

## CHAPTER 2

# Strengthened Trust? Immigrants' Media Consumption During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Norway

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**Abstract:** This chapter is about media-consumption among 60 Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds during the pandemic (March 2020 – July 2021). Through qualitative in-depth interviews, and a structured questionnaire the study explores access to and consumption of different sources of media among the informants during the pandemic. The study investigates ways informants employed various media to orient themselves regarding the pandemic and sought out information about COVID-19 and infection control. The study further looks at what the target group focused on in terms of information and how overall information about the virus impacted their everyday lives. Firstly, a review of the aggregated data reveals a significant multi-consumption of media among the informants, including Norwegian and international media, as well as media from the country of origin. This finding is further confirmation of the marked multi-consumption of media among “immigrants” a number of other studies refer to. Secondly, the study reveals the informants’ relatively strong trust in Norwegian media, while they consider “non-Norwegian” media as less credible and reliable. This finding stands in contrast to studies in which immigrants consider media in their host country to be sources of exclusion and marginalization. Thirdly, the study reveals the relatively significant role that “resource persons”, in form of friends, neighbors, colleagues, etc., played in the informants’ search for relevant information about COVID-19.

**Keywords:** immigrants, pandemic, COVID-19, media consumption, multi-use, trust, premise suppliers

Citation: Alghasi, S. & Stampe, P. L. (2024). Strengthened trust? Immigrants’ media consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic in Norway. In S. Alghasi, E. C. Vanvik, J. Barland & J. Falkheimer (Eds.), *Strategic communication – contemporary perspectives* (Ch. 2, pp. 15–36). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.208.ch2>  
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## Introduction

Since the early 1970s, immigration has been a major source of contention in the Norwegian public debate. Norway has evolved into a multicultural society with a diverse population that has a wide range of interests, perspectives, and affiliations. In today's Norway, approximately 19 percent of the population is classified as having an immigrant background.<sup>1</sup> In Oslo, this share is 34 percent, and in parts of the city such as *Groruddalen*, *Stovner*, and *Søndre Nordstrand*, more than 50% of the population has an immigrant background.<sup>2</sup>

The situation in Norway is similar to elsewhere in Europe, where immigration is often seen as a challenge to the nation-state. Ian Buruma (2006), for example, emphasizes the changing face of Europe caused by immigration, raising the question of how it might be possible to create a *home* for all, despite the existing differences between the inhabitants of a new Europe. Vertovec (2007) launches the term *superdiversity* to describe a distinct diversity in Soho, England where people from many places around the globe live side by side. He raises the question of what *binds* people across different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds to gather around a common *We*. Both Buruma and Vertovec have a clear focus on what might characterize the conditions for a well-functioning European community across all differences.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made its forceful and unprecedented entry to the global stage and Norwegian society, affecting almost every major aspect of everyday life. The pandemic led to many new challenges that needed to be met, many questions that needed to be reflected on, and develop measures for. One may assume the need for a strong sense of unity, collectivity, and solidarity under a global pandemic. Accordingly, this chapter focuses primarily on media-consumption, and the sense of community among Norwegian citizens with an immigrant background under the pandemic. The aim is to establish a better understanding of the conditions that affect a sense of unity and belonging in Norwegian society, an understanding of *the glue* that bound citizens from different backgrounds together under the pandemic. The chapter explores in what ways media consumption among the informants in the sample can be connected to a) strategic communication between the authorities and citizens with immigrant backgrounds, and b) the experience of trust, solidarity and togetherness among the same target group in an existence dominated by the pandemic.

1 <https://www.ssb.no/innvandring-og-innvandrere/faktaside/innvandring>

2 <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/statistikk/befolkning/landbakgrunn/#gref>

## Immigrants' media consumption under the pandemic

Media consumption among immigrants, both inside and outside Norway, is a well-explored topic (Alghasi, 2010, 2012, 2020; Aryal, 2018; Bakøy, 2006; Gillespie, 1995). For instance, research on media consumption has been linked to the question of the exclusion/inclusion of minorities in society at large. This link leads to several interrelated questions: What does media-consumption mean in the everyday life of citizens with immigrant backgrounds? What does media consumption tell us regarding the immigrants' experience of belonging to Norwegian society?

Some studies conclude that media consumption from the *host country* will increase immigrants' understanding of cultural codes and customs and promote language learning (Schudson, 1994). Other studies have concluded that media consumption from the country of origin is an exclusionary practice in relation to the host country, i.e., the more consumption of media from the *country of origin*, the less integrated in the host society (Eckhardt, 1996).

The perspective presented in this chapter does not consider media consumption as a measurable variable of either the exclusion or inclusion of Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds in Norwegian society. This is simply because the picture regarding the question of effect in the relationship between media consumption and formation of meaning is complex and should not be reduced to either the inclusion or exclusion of citizens with immigrant backgrounds into Norwegian society. The idea, however, is that media consumption should preferably be understood as a cultural practice where individuals and groups negotiate *identity*, who they are, and their *position*, where they stand, in relation to society at large (Alghasi, 2009; Mainsah, 2011). Furthermore, the cultural practice of media consumption by immigrants, and the meaning they attribute to media messages is too diverse to be reduced. For example, Alghasi (2009) demonstrates extensive consumption of various media among Norwegian-Iranians, as well as different adaptation strategies in relation to Norwegian society and the experience of belonging as emerged in their media consumption.

## Media consumption and social integration

The question of social integration, solidarity, and sense of belonging has always stood as a fundamental question in social science: How can a society made up of people, preferably with different backgrounds and convictions correspond and hold together? What is *the glue* that binds people together

and forms a community? What are the conditions for the formation of community, togetherness, and sense of belonging?

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) saw society as an organism with various parts and functions as necessary for a functioning society, *organic solidarity*. Furthermore, Durkheim argued that *mechanical solidarity*, a common consciousness, was the key to social cohesion. Cohesion and togetherness were thus the result of functional parts assembled around a collective consciousness. By that he meant that people develop a common consciousness when they perform tasks of the same type. Ferdinand Tönnies (1894–1936) for his part, distinguished between a community based on strong social ties and dependencies between individuals, *Gemeinschaft*, and society built on commercial transactions, *Gesellschaft*. Another key sociologist, Talcott Parsons (1927–1979), was concerned with the integrative, functional role of structures, including value systems, as decisive for the community, and conditions for integration in the community (Aakvaag, 2008).

Ideas about social integration, solidarity, and sense of belonging, as presented above, are well represented in media studies, not least in studies on *audience*, and media consumption. For example, the media has been considered an arena for creating “symbols and sentiments about national identity” (Thompson, 1995, p. 50). A public broadcasting model, for instance, aims to cultivate members of society through, among other things, “transmitting values, habits (...) desirable by an enlightened minority (Alasuutari, 1996, p. 106). It has also been suggested that the media are central in the construction of what Stuart Hall calls the “community of consensus”, i.e., a reference to the media’s homogenizing ability (Hall, 2005, p. 64). Media consumption may be seen as integrative, part and parcel of community-building for individuals and groups with a shared cultural understanding and experience, strengthening their feelings of social belonging to different communities (Gillespie, 1995; Schudson, 1994). Various media events, from major global events such as the Olympic Games, to the daily news coverage can function as integrative in society (Dayan & Katz, 1992).

Following the line of thought presented above, the media consumption of immigrants, may be perceived to have an integrative function, that the media have the potential to absorb immigrants into an imagined “we” in a sense that they, the media, convey values and cultural codes, and immigrants learn about their new surroundings, values and codes, and adopt to new conditions and structures in the host society. As such, the media and media consumption can be considered to be tools for cultural assimilation (Cooley, 1909). Immigrants’ multi-consumption of media has also been a

source of focus, e.g. types of media they consume, and whether they consume media from the country of origin or not. Some studies, for instance, understand immigrants' "home media", meaning media from the country of origin, as inhibiting their integration into host societies (Ekhardt, 1996).

## Methodological-analytical procedure

This chapter aims to establish an understanding of media consumption among Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds under the pandemic. The chapter investigates the interplay between media consumption among a group of Norwegian citizens under the pandemic, and their sense of social integration and belonging, as well their strategies for communication in Norwegian society. In this regard the study relies on data collected among 60 informants. All of the informants are Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds, living in Oslo and the surrounding area.

**Table 1** Key information about the informants in the sample. N = 60

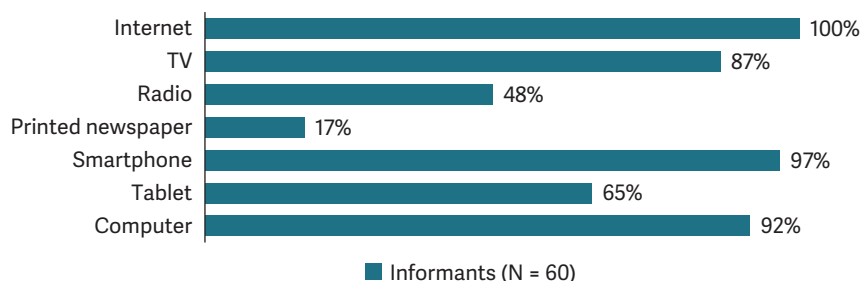
Variable	Variable groups	Numeric value
Gender	Female	20
	Male	40
Age	18–25 years old	4
	26–35 years old	17
	36–45 years old	22
	46–55 years old	9
	56–66 years old	6
	over 67 years old	2
	More than 12 years	34
Education	12 years	15
	0–7 years	9
	No answer	2
Years lived in Norway	0–7 years	16
	8–14 years	23
	15–25 years	13
	over 25 years	8
Infection pressure (based on country of origin). <sup>3</sup>	Low	21
	Middle	18
	High	21

3 Low = includes countries in Western Europe, Brazil, Philippines, Thailand, and Chile. Middle = Syria, Vietnam, Iran, Nigeria, India, Bulgaria, Poland, Algeria, H = Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Morocco, Iraq, Somalia.

The data collection for the study is two-folded: initially, the informants were asked to answer a set of standardized questions about access to different types of media, their actual media consumption in relation to content, quantity, and the context of their consumption. Here, the results are illustrated by several tables, exclusively presenting a univariate frequency distribution among the informants. Furthermore, this stage made it possible to identify different types of media consumers, and accordingly invite informants with different media-orientations for the next stage in the data-collection process, namely qualitative in-depth interviews. By conducting interviews, informants could be asked about topics such as their media preferences, as well their interpretation of media content relevant for the study. The presentation of data will firstly emphasize which media and content the informants in this study have access to. The second part of the analysis will be linked to media consumption during the pandemic, with a focus on a) types of media consumed, and b) what the informants' media consumption during the pandemic tells us.

## Media consumption: A portrait

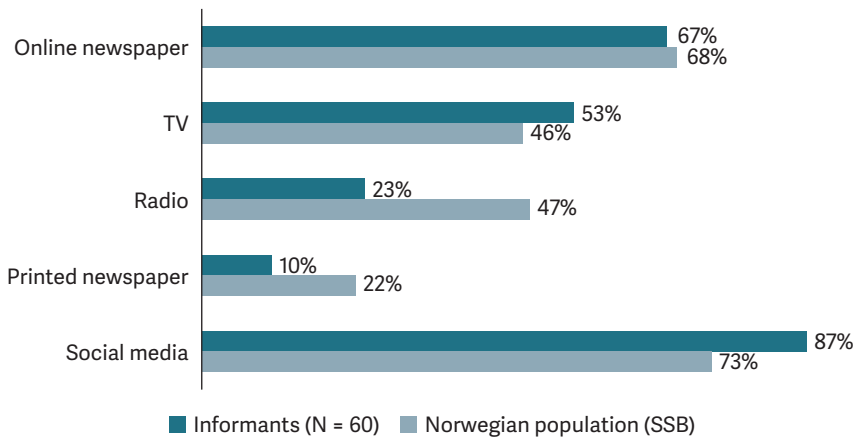
There are several elements that characterize media consumption among the informants in this study. One element is related to the *various media informants have access to*. Norway is a country with a widespread media landscape, and the majority of the population has access to a range of traditional and digital media. The same is the case with the informants in this study. Figure 1 illustrates the informants' access to various media at home.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1** Percentage of informants with access to various forms of media at home.

<sup>4</sup> We do not have any directly comparable figures for Norway's population in general, but statistics on use (cf. Figure 2) indicate that access is relatively similar.

Secondly, it is clear that *online media* are the most important media for the informants. The only non-online medium that the informants describe as important is television; however, television viewing appears to be a far more passive way to access information than the other media, according to the interviews. There are also more people amongst the informants who state that they watch TV broadcasts and TV clips from foreign channels online.



**Figure 2** Percentage of informants who use the following medias daily, compared to the general population.<sup>5</sup>

As illustrated above, the informants, as a group or individually, to a greater extent than the rest of Norway's population, state that they consume social media on a daily basis (difference of 15 percentage points). These tendencies were further confirmed during the qualitative in-depth interviews, where online media appears as an integral part of the informants' everyday life, creating a commonality. Informants describe online media as flexible and more suited to their needs; online media are always available, you can "check your phone" when you get up, on the bus, at lunch, on the toilet, when you're bored, before going to bed, and so on. Online media have a presence throughout the day in a way that traditional media do not.

<sup>5</sup> Sources: Norsk mediebarometer 2021, Statistisk sentralbyrå; Bruk av IKT i husholdningen (2019), Statistisk sentralbyrå.

Most of the informants point to the smartphone as crucial for keeping in touch with their country of origin on different levels. They keep in touch with friends and family through chat apps, follow famous people and media channels on social media, read online newspapers, and orient themselves regarding important political or social issues. This portrayal of informants and their consumption of online content on smartphones is confirmed in other research, among others, research on refugees and their media consumption. Smartphones seem to be crucially important for people who are on the run, or refugees and asylum seekers, with great need to update themselves with relevant information (Eide, 2019; Mancini et al., 2019). However, it is important to emphasize that the samples in Mancini's and Eide's studies are limited to refugees, but the importance of smartphones for keeping in touch with family and friends in the country of origin is relevant for immigrants regardless of their residence status.

For many, social media are the arenas where they establish a sort of virtual relationship with others and engage with the exchange and sharing of relevant information, experiences, and entertainment. There are many who state that they mainly keep up to date with news from their country of origin through media such as *WhatsApp*, *Facebook Messenger* or other similar chat applications that are popular in their country of origin. The informants often use several such media to keep in touch with people in different countries. In this way, the informants illustrate the importance of media in the formation of transnational and diasporic exchange. Social media, and particularly *Facebook*, are important sources for the informants' acquisition of information and news. It is difficult to say anything about the extent of the news the informants consume through social media, but what we observe is that many are unsure of exactly who publishes what they read, while others consciously follow actors such as *Aftenposten*, the *BBC* or smaller actors who publish news stories about more specific topics.

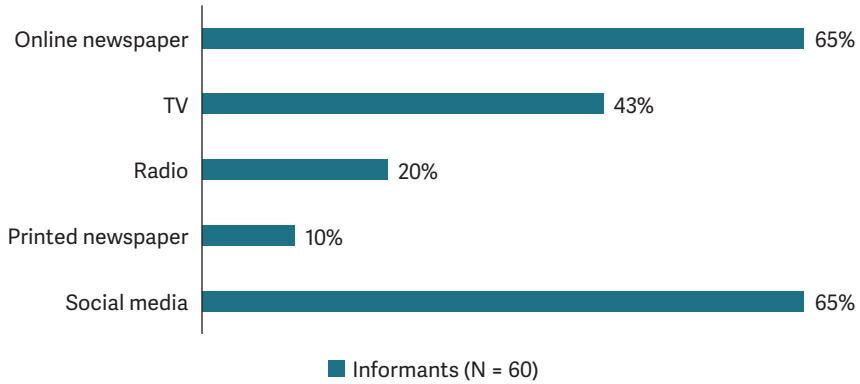
Many of the informants are active users of *YouTube*. The most common use of *YouTube* is for entertainment and learning, including series and films from the country of origin, documentaries, resources for learning Norwegian and hobby-related content about, among other things, gardening and cooking. *YouTube* is also an important source of news and information about the country of origin. Many state that they spend a lot of



time on *YouTube* to find out about news and information related to various topics including politics and economics, or other global and local topics.

To a large extent, the informants' consumption of media mirrors what we see in the general Norwegian population when it comes to consumption of online media compared to traditional media. Online newspapers and social media are clearly the most important form of media the informants consume, while more traditional media such as TV and paper newspapers are less popular (SSB, 2021). It is nevertheless worth noting that the proportion of informants who state that they read newspapers and/or listen to the radio daily is roughly half the Norwegian average. It is difficult to say whether this is an indication that the immigrant population in Norway has a clearer preference for online media than the rest of the population, or whether it is a consequence of barriers, such as language, that exist for immigrants in accessing Norwegian media.

Thirdly, the informants appear to be very much *information-oriented*. They are highly exploratory in their relationship with the media, something that is illustrated by their marked search for news regardless of consuming online- or traditional media. It is also worth adding that the informants' interest and desire for information is not limited to news, but also largely includes niche and hobby information. This orientation towards information and news is further evident in the qualitative in-depth interviews where an orientation towards entertainment and related themes emerged as a secondary focus. Obviously, the informants seek out entertainment while consuming media, but time spent on, or attention paid to entertainment is significantly less than the time and attention they pay to information and news. To put it differently, the attitudes of informants towards entertainment and information appear to be in no way equal – neither in terms of time, nor in terms of attention. In fact, the qualitative interviews also reveal a strong tendency among informants to *monitor* daily news and current affairs across different media. Several of the informants go even further and follow individual journalists, and smaller media houses or professionals that focus on particular topics the informants find important and attractive. This tendency applies in particular to those who seek information from their country of origin and is explained by the fact that they do not always trust the larger media corporations when it comes to sensitive topics such as conflicts.

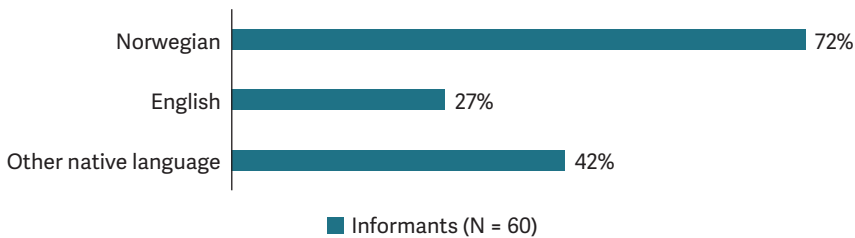


**Figure 3** Percentage of informants who use the following media daily – to follow news.

Fourthly, the informants prove to be *multi-consumers* of media, i.e., they often consume different media sources, among others, media from their country of origin, media from their host country, and international media sources. This multi-consumption is an exemplary illustration of *transnational practice*, where citizens with immigrant backgrounds make use of Norwegian, diasporic, international, and country of origin media sources. The informants consume many of the most common Norwegian sources of news, such as online newspapers, especially *VG*, *Aftenposten* and *NRK*'s online news, but in addition they often consume foreign online newspapers such as the BBC or newspapers from the country of origin. The in-depth interviews reveal that the majority of informants regularly follow non-Norwegian media sources. This orientation, however, according to the University of Oxford's *2022 Digital News Report* is relatively unusual in Norway since the majority of the population in Norway consumes mostly Norwegian media, either traditional or online.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, while the same report indicates that the Norwegian population, to a great degree, follows their local newspaper, this study indicates far less consumption of local newspapers among Norwegian citizen with immigrant backgrounds. This difference in consumption of local newspapers is probably linked to the informants' views that the Norwegian media landscape is distinctively locally focused, and therefore does not meet the need for informants to catch up on more international and global topics.

6 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022>

Obviously, this multi-consumption of media among the informants is a highly complex phenomenon (Alghasi, 2009). However, to mention an important dimension this study reveals, there is a clear interplay between the consumption of online newspapers among the informants and their language skills. Among those who are relatively good at Norwegian, the proportion who read online newspapers is very high, but many of the informants do not master the language well enough to read and understand online newspapers, despite the fact that they may have lived in Norway for quite some time. Traditional media appear to be even less relevant among the informants in this survey compared to the Norwegian population in general. Several of the informants express a preference for traditional media but experience that a language barrier prevents them from consuming Norwegian traditional media to the degree they wish.



**Figure 4** Percentage of informants who follow news in the following languages daily.

Multi consumption of media by informants may be linked to new forms of communication caused by the growing impact of online media, as well as profound changes online media represents compared to traditional media. For instance, while the consumption of traditional media is largely limited to one geographical area at a specific time, online media enable immigrants to engage in diasporic and transnational communication without geographical and temporal limitations. Many of the informants have a strong international orientation and are eager to follow news and current affairs in the country of origin as well as on the global scene. This finding is quite consistent with similar studies that emphasize immigrants' marked search for information and news on many different media sources in Norway, the country of origin, and elsewhere (Alghasi, 2009).

Several informants reveal that their media habits and consumption link their international media-orientation to their "media socialization" in their past, and how they have grown up with media interactions characterized

by an international focus, to a much greater extent than what they find in the Norwegian media. Informants are great consumers of media such as *Al-Jazeera*, *BBC World* and *CNN*. These news channels have no exclusively national focus and cover regional or global issues to a significant degree. Several of the informants reveal that their international media orientation has led to a perception of local news as being more often politicized or otherwise unreliable. Other informants state that their international orientation is related to their view of Norwegian media as being strongly local.

The importance of being a multi-consumer of media in the lives of immigrants is a well-explored topic. For instance, Annabelle Sreberny criticizes the perspective where immigrants are seen as *either* consumers of media from the country of origin, *or* from the country they live in, the host country. Instead, she operates with a “both-and” perspective, i.e., that immigrants consume media from both the country of origin, the host country, and elsewhere, emphasizing the transnational nature of media consumption among immigrants (Sreberny, 2005). Multiple consumption of media is characterized as crucial for maintaining source-critical quality among immigrants (Alghasi, 2009; Sreberny, 2005). This source-critical quality is strongly present among the informants in this study, and clearly evident in the in-depth interviews.

## Media consumption during the pandemic

So far, we have presented some key elements that characterize the informants’ media consumption. As discussed above, the informants mostly consume online media, they are information-oriented, and are often multi-consumers of media. These findings are in line with other studies on Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds (Alghasi, 2009b; Aryal, 2018; Mainsah, 2011). In what follows, we take a closer look at the informants’ media consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the focus is twofold, where we explore a) strategic communication between the authorities and citizens with immigrant backgrounds, and b) the experience of trust, solidarity and togetherness among the informants towards Norwegian society under the pandemic.

In the in-depth interviews, the informants expressed concern about the pandemic. They often highlighted Norwegian media sources, particularly sources such as *NRK*, *TV2* and *VG*, as their primary sources for obtaining information about the pandemic through the Norwegian media.

In addition, they consumed international media sources such as *Al-Jazeera*, *BBC* and *CNN*, and media from the country of origin. Many stated that they got information about the pandemic through social media, especially *Facebook*, but *Instagram* and *YouTube* were also important news channels among the informants. During the in-depth interviews, we asked the informants whether their media habits had changed during the pandemic. Several of the informants stated that they updated themselves on news and information to a greater extent under the pandemic than before. These informants were mostly information-oriented individuals before the pandemic as well, however, they stated that during the pandemic they were much more concerned with news than before. They stated that they were mostly concerned about getting information and news about the number of infected, hospitalized and dead, while gradually their focus shifted to information about travel rules and vaccines.

Some of the informants revealed that the pandemic led to them searching for new media sources, usually online media. One informant told us that after the pandemic, he often used the municipality's website, which he had never used before. This sort of statement, as another informant stated, is interesting since it indicates a new type of involvement and interaction with Norwegian society and media than before the pandemic. When speaking about new media habits under the pandemic, several informants revealed that they searched for information about the coronavirus from public websites such as *helsenorge.no*<sup>7</sup> and *fhi.no*.<sup>8</sup>

Norwegian media, online or traditional, was the most important source for information for the informants during the pandemic. The informants expressed a great deal of trust in the Norwegian media regarding information about the pandemic. This is in line with the trust the overall population in Norway demonstrated towards Norwegian media during this period.<sup>9</sup> Informants in this study indicated that they felt that the Norwegian authorities handled the crisis in a good way, and that they received good information from the media. One informant pointed out that he gained more trust in the Norwegian media during the pandemic. Consumption of Norwegian media has also left its mark on informants with shorter periods of residence in Norway. Some stated that during the

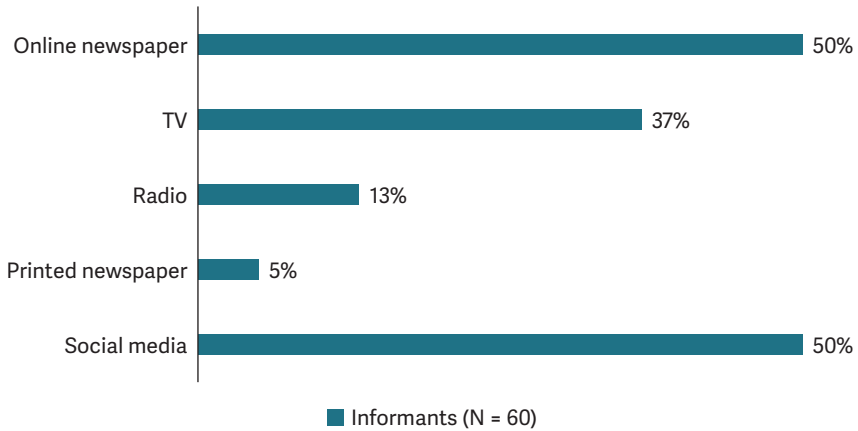
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7 *helsenorge.no* is a national public health information service.

8 *fhi.no* is the website of the National Institute of Public Health.

9 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022>

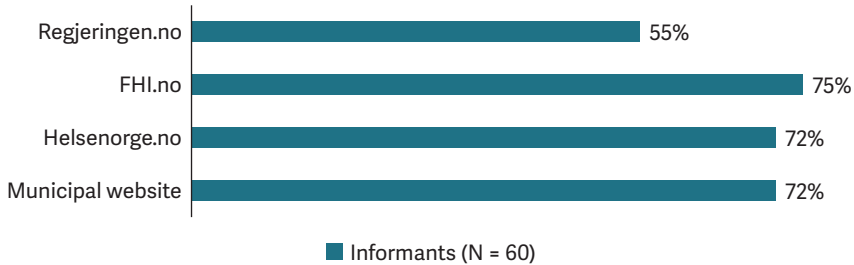
pandemic they accessed more Norwegian media, either because they came to Norway during the pandemic, or because they sensed a progression in their Norwegian language abilities as a result of greater consumption of Norwegian media, further resulting in a better understanding of the content of Norwegian media.



**Figure 5** Percentage of informants who use the following media daily – to follow news on COVID-19.

## Searching for public information on COVID-19

There are several important tendencies that characterize the informants' search for COVID-19 topics. The majority of informants were aware of and sought out information from the Norwegian public authorities, including *regjeringen.no*, *helsenorge.no*, *fhi.no*, as well as relevant websites in the municipalities and districts where they live. However, there seems to be a correlation between the length of time informants had lived in Norway at the time of the pandemic, and consumption of Norwegian public websites among the informants; the longer they had lived in Norway, the greater the consumption of Norwegian sources of information on COVID-19. For those with shorter stays in Norway, there was less consumption of Norwegian sources. However, those informants with shorter stays in Norway stated that they did follow public press conferences about the coronavirus situation in Norway. The press conferences were interpreted directly into various languages, including Arabic, English, Polish, Russian, Somali, Tigrinya and Urdu. The informants described this service as being very useful.



**Figure 6** Percentage of informants who have used the following public websites to find information on COVID-19.

## Language in media consumption

For several of the informants, language was a significant barrier to keeping up with the news and understanding the information provided by the Norwegian media and authorities about COVID-19. This language barrier does not necessarily apply only to those with the weakest knowledge of Norwegian. It is also a significant factor for several of the informants who command the language relatively well, but not fluently. One of the informants, who apparently speaks and writes Norwegian well and had no problems conducting the interview in Norwegian, illustrated this challenge as follows: they are fully able to read a Norwegian newspaper and understand all the content, but they must actively read each sentence and cannot just look at a front page and acquire an immediate impression of the news picture. This means that they often miss out on important news even if they read the newspapers daily. Some of the informants with weaker Norwegian skills said that they became insecure and scared when they did not understand what was happening, and several said that they got help from family or friends to translate and understand information about the pandemic. It was also mentioned that children often functioned as translators for their parents, since children often have better Norwegian language skills than their parents.

## Trust in information from social relationships

The ground-breaking *two-step flow of communication* by Lazarsfeld (1948) emphasizes the importance of social relationships to process and convey media messages to us in a credible and comprehensible way. The qualitative in-depth interviews in this study confirmed the important role of social relationships among the informants regarding the search for relevant and

important information about COVID-19. In many cases, the informants demonstrated a high level of trust in certain social relations, groups and individuals, when obtaining what the informants interpreted as relevant information about COVID-19. For some informants, it was people they knew well, for example family members who had a better understanding of the Norwegian language and healthcare system, while for other informants it was colleagues or people who enjoy public respect and credibility, for example doctors on *TikTok* or *YouTube* such as Wasim Zahid.<sup>10</sup> One of the informants described the importance of trust in an individual person in the following way: “My family contacts me all the time to ask me about news. They know Norwegian but trust more that I can find out what is correct”.

Many of the informants who were in school, often as part of their immigration process, mentioned their teachers as an important source of information about the coronavirus, such as information about infection and prevention measures such as washing hands and keeping a safe distance. They also received help from their teachers on how to look up information on the coronavirus situation. One informant said that previously he found news and information about the coronavirus on Facebook, but after learning about source criticism at school, he used Norwegian online newspapers and public websites to check that the information was correct. Many of the informants also highlighted the workplace as an important source of information about the coronavirus situation and which rules applied. One informant felt that there were often rumors about changes and new measures, but that he did not trust them until they were confirmed at his workplace.

## Media and trust

As described above, many informants consumed Norwegian media sources, including Norwegian public information sources, during the pandemic. This is an indication that the informants demonstrate a high degree of trust towards Norwegian sources, something that was also confirmed in the qualitative in-depth interviews. Informants often singled out Norwegian online newspapers, or Norwegian TV channels such as *NRK* as being highly credible. One of the informants pointed out that *NRK* is a state channel available to everyone, without commercial interests, so that it is

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<sup>10</sup> Wasim Zahid is a Norwegian physician, author, politician and YouTuber who has made an effort to communicate medical advice to people with immigrant backgrounds.



not dependent on clicks and likes for the information they share, and that she therefore had confidence in the channel. Several informants described [helsenorge.no](http://helsenorge.no) and [fhi.no](http://fhi.no) as the most credible sources since these sites convey information from professionals and responsible authorities.

In their accounts on their media consumption during the pandemic, the informants expressed a sense of trust towards Norwegian media, and not least, Norwegian society. They perceive Norwegian society as a society where the population generally trusts public institutions such as the state and the media, and because of this, members of society are often inclined to follow the rules, including rules and restrictions imposed during the pandemic that they did not always agree with. This view was clearly expressed when one of the informants referred to Erna Solberg, Norway's prime minister during the pandemic, saying "[When Erna Solberg] tells us how to handle the situation, not everyone agrees, but almost everyone listens and follows the advice".

Studies such as Helliwell et al. (2016) indicate a greater degree of trust among immigrants in countries with a high degree of trust. Röder and Mühlau's study (2012) also indicates that immigrants often demonstrate a greater trust in institutions in "host societies" than their countries of origin. In their accounts on trust towards Norwegian institutions during the pandemic, informants often made negative comparisons to governing institutions and media sources in their countries of origin. Often, they linked this lack of trust to a lack of democratic institutions in their countries of origin, either because of undemocratic governments, or weakly developed management systems. This relationship of trust between people and institutions in Norway, the informants insisted, stands in sharp contrast with their relationship towards public institutions in their country of origin, which they do not perceive as benefiting the population. Although this is not always the case, there seems to be an attitude among the population in the countries of origin that one does not always follow rules and recommendations set by the authorities. This attitude results in the informants being constantly worried about their near and dear ones in their countries of origin. Even under the pandemic when they did not always understand how all of the rules and restrictions applied to them, they still trusted that the "system" was looking after them in Norway. This attitude is clearly illustrated by one of the informants: "[...] I have been thinking a lot about my family and friends at home. There is a completely different structure for dealing with the pandemic there compared to Norway".

The informants showed reflection regarding their own media consumption. Many of the informants consumed a variety of media sources, online, or traditional, Norwegian, international or from their country of origin, and drew comparisons between these sources. In the process, the informants gained a positive view of Norway's handling of the pandemic, something they believed was reflected in the media's coverage of the pandemic situation in Norway.

## **Strengthened community in times of crisis**

The informants' trust in the Norwegian media's communications on the pandemic gives good reason for reflection. A number of studies confirm a complex relationship between immigrants, their media consumption, and their relationship with the society they have moved to and are a part of. For example, the media consumption of immigrant populations has often been linked to questions of inclusion and exclusion, identity and belonging (Alghasi, 2009, 2023a, 2023b; Anthias, 1998; Gillespie, 1995; Mainsah, 2011; Nikunen, 2008). Several empirical studies reveal immigrants' skeptical relationship with the media. For example, in his study of Norwegian-Iranians and their media consumption in Norway, Alghasi (2009) highlights different ways of relating to Norwegian media. Several Norwegian-Iranians seem to develop a sort of *mental surveillance system* through which they evaluate media narratives, and they employ these evaluations in their processes of identity-work, leading to a sense of inclusion/exclusion. Alghasi's study reveals that in a considerable number of cases, Norwegian-Iranians experience Norwegian media as stereotyping and excluding. In another study, Nikunen (2008) focuses on Finnish school pupils with immigrant backgrounds and their relationship to Finnish media. According to Nikunen, these students experience Finnish media as strongly stereotyping, discriminatory and exclusionary. Trebbe and Schoenhagen (2011) examine the relationship between various Swiss citizens with immigrant backgrounds and the Swiss media. They underline the informants' experience of strongly exclusionary Swiss media practices. They conclude that: "A high discrepancy between the desire for more presence and participation on the one hand, and the wish to stand in the spotlight less often, on the other hand". (Trebbe & Schoenhagen, 2011, p. 1).

All of the studies above, as well as a large number of other studies, concern the media consumption of citizens with immigrant backgrounds in

multi-ethnic landscapes such as Norway. However, the study in this chapter demonstrates that media consumption during the pandemic had its own complexity. The COVID-19 pandemic was somehow *egalitarian*, i.e., a democratic condition in a sense that all Norwegians, regardless of background, were exposed to COVID-19 and its consequences.

In *Flerkulturelle scenarioer: Mur, bro eller båt?* (2023b)<sup>11</sup> Alghasi and Eirksen present three different scenarios, each representing an approach to dealing with multicultural Norway, a Norway comprised of citizens with variety of cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. They suggest that these three scenarios are types of narratives based on ideologically rooted representations that connect the past, present and future. These narratives about possible futures begin with descriptions of a historical course that has led to a specific present, and with such a starting point, it becomes possible to describe a scenario about a future Norway (Alghasi & Eriksen, 2023b, pp. 15–16).

Roughly described, in the first scenario *wall builders* indicates a practice, which is to construct an invisible wall against those outside, to protect Norway and Norwegianness against dangers caused by immigrants and immigration. A basic belief is that life is dangerous and threatened by “foreigners”, who are considered to be incompatible with Norwegian institutions, values and ways of being. In the second scenario, *bridge builders* represent in many ways the opposite of wall builders. Bridge builders assume that differences exist between Norwegians and immigrants, and they see these differences as a challenge for the formation of community, but believe that these contradictions can be resolved. This scenario is often referred to as *multiculturalism*, a term that gives different but related views on differences and how they should be handled. All forms of multiculturalism accept that society consists of several cultural groups that differ from each other in certain ways – language, religion, traditions. In this context, bridge building refers to a specific approach to multiculturalism in which one relies on the Norwegian welfare ideals of equal rights and duties for citizens regardless of background. The task then becomes to build a bridge between “us” and “the others”, to increase understanding and tolerance for each other’s ways of being, and to reduce social differences so that minorities can also be full participants in society, but often on the premises of the larger society (Alghasi & Eriksen, 2023b).

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11 Translated as “Multicultural Scenarios: Wall, Bridge or Boat?”

Finally, in a third scenario, *boat building*, there are *boat builders* who question the previous two scenarios. Boat builders problematize the current mechanisms in the two preceding scenarios. According to boat builders, building walls or bridges ultimately leads to reductionist categories about *us* and *them*; bridge building leads to a reinforcement of boundaries they wish to weaken, while wall building regards ethnic, cultural and religious diversity as dysfunctional and a threat to Norway and Norwegianness. Boat builders do not want to build walls, nor do they see the need to build bridges as we all live on the same island. The challenges, in a boat building scenario, are related to social inequality, both globally and nationally, and the criteria for participation in an imagined community such as Norway. For boat builders, the fundamental normative basis is the equality of all people and the vital aim that everyone, regardless of where they were born, has the right to a meaningful life (Alghasi & Eriksen, 2023b).

Boat builders place the greatest emphasis on social integration, as opposed to cultural equality, as a condition for a well-functioning society. (Alghasi & Eriksen, 2023b). To put it more directly, we are all in the *same boat*, regardless of background. Returning to Durkheim, we are reminded of the integrative function extraordinary conditions can have on individuals and societies. Durkheim believed that times of crisis such as war or poverty and economic hardship can result in increased solidarity and sense of belonging to a community. The pandemic seems to have increased a sense of trust, community, and togetherness among a number of the informants in this study. The informants clearly expressed a sense of trust in the Norwegian media and the authorities regarding their different needs, from information to treatment linked to the pandemic. This integrative dimension of the global pandemic should be explored further.

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