

**News Consumption and Political Party  
Preferences in Poland**

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**Abstract:**

The objective of this paper is to determine the scale of influence of the media (both traditional and social) on party preferences. The complicated contemporary media ecosystem, in which the boundaries between traditional and internet media are blurred (internet versions of newspapers), news coverage is increasingly de-professionalized (emergence of civic journalism), verification of information becomes increasingly problematic (fake news) leads to a number of theoretical and methodological challenges. Theoretically, the paper uses the model in which mass media act as a factor triggering the emergence of latent views. Empirically, the effort is undertaken to cover the whole universe of information sources, including both print and electronic media, both traditional and internet sources. The analysis determines citizens' sources of information, tracks consistencies in selecting particular categories of sources (thus outlining 'information bubbles'), correlates sources with party preferences and measures generalized attitudes to media categories. The study is undertaken on a sample representative for adult Polish population, fielded with CAWI methodology.

**Key words:**

mass media, political attitudes, news, public opinion

***Introduction***

The main aim of the research project<sup>1</sup> discussed here is to determine the scope and character of the influence of media on political orientations. In the broadest sense, the question is: Do the media matter for democracy? Do they have a role in changing citizens' minds, influencing their cognitive processes and, ultimately, decisions? We know a lot about public

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opinion, and we have in-depth knowledge about the media. However, we do not know enough about their interactions. Sociology and political science have gathered a significant body of theory and data on the structure and correlates of social and political attitudes. We know which factors differentiate political orientations in the society, and how attitudes relate to the programs of political parties. Polish sociology and political science have a long-term experience in conducting empirical research of voters and political parties, both in-depth and comparative. On the other hand, communication studies have gathered a body of knowledge about the changing landscape of print and broadcast media. We have determined structural constraints of functioning of this sector. In recent years, the focus has shifted to internet communication: the web is both a channel of distribution for traditional media sources and a source of exclusive material. Moreover, thanks to interactivity, it brings qualitative difference to media exposure: consumers are often also producers.

Specifically, the objective of this paper is determining the scale of influence of the media (both traditional and social) on party preferences. The complicated contemporary media ecosystem, in which the boundaries between traditional and internet media are blurred (internet versions of newspapers), news coverage is increasingly de-professionalized (emergence of civic journalism), verification of information becomes increasingly problematic (fake news) leads to a number of theoretical and methodological challenges. Theoretically, the paper uses the model in which mass media act as a trigger of the emergence of latent views. Empirically, the effort is undertaken to cover the whole universe of information sources, including both print and electronic media, and both traditional and internet sources. The analysis determines citizens' sources of information, tracks consistencies in selecting particular categories of sources (thus outlining 'information bubbles'), correlates sources with party preferences and measures generalized attitudes to media categories. The study is undertaken on a representative sample for adult Polish population, fielded with CAWI methodology.

## **Conceptual framework**

### *Significance of the topic*

Access to fair, balanced, objective and comprehensive information about public institutions is indispensable in a functioning democracy. The dissemination of mass communication is a phenomenon parallel to democratization and is in a cause-and-effect relationship with it, where the two processes are mutually driven. Historically speaking, these

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processes, urbanization and elimination of illiteracy allow to broaden the spectrum of available mass communication media (press, television, radio, and later social media), which provides citizens with both information and means of participation in the political process (Lerner 1958; Pye 1963; Lipset 1959). As Lerner (1958: 60) wrote, the ability to read is initially available only to a few. Only at the next stage, when industrial development technology is relatively advanced, the society creates newspapers, radio stations, and mass-scale films. This process, in turn, speeds up the elimination of illiteracy. The institutions of participation (e.g. voting) come from the interaction of these processes. Contemporary understanding of the public sphere in liberal democracy, which we adopt as a norm, is described by Habermas (2008). For him, public sphere is the area of social life in which the formation of public opinion takes place. It is a space of critical and rational debate in which citizens form a public group by arguing about community issues. Habermas emphasizes the role of ‘communication rationality’ in the consolidation of the public sphere. Free and independent media are a necessary condition - though insufficient - to create such a public sphere.

There is empirical evidence for the role of political communication in shaping the quality of democracy and conscious citizenship. The use of the media, as Norris (2000) shows, has a positive impact on political knowledge, trust and participation in politics. The modern media environment in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, is exposed to multiple threats. Let us list two of them: politicization (concerning, above all, but not limited to, public media) and commercial pressure (affecting mainly, but not only, private media). Subordination of public media to political parties threatens such values as openness, accountability of power and equality (Diamond & Morlino 2005). The takeover of media by political parties distorts the main role of the media, as they lose impartiality. Political control creates party journalism (Mungiu-Pippidi 2013).

Market restrictions on media operations are fluid in the post-systemic transformation period. After the liberalization in the early nineties, there was a rapid process of privatization, internationalization and then concentration of media ownership and digitization in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. After the crisis of 2008, however, the process reversed. The following years marked the period of weakening of the position of international media groups and the emerging media oligarchisation. Against the background of other countries in the region, in Poland both the position of international corporations and oligarchisation were relatively weak (Štětka 2013).

Another approach to the intersection of the media and politics is from the comparative perspective taking into account different relations of media with political systems (Hallin & Mancini 2004; Dobek-Ostrowska et al. 2010). In Hallin and Mancini's classification, there are three major model media systems in Europe, differentiated, among others, by different level of maturity of democracy. The relatively recent democracies (the 'Mediterranean model') are characterized by high degree of political parallelism, understood as strong political orientation of the media and high degree of party-media links. In this system, the newspaper circulation is low and print media are elite and politically-oriented. Professionalization is weak and journalism is strongly oriented towards commentary. The state exerts strong control over the media and periods of censorship occur. East European media systems display many characteristics of this model.

### ***Model of media influence on attitudes***

In a classic definition, Allport (1935: 310) defines attitude as "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive and dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related." Attitudes are a cognitive process containing axiological and emotional elements as well as a behavioural dimension: they result in actions. Measuring attitudes, however, is a contentious issue. Not only are the validity and reliability of measurement questioned, but the very existence of attitudes themselves. Responses to attitudinal questions are unstable and inconsistent. At an extreme, it can be claimed that political attitudes are non-existent for large portions of populations, even for well-educated societies of old democracies. In his paper on 'The nature of belief systems in mass publics', Converse argued that opinion instability is due mainly to individuals who lack strong feelings on the given issue but choose available responses randomly because of conversational requirements: "large portions of an electorate simply do not have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy among elites for substantial periods of time" (Converse 1964: 245).

A refined conceptualisation of attitude formation and measurement takes into account the availability of attitudes for the purpose of the survey question: an attitude may rest in mind in a quasi-formed state and the validity of a question in a survey rests on its potential for retrieving it. According to Tourengau et al. (2000), formulating a response to any survey question typically involves four component processes – interpreting the questions, retrieving relevant information

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from memory, integrating that information into a judgement, and reporting the result. The key element of this process is thus the information retrieval: the degree of availability of an opinion is crucial in producing an answer. According to Fazio (1990) an attitude is a structure consisting of an attitude object, an evaluation, and the link between them. A key property of an attitude is the strength of an object-evaluation link, which determines the accessibility of an attitude: the stronger the link, the more likely that the evaluation will be activated (come to mind) when the object of the attitude is encountered. With highly accessible attitudes, the evaluation will come to mind automatically. If there are weak links between the object and evaluation, evaluation will be constructed on the spot based on information salient at the moment.

A widely used theory of this link was conceptualised by Zaller (1992). He designed the so-called *RAS (Receive-Accept-Sample)* model that describes how people receive new information, decide whether to accept it, and sample at the moment of answering questions. His concept highlights the role of the media in forging the link between latent attitudes and responses to survey questions. It is clear that individuals react differently to the same media message, and the level of political sophistication (knowledge of and interest in public affairs) may moderate its effects on individual's opinions. "Highly aware persons tend to be little affected by ... campaigns. (...) Meanwhile, at the lower end of the awareness spectrum, those who pay little attention to politics tend to get little or no information about ... politics, hence they are also relatively unaffected. That leaves the moderately aware most susceptible to influence: they pay enough attention to be exposed to the blandishments of the incumbent, but lack the resources to resist." (Zaller 1992: 19).

Moreover, the content of the information flow may affect the activation of attitudes. If media messages are one-sided, it signifies a political consensus on the issue. Therefore, there is no basis for rejection of the content on the grounds that it is incompatible with the value-system of a respondent. In such a situation, the contact with the media should be predictor of strength of attitude. It is the *mainstream effect*. On the other hand, if the information is mixed (several points of view are presented in adversarial manner), there is no political consensus on an issue. In such a situation, the level of political sophistication plays a role. Individuals with low interest in politics are usually not exposed to the information. People with high competence process information selectively, match the input with their pre-existing beliefs. However, the people in the middle of the scale of competence (not sophisticated, but reading or watching news) tend to be affected the most. This is the *polarisation effect*: in the case of evenly divided partisan elite

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and a balanced flow of partisan communication, the effect of political awareness is to promote the polarization of attitude reports. The more balanced the information to which individuals are exposed, the less likely we are to find a media effect as opposite effects may cancel out. Polarization effect is possible in a cross-cutting media exposure, which means that people must be exposed to political perspectives that they do not find agreeable. It is the best overall description of the way in which citizens relate to the partisanship of their news sources outside of experimental settings (Goldman & Mutz 2011: 42). The opposite is the selective exposure: people expose themselves to like-minded media whenever possible. The latter type of exposure results in the “friendly media phenomenon” of citizens effectively selecting like media for contact.

Media presentation of an issue is frequently explained with the use of the concept of framing. Frames can be defined as patterns of interpretation through which information is classified in order to handle it efficiently, based on (but not identical with) cognitive schemata. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman 1993: 52). Framing involves the contextualization of issues. “When people regard several considerations ... as more important than others, this can have substantial implications for opinion formation. It follows that every framing effect is potentially a persuasion effect” (Matthes & Schemer 2012: 321). Frames contain axiological and psychological components. Media presentation elicits emotions by presenting reality in black-and-white terms, by naming and shaming and creating good and bad characters. Such a construction enables the reader/viewer/listener to easier fit the content into his or her own value structure. By contextualizing, media frames put certain aspects of the topic in the foreground and provide - in a positive, negative or neutral manner – an organizing principle to the structure of a news story and therefore potentially to citizens’ understanding of and thinking about political, economic and social topics.

### ***Internet as qualitative difference***

Internet introduces a qualitatively different information ecosystem compared with traditional media. Dispersion of information sources makes users customize information content, unlike in the case of traditional media, where professional journalists establish the hierarchy of

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importance of different items. Participation in this new model requires more activity from internet users and conveys on them the role of experts, a role hitherto reserved for professionals.

Internet offers almost unlimited access to information, but internet access is not a sufficient condition to be competent and well informed about policy and politics. Conscious information selection requires certain skills. In addition to digital divide understood as lack of internet access, there is a second level digital divide, which refers to the lack of skills of necessary for competent use of the IT, including the ability to perform information retrieval (Hargittai 2002). People possessing digital competence understand the way the web is operating, are able to more effectively obtain necessary information, while those unfamiliar with web and technology do not obtain the sought information, or stop at suggestions offered by search engines, which often turn out to be sponsored links (Hargittai 2008). The level of technological skills also translates into the extent to which the user is able to generate content, speak in discussions, and post materials on the web. This, in turn, strongly depends on the socio-economic location of internet users (Hargittai & Walejko 2008). It must be assumed that inequalities are to some extent replicated online. The ability to create content, participate in the discussion is available to everyone, but in practice, it is used by only a few, and the majority are recipients. Moreover, cognitive skills and education are necessary to select and organize information in a meaningful way.

The new information model is also associated with a weakening of mechanisms of controlling and verifying information that function in traditional media. Users are, therefore, more exposed to 'fake news'. Interactive media created by the internet community are more vulnerable to the possibility of manipulating the opinion of users, and the detection of falsehood is more complicated. Anonymity of senders means that everyone can generate information by assuming any identity. For example, an anonymous and seemingly impartial blogger can be a spin-doctor of a political group, opinions can be machine-generated by state or institutional actors, etc.

### *Empirical analysis*

#### *Structure of the analysis*

The study was undertaken in a political context that has to be described for the findings to be interpreted. In 2015 parliamentary and presidential elections were held in Poland and, as a result, executive power was concentrated in the hands of one party, Law and Justice (PiS).

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Parliamentary opposition was formed by: Civic Platform (PO), Modern Party (Nowoczesna) and Kukiz'15 movement, while the left-wing parties failed to enter parliament in 2015. The government of PiS broke the continuity of institutional development. PiS activities strengthened the degree of clientelism (party colonization of state enterprises) and undermined the rule of law (subordination of the legal branch to the executive)<sup>2</sup>. The position of Constitutional Tribunal and Supreme Court was compromised by a series of legislative acts that undermined their independence. As a result, the European Commission launched a procedure under Article 7 of Treaty on European Union against Poland. Moreover, state policy severely weakened mass media: a change of legal framework of public media was introduced and consequent takeover of state radio and TV ensued. In consequence, both Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders downgraded Poland in their rankings of press freedom. In Freedom of the Press 2017 Poland is no longer classified as “free”, but “partly free”. These actions strengthened political parallelism in the Polish media, with consumption and trust of particular news channels largely determined by political views. One of the project goals is to map this differentiation.

The analysis presented in this paper is based on the assumption that the structure of the information flow is a salient factor in determining political opinions. We assume that the friendly media phenomenon is manifested in creation of media ecosystems consistent with political preferences. The ecosystems consist of networks of outlets. We believe that ownership and control structures observable on the level of the outlets are reflected in the audience. For instance, public radio and television (supporting the government) are expected to have common consumers, while major commercial networks and print media are expected to occupy a different niche. We suppose that these divisions overlap with political preferences.

In the first stage, we map media usage with regard to political preferences of respondents. They indicated all media they used to collect information and selected the most important sources. They chose from a list that included all major national-level information media in Poland (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and internet portals).

Secondly, we analyse correlations between the choices of important sources to verify the supposition that they are structured into ecosystems. We expect to find major clusters: 1. public media taken over by the party in government; 2. major private media; and, as a separate cluster, 3. most important online portals.

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<sup>2</sup> A concise account of post-electoral developments for a reader unfamiliar with Poland can be found in Kotnarowski & Wenzel (2017).

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Thirdly, we probe in-depth to establish the degree to which the enumerated ecosystems reflect value system of respondents. We are also interested in opinions ‘across the aisle’, i.e. how the opposite ecosystems are perceived.

### *Findings*

In the first step, we asked respondents to list their information sources (table 1). The use of various outlets is quite strongly related party preferences. We divided our respondents into four groups: The first consists of Law and Justice (PiS) voters. The second comprises electorates of Civic Platform (PO) and Modern Party (Nowoczesna), grouped together based on their attitudinal proximity. The third contains voters of parties other than PiS, PO and N and includes electorates of: Kukiz'15, Polish Peasant Party (PSL), Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD), Together (Razem) and Freedom (Wolność)<sup>3</sup>. The fourth group consists of the politically passive, i.e. the undecided and non-voters.

As far as the most commonly mentioned sources of information are concerned, the biggest differences can be seen between the use of TVP and TVN<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, no statistically significant differences between the electorates can be noticed in case of FB and Polsat.

In the hierarchy of information sources, the PiS electorate is clearly dominated by TVP (three of the four most-chosen sources are the programs of this broadcaster). They watch Polsat more often than TVN. PiS voters are less likely to use Onet and wp.pl, as well as Gazeta Wyborcza. They read for Super Express slightly more often than others, listen to the news of Polish Radio, read Gazeta Polska, Nasz Dziennik, wSieci and Do Rzeczy, watch TV Trwam and TV Republika, listen to Radio Maryja and use the "Niezależna.pl" portal. In short – they consistently prefer right-wing media.

PO and N voters, in turn, have a strong preference for TVN. They listen more often than other voters to RMF FM, Radio Zet and radio TOK FM, read Gazeta Wyborcza and Polityka and use Onet. They watch TVP much less often than others and rarely listen to information on Polish Radio.

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<sup>3</sup> This procedure is suboptimal but inevitable. This is a very heterogeneous group guided by different values and identity. They were grouped together due to small numbers of respondents making more detailed statistical analysis impossible.

<sup>4</sup> Please see the Appendix for a description of news outlets.

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**Table 1.** Use of news programs

Use of news programs. Percentage of respondents who use news programs of a given outlet at least once a week					
	Total	Electorate			
		PiS	PO/N	Other	Undecided/non-voters
Facebook	75.4%	72.0%	78.9%	76.9%	73.3%
TVN	66.7%	51.4%	88.3%	63.4%	64.5%
Polsat	62.0%	61.0%	66.8%	64.0%	56.6%
TVN24	53.9%	39.4%	74.9%	52.6%	49.6%
TVP1	51.3%	77.0%	36.8%	41.1%	54.3%
RMF FM	49.8%	46.8%	58.3%	44.4%	51.2%
Onet.pl	49.5%	44.0%	57.4%	51.0%	46.1%
TVP Info	47.1%	70.0%	36.3%	44.9%	39.9%
wp.pl	46.5%	39.4%	49.8%	52.8%	42.2%
Radio Zet	43.6%	41.3%	52.2%	38.0%	44.6%
Polsat News	41.7%	35.8%	50.2%	44.4%	36.0%
TVP2	41.4%	63.6%	25.4%	38.9%	39.4%
naTemat.pl	28.3%	18.3%	16.6%	13.9%	10.9%
Fakt	27.8%	26.1%	30.5%	29.4%	25.2%
Gazeta Wyborcza	27.5%	18.4%	34.5%	31.7%	23.9%
PR I	25.1%	33.5%	23.3%	25.4%	19.4%
Super Express	23.8%	29.4%	15.2%	24.8%	25.6%
Newsweek	20.6%	18.8%	24.2%	19.9%	19.7%
TOK FM	19.5%	10.6%	34.5%	19.9%	14.0%
Polityka	18.4%	17.9%	28.3%	16.8%	12.0%
PR III	17.9%	25.2%	14.3%	17.5%	15.1%
Superstacja	17.8%	18.4%	22.8%	16.8%	14.0%
Gazeta Polska	15.9%	24.3%	19.7%	9.6%	12.4%
Rzeczpospolita	15.5%	13.8%	17.5%	13.9%	17.4%
wPolityce.pl	15.3%	22.0%	19.6%	11.9%	10.1%
Niezależna.pl	14.7%	20.7%	9.0%	12.6%	10.8%
Gazeta.pl	13.2%	27.6%	31.4%	31.4%	22.5%
wSieci	12.8%	25.7%	10.3%	8.3%	9.7%
Nasz Dziennik	12.4%	22.5%	9.4%	8.9%	10.4%
Do Rzeczy	12.2%	15.6%	14.3%	11.6%	8.1%
TV Republika	11.3%	14.7%	6.7%	13.2%	10.1%
Telewizja Trwam	11.1%	23.9%	13.0%	3.3%	8.1%
Radio Maryja	6.9%	15.1%	3.6%	3.6%	7.0%

Unshaded cells: Chi-sq. test significant at  $p < 0.05$  or lower. Shaded cells: insignificant.

Source: own elaboration.

Citizens usually use many different media, not necessarily paying equal attention to them and with differing level of confidence. It is therefore necessary to specify which broadcasters are the basic source of information (table 2).

TVN programs (including TVN 24) were mentioned most commonly. Almost half use them as primary source of news. Polsat is the primary source for one third and TVP for around a quarter of respondents. Facebook is mentioned by over a quarter. Next in line are: RMF FM,

Radio Zet, as well as Onet and wp.pl. Gazeta Wyborcza is the most frequently mentioned print title.

The differentiation between electorates are distinct. For the majority of PiS voters, TVP is the basic source of news, and they relatively often indicate media such as TV Republika and Radio Maryja - these two broadcasters constitute the main source of knowledge about the world for a certain part of the PiS electorate. In general, the hierarchy of information sources is similar for PO / N voters, other parties and non-voters, while the PiS electorate lives in a different communication world. For example, TVP is only the sixth most important source of news for voters of parties other than Law and Justice. It is noteworthy that choosing Polsat as the source of information does not depend on political preferences.

**Table 2.** Most important sources of information

Most important sources of news. Up to three answers possible.					
	Total	Electorate			
		PiS	PO/N	Other	Undecided/non-voters
TVN, TVN24	48.6%	28.6%	68.6%	50.2%	46.3%
Polsat, Polsat News	34.2%	32.6%	41.3%	31.4%	32.9%
Facebook	27.9%	28.9%	22.9%	26.7%	32.9%
TVP	26.1%	54.6%	16.6%	17.5%	20.5%
RMF FM	23.5%	17.0%	20.5%	27.7%	26.7%
Radio Zet	15.6%	10.6%	17.5%	19.2%	14.0%
Onet.pl	12.2%	7.8%	11.7%	14.5%	13.6%
wp.pl	10.0%	4.6%	11.2%	10.9%	12.4%
Gazeta Wyborcza	8.5%	6.0%	14.7%	9.3%	4.2%
Polskie Radio (PR)	6.5%	15.1%	1.8%	6.6%	3.1%
Super Express	6.1%	7.8%	0.9%	5.0%	10.5%
Gazeta.pl	5.3%	1.4%	6.7%	7.6%	4.7%
Fakt	4.7%	5.5%	1.3%	6.9%	4.2%
Superstacja	3.6%	1.8%	4.0%	5.3%	2.7%
Newsweek	3.3%	2.3%	6.3%	2.0%	3.1%
TV Republika	3.2%	12.4%	0.0%	1.3%	0.4%
Radio Maryja	2.7%	11.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%
Gazeta Polska	2.5%	4.6%	1.3%	2.0%	2.3%
Niezależna.pl	2.3%	4.6%	0.0%	3.3%	1.2%
Telewizja Trwam	2.1%	5.5%	1.3%	1.0%	1.2%
Rzeczpospolita	2.0%	0.9%	3.6%	1.7%	1.9%
Polityka	1.8%	0.5%	3.6%	1.3%	1.9%
TOK FM	1.7%	0.0%	2.7%	1.7%	2.3%
wPolityce.pl	1.1%	2.8%	0.0%	0.7%	1.2%
wSieci	0.9%	3.2%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
Do Rzeczy	0.9%	0.9%	0.4%	1.7%	0.4%
Nasz Dziennik	0.7%	1.8%	0.4%	0.0%	0.8%
naTemat.pl	0.5%	1.4%	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%

Unshaded cells: Chi-sq. test significant at  $p < 0.05$  or lower. Shaded cells: insignificant.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3 shows the relationship between the choices of individual media as key sources of information. TVP viewers are clearly unlikely to follow the TVN coverage, and vice versa. They relatively rarely use the main private radio stations, tabloids, major internet portals, as well as such titles as *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Polityka* and *Newsweek*. However, they tend to listen to news broadcasts of Polish Radio and watch TV Republika.

The TVN audience is, to some extent, the reverse of TVP viewers. They do not tend to watch TVP, TV Trwam, TV Republika and Polish Radio and Radio Maryja, as well as such titles as: *Nasz Dziennik*, *Gazeta Polska*, *Fakt*, *wSieci* and *Do Rzeczy*, as well as portals: *Gazeta.pl* and *Niezależna.pl* and FB. They often read the *Newsweek* weekly.

Citizens who watch information on Polsat tend not to listen to news on the radio and on major portals such as Onet and *Gazeta.pl*. They also do not use TV Trwam and TV Republika. They read *Fakt* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* relatively often.

Viewers of TV Trwam are often also people who receive news from TV Republika, Radio Maryja, *Nasz Dziennik*, *wSieci* and *Gazeta Polska*. Interestingly, there are relatively weak relationships between the use of information provided by various media within certain capital groups. The same groups do not use TOK FM, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Gazeta.pl*, belonging to Agora. No correlations were found. Similarly, there is not a correlation between the portal *wPolityce* and the weekly *wSieci*, perhaps due to low number of users. On the other hand, there are strong relationships in the use of *Gazeta Polska*, TV Republika and the *Niezależna.pl* portal, as well as Radio Maryja, TV Trwam and *Nasz Dziennik*. These are media with a strong identity profile, which limits the group of users, but cumulates the use of these media.

Table 3. Correlation between use of different information sources

	TVP	TVN	Polsat	Trwam	TV Republika	Superstacja	PR	RMF FM	Radio Zet	Maryja	TOK FM	GW	Rz	ND	GP	Fakt	SE	Polityka	wSieci	Do Rzeczy	Newsweek	Gazeta.pl	Onet.pl	wp.pl	wPolityce	Niezależna	Na Temat	FB	
TVP	X	-.22**			.07*	-.08*	.20**	-.07*	-.12**	-.16**	-.07*	-.16**			-.08**	-.10*	-.06*	-.06*	-.09**	-.06*	-.08**	-.11**	-.09**	-.08*					
TVN		X		-.10**	-.14**	-.16**	-.08**	-.20**	-.17**	-.06*	-.09**	.06*			-.09**	-.10**	-.09**	-.09**	-.09**	-.06*	-.07*	-.09**	-.08**						
Polsat			X		-.13**	-.08**	-.08**	-.20**	-.17**	-.08**	-.08**	.06*			-.09**	-.09**	-.09**	-.09**	-.09**	-.06*	-.07*	-.09**	-.08**						
Trwam				X	.12**			-.07*		.32**					.10**														
TV Republika					X			-.07*		.41**					.12**														
Superst.						X		-.09**																					
PR							X	-.09**																					
RMF FM								X	-.09**																				
Radio Zet									X	.21**		-.12**																	
Maryja										X	.07*	-.07*																	
TOK FM											X																		
GW												X																	
Rz													X																
ND														X															
GP															X														
Fakt																X													
SE																	X												
Polityka																		X											
wSieci																			X										
DoRzeczy																				X									
Newsweek																					X								
Gazeta.pl																						X							
Onet.pl																							X						
wp.pl																								X					
wPolityce																									X				
Niezależna																										X			
naTemat																											X		
FB																												X	

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* Significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Negative correlations were shaded.

Differences in information source preferences are confirmed by evaluation of reliability of different media categories (table 4). Public media are a clear point of reference, as they are owned, controlled and regulated by the state, whose institutions are under control of a single political party. In case of the private media, the question measured generalized views on their model of operation in comparison to public media.

Private media generally have better ratings than public ones. A significantly larger group of respondents (a difference of 10 percentage points) believes that they present information reliably and truthfully. An even greater difference is recorded when asking about the value system represented by them. Most adults think that public media are not guided by values such as the theirs.

There are noticeable differences between the electorates in the assessments of the two media categories. PiS voters are mostly positive about public media, whereas PO and N electorates usually express negative opinions, while others are located between these two groups. As regards private media, PiS voters are negative, while the majority of others - regardless of party preferences - express a positive opinion.

**Table 4.** Reliability and value orientation of public and private media

Do most ... media	Total	Electorates (percentage of affirmative responses)			
		PiS	PO/N	Other	Undecided/non-voters
a. public					
- give reliable and true information;	54.9%	76.6%	37.7%	52.5%	54.1%
- act on values similar to yours	44.0%	60.6%	30.0%	40.9%	45.7%
b. private					
- give reliable and true information;	64.7%	44.0%	77.7%	67.9%	67.2%
- act on values similar to yours	59.6%	39.4%	78.9%	58.3%	61.2%

Chi-sq. test significant at  $p < 0.001$  for all four pairs of variables.

Source: own elaboration.

The majority of respondents are of the opinion that public media support the government (table 5). When it comes to private broadcasters, opinions are divided.

In assessing public media, PiS voters are different from other citizens. Most voters of other parties and non-voters believe these media to be supportive of the government, while PiS voters are divided in their opinions.

When assessing private media, the PiS voters are also clearly different from the others - most of them think that they favour the opposition. PO / N voters and the undecided / non-voters usually attribute impartiality to them.

**Table 5.** Perceived media attitude to government and opposition

Do most ... media	Total	Electorates (percentage of affirmative responses)			
		PiS	PO/N	Other	Undecided/non-voters
a. public					
support the government	61.1%	34.4%	77.9%	67.3%	62.0%
support the opposition	13.3%	20.6%	6.8%	19.8%	4.7%
are impartial	25.7%	45.0%	15.3%	12.9%	33.3%
b. private					
support the government	14.6%	11.4%	8.1%	14.9%	22.5%
support the opposition	43.5%	75.8%	28.7%	48.8%	22.9%
are impartial	41.9%	12.8%	63.2%	36.3%	54.7%

Chi-sq. test significant at  $p < 0.001$  for both pairs of variables.

Source: own elaboration.

### Conclusion

Summarizing the results, as far as sources of information are concerned, Facebook is the medium most commonly used for acquiring information, and treated as an independent source of knowledge. Respondents often do not quite know which specific sources of information they are using there. Of the main television stations, TVN is used more intensively than Polsat and TVP. Of the strictly informational channels - TVN24 has more regular users than TVP Info and Polsat News. RMF FM stands out among radio stations. The most popular press daily print news outlets are Gazeta Wyborcza and Fakt.

The use of various sources of information is strongly related to party preferences. The end points of the continuum are marked by, on one side, PO and N voters and, on the other side, by the PiS. Voters of the other parties and non-voters are located in the middle. In the hierarchy of information sources, the PiS electorate clearly prefers TVP. Relative to others, they frequently read Super Express, listen to the news on the Polish Radio, read Gazeta Polska, Nasz Dziennik, wSieci and Do Rzeczy, watch TV Trwam and TV Republika, listen to Radio Maryja and use the "Niezależna.pl" portal. PO and N voters, in turn, use TVN in the first place. They listen more often than others to RMF FM, Radio Zet and radio TOK FM, read Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita, Newsweek and Polityka and use Onet. These differences between electorates are

confirmed by generalized attitudes to public and private media. PiS voters, unlike other people, value public media (currently under control of ‘their’ party) and distrust privately-owned sources. A separate position is occupied by Polsat, selected irrespectively of political views.

Finally, let us refer back to the broad questions guiding our analysis. We expected that friendly media create ecosystems operating on two levels: media linked by ownership/control structures have separate audiences united by political preferences. We expected to find major clusters consisting of public media, major private and, as a separate cluster, online portals. We believe our hypotheses to be largely confirmed. There is a clear difference in media consumption and evaluation between the governing party electorate (PiS) and everyone else. It appears that the state-controlled media are trusted primarily by PiS voters, while others identify more strongly with and trust major private broadcasters.

A separate phenomenon is the strong position of social media aggregators (here exemplified by FB). Its use as primary source of information is negatively correlated with using news programs of both TVP and TVN, the centres of the two information ecosystems. It is therefore plausible to suppose that users of FB as information source are a separate, depoliticized category. Since FB acts as aggregator, naming it as primary source indicates limited competence in identifying and verifying information. Such incompetence can be treated as a manifestation of digital divide of the 2<sup>nd</sup> level, i.e. lack of competence necessary to navigate the web safely and competently.

## ***Appendix: Data source and brief description of media outlets***

### ***Data source***

The analysis uses a survey containing a series of questions about media consumption and evaluation of outlets. The survey was conducted on a sample a representative for the citizens of Poland. It was fielded with CAWI methodology. Post-stratification weighting was used taking into account: age, gender, region, size of locality and education. The survey was conducted by PBS, a reliable research institute. The number of cases was 1005. Fieldwork was performed in 18-25 May 2017.



**Media outlets**

Outlet	Description
Do Rzeczy	Weekly newsmagazine, right wing
Facebook	Social media news aggregator
Fakt	Tabloid daily newspaper
Gazeta Polska	Weekly newspaper with a daily mutation, right-wing
Gazeta Wyborcza	Daily newspaper, left-liberal
Gazeta.pl	Major news portal
Nasz Dziennik	Daily newspaper, right-wing
naTemat.pl	Niche news portal, left-liberal
Newsweek	Weekly newsmagazine, liberal
Niezależna.pl	Niche news portal, right-wing
Onet.pl	Major news portal
Polityka	Weekly newsmagazine, liberal
Polsat	Major private TV station
Polsat News	News channel of major private TV station
PR 1	Public (state) radio station 1
PR III	Public (state) radio station 3
Radio Maryja	Radio station, conservative Catholic
Radio Zet	Major private radio station
RMF FM	Major private radio station
Rzeczpospolita	Daily newspaper, centre-right
Super Express	Daily tabloid
Superstacja	Minor private TV station
Telewizja Trwam	TV station, conservative Catholic
TOK FM	Talk radio station, left-liberal
TV Republika	Minor private TV station, right-wing
TVN	Major private TV station
TVN24	News channel of major private TV station
TVP Info	News channel of public (state) TV
TVP1	Public (state) TV, channel 1
TVP2	Public (state) TV, channel 2
wp.pl	Major news portal
wPolityce.pl	Niche news portal, right-wing
wSieci	Weekly newsmagazine, right wing

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