exposure to alternative political media since the later relationship to generalized trust in news media is far more complex.

Thirdly, the relatively under investigated relationship between generalized trust in news media and news avoidance has received attention in this study. Quantitative data analysis reveals that generalized trust in news media negatively associates with the probability of more

regular intent to avoid the news in Sweden. Nevertheless, the intent to avoid the news significantly negatively associates only to exposure to TV news programs, while other correlations with mainstream news media (tabloids, quality newspapers) are insignificant, when control variables are accounted for. Therefore, the societal concern introduced at the beginning of this thesis, which suggest that low trust in news media can lead to widespread disengagement from news, receives only partial support from this study. People may want to avoid the news; nevertheless, their behaviour implies that the intent does not always lead to the actual lower media exposure.

However, considering that the study was conducted in the country where a relatively small number of citizens are actively trying to avoid the news, it may be that the association is more visible in other media systems where the overall public interest in politics is low. Since some connection between the intent to avoid the news and news avoidance exists on the aggregate level even in Sweden, this relationship should be further monitored.

The study results reiterate the observations that right-wing and left-wing respondents have different trust assessments in news media, indicating that in general, right-wing respondents trust media less. This is not the first time when citizens, who lean towards the right on ideological spectrum, report lower trust in news media: similar tendency is observable in the U.S. (see Jones, 2018).

This study also reviews the association between generalized trust in news media and the exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal political media. The choice to separate these two media types reveal not only confirmation bias among the respondents but also voluntary exposure to ideologically opposing stances. The preferences for attitude-consistent news matter, however, in case of Sweden, generalized trust in news media relates to exposure to ideologically attitude-consistent alternative political media only among right-wing

respondents, but not the left-wing. The more surprising is the significance of the relationship between generalized trust in news media and counter-attitudinal alternative media exposure among both left-wing and right-wing respondents. Taking into account that ideological leaning appears to be a relevant predictor of more frequent exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media, this result, however, raises question whether selective exposure argument is relevant to employ when the relationship between trust in news media and media exposure is investigated or whether motivated reasoning theory can be more helpful.

5.2. Discussion and outline for future studies

The Swedish data analysis allowed to answer the hypotheses and research questions raised in this thesis's scope. However, more work needs to be done in this field.

First of all, this study does not contribute to answering the question, whether trust in news media influences media exposure or whether media exposure affects the trust in news media. Therefore, an important avenue for further research is to use the panel data with several waves to investigate causal relationships.

Secondly, this study's results cannot be generalized to a higher level than one particular country. Therefore, in the future, research would benefit from a broader, cross-national study.

Thirdly, this study has not fully addressed the association between the intent to avoid the news and actual news avoidance behavior (lower news media exposure). That is so because, in Sweden, the intent to avoid the news is not widespread. However, in such countries, where there are more news avoiders, the associations may be more substantial. Thus, throughout the countries, more focus should be devoted to the relationship between trust in news media and intentional news avoidance, which may be mediated through the intent to avoid the news. Not only that, in this study the observed associations between these focal variables are rather small,

therefore, a more precise measurement of the intent to avoid the news might be better in this type of research.

Fourthly, this quantitative research suggests that the relationship between generalized trust in news media and ideological selective exposure can only be seen in some cases, while it does not appear in others. As already discussed in the results section, this empirical study implies that generalized trust in news media relates only to exposure to attitude-consistent alternative political media among right wing respondents, but not the left-wing. However, counter-attitudinal alternative political media exposure relates to generalized trust in news media. It is not clear why such a result appears, but a few speculative reasons, which can be further investigated, are suggested.

Regarding attitude-consistent alternative political media exposure, one possibility is that right-wing alternative media in Sweden position themselves more in opposition to mainstream news media than the left-wing, thus, they attract the attention of media sceptics. Alternatively, it can be so that left-wing ideology is slightly more represented in the mainstream news media in Sweden than the right-wing. Regarding counter-attitudinal media exposure, it may be so that respondents visit these alternative media sources because of curiosity, because they wish to prepare counter arguments or, simply, they want to check whether mainstream news media reporting about the opponents is accurate.

Thus, a more comprehensive knowledge about the relationship between generalized trust in news media and exposure to attitude-consistent or counter-attitudinal alternative political media could be gained from mainstream news media and alternative political media content analysis and an in-depth qualitative study, which would focus on the most exposed to alternative political media sources. The content analysis would show whether both left-wing and right-wing ideologies are equally represented (or not represented) in mainstream news

media and how much left-wing and right-wing alternative political media oppose mainstream news media. Regarding the qualitative studies, research would benefit from an approach that would suggest what type of reasoning the groups of people, who visit alternative political media sources regularly, have when they make their media exposure choices.

Finally, this empirical research implies that generalized trust in news media is not a strong predictor of media exposure – other factors may influence media exposure more. Therefore, the concerns that media skeptic people will all turn to less reliable online or social media or that they will all entirely detach from the mainstream news media are indeed exaggerated. The indicators related to mainstream media abandonment are significant; however, at this moment, they are not yet substantial.

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Appendix 1. Principal components analysis of exposure to media sources

Table A1. Results of principal components (OBLIMIN) analysis of mainstream news media and alternative political media sources

| | Communalities | Principal components | | | | |
		1 = Right-wing alternative political media	2 = TV news programs	3 = Left-wing alternative political media	4 = Tabloids	5 = Quality newspapers
Eigenvalue		2.613	2.279	1.602	1.440	1.138
Variation (%)		17.42	15.194	10.682	9.601	7.585
Aftonbladet	.762	.042	.096	-.056	**.864**	.005
Expressen	.728	-.148	.129	.012	**.832**	.172
Dagens Nyheter	.610	.056	-.019	-.234	.012	**.756**
Svenska Dagbladet	.622	-.172	.063	.009	.135	**.759**
Rapport	.753	.091	**.857**	-.020	.006	.091
Aktuellt	.775	.049	**.877**	-.043	.079	.080
TV4 Nyheterna	.623	-.003	**.744**	.098	.254	-.149
Fria Tider	.607	**.757**	.146	.170	-.082	.034
Samhällsnytt	.635	**.795**	.043	.131	-.058	-.064
Nyheter Idag	.587	**.764**	.058	.149	-.031	-.038
Ledarsidorna.se	.407	**.552**	-.200	.247	.086	-.222
Dagens Arena	.536	.190	.062	**.716**	-.050	-.206
Aktuellt I Politiken	.331	.182	-.205	**.533**	.004	-.041
Arbetet	.563	.139	-.015	**.732**	-.054	.039
ETC	.532	.116	.139	**.696**	.117	-.224

Notes: The factors, which contribute the most to the component, are highlighted. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of Sampling Adequacy 0.697. Bartlett's test of Sphericity .000 *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 2. Descriptive statistics

Table A2. Descriptive statistics

Key variables	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Variance
Generalized trust in news media						
Credibility of Swedish news media (1 – Strongly disagree, 7 – Strongly agree)						
The news media are fair in their news coverage	3229	1	7	3.99	1.559	
The news media are unbiased in their news coverage	3232	1	7	3.77	1.650	
The news media tell the whole story in their news coverage	3227	1	7	3.71	1.620	
The news media are accurate in their news coverage	3238	1	7	4.28	1.534	
The news media separate fact and opinion in their news coverage	3223	1	7	4.17	1.585	
Generalized trust in news media (Additive index: 0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media)	**3203**	**0**	**30**	**14.90**	**7.102**	
Exposure to mainstream news media sources						
Frequency of exposure to mainstream news media (1 – 7 days a week, 8 – Less than once a week)						
Aftonbladet	3264	1	8	5.56	2.832	
Expressen	3255	1	8	6.39	2.479	
Dagens Nyheter	3249	1	8	6.68	2.365	
Svenska Dagbladet	3239	1	8	7.20	1.846	
Rapport	3309	1	8	4.50	2.748	
Aktuellt	3291	1	8	5.02	2.622	
TV4 Nyheterna	3285	1	8	5.37	2.615	
Exposure to tabloids: Aftonbladet, Expressen. (Additive index: 1 – Exposure to at least one of the sources once a week, 14 – Daily exposure to both sources)	1939	1	14	6.72	4.064	16.519
Exposure to quality newspapers: Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet. (Additive index: 1 – Exposure to at least one of the sources once a week, 14 – Daily exposure to both sources)	1267	1	14	5.28	3.259	10.625
Exposure to public service TV news: Rapport, Aktuellt. (Additive index: 1 – Exposure to at least one of the sources once a week, 14 – Daily exposure to both sources))	2572	1	14	8.21	4.077	16.623
Exposure to commercial TV news: TV4 Nyheterna. (1 – Once a week, 7 – Daily*)*	2100	1	7	4.12	2.136	4.565
Alternative political media exposure						
Readership of alternative political media (0 – No, 1 – Yes)						
Fria Tider	2744	0	1	.16	.369	
Samhällsnytt	2744	0	1	.15	.357	
Nyheter Idag	2744	0	1	.16	.367	
Ledarsidorna.se	2744	0	1	.17	.376	
Dagens Arena	2744	0	1	.08	.264	
Aktuellt I Politiken	2744	0	1	.07	.257	
Arbetet	2744	0	1	.12	.324	
ETC	2744	0	1	.23	.423	
Frequency of exposure to alternative political media (1 – 7 days a week, 8 – Less than once a week)						
Fria Tider	445	1	8	6.61	2.227	

Samhällsnytt	401	1	8	6.22	2.278	
Nyheter Idag	432	1	8	6.27	2.289	
Ledarsidorna.se	463	1	8	5.25	2.640	
Dagens Arena	204	1	8	7.32	1.292	
Aktuellt I Politiken	194	1	8	6.92	1.703	
Arbetet	317	1	8	7.28	1.387	
ETC	639	1	8	6.93	1.806	
Exposure to left-wing alternative political media: Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC. (Additive index: 1 – The lowest exposure (to at least one of the sources less than once a week), 17 – the highest exposure)	**753**	**1**	**17**	**2.61**	**2.377**	**5.654**
Exposure to right-wing alternative political media: Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna.se. (1 – The lowest exposure (to at least one of the sources less than once a week), 32 – the highest exposure)	**957**	**1**	**32**	**5.32**	**5.49**	**30.214**
Other						
Exposure to online or social media for news in order to… (1 – A few times a day, 6 – Less than once a week)						
Get news that are not covered by traditional news media	3233	1	6	4.91	1.494	
Get news that provide other views on societal issues than traditional news media	3223	1	6	4.90	1.418	
Get news that present societal problems in a way that corresponds with my own view	3206	1	6	4.66	1.531	
Get news that provide new perspectives on important societal issues	3225	1	6	4.42	1.527	
Check facts provided by the news media that I do not fully believe	3216	1	6	5.03	1.332	
Exposure to online media or social media for news (inverted, recoded additive index, 1 – 25)	**2567**	**1**	**25**	**7.471**	**5.37**	**28.849**
Intent to avoid the news (1 – No news avoidance, 7 – A few times a day)	**3279**	**1**	**7**	**2.42**	**1.76**	**3.097**
Ideological leaning						
Left (0-4 in the original scale)	3185	0	1	.416	.492	.243
Neither left nor right (5 in the original scale)	3185	0	1	.1385	.345	.119
Right (6-10 in the original scale)	3185	0	1	.445	.497	.247
Leaning towards the left	1325	1	5	2.455	1.21	
Leaning towards the right	1419	1	5	2.261	1.17	
Third variables						
Gender (woman)	3433	0	1	.502	.500	
Age (by decades, from 1 – under 30, to 6 – over 70 years old)	3433	1	6	3.68	1.664	
Education (unfinished high school)	3161	0	1	.176	.381	
Education (finished high school)	3161	0	1	.537	.498	
Education (university degree)	3161	0	1	.285	.451	
Political interest (1 – Not interested in politics, 4 – Very much interested in politics)	3161	1	4	2.96	0.757	

Source: The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 3. Bivariate correlations between the focal variables

Table A3.1. Bivariate correlations between generalized trust in news media and the strength of ideological leaning.

Variable	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
The strength of ideological leaning to the left (1-5)	0.001	-.018
The strength of ideological leaning to the right (1-5)	-.239**	-.229**

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Table A3.2 Bivariate correlations between generalized trust in news media and media exposure patterns

Variable	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
Exposure to mainstream news media		
Tabloids	-.024	-.033
Quality newspapers	.098**	.112**
TV news (PBS)	.132**	.123**
TV news (commercial)	.009	.001
Exposure to news media alternatives		
Left-wing alternative media	-.012	-.02
Among left-wing respondents	-.027	.006
Among right wing respondents	-.166*	-.254**
Right-wing alternative media	-.347**	-.312**
Among left-wing respondents	-.178**	-.114
Among right-wing respondents	-.347**	-.366**
Online or social media	-.277**	-.233**
News avoidance		
Intent to avoid the news	-.112**	-.094**

Notes: Frequency of exposure to mainstream news media. Tabloids – *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* (N=1865, 1-14) Quality newspapers – *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* (N=1223, 1-14). TV news programs (PBS) – *Rapport* and *Aktuellt* (N=2484, 1-14). TV news programs (commercial channel) – *TV4 Nyheterna* (N=2020, 1 –7). Frequency of exposure to alternative political media. Exposure to left-wing alternative media (1 – 17) – *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC* (N=753). Exposure to right-wing alternative media (1 – 32) – *Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna.se* (N=957). Frequency of exposure to online or social media for news (1 – 25), N=2567. Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 4. Exposure to mainstream news media

Table A4. The associations between the exposure to mainstream news media (quality newspapers and PBS TV news programs) and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning and political interest among Swedes (2020)

	Exposure to quality newspapers				Exposure to TV news programs (PBS)	
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	Unstandardized B	SE
Model I						
Generalized trust in news media	.009***	.003	11.489	1.009	.078***	.012
Deviance value/df	1.049					
Pearson chi square/df	.967					
χ 2 *, Log likelihood	11.442**, -3088.079					
AIC**, BIC**	6182.157, 6197.484					
Estimated parameter	.204				R² .018	
N	1223				N 2484	
Model II						
Generalized trust in news media	.008**	.003	10.312	1.008	.072***	.010
Female	-.033	.036	.855	.967	.066	.145
Age	.081***	.010	57.762	1.084	1.226***	.046
Unfinished high school	.023	.060	.150	1.024	-.200	.196
University degree	.137**	.038	12.888	1.147	-.270	.170
Deviance value/df	1.054					
Pearson chi square/df	.987					
χ 2, Log likelihood	78.366***, -2945.420					
AIC, BIC	5904.840, 5940.353					
Estimated parameter	.181				R² .246	
N	1180				N 2415	
Model III						
Generalized trust in news media	.008**	.003	9.343	1.008	.072***	.011
Female	-.011	.036	.086	.989	.222	.145
Age	.075***	.010	48.142	1.078	1.168***	.047
Unfinished high school	.047	.060	.598	1.048	-.061	.195
University degree	.116**	.038	9.034	1.123	-.496**	.170
Left-wing	.065	.057	1.248	1.067	-.049	.229
Right-wing	.060	.057	1.076	1.062	-.013	.226
Political interest (1-4)	.112***	.026	17.549	1.118	.897***	.102
Deviance value/df	1.058					
Pearson chi square/df	.987					
χ 2, Log likelihood	97.768***, -2911.366					
AIC, BIC	5842.733, 5893.380					
Estimated parameter	.174				R² .268	
N	1170				N 2401	

Notes: Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media). Dependent variables. Exposure to quality newspapers - *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* (1-14) Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function, automatically estimated parameter. Exposure to TV news programs (PBS) – *Rapport* and *Aktuellt* (1-14). Results of OLS regression. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ 2 – likelihood ratio chi-square, ** AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 5. Exposure to online or social media for news

Table A5. The associations between the exposure to online or social media for news and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning and political interest among Swedes (2020)

	Model I				Model II				Model III			
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)
Generalized trust in news media	-.025***	.002	184.201	.975	-.024***	.002	161.78	.976	-.023***	.002	135.732	.977
Female					-.174***	.028	36.831	.841	-.122***	.027	19.163	.885
Age*					.017*	.008	3.975	1.017	-.002	.0085	.055	.998
Unfinished high school					.027	.040	.439	1.027	.068	.038	3.107	1.071
University degree					.010	.032	.087	.976	-.052	.031	2.651	.950
Left-wing									-.011	.044	.064	.989
Right-wing									.027	.043	.383	1.027
Political interest (1-4)									.270***	.0194	194.151	1.310
Deviance value/df	1.042				1.043				1.044			
Pearson chi square/df	.991				.998				1.020			
χ²	179.416***				221.887***				411.992***			
Log likelihood	-7379.124				-7141.187				-7012.597			
AIC**	14764.248				14296.373				14045.194			
BIC**	14781.761				14337.029				14103.228			
Estimated parameter	.352				.345				.305			
N	2534				2460				2449			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media). Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to online or social media for news (1 –25). Independent variable (X): *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ 2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. Source: The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 6. The intent to avoid the news and media exposure

Table A6.1
The associations between the exposure to tabloids and the intent to avoid the news, ideological leaning, sociodemographic factors, political interest and generalized trust in news media.

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	B	Exp (B)	B	SE	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
The intent to avoid the news	-.022** (.008)	.978	-.015 (.008)	.985	-.014 (.008)	.986	-.016 (.008)	.984
Female			-.021 (.02)	.979	.000 (.03)	1.000	-.002 (.03)	.998
Age			.045*** (.009)	1.046	.040*** (.056)	1.041	.040*** (.009)	1.041
Unfinished high school			.050 (.04)	1.051	.056 (.04)	1.057	.059 (.040)	1.061
University degree			-.003 (.03)	.997	-.012 (.035)	.988	-.009 (.035)	.991
Left-wing					-.072 (.046)	.931	-.071 (.047)	.932
Right-wing					.012 (.045)	1.012	.003 (.046)	1.003
Political interest					.039 (.02)	1.040	.037 (.020)	1.038
Generalized trust in news media							-.002 (.002)	.998
Deviance value/df	1.057		1.06		1.062		1.062	
Pearson chi square/df	.919		.926		.932		.934	
χ 2	7.253**		33.345**		42.399***		42.973***	
Log likelihood	-5270.955		-5017.370		-4972.076		-4915.467	
AIC, BIC	10547.911, 10564.566		10048.739, 10048.801		9964.151, 10019.118		9852.934, 9913.274	
Estimated parameter	.252		.248		.244		.243	
N	1904		1816		1802		1782	

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): *Exposure to tabloids Aftonbladet, Expressen* (1-14). Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, standard error in parentheses. Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ ^{2} – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Table A6.2
The associations between the exposure to quality newspapers and the intent to avoid the news, ideological leaning, sociodemographic factors, political interest and generalized trust in news media.

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	B	Exp (B)	B	SE	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
The intent to avoid the news	-.030** (.010)	.971	-.021* (.01)	.979	-.017 (.01)	.986	-.015 (.01)	.986
Female			-.030 (.035)	.971	-.012 (.03)	1.000	-.016 (.03)	.984
Age			.076*** (.01)	1.079	.072*** (.01)	1.041	.072*** (.01)	1.075
Unfinished high school			.041 (.059)	1.042	.061 (.05)	1.057	.051 (.06)	1.052
University degree			.158*** (.038)	1.171	.133** (.038)	.988	.120** (.038)	1.128
Left-wing					.078 (.057)	.931	.065 (.05)	1.067
Right-wing					.033 (.057)	1.012	.062 (.05)	1.064
Political interest					.107*** (.026)	1.040	.110*** (.02)	1.116
Generalized trust in news media							.008** (.002)	1.008
Deviance value/df	1.049		1.055		1.059		1.059	
Pearson chi square/df	.961		.982		.985		.989	
χ 2	8.382**		71.727***		90.528***		99.966***	
Log likelihood	-3137.328		-2962.872		-2930.798		-2893.516	
AIC, BIC	6280.656, 6296.024		5939.744, 5975.286		5881.596, 5932.294		5809.032, 5864.678	
Estimated parameter	.207		.248		.176		.174	
N	1240		1185		1176		1163	

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to quality newspapers *Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet* (1-14). Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, standard error in parentheses. Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ 2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Table A6.3
The associations between the exposure to PBS TV news programs, the intent to avoid the news, sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning, political interest and generalized trust in news media among Swedes (OLS regression, Unstandardized B)

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
The intent to avoid the news	**-.362*****	**.047**	-.200***	.043	-.158***	.043	-.129**	.043
Female			.172	.144	.301*	.145	.227	.145
Age			1.197***	.047	1.157***	.047	1.150***	.047
Unfinished high school			-.204	.195	-.067	.193	-.071	.194
University degree			-.165	.170	-.393***	.170	-.489**	.170
Left-wing					.155	.227	-.043	.229
Right-wing					-.091	.224	-.012	.226
Political interest					.860***	.103	.872***	.103
Generalized trust in news media							.070***	.011
R^2	.022		.235		.256		.271	
N	2351		2444		2429		2391	

Notes: Results of OLS linear regression, Unstandardized B. Dependent variable: Exposure to PBS TV news programs *Rapport, Aktuellt* (1 –14). Independent variable (X): The intent to avoid the news (1 – Never, 7 – A few times a day). Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media) * *Source:* Knowledge Resistance Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020)
*** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05.

Table A6.4. The associations between the exposure to TV news on commercial channel, the intent to avoid the news, sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning, political interest and generalized trust in news media among Swedes (OLS regression, Unstandardized B)

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
The intent to avoid the news	-.063*	.027	-.073**	.027	-.065*	.027	-.063*	.027
Female	.482***	.094	.401***	.092	.498***	.093	.482***	.094
Age	.318***	.031	.346***	.030	.321***	.030	.318***	.031
Unfinished high school	.180	.121	.126	.120	.189	.119	.180	.121
University degree	-.525***	.113	-.504***	.111	-.513***	.112	-.525***	.113
Left-wing	-.158	.146			-.142	.144	-.158	.146
Right-wing	.424**	.142			.414**	.140	.424**	.142
Political interest	.145*	.065			.146*	.065	.145*	.065
Generalized trust in news media	.008	.007					.008	.007
R^2	.011		.100		.116		.115	
N	2065		1984		1972		1943	

Notes: Results of OLS linear regression, Unstandardized B. Dependent variable: Exposure to TV4 *Nyheterna* (1 –7). Independent variable (X): The intent to avoid the news (1 – Never, 7 – A few times a day). Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media) * *Source:* Knowledge Resistance Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020) *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05.

Table A6.5.
The associations between the exposure to right-wing alternative political media among left-wing respondents and the intent to avoid the news, sociodemographic factors, political interest and generalized trust in news media.

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	B	Exp (B)	B	SE	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
The intent to avoid the news	-.067* (.026)	.935	-.051* (024)	.950	-.044 (.024)	.957	-.052* (.02)	.950
Female			-.175* (.088)	.839	-.118 (.09)	.889	-.108 (.09)	.898
Age			.167*** (.026)	1.181	.155*** (.026)	1.167	.164*** (.026)	1.178
Unfinished high school			-.084 (.124)	.919	-.064 (.123)	.938	-.084 (.125)	.919
University degree			-.138 (.100)	.871	-.182 (.101)	.833	-.171 (.100)	.843
Political interest					.168* (.068)	1.18	.130 (.068)	1.139
Generalized trust in news media							-.022*** (.006)	.978
Deviance value/df	.977		.963		.964		.962	
Pearson chi square/df	1.177		1.214		1.172		1.100	
χ 2	6.685*		52.888***		58.908***		70.048***	
Log likelihood	-689.502		-660.496		-657.487		-642.408	
AIC, BIC	1385.004, 1396.065		1334.93, 1335.387		1330.973, 1331.482		1302.816, 1303.463	
Estimated parameter	.144		.276		.265		.251	
N	295		292		292		288	

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to right-wing alternative media (1 – 32) – *Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna* (N=957). Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). Filter: left-wing respondents (=1). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, standard error in parentheses. Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ 2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05.
Source: The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 7. The intent to avoid the news

Table A7.1
The associations between the intent to avoid the news and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, ideological leaning and political interest among Swedes (2020)

	Model I				Model II				Model III			
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp(B)
Generalized trust in news media	-.011***	.001	42.110	.989	-.010***	.001	34.433	.990	-.011***	.0018	38.705	.989
Female					.004	.0255	.030	1.004	-.024	.0258	.839	.977
18-29 years old					.256***	.0476	28.972	1.292	.210***	.0480	19.175	1.234
30-39 years old					.390***	.0461	71.42	1.476	.343***	.0465	54.228	1.408
40-49 years old					.309***	.0439	49.49	1.361	.265***	.0442	36.111	1.304
50-59 years old					.286***	.0437	42.84	1.331	.254***	.0439	33.635	1.290
60-69 years old*					.102*	.0437	5.479	1.108	.089*	.0438	4.130	1.093
Unfinished high school					.018	.0354	.253	1.018	-.008	.0355	.056	.992
University degree					-.020	.0296	.473	.980	.005	.0299	.024	1.005
Left-wing									.015	.0391	.152	1.015
Right-wing									-.055	.0386	2.018	.947
Political interest (1-4)									-.099***	.0172	33.438	.905
Deviance value/df	.867				.860				.858			
Pearson chi square/df	1.052				1.050				1.055			
χ^2*	41.744***				144.195***				179.267***			
Log likelihood	-5813.032				-5579.228				-5527.537			
AIC	11632.065				11180.457				11083.074			
BIC	11650.264				111246.852				11167.500			
Estimated parameter	.081				.068				.063			
N	3186				3090				3073			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Intent to avoid the news (1 – Never, 7 – A few times a day). Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, 30 – Complete trust in news media) * Age effects: compared to the reference group (above 70). B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ^2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion.
*** $p > 0.001$, ** $p > 0.01$, * $p > 0.05$. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 8. Ideological leaning and exposure to alternative political media

Figure A8.1.
Exposure to Swedish alternative political media among left-wing respondents (%)
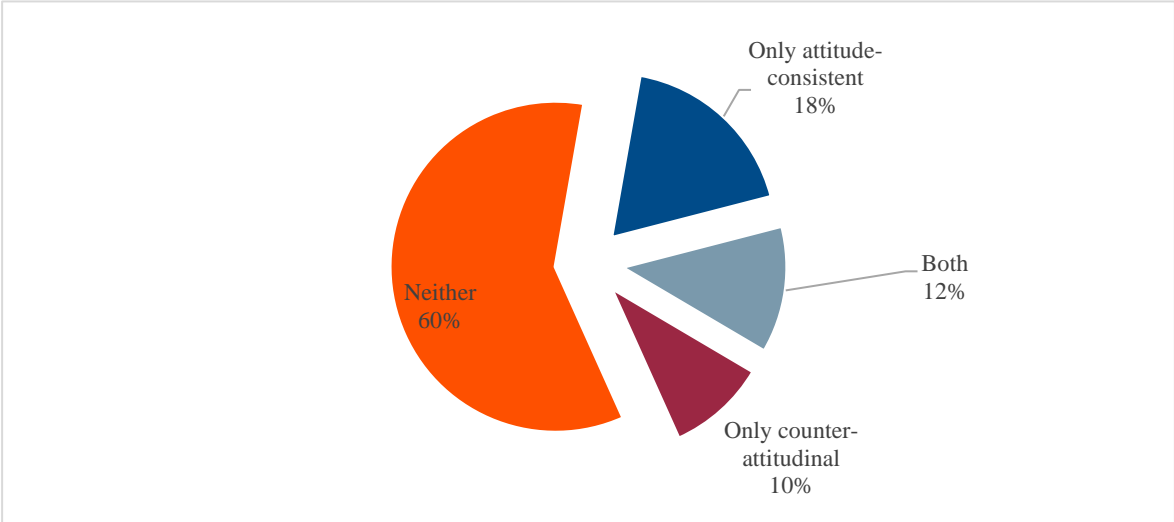
Notes: Ideologically attitude-consistent media – left-wing alternative media (*Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet* and *ETC)*. Counter-attitudinal media – right-wing alternative media (*Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag and Ledarsidorna)*. Left-wing respondents (N)=1325. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Figure A8.2.
Exposure to Swedish alternative political media among right-wing respondents (%)
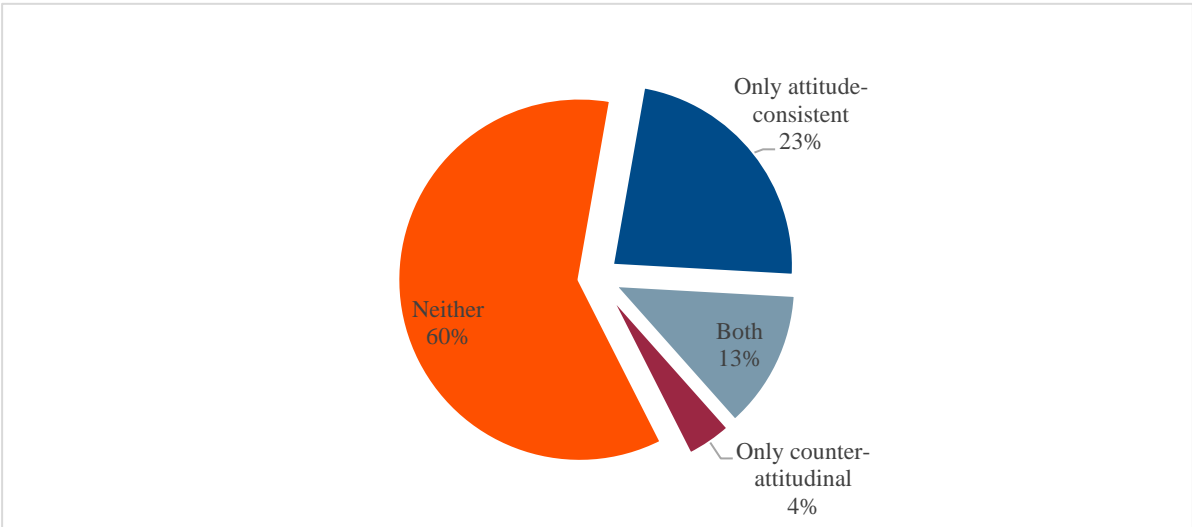
Notes: Ideologically attitude-consistent media – right-wing alternative media (*Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag and Ledarsidorna*). Counter-attitudinal media – left-wing alternative media (*Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet* and *ETC*). Right-wing respondents (N)=1419. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Table A8.1. Left-wing and right-wing respondents, who use Swedish alternative political media

Respondents	Exposure to only attitude-consistent alternative political media	Both	Exposure to only counter-attitudinal alternative political media	Neither	All
Left-wing	241	165	130	789	1325
%	18.2	12.5	9.8	59.5	100
Right-wing	328	178	58	855	1419
%	23.1	12.55	4.1	60.25	100

Notes: Exposure to left-wing alternative media (1 − 17) − *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC* (N=753). Exposure to right-wing alternative media (1 − 32) − *Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna* (N=957). Attitude-consistent media: left-wing alternative media for left-wing respondents and right-wing alternative media for right-wing respondents. Counter-attitudinal media: left-wing alternative media for right-wing respondents and right-wing alternative media for left-wing respondents. *Source:* The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 9. Exposure to attitude-consistent alternative media

Table A9.1 The associations between the exposure to Swedish right-wing alternative media among right-wing respondents and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, political interest

	Model I				Model II				Model III			
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)
Generalized trust in news media	-.051***	.005	88.150	9.85	-.054***	.005	95.304	.948	-.051***	.0054	89.662	.950
Female					-.106	.084	1.598	.899	-.099	.0820	1.464	.906
Age					.128***	.024	26.263	1.136	.110***	.0244	20.330	1.116
Unfinished high school					.070	.112	.387	1.073	.097	.1096	.778	1.102
University degree					.053	.085	.387	1.055	-.016	.0840	.034	.985
Political interest (1-4)									.335***	.0558	36.163	1.398
Deviance value/df	1.022				1.023				1.012			
Pearson chi square/df	1.144				1.159				1.167			
χ^2	80.595***				106.386***				143.216***			
Log likelihood	-1424.181				-1398.919				-1376.194			
AIC	2854.363				2811.839				2768.683			
BIC	2867.025				2841.313				2802.057			
Estimated parameter	.569				.535				.49			
N	503				498				497			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to right-wing alternative media (1 – 32) – *Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna* (N=957). Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). Filter: right-wing respondents (=1). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ^2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source*: The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Table A9.2 The associations between the exposure to Swedish left-wing alternative media among left-wing respondents and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, political interest

	Model I				Model II				Model III			
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)
Generalized trust in news media	**-.004**	**.006**	**.331**	**.996**	-.001	.006	.014	.999	-.002	.006	.077	.998
Female					-.258**	.085	9.159	.772	-.206*	.084	5.939	.814
Age					.048	.027	3.063	1.049	.030	.027	1.202	1.030
Unfinished high school					.128	.125	1.042	1.137	.146	.123	1.404	1.157
University degree					-.044	.092	.227	.957	-.097	.091	1.134	.907
Political interest (1-4)									.281***	.065	18.191	1.324
Deviance value/df	.922				.925				.920			
Pearson chi square/df	1.244				1.203				1.178			
χ²	.331				17.928**				35.914***			
Log likelihood	-847.482				-826.856				-817.864			
AIC	1700.964				1667.713				1651.728			
BIC	1712.931				1695.512				1683.498			
Estimated parameter	.338				.535				**.285**			
N	399				398				392			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to left-wing alternative media (1 – 17) – *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC* (N=753). Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). Filter: left-wing respondents (=1). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ^2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source*: The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Appendix 10. Exposure to counter-attitudinal alternative media

Table A10.1. The associations between the exposure to Swedish right-wing alternative media among left-wing respondents and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, political interest

	Model I				Model II				Model III			
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)
Generalized trust in news media	-.021**	.006	10.111	9.79	-.023***	.006	13.162	.977	-.021**	.006	11.050	.979
Female					-.143	.088	2.582	.867	-.095	.09	1.096	.909
Age					.180***	.026	45.912	1.198	.169***	.026	39.315	1.184
Unfinished high school					-.098	.126	.601	.906	-.077	.125	.374	.926
University degree					-.136	.100	1.849	.873	-.175	.10	3.012	.839
Political interest (1-4)									.148*	.068	4.653	1.159
Deviance value/df	.976				.957				.962			
Pearson chi square/df	1.116				1.124				1.116			
χ^2	10.032**				61.075***				65.685***			
Log likelihood	-678.276				-646.895				-644.589			
AIC	1362.552				1307.789				1305.179			
BIC	1373.572				1333.430				1334.482			
Estimated parameter	.357				.267				.257			
N	291				288				288			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to right-wing alternative media (1 – 32) – *Fria Tider, Samhällsnytt, Nyheter Idag, Ledarsidorna*. Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). Filter: left-wing respondents (=1). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ^2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source*: The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).

Table A10.2. The associations between the exposure to Swedish left-wing alternative media among right-wing respondents and generalized trust in news media, sociodemographic factors, political interest

	Model I				Model II				Model III			
	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)	B	SE	Wald chi square	Exp (B)
Generalized trust in news media	-.017**	.006	7.572	9.83	-.017**	.006	7.238	.983	-.017**	.006	7.076	.983
Female					.071	.105	.453	1.073	.063	.104	.365	1.065
Age					.111**	.032	11.524	1.117	.095**	.032	8.512	1.099
Unfinished high school					.274	.159	2.946	1.315	.289	.156	3.387	1.335
University degree					.007	.107	.005	1.007	-.041	.108	.146	.960
Political interest (1-4)									.150*	.076	3.902	1.162
Deviance value/df	.839				.839				.832			
Pearson chi square/df	1.191				1.096				1.114			
χ^2	7.585**				23.569***				27.051***			
Log likelihood	-419.615				-405.997				-398.867			
AIC	845.229				825.993				813.734			
BIC	855.621				850.121				841.273			
Estimated parameter	.357				.10				.084			
N	236				232				231			

Notes: Results of negative binomial regression (MLE), log link function. Dependent variable (Y): Exposure to left-wing alternative media (1 – 17) – *Dagens Arena, Aktuellt I Politiken, Arbetet, ETC*. Independent variable (X): Generalized trust in news media (0 – No trust in news media, – 30 – Complete trust in news media). Filter: right-wing respondents (=1). *Age: 1 – 18-29 y., 2 – 30-39, 3 – 40-49, 4 – 50-59, 5 – 60-69, 6 – 70-80. B – negative binomial regression coefficient, Exp (B) – incident rate ratio, χ^2 – Likelihood ratio chi-square, AIC – Akaike's information criterion, BIC – Bayesian information criterion. *** p > 0.001, ** p > 0.01, * p > 0.05. *Source*: The Knowledge Resistance panel – Wave 1 – Knowledge Resistance and the Media dataset (2020).