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Cultural values and digital media usage in social communication. Statistical analysis across EU countries

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Abstract. In the context of globalization and the rapid pace of digitalization, social media are becoming the main spaces for communication, interaction, and identity formation. Online social networks function as "social networks" — structures of connections between individuals or groups, through which information, norms, values, resources, and social support circulate. This paper aims to link trust in media and online media consumption to the cultural values and socio-economic conditions. Therefore, the study aims to estimate significant differences in the research variables using Hofstede's cultural model. Using a sample of EU member states, the paper highlights the extent to which trust in online news is determined by cultural factors compared to economic ones. Using quantitative research methods based on T-test and multiple regressions, the paper creates a comprehensive framework for understanding the role played by cultural values and economic conditions in shaping trust in media and online media consumption for news and political information.

Keywords. Social media usage, cultural values, trust in media, EU countries, and socio-economic conditions

1. Social Media and Culture Intersection

Digital media represents a challenging communicational environment in which the technologically mediated interaction among people with different cultural backgrounds sometimes involves veritable axiological clashes with profound political consequences. In this respect, the European Union represents a good, even spectacular example, given its tourmented history generated by the coexistence of different cultures in a relatively limited geographical space. Moreover, the European countries experienced the implementation of different political and economic ideologies throughout their historical development, an aspect that deeply influenced the process of configuring various mentalities, each of them praising another value. This situation distinguishes the European cultural space as a genuinely multicultural and axiologically multilayered one.

In this context, we can observe that one of the most important characteristics of digital media usage is the fact that the communicational interaction happens within cyberspace; therefore, the participants are encouraged to express their opinions in a free manner and, in the

same time, can group themselves in communities that share common values, communities that seem to be organized as thematic clusters. Belonging to such communities has multiple effects on individuals, shaping their behavior in accordance with certain identity characteristics that become common traits among the members of the same community.

Digital media extend these traditional structures, allowing for rapid connections, large-scale information exchange, self-representation, and the formation of transnational communities. Therefore, it is important to understand not only the technological use of social media but also how cultural values shape this use and influence social and intercultural communication through digital media.

We have some theoretical perspectives for analyzing the relationship between social media and culture. Social media can facilitate the formation of support networks, access to information, and social mobilization, improving social ties and cooperation from the perspective of the concept of social capital [1]. In addition, the media richness theory shows that digital media offer a diverse spectrum of communication means (text, image, video), influencing the quality of interactions and the way messages are transmitted [2]. Also, the uses and gratifications paradigm explains that users select platforms and content according to their needs — information, socialization, identity expression, etc.[3,4]. These theories indicate that the use of social media is a deliberate act, shaped by individual motivations, structural conditions, and cultural orientations.

Cultural values are a central pillar of socio-political analysis, influencing citizens' behavior, the functioning of institutions, and democratic stability, and shaping how individuals perceive authority, participate in public life, and interact in their communities [5, 6]. According to Grecu et al. [7], the effectiveness of social media in stimulating democratic participation depends on the media context, with a balanced framework favoring civic engagement. Scholarly studies show that cultural values are not fixed; they evolve under the influence of modernization, globalization, public policies, and complex social contexts [8-10].

Within the European Union, cultural values are a fundamental pillar of democracy, social cohesion, and policies of inclusion and civic participation [11,12]. At the same time, user preferences and behaviors differ significantly between European societies. The research conducted by AlAfnan [13] across 19 European countries reveals notable differences in platform choice, types of digital practices, and interaction styles. These differences suggest that the cultural environment and regional context decisively shape how social media is used. In the same vein, Fuchs [14] argues that digital platforms are socially structured spaces, imbued with cultural and power dynamics, such that the way citizens use them reflects both the structures of society and the identity and civic orientations of individuals.

A critical aspect of the intersection of social media and culture is how users evaluate information and react to content—including disinformation. The study *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Fake News: A Comparative Study of Instagram Users in Greece and Portugal* [15] shows that users in Greece and Portugal have different approaches to recognizing fake news—Greeks tend to trust content shared by friends/family and pay less attention to cues of message quality, while Portuguese users place greater importance on objective characteristics of the message. This difference reflects distinct cultural values related to trust, social relationships, and critical evaluation of information.

2. The Theoretical Perspective on Cultural and Social Values

Different studies comparing societies show that cultural differences determine distinct political behaviors and institutional structures. In this regard, Hofstede [5] highlights that cultural values function as cognitive scaffolding through which individuals interpret social and political reality. Starting from the same premise, Schwartz [6] develops a system of universal values focused on the dynamics between autonomy and conformity, conservation and openness to change, and equality and hierarchy. The author shows that these sets of values define the foundation of social consensus and influence how communities prioritize issues such as social justice, collective security, and civil liberties. Schwartz therefore emphasizes that the structure of cultural values guides the development trajectories of political systems, influencing both electoral behavior and the mechanisms for formulating public policy. In addition, Inglehart and Welzel [10] argue that long-term economic and social transformations produce profound shifts in collective values. As societies move from material deprivation to prosperity, there is a shift from materialistic values—focused on survival, security, and order—to postmaterialistic values associated with individual freedom, civic participation, social tolerance, and the valuing of self-actualization. This evolution favors the consolidation of democracy, as citizens become more receptive to pluralism, political transparency, and public accountability. This idea is complemented by Inglehart and Norris [9] who emphasize the impact of globalization on value change, especially regarding cosmopolitan values and openness to diversity.

Welzel emphasizes that individual emancipation is one of the internal engines of democratic development [10]. Moreover, it implies not only formal freedom, but also the real capacity of individuals to control their lives, to formulate demands, and to influence institutions. The process of emancipation is fueled by socio-economic resources — education, social capital, material security — that give individuals personal confidence and a sense of political efficacy. This confidence extends to the social level as interpersonal trust capital, which the author considers a necessary condition for civic participation, institutional cooperation, and public accountability.

On a broader conceptual scale, Huntington [16] examines the diversity of value systems in relation to the civilizational structures of the contemporary world. Differences in values between civilizations can generate opportunities for complementarity and collaboration—for example, through cultural exchange or normative convergence—but they can also produce tensions when conceptions of legitimacy, morality, or the role of institutions conflict. In this regard, the author suggests that understanding global politics requires a careful analysis of how the values of different civilizations meet, negotiate, or reject one another in the international arena. In the same vein, Minkov explains that culture and civilization derive from cumulative historical processes, not from biological or racial determinism, which makes their study necessary for understanding contemporary societies [17]. He rejects moralizing or essentialist interpretations of culture and advocates for comparative research based on inter-societal indicators.

Hall emphasizes the role of implicit cultural codes in political communication [18], and the lack of congruence between leaders' values and citizens' values can affect the effectiveness of governance, while Durkheim emphasizes the sacred and symbolic role of values in maintaining social cohesion and legitimizing power [19].

Almond and Verba [20] show that democratic stability depends crucially on the type of political culture dominant in a society. They distinguish between a participatory culture—in which citizens are informed, involved, and able to articulate their interests—and a passive or submissive one, characterized by detachment, apathy, or distrust of institutions. Thus, political

culture becomes a predictor of democratic performance because it shapes individuals' expectations, patterns of political behavior, and the degree of public accountability.

In addition, Berger and Luckmann [21] argue that social and political reality does not exist independently of collective consciousness, but is constructed through symbolic, discursive, and institutional processes. They show that institutions become legal and legitimate only when individuals internalize the values and norms they promote. Thus, political legitimacy derives from cultural acceptance, making public policies and authority structures inseparable from the systems of meaning shared in society. Kymlicka [22] explores the normative dimension of cultural values, arguing that the protection of identity diversity—especially of ethnic, linguistic, and national minorities—is a fundamental condition for the functioning of contemporary liberal democracies. From Kymlicka's perspective, democracy is strengthened when the state adopts policies of inclusion and recognition, ensuring a balance between the universalism of rights and cultural particularism [22].

Along the same lines of comparative analysis, Minkov [17] offers a systematic approach to the way in which cultural differences manifest themselves around the world and how they influence the dynamics of globalization. He explores cultural variables such as autonomy orientation, tolerance, social adaptability, and collective pragmatism, showing that these values determine not only individual behaviors but also institutional orientations and economic models. Minkov highlights that global interactions can accentuate identity particularities, generating simultaneous processes of transnational connection and local reaffirmation of cultural specificity. Thus, his work reveals that political and economic development cannot be understood without a nuanced assessment of the matrix of values that structures societies. Nationality remains relevant in explaining collective behavior, contrary to the idea that globalization would standardize values and attitudes about success, morality, education, and politics, which remain deeply rooted in historical traditions and institutions, and culture becomes a predictor of happiness, consumption, religion, or social cooperation, highlighting the need for an empirical approach to cross-cultural differences.

An important contribution to the study of values is the book "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind" [23]. The work examines culture as "software of the mind," a system of social programming internalized in childhood that shapes the way individuals think, feel, and act. The authors argue that cultural differences are pervasive and influence international cooperation, institutions, education, social relations, and the organizational environment. Culture manifests itself through symbols, heroes, rituals, and values, and values constitute its relatively stable core. Culture is collective; it reproduces itself intergenerationally and forms the moral framework by which "us" and "them" are delimited. Identity is only one of the layers of culture, along with gender, generation, class, religion, or organization, and cultural change affects practices more quickly than values. Culture is an evolutionary process in which societies develop through adaptation and vary according to criteria such as religion, ethnicity, class, or gender, and their understanding requires a scientific, reflexive, and non-stereotyped approach.

The first cultural dimension discussed is power distance, which explains how societies accept inequality. Hierarchy is perceived as natural, and authority is rarely questioned in cultures characterized by high power distance [23]. In contrast, in societies with low power distance, the principles of equality and mutual consultation dominate [24].

The second cultural dimension, developed by Hofstede's individualism versus collectivism, highlights social differences: individualism promotes autonomy, initiative,

competition, nuclear families, independent education, direct communication, and an economy based on performance and innovation.

The third dimension, collaboration versus competition, differentiates societies oriented towards performance and competition from those focused on cooperation, equality, and quality of life, influencing family, education, and politics.

The fourth dimension, uncertainty avoidance, according to Hofstede, shows how societies manage ambiguity. Those with high avoidance prefer rules, stability, and order, while those with low avoidance accept risk and change, influencing education, religion, motivation, politics, and social adaptation.

Hofstede's fifth dimension, long-term versus short-term orientation, reflects how societies prioritize values over time. Long-term oriented societies value perseverance, thrift, and strategic planning, adapting to change, and promoting sustainable development. Short-term-oriented societies emphasize tradition, stability, and adherence to immediate social norms.

A recently introduced dimension, indulgence versus restriction, examines the relationship between social control and the satisfaction of desires. Indulgent cultures favor expressiveness, freedom, and subjective well-being; restrictive cultures value discipline, conformity, and self-control [23].

3. Cultural values and contemporary European dynamics

Recent studies confirm the dynamics of values in Europe. For example, Santagiustina et al. [25] highlight how European Union citizens express their identity and political values on social networks, highlighting intercultural variations between states. Some other authors, such as Krasnova and Grinavica [12], analyze the pluralism of European values, emphasizing their diversity and complexity in the context of continental integration. The authors show that cultural values in the EU are not uniform; they vary between countries, regions, and communities, reflecting different historical traditions, social experiences, and economic contexts. This plurality of values offers opportunities for intercultural dialogue, but also challenges in harmonizing public policies and promoting democratic consensus. Also, the European Commission report "Culture and Democracy: the evidence" [11] shows that involvement in cultural activities enhances the democratic framework because cultural participation facilitates the development of social capital, increases trust between community members and in public institutions, and stimulates a sense of belonging to society.

Deirmentzoglou and Triantopoulos [26] highlight the close connection between cultural values, innovation, and sustainability. Values that promote collective responsibility, respect for the environment, and future orientation facilitate sustainable development and stimulate innovative capacity, demonstrating that economic progress and environmental protection are interdependent with culture and collective mentalities.

Complementarily, Morollon Diaz-Faes et al. [27] show that European fairy tales function as a tool for the intergenerational transmission of normative values.

Reports such as the "State of Culture Report" [28] and the "Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe" [29] provide insight into cultural policies and how they promote pluralism, inclusion, and civic participation. European values are neither static nor uniform; they are constantly transforming under the influence of the social, economic, and political context. In this framework, scholars highlight the divergences of values both globally and within Europe. They show that Western countries tend to value self-expression, tolerance, and individual rights, while cultural differences persist in various regions and social groups. This plurality generates a diversity of social, economic, and political perspectives and

practices, highlighting the fact that values not only reflect cultural identity but also shape collective decisions, public policies, and community cohesion. In conclusion, contemporary Europe is characterized by a dynamic value pluralism, which contributes to social innovation, intercultural dialogue, and adaptation to global changes. The role of cultural values in social cohesion and public policies

Cultural values directly influence civic participation, social cohesion, and public policy-making. Active participation in cultural activities plays an essential role in strengthening social cohesion and democracy [11] and the Council of Europe / Hertie School. Involvement in art, music, theatre, heritage, or community projects facilitates interaction between different social groups, cultivating social trust, mutual respect, and tolerance towards diversity. Culture is not only a normative benchmark, but also a strategic public policy instrument, as shown by the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe [29] and Culture Action Europe [30].

Cultural values are also transmitted through education, the media, and folk tales, strengthening European identity and social cohesion. In the context of recent crises, cultural values become a benchmark of stability and social bargaining [30]. Thus, analyzing cultural values allows us to understand not only individual behavior but also how European societies adapt their policies, thereby strengthening democracy, inclusion, and solidarity.

4. Research methodology and quantitative data

Using these normative perspectives on the relation between online media consumption, cultural values, social media platforms, and social trust in online media sources, the paper aims to answer to several research questions, such as: What are the main significant differences between online media consumption and cultural values? What is the impact of cultural values in the field of trust in online media? What are the main factors that influence the dynamics of online media consumption in EU countries? What is the relationship between income level and social platforms' use for news consumption? In line with these research questions, the study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

O1: to estimate the significant differences between research variables by Hofstede's cultural model.

O2: to analyze the impact of cultural values on the evolution of trust in online media in a sample of EU states.

O3: to assess the extent to which trust in online news is determined by cultural factors compared to economic ones.

O3: to estimate the correlation between the level of net average salary and social media usage for news consumption.

O4: to identify statistically significant predictors of trust and online news consumption in a sample of EU countries.

To achieve these objectives, our study advances a set of testable hypotheses that demonstrate the complex interaction between cultural values, social media consumption for news, income level, and trust in online media perspectives. Therefore, our research hypotheses are:

H1: Societies with lower power distance exhibit higher trust in online news and more diverse social media platforms usage.

H2: Collectivist cultures show higher consumption of online news compared to individualist cultures.

H3: Traditionalist cultures, characterized by short-term orientation, consume more news on personal and community-based channels, emphasizing trust in shared information.

H4: An increased level of net average salary is positively related to an increased level of

trust in online news.

H5: The level of power distance and collaboration vs. competition values predict the dynamics of trust in online news within the analyzed EU sample.

As regards the research data, our study is based on secondary statistical data provided by relevant research institutes in the field of cultural values, online communication, and social trust. However, data regarding cultural values is provided by The Culture Factor Group. It is an international think-tank that provides research and statistical data based on Hofstede's cultural model in most of the world. In this regard, we present the conceptual approach, units of measurement, and data sources in the following table:

Table 1. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Dimension	Conceptual meaning/ Definition	Units of Measurement	Sources of data
Power Distance	“This dimension deals with the fact that all individuals in societies are not equal - it expresses the attitude of the culture towards these inequalities amongst us. Power Distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”	0-100	https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Individualism	“The fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. It has to do with whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We". In Individualist societies, people are supposed to look after themselves and their direct family only. In Collectivist societies people belong to 'in groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty.”	0-100	https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Motivation towards Achievement and Success	“A high score (Decisive) on this dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the winner / best in field - a value system that starts in school and continues throughout organisational life. A low score (Consensus-oriented) on the dimension means that the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life. A Consensus-oriented society is one where quality of life is the sign of success and standing out from the crowd is not admirable. The fundamental issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (Decisive) or liking what you do (Consensus-oriented).”	0-100	https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Uncertainty Avoidance	“The dimension Uncertainty Avoidance has to do with the way that a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? This ambiguity brings with it anxiety and different cultures have learnt to deal with this anxiety in different ways. The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or	0-100	https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool

	unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these is reflected in the score on Uncertainty Avoidance.”		
Long Term Orientation	“This dimension describes how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future, and societies prioritise these two existential goals differently. Normative societies which score low on this dimension, for example, prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Those with a culture which scores high, on the other hand, take a more pragmatic approach: they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.”	0-100	https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Indulgence	“One challenge that confronts humanity, now and in the past, is the degree to which small children are socialized. Without socialization, we do not become "human". This dimension is defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised. Relatively weak control is called "Indulgence" and relatively strong control is called "Restraint". Cultures can, therefore, be described as Indulgent or Restrained.”	0-100	https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool

In line with these conceptual definitions, we used a taxonomy based on the following dimensions: less hierarchy/ high hierarchy societies (Power Distance), Individualist vs. Collectivist societies (Individualism), Collaboration/ Competition in society (Motivation towards Achievement and Success), risk and flexibility vs. structure and security (Uncertainty Avoidance), tradition vs. progress (Long term orientation) and indulgence vs. restraint (Indulgence).

Together with cultural variables, we used data regarding online media consumption for news, trust in online news, and social media platforms usage for news and political information. These data were provided by the Digital News Report, Reuters Institute, University of Oxford. This quantitative study was conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism to understand how news is consumed in different countries from various geographical regions. Data are measured from 0 to 100. An increased value is strongly related to an increased consumption of online news content. Economic data regarding the net average salary were provided by both Eurostat and Trading Economics. Table 2 presents the research variables, their symbols, units of measurement, and sources of data.

Table 2. Research Variables

Variable	Symbol	Units of Measurement	Data Sources
Power Distance	PD	0-100	The Culture Factor Group https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Individualism- Collectivism	IC	0-100	The Culture Factor Group https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool

Motivation towards Achievement and Success (Collaboration vs. Competition)	CC	0-100	The Culture Factor Group https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Uncertainty Avoidance	UA	0-100	The Culture Factor Group https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Long Term Orientation	LTO	0-100	The Culture Factor Group https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Indulgence- Restraint	IR	0-100	The Culture Factor Group https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool
Trust in News	TN	0-100	Reuters Institute, Digital News Report https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2025
Online News Consumption	ONC	0-100	Reuters Institute, Digital News Report https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2025
YouTube for news	YTN	0-100	Reuters Institute, Digital News Report https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2025
Facebook for news	FN	0-100	Reuters Institute, Digital News Report https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2025
WhatsApp for news	WAN	0-100	Reuters Institute, Digital News Report https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2025
Instagram for news	IN	0-100	Reuters Institute, Digital News Report https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2025
TikTok for news	TTN	0-100	Reuters Institute, Digital News Report https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2025
Net Average Salary	NVA	Euro/ month	Eurostat; Trading Economics https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00155/default/table?lang=en&category=t_labour.t_earn https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/average-annual-wages

In order to evaluate the significant differences between online media usage for news and the level of trust in media, we performed a T-test for independent samples, taking into account $p < 0.05$. Beyond statistical differences between research variables, we aimed to develop a multiple regression model based on the following general equation

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \dots + \beta_n x_n + \varepsilon_{i,j}$$

where Y_i is the dependent variable, $x_{1,n}$ represent the independent variables, and $\varepsilon_{i,j}$ is an error coefficient of regression.

Our statistical data represent the average of the quantitative values for 2024 and 2025. In our analysis, we integrated in the sample 20 countries of the European Union. Table 3 presents the sample and the geographical positions of the EU countries:

Table 3. EU countries included in the analysis

Country	Geographical Regions
Austria	Central and Eastern Europe
Belgium	Western Europe
Bulgaria	Central and Eastern Europe
Croatia	Central and Eastern Europe
Czech Republic	Central and Eastern Europe
Denmark	North Europe and Scandinavia
Finland	North Europe and Scandinavia
France	Western Europe
Germany	Western Europe
Greece	Southern Europe
Hungary	Central and Eastern Europe
Ireland	Western Europe
Italy	Southern Europe
Netherlands	Western Europe
Poland	Central and Eastern Europe
Portugal	Southern Europe
Romania	Central and Eastern Europe
Slovakia	Central and Eastern Europe
Spain	Southern Europe
Sweden	North Europe and Scandinavia

5. Regional differences in social media consumption for news and cultural perspectives

This section presents the descriptive statistics results and differences between variables by geographical region. In this regard, we assessed the average values and standard deviations to observe the central tendency of both dependent and independent variables. In the field of cultural values, Power Distance (PD), we estimated the lowest scores in Northern countries, which are characterized by less hierarchical societies and egalitarian perspectives. The average value of Power Distance in Northern countries is 27.33 with a standard deviation of ± 8.14 . The lowest values are registered in Denmark (PD = 18) and Sweden (PD = 31). Central, Eastern, and Southern EU countries are characterized by an increased level of social hierarchy. The Nordic countries are characterized by participatory democracy and consensus-based decision-making. Also, governmental structures are more likely to develop transparency and social trust, diminishing the perceived need for distance from authority. Civic culture promotes participation and collaboration. Central and Eastern European countries are characterized by historical legacies that emphasize social and political hierarchy. In Southern and Eastern European countries, there are significant elements of traditional cultures that reinforce the role played by political authority, family, and religious authorities in shaping social and political behaviour. In accordance with these findings, Northern European countries registered important levels of individualism (IC=83; $\sigma = \pm 7.57$), suggesting the relevance of self-expression values and liberal perspectives in shaping social behaviour. In contrast, Central and Eastern European countries (IC=60.66; $\sigma = \pm 13.04$) present collectivist attitudes. Hierarchical values and

parochial political culture explain the prevalence of collectivist attitudes within Eastern European countries. Western democracies are characterized by increased values in the field of individualist values (IC=75.33, $\sigma = 15.43$). Historical and cultural roots of Western countries are relevant factors that explain the dynamics of individualist values in this geographical region. The Western Enlightenment was an important cultural movement that emphasized rationality, human autonomy, and rights. This cultural tradition created premises for constitutionalism and cultural norms based on personal freedom and liberal democracy. Following this cultural trend, economic development and the Industrial Revolution created premises for economic freedom and entrepreneurship. Moreover, institutional transparency and the rule of law are relevant variables that explain individualist values in Western democracies. Except for Northern countries, characterized by an increased level of collaboration (CC=15.66, $\sigma = \pm 10.50$), the rest of the EU regions are characterized by an optimal equilibrium between competition and collaboration (CC \approx 49, $\sigma \in [14.84; 29.05]$).

Regarding the complex relation between flexibility and security, measured by uncertainty avoidance, Southern EU countries recorded the highest values (UA= 91.2, $\sigma = \pm 10.61$), reflecting preferences for security, social structure, and stable rules. In the same cluster, we can integrate Central and Eastern European countries, with an increased score of UA (UA= 75.08, $\sigma = \pm 13.35$). By contrast, Nordic states are characterized by decreased scores of UA (UA= 47, $\sigma = \pm 20.78$). This fact suggests strong preferences for flexibility. Western EU countries have a balanced position, with average scores of UA (UA= 67.16 $\sigma = \pm 21.55$), balancing between rigid rules and social flexibility.

The dyadic relationship between tradition and progress is measured by short vs. long-term orientation. Western and Nordic EU countries registered increased values, reflecting a cultural orientation to future economic investment and stability. Southern and Eastern EU countries are characterized by social pragmatism and short-term orientation. In connection with PD and LTO, the level of indulgence and restraint might suggest the prevalence of social psychology in shaping social or political behaviour. Therefore, Northern countries are characterized by an increased level of indulgence (IR= 68.33, $\sigma = \pm 10.59$), emphasizing freedom of expression and the satisfaction of individual desires. Central and Eastern EU countries have the lowest scores (IR= 30.16, $\sigma = 19.36$), being characterized by a conservative profile, explained by an increased value of PD and self-control and cultural and social restraint. Table 4 shows the central tendency and dispersion indicators associated with cultural variables included in Hofstede's axiological model:

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics. Cultural Values

Variables	Descriptive Statistics	Western Europe	North Europe and Scandinavia	Southern Europe	Central and Eastern Europe
Power Distance	Mean	45.667	27.333	57.2	59.5
	Std. Deviation	16.669	8.145	4.868	24.281
Collectivism-Individualism	Mean	75.333	83.667	59.4	60.667
	Std. Deviation	15.436	7.572	4.98	13.048
Collaboration-Competition	Mean	49.167	15.667	49.4	48.917
	Std. Deviation	19.682	10.504	14.843	29.05
Uncertainty Avoidance	Mean	67.167	47	91.2	75.083

		Std. Deviation	21.554	20.785	10.616	13.358
Long-Short Orientation	Term	Mean	60	58	45.2	50.583
		Std. Deviation	5.586	5.568	4.712	10.74
Indulgence vs. Restraint		Mean	55.667	68.333	44.6	30.167
		Std. Deviation	10.443	10.599	14.45	19.366

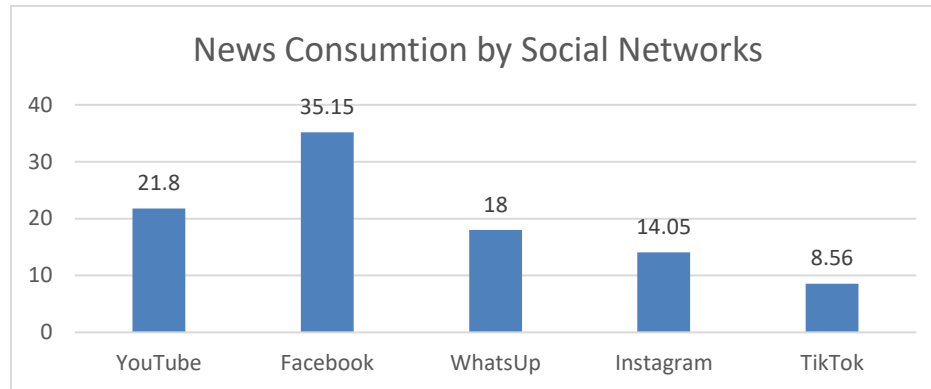
Beyond cultural dimensions, the comparative averages and standard deviations of online media indicators suggest how cultural values have a real impact in the field of trust in mass media and digital consumption of news. Trust in media and online news consumption reflects deeper cultural patterns of hierarchy, individualism, collaboration and competition, flexibility, conservative vs. progressive values. By using the link between cultural dimensions and media practices, we aim to create a comprehensive image of digital behaviour across EU geographical regions. In line with empirical findings, Northern EU countries are characterized by an increased level of trust news. Average value of 58.66 and $\sigma = \pm 9.6$ confirms that citizens perceived media organizations as credible, with professional journalistic standards and minimal political bias. In correlation with trust in news, Northern EU countries are characterized by strong interpersonal trust and an increased level of confidence in political institutions. The media public system is created to encourage independence, accountability, and a professional approach, emphasizing public trust in both digital and traditional news. The same perspectives are found in Western democracies (TN=43.6, $\sigma = \pm 8.26$), where empirical findings illustrate an increased level of confidence in media sources. Southern (TN= 36.5, $\sigma = \pm 13.91$) and Eastern European countries (TN= 28.12, $\sigma = \pm 7.47$) recorded the lowest scores in the field of trust in media. This fact reveals a sceptical and conservative profile, shaped by low institutional credibility and reliance on social networks. In line with trust in media, online news consumption is specific to Northern societies. Online news consumption across EU countries reflects the same cultural and socio-economic divides observed in the field of trust in media. Western (ONC= 35, $\sigma = \pm 14.71$) and Eastern EU countries (ONC= 34, $\sigma = \pm 9.40$) show moderate online news consumption, with a high level of variability, suggesting a mixed approach to online information: a balance between trust and scepticism. Southern countries are characterized by the lowest scores of online media consumption and a decreased level of confidence in social platforms and political news. There is a regional contrast within EU countries in the field of social platforms usage for news. Facebook has a significant impact in Eastern and Southern European countries, with an average value of users of 46.5%. Eastern and Southern EU countries use primarily as primary sources of information: Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Tik-Tok. In contrast, Northern and Western EU countries show minimal dependence on these social networks, reflecting the image of trust in official information and more selective news consumption. Regarding the income levels, we observe significant differences in the field of net average salary between Western and Northern countries and the Eastern part of the EU. Economic conditions could be an important factor that might predict online behaviour in the field of news consumption. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistical values for media and economic variables:

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics. Media trust, online platforms and net average salary

Variables	Descriptive Statistics	Western Europe	North Europe and Scandinavia	Southern Europe	Central and Eastern Europe
Trust in News	Mean	43.6	58.667	36.5	28.125
	Std. Deviation	8.264	9.609	13.916	7.473
Online News Consumption	Mean	35	48	22	34
	Std. Deviation	14.714	7.234	4.243	9.403
Internet Usage	Mean	95.1	95.7	89.1	88.85
	Std. Deviation	4.326	2.663	4.088	4.274
YouTube News	Mean	21	15	21.5	24.5
	Std. Deviation	3.209	3.606	4.082	4.373
Facebook News	Mean	29	28	36	46.5
	Std. Deviation	7.014	3.512	7.416	10.986
WhatsUp News	Mean	16	14	24	17
	Std. Deviation	3.271	0.01	3.862	4.298
Instagram News	Mean	14	10	20	12
	Std. Deviation	2.387	3.215	0.577	1.902
TikTok News	Mean	6.5	5.5	10	9.5
	Std. Deviation	2.16	0.707	2.986	4.278
Net Average Salary	Mean	3131.5	3263	1594	1322
	Std. Deviation	459.405	813.813	382.217	612.657

As regards the social platforms used for news consumption, Facebook emerges as a main and dominant platform with 35.15% usage for news consumption. In correlation with Facebook, an average value of 21.8% of citizens consume YouTube for political information and news. Traditional communities use WhatsApp (18%) for information, and Western societies use Instagram (14.05) for news consumption. An average score for using Tik-Tok for news in EU countries is 8.56%, with increased levels in Southern (10%) and Eastern EU countries (9.5%). Figure 1 presents the news consumption by social networks:

Figure 1. News consumption by social networks



In connection with quantitative results, we can underline the fact that cultural values influence how citizens use digital media, generating distinct regional profiles of online news consumption.

6. Cultural and economic predictors of trust and online media consumption

This section presents the main findings regarding statistical differences by cultural variables and the main predictors of online media consumption for news and overall trust in media. The results confirm that cultural values and socio-economic conditions significantly shape patterns of online news consumption and trust. These insights provide important perspectives about the role played by culture in the field of digital behavior. Using the T-test for independent samples, we observed significant differences in the fields of trust and online media consumption by digital platforms. Therefore, we used two categories based on the median value: less hierarchical societies ($PD < 52$) and high hierarchical societies ($PD > 52.1$). Table 6 shows the T-values, p- p-values, and Cohen’s magnitude of effect for trust and online media consumption by digital platforms:

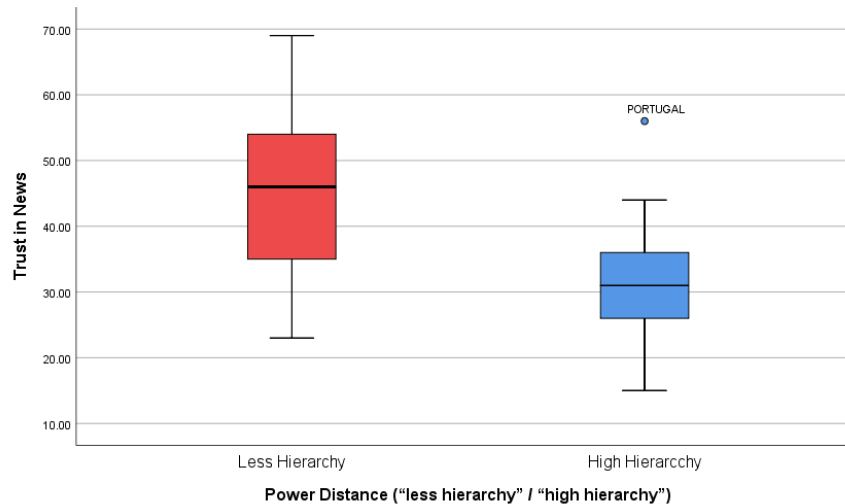
Table 6. Independent Samples T-Test. Media variables by power distance

	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d	95% CI for Cohen's d	
						Lower	Upper
TN	2.425	18	0.026	1.090	0.518	0.128	2.026
ONC	0.763	18	0.456	0.343	0.457	-0.550	1.226
YTN	-2.740	18	0.013	-1.232	0.535	-2.185	-0.250
FN	-2.928	18	0.009	-1.316	0.546	-2.280	-0.322
WAN	0.529	15	0.605	0.268	0.513	-0.735	1.263
IN	-0.833	16	0.417	-0.395	0.485	-1.329	0.551
TTN	-2.423	14	0.030	-1.211	0.585	-2.270	-0.117

Results indicate significant differences in the field of trust in media ($T = 2.425$, $p < 0.026$). Countries characterized by less hierarchy (45.66) are more likely to have increased values of trust in news than countries characterized by high social hierarchy (32.18). Finland, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden and Ireland are relevant examples of less hierarchical societies with an increased level of trust in media. By contrast, Czech Republic, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria

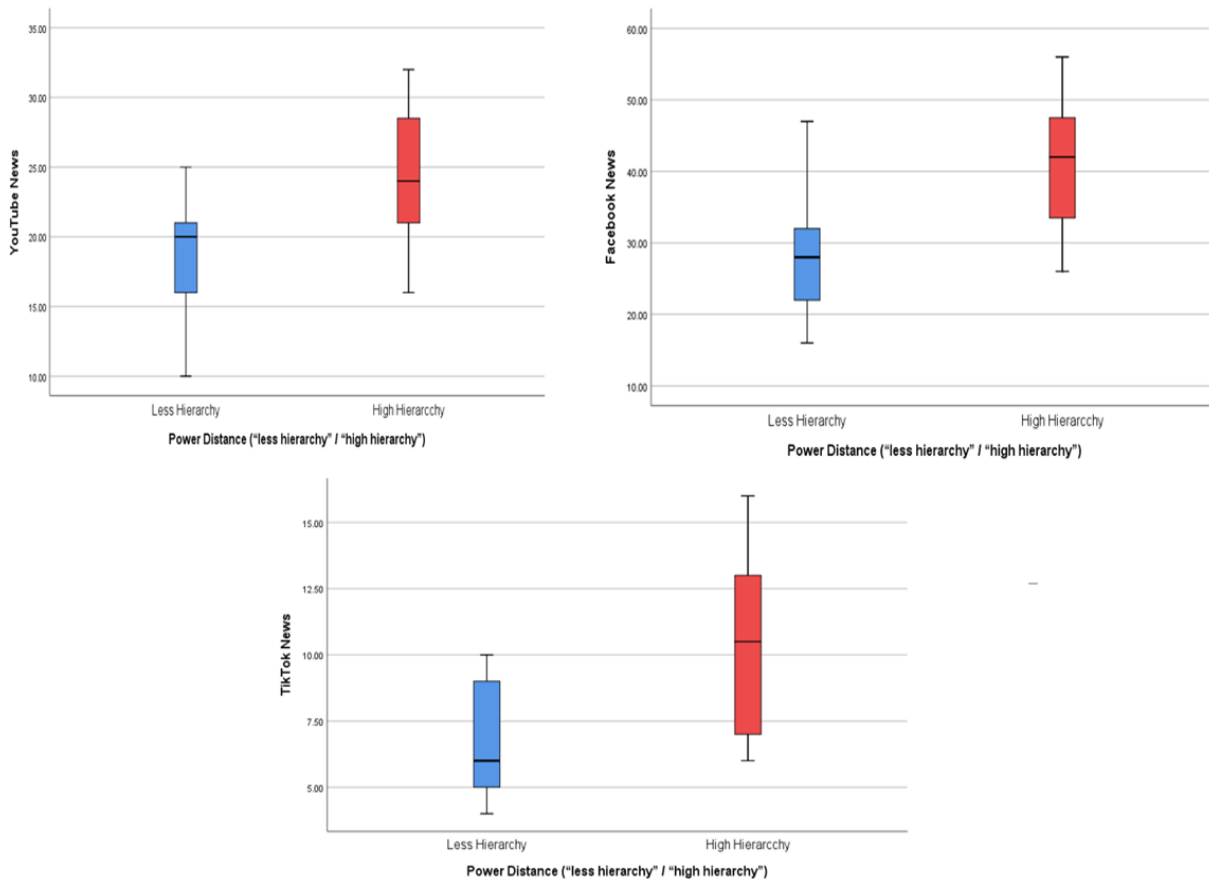
are characterized by hierarchical societies with lowest rates of trust in media. Figure 2 shows the significant differences between these groups:

Figure 2. Trust in News by Power Distance



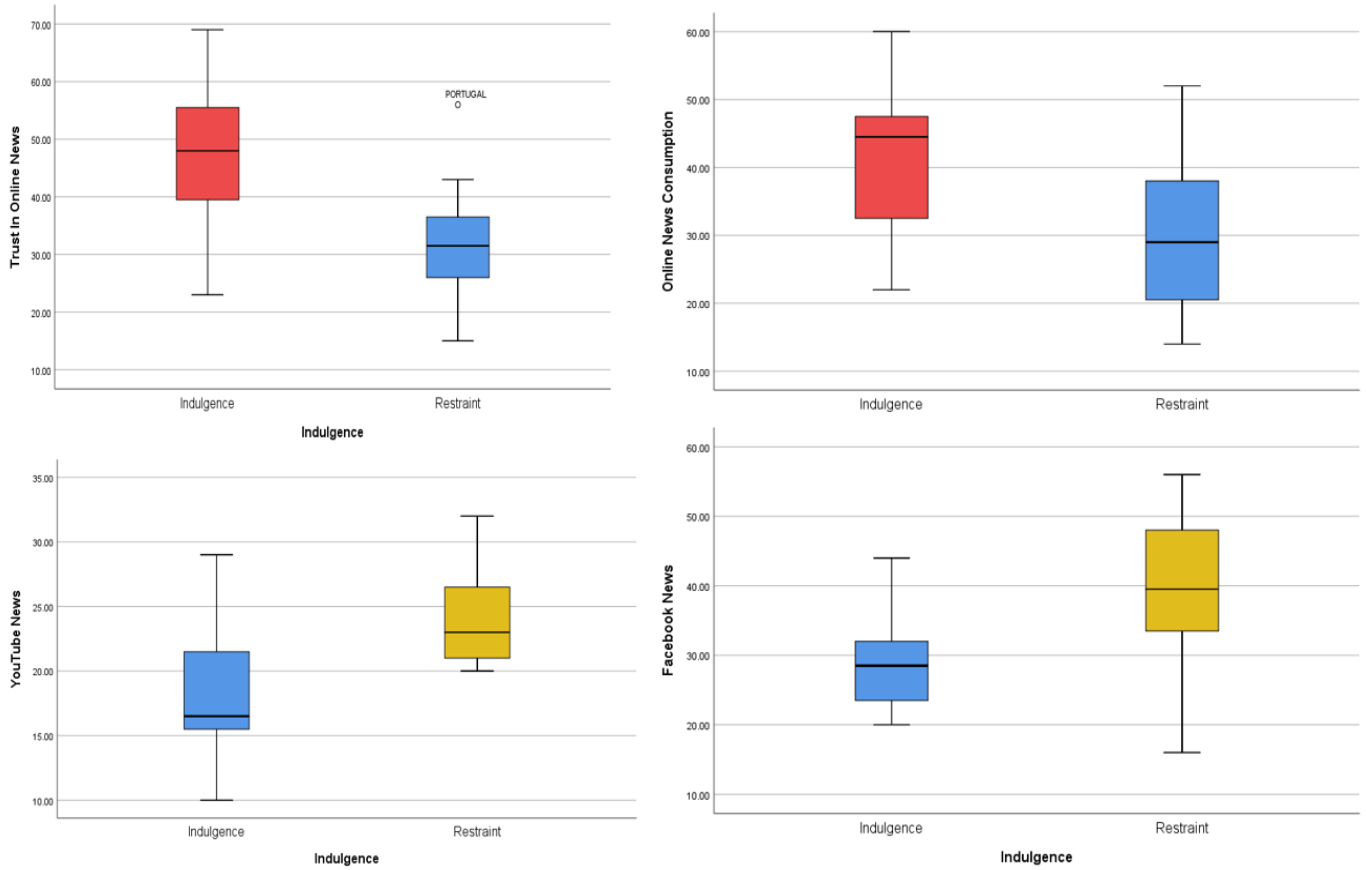
In line with this result, we estimated significant differences in the field of social media platforms used for political information and news. Therefore, a YouTube channel is more likely to be used for news consumption in societies characterized by an increased level of hierarchy ($T=-2.740$, $p=0.013$). Thus, in countries characterized by less hierarchy YouTube platform is used by an average value of 18.55% of citizens for news consumption. This value is specific to Northern and Western democracies. By contrast, an increased level of social hierarchy is associated with an increased level of YouTube consumption for political information and news. Particularly, Southern and Eastern EU countries are characterized by an average value of 24.45%. In connection with the YouTube platform, we observed significant differences in Facebook usage for news and information. Northern and Western countries, characterized by a decreased level of social hierarchy, registered an average value of 28.44% in the field of social platforms usage for news. The Facebook platform is more likely to be correlated with hierarchical societies from Southern and Eastern EU countries (40.63%). The same significant difference is found in the field of TikTok users for news and political information. This platform is more likely to be used in Eastern European countries (10.37%) than in Western or Northern consolidated democracies (6.75%). Figure 3 shows the significant differences between these platforms by the level of power distance.

Figure 3. Social Media Usage for News by Power Distance



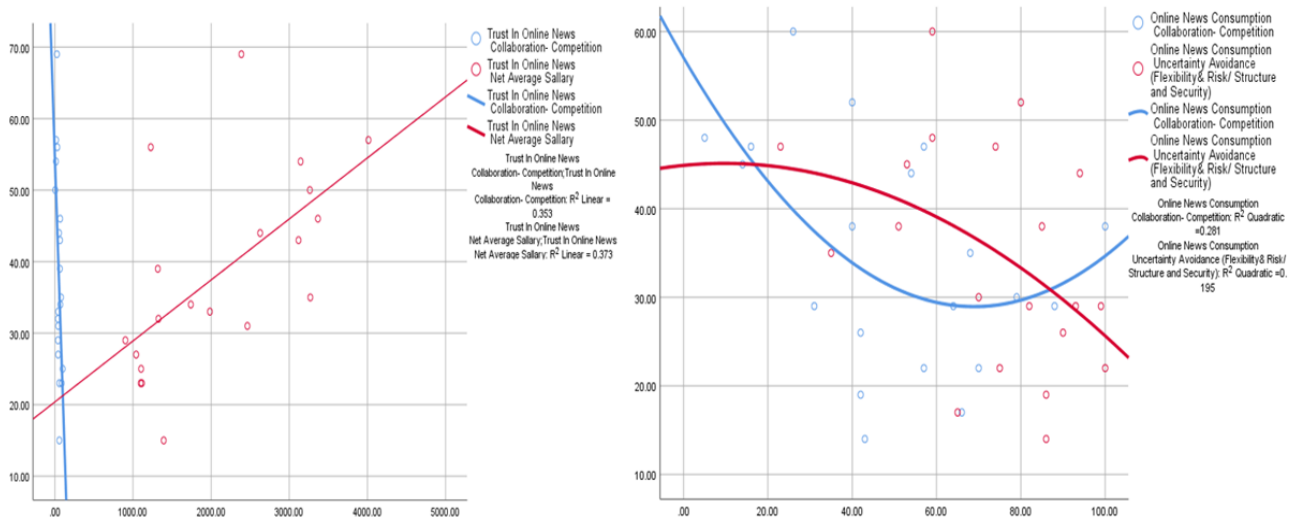
For the remaining cultural dimensions, no statistical differences were identified except for the relationship between individualism-collectivism and indulgence vs. restraint. In this respect, we observed that the YouTube platform is more likely to be used in collectivist societies ($T=-2.171$, $p=0.04$). As regards the cultural dimension, indulgence vs. restraint, we observed that societies based on social restraint are more likely to use YouTube ($T= -2.693$, $p= 0.015$) and Facebook ($T= -2.261$, $p= 0.036$). In this context, we can underline the fact that societies based on self-expression and social indulgence are more likely to have an increased level of trust in media ($T= 2.747$, $p=0.03$) and an increased level of online media consumption ($T= 2.107$, $p=0.049$). Figure 4 captures these findings, suggesting the relevance of self-expression in the field of confidence and media consumption:

Figure 4. Social Media Usage for News and Media Trust by Indulgence vs. Restraint



In order to achieve our research objectives, we estimated relevant predictors of trust in media and social media consumption in dependence on cultural and economic variables. However, using a multiple linear equation based on the stepwise method, we estimated that the dyadic relation between collaboration-competition ($R^2= 0.353$) and net average salary ($R^2= 0.373$) are significant predictors of trust in media. Therefore, trust could be seen as a linear combination of collaboration, competition, and economic development. In line with this result, we stress that collaboration-competition ($R^2= 0.281$) and uncertainty avoidance ($R^2= 0.195$) are significant predictors of online media consumption. Figure 5 presents two regression models that explain and predict both trust in media and online media consumption for news.

Figure 5. Regression Models for Trust and Online media consumption for news



Empirical results suggest that there are significant differences between variables by geographical regions. Power distance is an important factor that could explain further evolutions of trust and online media consumption for news and political information. However, the level of competition and income predict the dynamics of trust in media across our sample. The levels of collaboration, risk, and flexibility might predict the evolution of online media consumption across EU countries. Results underscore the importance of cultural values and socio-economic conditions in shaping both trust and digital behavior.

7. Conclusions

The literature review presents cultural values as a core element of socio-political analysis, because they shape civic participation, cultural identity, social cohesion, and the functionality of democratic institutions. Values are neither uniform nor fixed; they evolve in response to economic, social, political, and digital contexts, and value pluralism is becoming a defining feature of contemporary Europe. In the European Union, cultural values are essential for the development of effective public policies, the promotion of inclusion and tolerance, and the consolidation of democracy. They influence both individual behavior and institutional structures, generating cohesion and solidarity in all societies. The paper highlights the relevance of power distance, collaboration and competition, and self-expression values as factors that could interact with trust in media and online media consumption.

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