

An Empirical Analysis of the Impact of Media Trust on Media Usage Frequency: The Moderating Roles of Education and Income

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Abstract—This paper investigates the impact of media trust on media usage frequency, with a focus on the moderating effects of income and education. Using data from the Gallup World Poll, our analysis reveals that high-income individuals increase their media consumption when they trust the media, while higher-educated individuals rely less on trust. The study contributes to the existing literature by incorporating interaction terms for income and education, providing a more nuanced understanding of how socioeconomic factors influence the relationship between media trust and consumption. These findings have significant implications for media organizations aiming to retain consumer engagement.

Keywords-media trust; media use; moderating effects; Gallup World Poll

1. Introduction

The news media is a core tool for information dissemination in modern society. It serves as a lens through which individuals perceive society and the world. For it to effectively play this role, a crucial condition is that people both trust and actively engage with the news media (Fletcher, 2017). If the public lacks trust in the media, the efficiency of information flow decreases, potentially leading to the creation of information silos.

In recent years, the rise of bias and fake news has posed significant challenges to public trust in the media (Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019; Benkler et al., 2018; Kavanagh and Rich, 2018). Media trust appears to be steadily declining, and many citizens are increasingly skeptical of the news they consume. Comparative research shows that only 49 percent of people across surveyed countries trust “most news most of the time” (Newman et al., 2019, p. 20). In the United States, trust in “the mass media” has seen a dramatic drop, falling from 68 percent in 1968 to just 32 percent in 2016, according to Gallup (Jones, 2018). Although there has been a slight recovery, only 12 percent of Americans currently express “a great deal” of confidence in the media (Guess et al., 2018). While some studies argue that general claims of declining media trust are overstated (Hanitzsch et al., 2018), the growing prevalence of biased reporting and fake news underscores the fragility of public trust in news media, which remains under significant strain.

Understanding the potential social impacts of declining media trust has become crucial. One important question is whether declining trust in the news media might lead to reduced usage, potentially pushing people toward non-mainstream channels or even unreliable sources, thereby further exacerbating the deterioration of the information environment. However, it remains unclear how much people trust the news media and the extent to which this trust influences their media usage (Jesper, 2020). Existing literature has extensively studied media usage behavior with scatter focuses, diverting attention from media trust as a core factor. The mechanisms linking declining trust to reduced news consumption remain underexplored, overlooking the moderating effects of socioeconomic factors such as income level and education. Moreover, most studies rely on outdated datasets; for example, Hanitzsch et al. (2018) used data from 1981 to 2014, which fails to capture significant changes in the media industry over the past decade, particularly the impact of digital

development. These gaps provide a valuable opportunity for our research to use updated data, center media trust as a key determinant of media usage, and explore the moderating effects of socioeconomic factors, thereby contributing fresh insights to the existing literature.

Using data from the 2016 Gallup World Poll conducted globally, our study highlights the strong connection between trust and user behavior, especially among high-income groups. As media outlets increasingly employ political bias and misinformation to attract and retain audiences (Brookings, 2021), this paper emphasizes the critical relationship between media trust and media usage, serving as an urgent wake-up call for news organizations. Our study tried to indicate the potential losses that news media may face if they prioritize sensationalism and false narratives to capture readers' attention. Decline in media trustworthiness or credibility in the news media could result in even greater setbacks for the industry. Our findings provide practical guidance for contemporary media outlets—to survive and even thrive in the long term, it is crucial to rebuild the news in trust by focusing on improving content quality and transparency. This, in turn, helps us better understand how the public consumes information, offering insights for the development of the media industry and policymaking, ultimately promoting more efficient information flow in society.

This paper begins with a discussion of previous literature on media use, focusing on both theoretical and empirical studies, and explains how our work contributes to existing gaps in terms of topic selection, data choice, and methodology. Following this, the Methodology section provides a detailed introduction to our dataset, variable selection, and econometric specification. In the next section, we present the results of our baseline regression, showing that media trust has a significantly positive effect on media use. In our analysis of moderating effects, the results indicate that income level positively moderates the relationship between media trust and media use, while education level plays a negative moderating role. To explore this intriguing finding, we delve into both theoretical and empirical perspectives in the Discussion section to provide possible explanations behind these results. Through this study, we hope to encourage greater academic attention to the relationship between trust and media behavior, while also offering directions and references for future research.

2. Literature review

Media that produce news are definitely one of the most important sources for the public to acquire information. Theoretical models had predicted that media outlets will decide to have the slant if it maximizes its own profit (Shapiro and Gentzkow, 2010). However, we believe that such adoption of slant may induce negative influence on those media outlets. Specifically, it reduces their consumer trust, but “trust matters and has behavioral consequences” (Stromback et al, 2020). Stromback et al (2020) then suggest, trust on media is highly related to the bias produced by them, while the lack of trust in media ends up with fewer use of mainstream sources ---- people start to take non-mainstream sources instead (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). What makes things even worse is that, since 2016, public trust in media has steadily declined (Stromberg et al, 2020).

We already have some precedents incorporating media trust into theoretical models. Like, Stone et al (2014) provided a model over “distortion bias, and consumers trusting like-minded media to deliver more accurate news”, while gradually increasing competition due to media differentiation has made media outlets more biased and less informative (Stone et al, 2014). More on that, there is also a model predicting that media can distort information consumers receive in some cases without hurting, “even though news consumers are perfectly rational and know the bias of the publishers, because the consumers do not know how much information the news organization has” (Anderson and McLaren, 2012). Anderson and McLaren (2012) also point out that it might not work out sometimes due to the scenario that rational consumers can be suspicious of the news monopoly brought by political motivations. As we also anticipate consumer’s suspicion on media an essential factor that media companies cannot ignore when making decisions, we therefore concern about impact dealt by public trust in media on news consumption, which becomes frequency of consuming news. Consequently, our research makes it our goal to provide additional information for the theoretical model and demonstrate whether the impact is significant or not.

Further looking into the field, we notice that there are not many recent empirical studies using large-scale recent data and have examined the issue of how trust as a factor influences media consumption. For comparatively new empirical research, we have Hanitzsch et al (2018) doing empirical analysis showing that media trust has been declining in many countries in the world. They

adopt panel data from 1981 to 2014 to synthesize trust in the press across time, which does not adequately talk about how such decline in trust alters news consumption. Besides, the change we had in the media industry in the past 10 years was undoubtedly a huge step forward, bringing in more comprehensive media outlets. Also, the study only samples from at most 93 countries, which we think can find databases that can improve the number to 168 countries. On the flip, Edgerly (2022) did investigate consumption of news with newer data from 2019 that both cognitive and emotional attitudes significantly contribute to news avoidance behaviors, which means consumers are less likely to consume news when they perceive it as biased or untrustworthy. Nevertheless, behind its finding that news consumption was on a low pattern due to such emotional factors, it failed to generate an explanation on the phenomenon, which we think can dig deeper. Another key difference between this study and ours would be that it split its attention to subfactors like value of news, cognitive ability, and emotional costs instead of media trust itself.

Extending the field, we did think about elements which alter and control people's trust in the media. Tsfaty and Cappella (2005) mentioned an element through another empirical study that employed regression techniques to test the relationship between news skepticism and news exposure with NFC as a moderating variable, showing that people with a high need for cognition (NFC) are more likely to consume news even if they are skeptical about its trustworthiness. These individuals are driven by a desire for information and cognitive stimulation, leading them to seek out news despite their skepticism. In contrast, those with a low need for cognition are more likely to avoid news they distrust. While this study focused on psychological traits reflecting news consumption, it inspired us to think beyond psychological factors and bring in socio-economic ones. As Edgerly (2022) also did not include interaction terms in their study, we have been considering bringing moderation effects of income level and education level into our regression may help us more precisely describe and explain the effect, also to provide better guidance for future decision making of those media companies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

This study utilizes data from the Gallup World Poll, a global survey conducted annually from 2006 to 2023, covering 168 countries and addressing a wide range of topics, including well-being, employment, law and order, food security, migration, health, financial issues, civic engagement, and media use. The data are collected through probability sampling, ensuring that the sample is nationally representative of the population aged 15 years and older. In developed countries, data collection is primarily conducted through telephone interviews, whereas in many developing countries, face-to-face interviews are employed to increase accessibility and ensure representativeness. This methodology ensures that the Gallup World Poll is considered one of the most authoritative sources for global public opinion data.

For this analysis, we specifically utilize data from the 2016 survey, which includes 86,189 respondents from 186 countries. The year 2016 was selected due to the significant global political and social events that influenced public discourse on media, trust, and disinformation. This period marked a sharp rise in public debates about media credibility, making it an appropriate year for examining the relationship between media trust and media usage. The large sample size and broad geographical coverage of the data provide a robust basis for cross-sectional analysis and enhance the generalizability of our findings across diverse contexts.

3.2 Variables

In this study, the dependent variable is media usage frequency, which measures how often respondents used media, such as television, radio, or the Internet, to consume news and information in the past seven days. Responses are recorded on an ordinal scale, ranging from "Every day" to "Did not use media." The primary independent variable, media trust, gauges respondents' trust in the news and information provided by media outlets in their country, with response categories including "A great deal," "Somewhat," and "Not at all." This variable is critical for our analysis, as it allows us to investigate how trust in media influences individuals' media consumption behavior.

To control for potential confounding factors, we include several demographic and socioeconomic variables in the analysis. Age is treated as a continuous variable, as previous research suggests that media consumption habits vary significantly across different age groups. Gender is included as a binary variable, acknowledging the documented differences in media consumption patterns between men and women. Socioeconomic controls such as education and income are also incorporated. Education is measured based on the respondent's highest completed level, ranging from "Completed elementary education or less" to "Completed four years of education beyond high school," while income is recorded as the respondent's annual household income in local currency. Both variables are expected to influence media consumption, with higher education and income levels potentially associated with more frequent media use.

Lastly, we account for geographical factors by including urbanicity, which measures the degree of urbanization on a scale from 1 to 4, and country, which accounts for country-level differences in media systems and access to information. More urbanized regions are expected to provide greater access to a variety of media platforms, influencing media usage patterns. By including these control variables, we aim to isolate the effect of media trust on media consumption and to explore whether income and education moderate this relationship.

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the key variables used in this analysis. The dataset comprises 85,623 observations for most variables, with slightly fewer (84,990) for income due to missing data. The independent variable, trust, has a mean of 1.137, with values ranging from 0 to 2, indicating the distribution of trust levels in media across the sample population. The dependent variable, frequency of media usage, has a mean of 5.66, with a standard deviation of 2.08, and ranges from 1 (indicating very low usage) to 7 (indicating daily use).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
trust	85623	1.137	.592	0	2
frequency	85623	5.657	2.078	1	7
age	85623	40.888	17.599	15	100
gender	85623	.469	.499	0	1
education	85623	1.801	.663	1	3
income	84990	4119118.1	20732124	0	9.600e+08

urbancity1	85623	2.49	1.207	1	4
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In terms of demographic variables, the age of respondents has a mean of 40.89 years, with a wide distribution ranging from 15 to 100 years, suggesting a diverse age sample. Gender is a binary variable with a mean of 0.469, where 0 represents male and 1 represents female, indicating that the sample is roughly equally split between genders. Education is measured on a scale from 1 to 3, with a mean of 1.80, reflecting the range of educational attainment in the sample. For socioeconomic variables, income displays significant variability, with a mean of approximately 4.12 million in local currency and a large standard deviation, indicating high income inequality among respondents. Lastly, urbanicity is measured on a scale from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.49, suggesting that respondents are, on average, from moderately urbanized areas. These descriptive statistics provide an overview of the sample's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, offering insights into the diversity and representativeness of the dataset. They also highlight the variability in key variables such as trust in media and frequency of media consumption, which will be explored in the subsequent regression analyses.

3.3 Econometric specification

For the baseline regression model, we used an OLS model where i represents an individual respondent, β_1 denotes the coefficient for media trust, λ represents the coefficients for control variables, and ε_i is the error term. In this research, we conducted the analysis at the individual level, focusing on how subjective trust in media influences an individual's frequency of media consumption. The control variables (controls_i) include age, gender, urbanity, education, and country.

In Model 2 of the baseline regression, education is replaced by income. We avoid using education and income as control variables in the same regression model due to the potential for multicollinearity between these two variables, as they are often highly correlated in practice. Since the scale of income is relatively large, we applied a log transformation to normalize it. Additionally, in all analyses, country is controlled as a categorical variable. However, given the potential complexity and length of regression results with country variables, we chose not to display country-level results in the final presentation.

$$Frequency_i = \beta_1 * Trust_i + \lambda * controls_i + \varepsilon_i$$

To examine the moderating effects of education and income on the relationship between trust and media consumption, we constructed interaction terms between trust and these variables. In these models, the control variables remained age, gender, urbanity, and country. With interaction terms, we adopt the method commonly used by prominent researchers by including the main effect of income (or education) in both models to ensure the correct interpretation of the interaction effect.

$$Frequency_i = \beta_1 * Trust_i + \beta_2 * Trust_i * Education_i + \lambda * controls_i + \varepsilon_i$$

$$Frequency_i = \beta_1 * Trust_i + \beta_2 * Trust_i * Lincome_i + \lambda * controls_i + \varepsilon_i$$

4. Result

4.1 Baseline regression

Table 1 presents the primary findings from the baseline regression analysis. The impact of trust on frequency is both positive and statistically significant across all model specifications. In this analysis, we use different control variables to examine how trust influences frequency under varying conditions.

In the first model, education is included as a control variable. The results indicate that trust has a strong positive effect on frequency (coefficient = 0.2847887, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that individuals with higher levels of trust tend to engage in more frequent activities.

In the second model, we substitute education with income as a control variable. The effect of trust remains highly significant (coefficient = 0.2873174, $p < 0.001$), reaffirming the strong link between trust and frequency. The inclusion of income as a control variable reveals a significant positive impact on frequency (coefficient = 0.1874355, $p < 0.001$). The results suggest that higher-income individuals tend to exhibit more frequent behaviors. Other control variables, including age (coefficient = 0.0081119, $p < 0.001$), gender (coefficient = 0.125809, $p < 0.001$), and urbanicity (coefficient = 0.1253243, $p < 0.001$), continue to show similar significant patterns as in the first model.

Table 2. The Effect of Trust on Frequency

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)
	frequency	frequency
trust	0.285*** (0.0119)	0.287*** (0.0129)

age	0.00908*** (0.000413)	0.00811*** (0.000446)
gender	0.136*** (0.0135)	0.126*** (0.0146)
education	0.311*** (0.0114)	
urbancity1	0.113*** (0.00616)	0.125*** (0.00671)
lincome		0.187*** (0.00935)
Constant	3.993*** (0.0734)	2.794*** (0.114)
Observations	85,623	71,985
R-squared	0.126	0.126

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Overall, the findings from both models are consistent, demonstrating that trust is a strong predictor of frequency, regardless of whether education or income is controlled. Additionally, the control variables highlight the important roles of demographic and socioeconomic factors in shaping individuals' behavior patterns.

4.2 The moderating effects of Income

In the first model, the interaction between trust and logarithmic income (lincome) is analyzed to determine how the relationship between trust and frequency changes across different income levels. The coefficient for the interaction term (trust_lincome_interaction) is positive (0.0145391) and statistically significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.024$). This suggests that as income increases, the positive relationship between trust and frequency also strengthens. Specifically, higher levels of trust have a more pronounced effect on frequency for individuals with greater income.

Table 3. The Moderation Effect of Income

VARIABLES	(1) frequency
trust	0.126* (0.0756)
lincome	0.124***

	(0.0123)
trust_lincome_interaction	0.0145**
	(0.00646)
age	0.00956***
	(0.000451)
gender	0.114***
	(0.0146)
urbancity1	0.107***
	(0.00676)
Constant	2.980***
	(0.142)
Observations	71,985
R-squared	0.131

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

To explore the relationship between media trust and news consumption frequency while considering income as a moderating variable, the following analysis calculates how the effect of media trust changes at different levels of income, with lincome representing the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles, labeled as 1, 2, and 3, respectively. The marginal effect demonstrates how a one-unit change in trust impacts the dependent variable (frequency) at these specified income levels. At lower income levels, each 1-unit increase in trust leads to an approximate 0.268-unit rise in media use frequency, while at higher income levels, a 1-unit increase in trust corresponds to a more substantial 0.319-unit rise in media use frequency.

Table 4. Margin Effects Analysis

		Delta-Method					[95% conf. interval]
		dy/dx	std. err.	t	P> t		
trust	_at						
	1	.268	.0171	15.71	0.000	.235	.302
	2	.293	.0129	22.66	0.000	.267	.318
	3	.319	.0173	18.49	0.000	.286	.353

A plot of the marginal effects is generated, with lincome on the x-axis, visually illustrating how the relationship between trust and media consumption varies across income levels. indicating that as income increases, the influence of trust on media usage frequency becomes stronger.

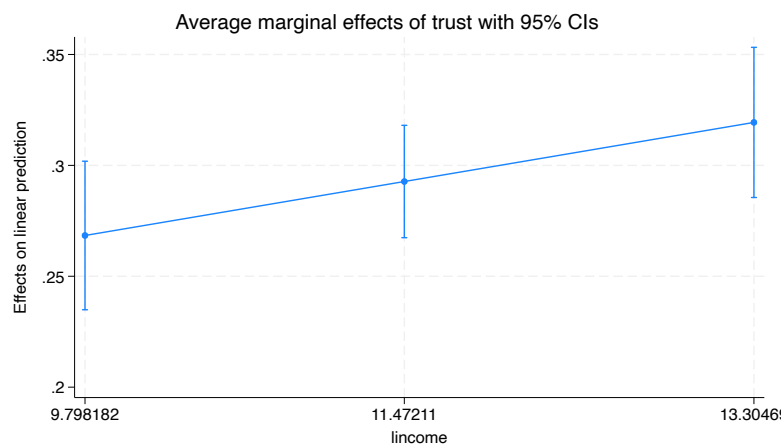


Figure 1. Margin Plot

4.3 The moderating effects of Education

In the second model, the interaction between trust and education is examined. The coefficient for the interaction term (trust_education_interaction) is negative (-0.0750416) and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This negative interaction suggests that as education levels increase, the relationship between trust and frequency weakens. In other words, the effect of trust on frequency diminishes as individuals become more educated. This could indicate that more educated individuals may rely less on trust in making decisions that affect frequency.

Notably, both trust and education have strong individual effects in this model, with coefficients of 0.4159563 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.3966608 ($p < 0.001$), respectively. This highlights that while both trust and education are positively associated with frequency, the interaction between the two suggests a more complex relationship.

Table 5. The Moderation Effect of Education

VARIABLES	(1)
	frequency

trust	0.416*** (0.0324)
education	0.397*** (0.0227)
trust_education_interaction	-0.0750*** (0.0173)
age	0.00911*** (0.000413)
gender	0.136*** (0.0135)
urbancity1	0.113*** (0.00616)
Constant	3.839*** (0.0814)
Observations	85,623
R-squared	0.126

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

To explore the relationship between media trust and news consumption frequency while considering education as a moderating variable, the following analysis calculates how the effect of media trust changes at different levels of education, with 1, 2, and 3 representing elementary education, secondary education, and post-secondary education (beyond high school), respectively. The marginal effect demonstrates how a one-unit change in trust impacts the dependent variable (frequency) at these specified education levels. At lower education levels, each 1-unit increase in trust leads to an approximate 0.334-unit rise in media use frequency, while at higher education levels, a 1-unit increase in trust corresponds to a more substantial 0.184-unit rise in media use frequency.

Table 6. Margin Effects Analysis

		Delta-Method					
		dy/dx	std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
trust	_at						
	1	.334	.0176	18.96	0.000	.299	.368
	2	.260	.0127	20.40	0.000	.234	.284
	3	.184	.0025	7.45	0.000	.136	.233

A plot of the marginal effects is generated, with education level on the x-axis, visually illustrating how the relationship between trust and media consumption varies across education levels. indicating that as education increases, the influence of trust on media usage frequency becomes weaker.

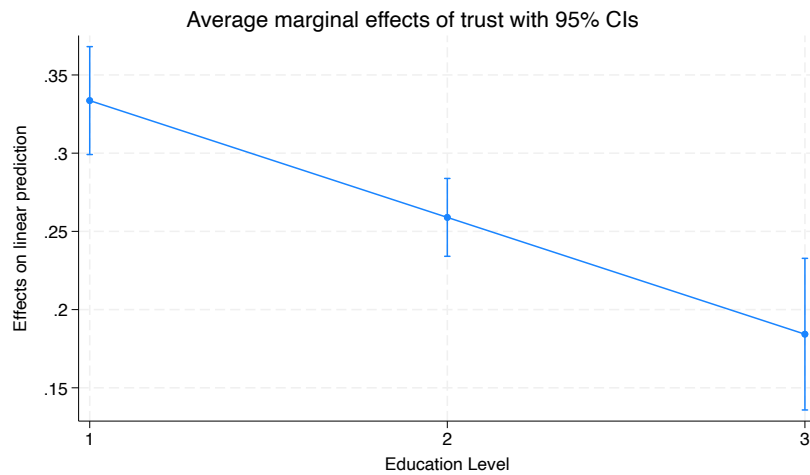


Figure 2. Margin Plot

5. Discussion

In presenting the main results, we have established the conclusion that when individuals place trust in the media, their frequency of reading media news increases. When examining the moderating effects of income and education on the relationship between trust and news consumption, we observed a very interesting phenomenon: the moderating effect of income is positive, while the moderating effect of education is negative. However, both income and education have been empirically shown in numerous studies to be significantly positively correlated (World Bank, 2019; Gumus and Kayhan, 2012). By observing the fact that both of them are positively associated with news reading frequency (Table 2) and negatively associated with the level of trust in the media (Table 7), we will attempt to explain why the moderating effects of income and education show opposite signs in this section.

5.1 Trust has a larger impact on media usage for wealthier individuals.

Our first finding is that wealthier individuals tend to have higher media consumption when they trust the media. Studies indicate that wealthier individuals are often better positioned to access diverse information sources due to their financial resources (Reuters Institute, 2018). When wealthy

individuals place their trust in the media, they are not only willing but able to invest in the products and services offered by the media outlets they believe in (World Economic Forum, 2020). In other words, their trust is more likely to be translated into increased consumption and loyalty. In comparison to low-income people, their financial constraints might prevent them from further investing in the information resources they have trust in. According to the Scarcity Theory developed by Mullainathan and Shafir, scarcity can impose cognitive constraints and alter how people prioritize decisions (Hilbert et al., 2013). Resource scarcity that poor individuals face often leads them to focus on immediate, basic survival needs, such as paying bills or meeting daily necessities (Hilbert et al., 2013; Edgerly, 2021). While reading high-quality news could be beneficial for personal development (Digital News Report, 2018), this activity is not directly related to their urgent, current concerns and is often overlooked (Reuters Institute, 2017; Edgerly, 2021). Therefore, even if poor individuals believe that news sources are trustworthy and recognize the long-term benefits of reading these news, tunneling effects limit their ability to allocate sufficient time or resources to focus on such consumption activities (Sawady and Tescher, 2008).

Time-allocation theory proposed by Gary Becker provides alternative explanation. The theory indicates that as income increases, time becomes more expensive, and therefore, the amount of time spent on unproductive consumption activities tend to decrease, allowing for more time to be allocated to work (Becker, 1965). Based on that, Gary Becker also pointed out that for high-income individuals, the cost of time will be less for commodities that contribute to productive efforts (Becker, 1965). The opportunity cost of time spent reading and seeking news should be perceived as lower, given that this activity can benefit personal and professional development, indirectly contributing to earnings. However, the belief in the usefulness of news for their career is significantly influenced by individuals trust in news media (Reuters Institute, 2023). This supports our finding: when high-income individuals trust news and believe it is valuable for career advancement, they are more likely to view the opportunity cost of consuming news as low and willingly invest more time in it. Conversely, if news is perceived as untrustworthy, high-income individuals are even less willing than low-income individuals to waste time on it, as their time is more expensive.

5.2 Individuals with higher education levels rely less on trust to guide their media consumption.

An intuitive explanation is that highly educated individuals tend to develop more consistent and stable reading habits due to their long-term exposure to structured study routines and self-regulated learning strategies (Abid et al., 2023). Once these habits are formed, individuals are likely to maintain their established news consumption patterns, even amidst changes in content or media environment (Katenga et al., 2019). Similarly, Swart (2017) suggests that the habitual nature of news consumption makes these routines so entrenched that, as long as factors like situational fit, availability, and accessibility remain constant, it becomes difficult to break the habit—even when certain news outlets are deemed “too unreliable.” This helps to explain why the news consumption frequency of highly educated individuals is not significantly influenced by temporary shifts in their attitude toward the media.

The second explanation is that for individuals with high education level, referential function of news (i.e., the need to learn accurate information about the impersonal world) might not be the sole reason that drives news consumption. When other motivations are present, trust in the media becomes less relevant (Tsfati and Cappella, 2005). Typically, people read the news to understand truth and facts, which leads them to prefer sources they trust (Swart, J., & Broersma, 2022). However, for individuals with higher levels of education, their need for cognition tends to be greater (Jebb et al. 2016). Even if they generally hold a distrustful attitude towards the media, they still engage with news to satisfy their cognitive needs (Tsfati and Cappella, 2005). Just as some enjoy solving riddles and puzzles, those with high need for cognition typically take pleasure in engaging with challenging, analytical problems and enjoy thinking critically, including evaluating issues presented in complex news reports (Tsfati and Cappella, 2005). Moreover, individuals with a high need for cognition also seek diversity of viewpoints. They aim to better understand the world not only by obtaining accurate and objective information but also by familiarizing themselves with different arguments and counterarguments surrounding issues. They enjoy thinking critically, including evaluating issues presented in complex news reports because their goal is to enrich their own views by understanding different perspectives (Tsfati and Cappella, 2005). These motivations underlying news consumption are unrelated to the trustworthiness of the source.

In addition, more educated individuals tend to be better at critically evaluating information, such as fact-checking, cross-referencing multiple news sources, and identifying bias (Edgerly, 2021). They possess greater news literacy, an essential skill for effectively accessing, analyzing, and evaluating news content (Craft et al., 2013; Digital News Report, 2018). In comparison, people with lower level of education often lack these news media literacy skills, making them more susceptible to news fatigue, where they may become frustrated or overwhelmed by complex news or information that contradicts their prior beliefs (Edgerly, 2021). As a result, these people are more likely to avoid the news especially when facing news bias, distrust, and fake news since processing such information can cause cognitive overload and they lack self-confidence in their ability to distinguish opinion from fact (Edgerly, 2017; Schwarzenegger, 2020; Van Duyn and Collier, 2019).

6. Conclusion

This paper has explored the intricate relationship between media trust and media usage frequency, particularly focusing on how income and education moderate this relationship. Our findings suggest that trust in the media plays a significant role in influencing media consumption, with its effects varying depending on an individual's socioeconomic status.

First, we found that income positively moderates the relationship between media trust and media usage. Higher-income individuals tend to increase their media consumption when they trust the news, as they have the financial resources to invest in accessing various information sources. This result aligns with the Scarcity Theory, which suggests that individuals with higher income face lower opportunity costs when consuming media that could benefit their career and personal development. Conversely, lower-income individuals, constrained by limited resources and cognitive bandwidth, are less likely to invest time and resources in media consumption, even if they trust the media.

Second, education plays a contrasting role. While more educated individuals consume more media overall, their reliance on trust to guide their media usage is lower compared to those with less education. This may be attributed to their ability to critically evaluate information and access diverse viewpoints, which allows them to engage with news sources even when they hold a skeptical view of

the media. Highly educated individuals often seek out news to satisfy their cognitive needs, rather than merely relying on media trust for consumption decisions.

Overall, our study underscores the importance of media trust in shaping media consumption behavior, but it also reveals that the effects of trust are not uniform across socioeconomic groups. For media outlets aiming to maintain credibility and sustain consumer engagement, it is crucial to consider these varying dynamics, particularly as trust remains a fragile element in the public's relationship with the media. By prioritizing credibility and reliability, news organizations can ensure greater engagement, especially among wealthier and more skeptical audiences, and sustain their long-term relevance in an increasingly polarized media landscape.

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Appendix

Table 7. The Effect of Income/Education on Media Trust

VARIABLES	(1) trust	(2) trust
education	-0.0285*** (0.00328)	
age	0.000903*** (0.000119)	0.00104*** (0.000128)
gender	-0.0172*** (0.00387)	-0.0202*** (0.00422)
urbancity1	-0.0166*** (0.00177)	-0.0170*** (0.00193)
lincome		-0.00751*** (0.00270)
Constant	0.951*** (0.0208)	0.968*** (0.0328)
Observations	85,623	71,985
R-squared	0.110	0.106

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1