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Different Effects on Different Immigrant Groups: Testing the Media's Role in Triggering Perceptions of Economic, Cultural, and Security Threats from Immigration

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Immigration has become increasingly politicized in Europe, and many countries have implemented more restrictive immigration policies. An important driver of this development is perceptions that immigration constitutes a threat toward the host country—perceptions potentially triggered by the media. The purpose of this study is to investigate (a) how news consumption influences different perceptions of threat from immigration from different regions, and (b) whether potential effects are robust across countries. Among other things, the results from a panel survey (N = 6,428) conducted in six European countries—Germany, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK—suggest that news consumption is more powerful in triggering perceived threats about non-European immigration than European immigration. However, the effects vary across countries, implying that such things as universal effects of news consumption do not exist.

Keywords: news consumption, immigration, comparative research, panel survey, threat perceptions, intergroup threat theory

Opposition toward immigration is a key issue in the growing movement of authoritarian right-wing populism across European countries (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In many countries, immigration policies have also become increasingly restrictive in recent years (Czaika & Di Lillo, 2018). While there might be different reasons for this development, according to intergroup threat theory (ITT), one important driver is perceptions that immigration comprises different types of threats to the host country. These perceived threats can be related to the host country's culture, economy, or security situation (Stephan, Ybarra, & Rios Morrison, 2009). Because such perceptions of threat might lead to destructive intergroup relations (Stephan et al., 2009) and influence policy attitudes (Cottrell, Richards, & Nichols, 2010) and political outcomes such as the Brexit referendum (Macdougall, Feddes, & Doosje, 2020), it is important to understand *how* such threat perceptions are generated and triggered and/or strengthened.

In this context, the role of the media is likely to be crucial; the media frequently frame immigration and immigrants as threats to the host society, for example, by linking immigrants to crime, economic challenges, or "cultural clashes" (Kim, Harwood, & Xiang, 2018; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017; van der

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Linden & Jacobs, 2017). Moreover, research suggests that media content linked to different types of threats might in fact activate and trigger perceptions of threat from immigration (Igartua & Cheng, 2009; van der Linden & Jacobs, 2017).

Despite such findings, research on the effects of the media on immigration in different parts of the world is limited. Building on two-wave panel data from six European countries, the current study addresses two crucial research gaps. First, most media effects studies have not taken into account that immigration is multifaceted and that media effects might differ depending on where immigrants are coming from (although see Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008; Igartua & Cheng, 2009). This is surprising, given that research shows that people's attitudes toward immigration differ depending on the immigrants' origins (Ford, 2011; Hagendoorn, 1995). Another issue is that extant research has not taken into account that the media might stimulate not only different *degrees* of perceived threats from immigration, but also different *types* of threats. At the same time, research shows that the media tend to link specific immigrant groups to specific threats. For example, European research suggests that the media tend to link non-European immigration to cultural (de Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2011; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017) and security threats (Jacobs, 2017; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017), whereas immigration from other European countries is more often linked to economic threats (Balch & Balabanova, 2016; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017). This could be expected to influence the effects the media might have on threat perceptions. Third, most previous studies in this area are single-country studies, implying that the generalizability of findings is uncertain.

In light of this, the purpose of this study is to investigate (a) how news consumption—specifically use of newspapers and TV news—influences different perceptions of threat from immigration from different world regions, and (b) whether potential effects are robust across countries. The study combines ITT and media effects research, and methodologically builds on panel data from six European countries between 2017 and 2018.

Perceptions of the Impact of Immigration From Different Regions

According to ITT, an intergroup threat is experienced when members of one group perceive that another group is in a position to cause them some kind of harm. ITT distinguishes between two categories of threats: perceived symbolic threats and perceived realistic threats (Stephan et al., 2009).

Symbolic threats stem from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to this theory, people generally evaluate their own in-group more favorably than relevant out-groups to uphold a positive social identity. Thus, negative attitudes toward immigration might be grounded in perceived threats to the (perceived superior) culture, values, or religious beliefs of the host society (Stephan et al., 2009).

The concept of realistic threats, in turn, is grounded in realistic group conflict theory, suggesting that negative attitudes toward immigrants can be explained by concerns about physical harm and/or a loss of limited resources (Zárate, Garcia, Garza, & Hiltan, 2004). In line with this, realistic threats may, for instance, be grounded in concerns about increased competition in the labor market or perceived threats to national security.

Another important aspect of research into intergroup relations is the existence of so-called ethnic hierarchies. Research shows that ethnic groups that differ more from the majority group are likely to have a lower position in these hierarchies than ethnic groups that are more similar to the majority group, because the former are often considered to pose a greater threat to the host society (Ford, 2011; Hagendoorn, 1995). Specifically, people tend to "rank lower" immigrants from regions that differ more from the host society on dimensions such as culture, ethnicity, language, and religion (Ford, 2011; Hagendoorn, 1995). Furthermore, people are generally more negative toward immigration from poorer regions compared with immigration from wealthier regions (Ford, 2011). In line with this, research from several European countries shows that people tend to hold relatively positive perceptions and attitudes toward immigration from other European countries and that immigration from Africa and the Middle East attracts the most opposition (Ford, 2011; Hagendoorn, 1995; Theorin & Strömbäck, 2020).

Importantly, research also indicates that immigration from different regions of the world is not only likely to be perceived as posing different degrees of threats, but also different types of threats (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Hellwig & Sinno, 2017). For instance, a study from the United States showed that African Americans are perceived as posing a larger security threat than Asian Americans, while Asian Americans are perceived as posing a larger economic threat (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). This is important because research also suggests that different types of threat perceptions tend to evoke different behaviors (Cottrell & Nueberg, 2005; Cottrell et al., 2010; Johnston & Glasford, 2014). For example, perceived economic threats are likely to lead to a tendency toward aggression, perceived security threats tend to lead to a tendency to flee, and perceived symbolic threats cause avoidance (Cottrell & Nueberg, 2005; Cottrell et al., 2010; Johnston & Glasford, 2014). In other words, different types of perceived threats are likely to have different effects on intergroup behavior and, by extension, different societal implications.

Does News Consumption Trigger Threat Perceptions About Different Immigrant Groups?

There are primarily two reasons to expect that the effect of news consumption on threat perceptions is likely to vary depending on where immigrants come from. First, in the European media, immigrants from outside Europe tend to be covered in more negative and problem-oriented ways than immigrants from European countries (Eberl et al., 2019; Jacobs, 2017). For instance, Jacobs (2017) showed that in Flanders, immigrants from North Africa are covered in significantly more threatening ways than immigrants from Western and Eastern European countries.

Second, findings from experimental data (Brader et al., 2008; Igartua & Cheng, 2009) suggest that negative news coverage of immigrants who are perceived as being more remote from the host society leads to more opposition than negative news coverage of immigrants who are perceived as being closer to the host society. In other words, people appear to be more sensitive toward negative news coverage about immigrant groups toward whom they already hold more negative attitudes. In fact, empirical evidence shows that using the same media outlet can have *opposite* effects on different immigrant groups. For example, a Swedish study found that the use of right-wing alternative media reinforced negative attitudes toward immigration from Africa and the Middle East, but stimulated more positive attitudes toward immigration from other European countries. The same study also indicated that the consumption of commercial TV news stimulated slightly more negative attitudes toward immigration from Africa and the

Middle East, whereas there was no effect on attitudes toward immigration from European countries (Theorin, 2019). Based on this, the first hypothesis is:

H1: News consumption will have stronger effects on threat perceptions about non-European immigration than about European immigration.

In addition, different immigrant groups tend to be linked to specific types of threats. For example, research from European countries indicates that non-European immigration tends to be more strongly linked to security threats (Jacobs, 2017; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017) and cultural threats (de Vreese et al., 2011; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017). Here, it also should be noted that these immigrant groups have been increasingly associated with terrorism and cultural change, especially after 9/11 (Hellwig & Sinno, 2017); this might partly explain why people perceive immigrants from these regions as posing a greater threat to security and national culture than immigrants from other regions (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Hellwig & Sinno, 2017).

Immigration from other European countries, on the other hand, is more often linked to threats to the economy (Balch & Balabanova, 2016; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017); that the economy and labor market competition have been the main focus of public debate about migration within the EU might explain this (Hellwig & Sinno, 2017; Ruhs, 2017). Thus, people who are exposed to media content about economic challenges related to European immigration might develop stronger economic threat perceptions because they have learned to associate economic threats with that group (Hellwig & Sinno, 2017).

Despite this, research into the role of the media in driving different types of threat perceptions is scarce. An exception is a study from Belgium that investigated the effects of TV news coverage about North African immigrants on perceived economic, cultural, and security threats (van der Linden & Jacobs, 2017). The study found that exposure to cultural and security issues increased perceptions of cultural and security threats, whereas exposure to economic issues did not trigger perceptions of economic threat. It is, however, unclear whether these findings can be generalized to other European countries. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the effects vary between immigration from different regions and depending on what media people are using.

In fact, thus far, virtually no research has been conducted on the potential role of the media in driving different types of threat perceptions about migration from different regions in the world. However, because there is research showing that non-European immigration tends to be more strongly linked to, and perceived as, cultural and security threats, whereas European immigration is linked to, and perceived as, an economic threat rather than a cultural or security threat, it is plausible to expect that news consumption will stimulate different types of perceived threats about immigration from different regions. On this basis, the next hypotheses are:

H2a: News consumption will be more powerful in triggering perceived cultural and security threats than economic threats related to non-European immigration.

H2b: News consumption will be more powerful in triggering perceived economic threats than cultural and security threats related to European immigration.

Different Effects in Different Countries?

Although the mentioned hypotheses are expected to hold true across countries, there might be variations in media effects, given that relationships between variables are context dependent (Rojas & Valenzuela, 2019). To begin with, research shows that immigration attitudes and perceptions vary across countries (Heath et al., 2019). Second, the relative importance of economic and symbolic threats might vary across countries because of factors such as different economic conditions, immigration history, and the dominant discourse about immigration-related issues (Heath & Richards, 2019a). Certain threat perceptions might thus be more easily triggered and/or strengthened in some countries than in others. Third, how the media cover immigration-related issues differs across countries. For example, a recent cross-national study found cross-national differences in media salience as well as coverage on migration issues (Eberl et al., 2019).

Fourth, research from Europe suggests that commercial TV news and tabloids tend to emphasize negative aspects of immigration more than public service TV news and broadsheets do (Cheregi, 2015; Jacobs, Meeusen, & d'Haenens, 2016). Evidence also indicates that these content differences can influence perceptions and attitudes. Specifically, research suggests that the use of tabloids and commercial TV news may be more likely to trigger threat perceptions and negative attitudes than the use of public service TV and broadsheets (Blinder, 2015; Jacobs et al., 2016). The distinction between different media types seems to be more relevant in some countries than in others, however. For instance, research suggests that there are substantial differences in the way that broadsheets and tabloids in the UK cover immigration (Cheregi, 2015; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008), whereas this does not seem to be the case in Sweden (Bolin, Hindfors, & Strömbäck, 2016; Strömbäck, Andersson, & Nedlund, 2017). Consequently, the effects of the same media type might differ across countries. At present, there are, however, virtually no studies comparing the effects of different media types on attitudes toward, or perceptions of, immigration across countries. Given the lack of previous cross-national research, the following research question is formulated:

RQ1: (a) Can the effects of news consumption on perceptions of immigration be generalized across countries, or are the relationships country-specific? (b) Are there general effects from using specific media types across countries, or can the same media type have different consequences in different countries?

Method

The National Contexts: A Most Different Systems Design

To test the hypotheses and address RQ1, this study draws on a two-wave panel survey conducted in Germany, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK[1] between December 2017 and

[1] The country selection was made within the REMINDER project.

January 2018 (Wave 1) and October–November 2018 (Wave 2).[2] During this period, evidence indicates that migration-related issues were salient in the news media in all countries, although the degree of media salience varied between countries (Eberl et al., 2019). More specifically, content analyses suggest that at the beginning of 2017, migration was most salient in the news media in Hungary and least salient in Poland and Spain, with the other countries falling in between (Eberl et al., 2019).

Noteworthy is that the countries also differ in terms of their media systems. Drawing on Hallin and Mancini's (2004) well-established media system framework, Spain can be classified as belonging to the Polarized Pluralist Model, Germany and Sweden are closer to the Democratic Corporatist Model, and the UK belongs to the Liberal Model. Poland and Hungary are more difficult to classify into one of the ideal types, but it should be noted that one key characteristic of the media landscapes in Hungary and Poland is that press freedom is substantially more limited than in the other countries (Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

The countries also differed in terms of migration flow. This is important to take into account because research shows that the relative size of the immigration population, as well as an *increase* in the relative size of immigration, can influence attitudes and perceptions of immigration (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010). These factors might also condition the effects of news consumption. In terms of migration flows, Germany, Sweden, and the UK have positive net migration—that is, the number of immigrants is greater than the number of emigrants. In these countries, between 14.1% and 20% of the population was born abroad in 2019. Spain also hosts relatively many immigrants—13.1% of the population was born abroad in 2019—but net migration is closer to zero than in Germany, Sweden, and the UK. In other words, the number of immigrants is not much larger than the number of emigrants in Spain. Hungary also has a net migration that is relatively close to zero, however, only 5.3% of the population was born abroad in 2019 (Macrotrends, 2019; United Nations Population Division, 2019). It should be mentioned, however, that immigration to Hungary—as well as to Germany and Sweden—increased sharply in 2015 (Eberl et al., 2019). In Poland, finally, only 1.7% of the population was born abroad in 2019, and the number of emigrants is higher than the number of immigrants (Macrotrends, 2019; United Nations Population Division, 2019).

There is also variation between the studied countries regarding immigration attitudes. For example, evidence from the European Social Survey conducted in 2016/2017 shows that attitudes toward immigration were most positive in Sweden (the second most positive among the 24 countries that were measured) and most negative in Hungary (the second most negative), with the other countries somewhere in between (Heath & Richards, 2019b).

There are also other differences between the countries, such as integration policies, socioeconomic conditions, electoral support for anti-immigration parties, and the media environments. Because of space constraints, it is impossible to discuss all these factors here. The important point is that

[2] It should be noted that a panel wave was also conducted between Wave 1 and Wave 2; however, that wave was not included in the current study because it did not measure news consumption.

the countries differ in several ways and that a study within the confines of Europe, therefore, can be described as based on a most different systems design.

The Panel

The panel survey was conducted by Kantar TNS. Respondents were recruited via existing opt-in online panels. To increase the representativeness of the sample, respondents were classified by sociodemographic characteristics into quotas set for age, gender, and region. The sample was largely in line with the overall population, with minor discrepancies regarding age, gender, and education.[3] The analyses in this article are based on respondents who participated in both panel waves (N = 6,428), who passed quality control,[4] and who did not answer "don't know" on the questions about perceptions of immigration (total number of respondents = about 4,570, depending on type of perception. Number of respondents/country = 603–911).

Measures

News Consumption

News consumption was measured by asking respondents about their use of several different media outlets. Respondents were asked to indicate which newspapers (in print or online) they read at least once a week, as well as the frequency of reading (print version: 1 = 1 day a week; 7 = 7 days; online version: 1 = 1 day a week, 8 = more than once a day). Similarly, respondents were asked to indicate which TV news they watched, and their frequency of viewing (1 = 1 day a week, 7 = 7 days a week). These measures were recoded so that each respondent for each media outlet was assigned the value representing the most frequent/highest use of the particular outlet (newspapers: 0 = nonuser, 8 = high user; TV: 0 = nonuser, 7 = high user). The analyses in this article used the media variables measuring the use of the major broadsheet, the major tabloid, the major public service TV outlet, and the major commercial TV outlet in each country.[5]

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[3] Specifically, the gender distribution among respondents who participated in both panel waves was 54% men and 46% women. The median age was 51 years. About 15% belonged to ISCED Levels 0–2 (early childhood education-lower secondary education); 42% to ISCED Levels 3–4 (upper secondary education-post secondary non-tertiary education); and 43% to ISCED Levels 5–8 (short cycle tertiary education-doctoral or equivalent). In 2018, the gender distribution in the EU was 49% men and 51% women (Eurostat, 2019a). The median age was 43 years (Eurostat, 2019b). About 19% belonged to ISCED Levels 0–2; 45% to ISCED Levels 3–4; and 35% to ISCED Levels 5–8 (Eurostat, 2019c).

[4] Quality control excluded all respondents who (1) took less than 20% of the median time to complete the survey, (2) answered "don't know" for more than 40% of the questions, or (3) streamlined a large portion of the questions. In total, 225 respondents were excluded because of quality control.

[5] Broadsheets: Germany—*Süddeutsche Zeitung*; Hungary—*Magyar Nemzet*; Poland—*Gazeta Wyborcza*; Spain—*El País*; Sweden—*Dagens Nyheter*; the UK—*The Times*. Tabloids: Germany—*Bild*; Hungary—*Blikk*; Poland—*Fakt*; Spain—no tabloid measured; Sweden—*Aftonbladet*; the UK—*The Sun*. Public service TV news: Germany—*Tagesschau* 20.00; Hungary—*Hírádo* 20:30; Poland—*Wiadomości* 19:30; Spain—

Perceptions of Immigration

Respondents were asked about the perceived impact of immigration from four regions in the world: Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe (e.g., "Thinking about people from. . . Would you say that immigrants from. . . are bad for the UK economy (1), are good for the UK economy [10])." Two of these items tapped into the perceived economic impact, two the perceived cultural impact, and two the perceived security impact (see the respective items below each table in the Results section). Three separate indices for immigration from these regions were first constructed for the analyses: one for perceived economic impact, one for perceived cultural impact, and one for perceived security impact.[6] In a second step, three indices for non-European immigration were constructed based on the indices measuring perceptions of immigration from Africa and the Middle East (Cronbach's alpha—economic impact index: .89; cultural impact index: .89; security impact index: .87), and three indices for European immigration based on the indices measuring perceptions of immigration from Western Europe and Eastern Europe (Cronbach's alpha—economic impact index: .80; cultural impact index: .80; security impact index: .68). These indices were then rescaled to range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating more positive perceptions.

It should be noted that immigration from Africa and the Middle East does not represent all non-European immigration. However, in the current study, the focus is on these groups versus European immigration because research suggests that immigrants from Africa and the Middle East are salient and negatively framed in European media coverage (Bleich, Stonebraker, Nisar, & Abdelhamid, 2015; Jacobs, 2017) and that people in Western societies tend to be especially negative toward immigration from these regions (Ford, 2011; Hagendoorn, 1995). The descriptive statistics in Table A1 in the Online Appendix[7] also show that respondents in all countries had more negative perceptions of immigration from Africa and the Middle East than from Eastern and Western Europe. Perceptions of immigration from Eastern and Western Europe are above the midpoint of the scale in most cases, suggesting positive rather than negative perceptions. When it comes to immigration from Africa and the Middle East, on the other hand, perceptions are below the midpoint of the scale in all cases.

Data Analysis

Fixed effects models were used to test the effects of news consumption on perceptions of immigration from different regions. The main advantage of fixed effects models is that they control for all stable individual characteristics, whether measured or not. This is done by using only *within*-individual variation (and not *between*-individual variation) to estimate the regression coefficient (Allison, 2009). In that way, fixed effects offer the opportunity to test whether news consumption predicts *within-person*

Telediario 1 15:00; Sweden—*Rapport* 19.30; the UK—*BBC1 News* at Ten. Commercial TV news: Germany—*RTL aktuell* 18.45; Hungary—*Esti Híradó* 18:30; Poland—*Fakty* 19:00; Spain—*Antena 3 Noticias 1* 15:00; Sweden—*TV4Nyheterna* 19.15; UK—*Sky News* at Ten.

[6] The Cronbach's alpha values for all these indices are above .69.

[7] The Online Appendix can be found here: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/btfqayyf1ds9yg9s11dgv/Online-Appendix.docx?dl=0&rlkey=qn3fdgdviuhlnaslqtbtpir3f

change in perceptions of immigration, controlling for unobserved heterogeneity at the individual level. This is a clear strength compared with most other analyses, which presume that all potential causes of spurious relationships have been measured (Dilliplane, Goldman, & Mutz, 2013). In fact, it has been argued that fixed effects models provide the most stringent causal test possible outside an experimental setting (Kruikemeier & Shehata, 2017). It should also be noted that fixed effects models provide a tough test, given that they focus exclusively on within-person change (Andreß, Golsch, & Schmidt, 2013).

Results

H1 predicted that news consumption would trigger stronger threat perceptions about non-European immigration than about European immigration. The effects are shown in Table 1 (economic perceptions), Table 2 (cultural perceptions), and Table 3 (security perceptions). All the media types were included in each model. The relevant type of perceptions about immigration from the other regions was controlled in each model—for instance, when the effects of news consumption on economic perceptions of *non-European* immigration were tested, the economic perceptions of *European* immigration were controlled.

Table 1. Effects of News Consumption on Economic Perceptions of Immigration, 2017–2018.

	European immigration	Non-European immigration
Broadsheet		
Germany	.005 (.004)	.002 (.004)
Hungary	.007 (.004)	−.007 (.004)
Poland	.002 (.003)	.001 (.003)
Spain	.000 (.002)	−.001 (.002)
Sweden	−.001 (.004)	−.001 (.004)
UK	−.004 (.006)	−.001 (.006)
Tabloid		
Germany	.001 (.004)	−.004 (.004)
Hungary	.001 (.004)	.006 (.004)
Poland	−.002 (.004)	−.000 (.004)
Sweden	−.001 (.003)	.000 (.003)
UK	.004 (.005)	.002 (.006)
Public service TV		
Germany	**−.005* (.003)**	.003 (.003)
Hungary	.005 (.004)	−.006 (.004)
Poland	−.001 (.004)	−.001 (.004)
Spain	.001 (.002)	−.002 (.002)
Sweden	.000 (.003)	−.004 (.003)
UK	.004 (.003)	−.002 (.003)
Commercial TV		
Germany	.002 (.003)	**−.006* (.003)**
Hungary	−.001 (.003)	.000 (.003)

Poland	.000 (.003)	.003 (.003)
Spain	−.001 (.002)	.001 (.002)
Sweden	−.002 (.003)	**.005* (.003)**
UK	.006 (.004)	.005 (.004)
N (individuals/observations), and R^2 (within)		
Germany	*N* = 885/1,558, R^2: .290	*N* = 885/1,558, R^2: .290
Hungary	*N* = 634/995, R^2: .353	*N* = 634/995, R^2: .353
Poland	*N* = 839/1,355, R^2: .399	*N* = 839/1,355, R^2: .399
Spain	*N* = 909/1,153, R^2: .329	*N* = 909/1,153, R^2: .329
Sweden	*N* = 694/1,166, R^2: .381	*N* = 6,94/1,166, R^2: .381
UK	*N* = 607/1,018, R^2: .322	*N* = 607/1,018, R^2: .322

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. Significant effects in bold. Economic perceptions of immigration from the other region was controlled in both models. The measures of economic perceptions are based on the following items: Thinking about people immigrating to [country] from [region]. Would you say that immigrants from [region]… (a) take jobs away in [country] (1), create new jobs in [country] (10), (b) are bad for [country's] economy (1), are good for [country's] economy (10).
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 2. Effects of News Consumption on Cultural Perceptions of Immigration, 2017–2018.

	European immigration	Non-European immigration
Broadsheet		
Germany	.001 (.004)	−.003 (.004)
Hungary	.005 (.004)	**−.009* (.004)**
Poland	.002 (.003)	−.000 (.003)
Spain	−.001 (.003)	.000 (.003)
Sweden	.000 (.004)	−.006 (.004)
UK	−.013 (.007)	.000 (.006)
Tabloid		
Germany	.005 (.005)	**−.010* (.005)**
Hungary	.003 (.005)	.007 (.005)
Poland	−.000 (.004)	−.003 (.004)
Sweden	.002 (.003)	.001 (.003)
UK	**.015* (.006)**	−.005 (.005)
Public service TV		
Germany	−.005 (.003)	.000 (.003)
Hungary	.000 (.005)	−.002 (.004)
Poland	−.003 (.004)	−.000 (.004)
Spain	.001 (.002)	.002 (.002)
Sweden	−.002 (.003)	.000 (.003)
UK	−.000 (.003)	.003 (.003)
Commercial TV		
Germany	.001 (.004)	**−.008* (.004)**
Hungary	−.003 (.004)	.003 (.004)

Poland	.001 (.003)	.005 (.003)
Spain	.000 (.002)	−.001 (.002)
Sweden	−.001 (.003)	.005 (.003)
UK	−.008 (.005)	.005 (.005)
N (individuals/observations), and R^2 (within)		
Germany	N = 888/1,570, R^2: .282	N = 888/1,570, R^2: .282
Hungary	N = 639/1,010, R^2: .225	N = 639/1,010, R^2: .225
Poland	N = 838/1,371, R^2: .350	N = 838/1,371, R^2: .350
Spain	N = 911/1,535, R^2: .343	N = 911/1,535, R^2: .343
Sweden	N = 697/1,178, R^2: .416	N = 697/1,178, R^2: .416
UK	N = 603/1,019, R^2: .293	N = 603/1,019, R^2: .293

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. Significant effects in bold. Cultural perceptions of immigration from the other region was controlled in both models. The measures of cultural perceptions are based on the following items: Thinking about people immigrating to [country] from [region]. Would you say that immigrants from [region]… (a) undermine the cultural life in [country] (1), enrich the cultural life in [country] (10), (b) undermine traditional [country's] customs and values (1), enrich traditional [country's] customs and values (10).
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 3. Effects of News Consumption on Security Perceptions of Immigration, 2017–2018.

	European immigration	Non-European immigration
Broadsheet		
Germany	.000 (.004)	.002 (.004)
Hungary	.002 (.004)	**−.009* (.004)**
Poland	**.007* (.003)**	.000 (.003)
Spain	−.002 (.003)	.002 (.003)
Sweden	.002 (.004)	−.004 (.003)
UK	−.009 (.007)	.003 (.006)
Tabloid		
Germany	−.002 (.004)	.001 (.004)
Hungary	.006 (.005)	.002 (.004)
Poland	.001 (.004)	.001 (.004)
Sweden	.005 (.003)	−.004 (.003)
UK	.001 (.006)	.001 (.005)
Public service TV		
Germany	.001 (.003)	.001 (.003)
Hungary	.004 (.005)	−.005 (.004)
Poland	−.007 (.004)	.002 (.004)
Spain	.002 (.002)	.003 (.002)
Sweden	−.003 (.003)	.004 (.003)
UK	.003 (.003)	.001 (.003)

Commercial TV		
Germany	−.001 (.003)	−.002 (.003)
Hungary	.001 (.004)	−.001 (.004)
Poland	.002 (.003)	**.007* (.003)**
Spain	.002 (.002)	−.002 (.002)
Sweden	−.000 (.003)	.002 (.003)
UK	−.006 (.005)	.004 (.004)
N (individuals/observations), and R^2 (within)		
Germany	*N* = 888/1,572, R^2: =.293	*N* = 888/1,572, R^2: .285
Hungary	*N* = 638/1,002, R^2: .196	*N* = 638/1,002, R^2: =.196
Poland	*N* = 833/1,370, R^2: .271	*N* = 833/1,370, R^2: .271
Spain	*N* = 911/1,542, R^2: .317	*N* = 911/1,542, R^2: .317
Sweden	*N* = 698/1,179, R^2: .408	*N* = 698/1,179, R^2: .408
UK	*N* = 605/1,014, R^2: .419	*N* = 605/1,014, R^2: .419

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. Significant effects in bold. Security perceptions of immigration from the other region were controlled in both models. The measures of security perceptions are based on the following items: Thinking about people immigrating to [country] from [region]. Would you say that immigrants from [region]… (a) make [country] crime problems worse (1), make [country] crime problems better (10), (b) make [country] safety problems worse (1), make [country] safety problems better (10).
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

In total, there are five significant negative effects on perceptions of non-European immigration and one significant negative effect on perceptions of European immigration. Given that higher values indicate more *positive* perceptions, this suggests that news consumption triggered threat perception about non-European immigration in five cases, and threat perceptions about European immigration in one case. This lends support to H1. Tables 1–3 also show two positive media effects on perceptions of European immigration, and two on perceptions of non-European immigration. This suggests that in some cases, news consumption stimulated more positive perceptions. However, overall, news consumption triggered threat perceptions rather than positive perceptions of non-European immigration (five negative vs. two positive effects). When it comes to European immigration, on the other hand, the results indicate that news consumption was slightly more likely to stimulate positive perceptions than threat perceptions (one negative and two positive effects).

H2 first predicted that news consumption would be more powerful in triggering perceived cultural and security threats than economic threats related to non-European immigration (H2a), and this hypothesis is partly supported: The results suggest that news consumption was more powerful in triggering cultural threat perceptions (see the three negative effects in Table 3) than economic threat perceptions (see the one negative effect in Table 3). However, the expectation that news consumption would also trigger perceived security threats more than perceived economic threats is not supported: one negative effect on economic perceptions (Table 1) and one on security perceptions (Table 3) are shown.

H2b, in turn, predicted that news consumption would be more powerful in triggering perceived economic threats than cultural and security threats related to European immigration. This expectation was partly supported by the results: The only negative effect found on perceptions of European immigration

was related to economic perceptions (Table 1). However, far-reaching conclusions should not be drawn on the basis of this finding because in all other cases, there was no significant effect of economic perceptions of European immigration.

The research question asked if the effects of news consumption on perceptions of immigration could be generalized across countries or if the relationships are country specific (RQ1a). The results suggest that there are clear cross-national differences in terms of how likely news consumption is to trigger perceptions of immigration, the direction of the effects (positive vs. negative/threat perceptions), and what type of perceptions are affected (i.e., economic, cultural, and security perceptions). It is also important to note that all the negative media effects were found in Germany and Hungary. One negative effect on economic perceptions of European immigration, and of non-European immigration, was found in Germany, and two negative effects were found on cultural perceptions of non-European immigration. One negative effect on cultural perceptions and one negative effect of security perceptions about non-European immigration were found for Hungary. It is also noted that no positive media effects were found in these countries.

In Poland, Sweden, and the UK, on the other hand, news consumption only had positive effects. In Poland, one positive effect on security perceptions was found related to non-European and European immigration. In Sweden, one positive effect on economic perceptions of non-European immigration was found, and in the UK, one positive effect on cultural perceptions of European immigration was found. In Spain, no significant effects were detected.

Finally, RQ1b asked if there are general effects from using *specific media types* across countries, or if the same media type could have different effects in different countries. Again, the results show clear cross-national differences regarding the effects of using the same media type in different countries. Reading the Hungarian conservative broadsheet *Magyar Nemzet* had a negative effect on cultural ($B = -.009$, $p = .003$) and security perceptions ($B = -.009$, $p = .020$) of non-European immigration.[8] On the other hand, reading the liberal and pro-European Polish broadsheet *Gazeta Wyborcza* had a positive effect on security perceptions of European immigration ($B = .007$, $p = .039$). The broadsheets in the other countries did not influence perceptions.

The conservative German tabloid *Bild* had a negative effect on perceptions of cultural threats of non-European immigration ($B = .010$, $p = .036$), whereas reading the conservative UK tabloid *The Sun* led to more positive cultural perceptions of European immigration ($B = .015$, $p = .015$). The tabloids in the other countries did not trigger any media effects.

Public service TV news triggered negative economic perceptions about immigration from Europe in Germany ($B = -.005$, $p = .036$). Specifically, it was the news program *Tagesschau* at the public broadcaster ARD that had this effect. This was the only effect found for public service news.

[8] The information about the political orientation of the different media outlets was obtained from Eurotopics (2021).

Finally, the effects of using commercial TV news also varied between countries. Watching the German news program *RTL aktuell* stimulated negative economic (B = −.006, p = .037) and cultural (B = −.008, p = .032) perceptions of non-European immigration. In Sweden, on the other hand, watching TV4 Nyheterna stimulated more positive economic perceptions of non-European immigration (B = .005, p = .044). Watching the commercial Polish news program *Fakty* on TVN had a positive effect on security perceptions of non-European immigration (B = .007, p = .039). When looking into the general pattern of how news consumption triggers perceptions of immigration in Europe, it is thus important to bear in mind that the effects vary between countries in terms of how likely the media is to trigger perceptions, the direction of the effects, the influence on different types of perceptions, and the influence of different media types.

Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate (a) how news consumption influences different perceptions of threat from immigration from different regions in the world, and (b) whether potential effects are robust across countries. The results suggest, first, that news consumption—in line with expectations—is more powerful in triggering threat perceptions of non-European immigration than European immigration. The results also suggest that news consumption not only stimulates different *degrees* of perceived threats of European versus non-European immigration, but also different *types* of threat perceptions. News consumption especially triggered and/or strengthened perceived cultural threats related to non-European immigration, whereas the only negative effect observed with respect to European immigration was on economic perceptions.

Although this was the general pattern, the effects differed in several ways at the country level. First, the results suggest that news consumption is more likely to trigger perceptions that immigration has an impact in some countries than in others. For instance, four effects were found in Germany, whereas no effects were found in Spain. Second, the direction of media effects differed between countries: Whereas there were only negative effects in Germany and Hungary, there were only positive effects in Poland, Sweden, and the UK. Third, the results suggest that news consumption might trigger different types of threat perceptions in different countries. For instance, in Poland, the observed effects were related to security perceptions, whereas in Sweden, the only effect found was related to economic perceptions. Fourth, the results show that the same media type might have different—and even opposite—effects in different countries. An illustrative example is that the Hungarian conservative broadsheet *Magyar Nemzet* had a negative effect on cultural and security perceptions related to non-European immigration, whereas reading the liberal and pro-European Polish broadsheet *Gazeta Wyborcza* had a positive effect on cultural perceptions related to European immigration.

Some of these differences are not very surprising. For example, the finding that a conservative broadsheet in Hungary triggered threat perceptions while a liberal broadsheet in Poland stimulated more positive perceptions is in line with previous research showing that conservative media tend to portray immigration more negatively, and stimulate more negative effects, than liberal media (Eberl et al., 2018). The finding that news consumption triggers threat perceptions related to non-European more than European immigration is also consistent with research showing that the European media tend to cover immigration from outside Europe more negatively than immigration from European countries (Eberl et al.,

2019; Jacobs, 2017) and that specific media news consumption is especially powerful in triggering negative attitudes toward immigration from outside Europe (Theorin, 2019).

However, other differences found are not as easy to explain. It is, for instance, unclear why there were relatively many effects found in Germany, while no effects were found in Spain. Interestingly, there sometimes appear to be greater differences in media effects between countries that are quite similar in several respects than between countries that differ more from each other. For example, while both Poland and Hungary host a small proportion of immigrants (United Nations Population Division, 2019) and are characterized by the strong influence of anti-immigration and radical right parties (Politico, 2021), the media effects differ substantially. In Hungary, two negative effects were found, while two positive effects were found in Poland. Thus, in terms of media effects, Hungary seems to be closer to, for instance, Germany (where four negative effects were found), and Poland is more like Sweden (where one positive effect was found). Thus, it appears difficult to even speculate on which factors explain most of the variation between the countries. Explaining such cross-national differences in media effects is thus a task for future research. From a theoretical perspective, the results of this study, and the fact that the media effects literature has paid little attention to the interplay between contextual factors and the media (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), highlight the need to develop a theoretical framework that can be used to analyze how different contextual factors impact media effects. Qualitative in-depth contextual focused studies (Rojas & Valenzuela, 2019) would be a suitable starting point for theory building on this. The qualitative approach could then be complemented by multilevel models (which would require a larger sample of countries than in this study) that statistically test the role of different contextual factors.

Regardless of the reasons for the cross-national differences found in this study, these differences illustrate the importance of differentiating between immigration from different regions, different types of perceptions, and conducting cross-national research. In light of this, the current study has contributed to communication research in several ways. Among other things, it has shown that news consumption, on the aggregate level, is more powerful in triggering threat perceptions related to non-European than European immigration and that cultural threat perceptions related to non-European immigration are especially easy to trigger. This study has also shown that the effects are country-specific rather than general, implying that no such thing as a universal effect exists when using specific media types. This suggests that the findings from previous studies—for instance, that tabloids and commercial TV news are more likely no stimulate negative perceptions and attitudes than broadsheets and public service TV news (Blinder, 2015; Jacobs et al., 2016)—cannot be assumed to hold true in countries other than those in the studies.

Another interesting finding is that relatively few effects of news consumption were found. In total, 138 media effects were tested (six countries, four media types, and immigration from Europe as well as immigration from outside Europe were included in the study), but only 10 significant media effects were found (see Tables 1–3). Because 138 effects were tested, one might perhaps argue that it is reasonable to assume that the significant effects found were generated by chance rather than because they really exist; however, this is unlikely because substantially more effects were found with respect to non-European immigration than European immigration, which is in line with theory and previous research. It is also plausible to assume that the effects would be stronger—and possibly that more effects would be found—if

a larger sample had been used. It should also be noted that fixed effects models can be considered a hard test because they focus exclusively on within-person change.

Still, one might wonder why news consumption did not affect people's perceptions in the vast majority of the cases. One answer may be that even if several studies have shown that news consumption has effects on perceptions and attitudes toward immigration (Eberl et al., 2018), research also shows that strong attitudes reduce the likelihood of media effects (Pomerantz, Chaiken, & Tordesillas, 1995). This is relevant because immigration-related issues have been highly salient for several years, implying that many citizens have already formed strong opinions that are more resistant to change. These opinions, in turn, are likely to have been influenced by the media and their coverage of immigration at an earlier time (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The media's role in shaping perceptions might thus be more important than shown by this study.

Another factor that might explain the rather few effects is the fact that the news media variables in this article are based on the major outlets. It is plausible to expect that the most widespread outlets have weaker effects because of their more "mainstream" coverage, for instance, compared with alternative media that are guided by political agendas rather than journalistic norms. This would be in line with research showing that there are more substantial effects on immigration attitudes of using alternative media than traditional media (Theorin, 2019; Theorin & Strömbäck, 2020). Thus, to provide a more comprehensive picture of the effects of media use on threat perceptions, media types other than the major newspaper and TV outlets—such as alternative media, social media, and entertainment media—should ideally be included in future analyses.

It also should be noted that although a key argument in this article is that news consumption might influence perceptions as a consequence of news *content*, the self-reported media use measures are not linked to content data. This does, of course, limit the possibilities around understanding which content characteristics are likely to influence perceptions of immigration. Therefore, a task for future research is also to conduct linkage analyses in which each respondent's exposure to different types of content about immigration is incorporated into the analyses.

To sum up, this study has shown that news consumption is likely to stimulate different *degrees* as well as *types* of threat perceptions about European versus non-European immigration. Moreover, the effects vary depending on the national contexts. The current study has shown that the relationship between news consumption and perceptions of immigration is complex and multifaceted. Because perceptions of immigration might influence intergroup relations as well as policy attitudes and political outcomes, further research that continues to disentangle this complex relationship is clearly warranted.

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