Media Use and Green Lifestyle Politics in Diverse Cultural Contexts of Postmaterialist Orientation and Generalized Trust: Findings From a Multilevel Analysis

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In lifestyle politics, citizens take political action by adapting their everyday lives to address transnational challenges, such as climate change. An important driver of lifestyle politics is exposure to media—both mass media, serving as important information sources, and social media, enabling discussion and expression. To explore how elements of culture shape this relationship, this study examines (a) the link between media use (measured by mass media and social media use) and lifestyle politics across 28 European countries and (b) how cultural context factors (measured by national levels of postmaterialist orientation and trust) moderate this relationship. Results of a multilevel analysis support the positive link between mass media use and lifestyle politics across all countries. However, the results also suggest that the relationship between social media use and lifestyle politics is positive only in countries with postmaterialist orientations and high levels of trust, underscoring the importance of cultural context factors.

Keywords: lifestyle politics, media use, cross-cultural research, generalized trust, postmaterialism, multilevel analysis

"Be the change you want to see in the world." This paraphrase of Gandhi's dictum has become a truism for those who purposefully change their lifestyles to accomplish good (De Moor, 2017) and encapsulates the concept of lifestyle politics: citizens taking political action by adapting their everyday behavior (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones, 2012; Micheletti & Stolle, 2012). In light of climate change, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation, citizens especially engage in *green lifestyle politics*: everyday practices by which they aim to tackle environmental problems (e.g., green purchasing choices or responsible diets). From the perspective of communication research, the role of media in this politicization of lifestyles is of particular interest. Media serve as crucial information sources shaping how citizens understand, evaluate, and respond to global challenges like climate change (Metag, Füchslin, & Schäfer, 2017; Schäfer & Painter, 2021). Social media in particular have created new opportunities to engage with public issues, including political discussion and expression (Cheng, Zhang, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2022), which is vital to the promotion of lifestyle politics (Boulianne, Copeland, & Koc-Michalska, 2022).

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Despite increasing scholarly attention to the relationship between (social) media and lifestyle politics, research in this field is not without limitations. To date, empirical studies focus mainly on the United States or Western Europe (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020), largely neglecting other national contexts. However, these geographic foci ignore that lifestyle politics are—like the problems they address—global phenomena (Summers, 2016). Citizens engage in lifestyle politics around the world and in doing so are influenced by the media they use (see Boström, Micheletti, & Oosterveer, 2018). Nevertheless, how media use relates to lifestyle politics across diverse societies and to what extent it differs by context remain unexplored.

From cross-national research on political participation, we know that cultural contexts in particular (here understood as collectively shared value orientations) shape individual engagement at the microlevel (Koos, 2012). In the case of lifestyle politics, for instance, studies have shown that citizens in societies with a strong postmaterialist orientation and high levels of general trust tend to be more engaged in lifestyle politics (Koos, 2012; Pisano & Lubell, 2017; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; Tam & Chan, 2018). Yet, this awareness of the central role of cultural context has hardly been considered in research on the role of media use in lifestyle politics. Thus, we lack a comprehensive understanding of how cultural contexts may shape the relationship of media use and lifestyle politics.

With this research gap in mind, this study examines (a) the relationship between media use and engagement in lifestyle politics across the 28 European Union countries (before Brexit) and (b) how cultural context moderates this relationship. To capture media use, traditional mass media and social media are examined as distinct media forms in their relationship to lifestyle politics. Cultural context is measured by national levels of postmaterialist orientation and generalized trust, which are known to be particularly relevant to individual engagement in green lifestyle politics.

To address the study's aims, a multilevel analysis was conducted using secondary data from the Eurobarometer survey program (N = 24,782). The results support a positive link between traditional media use and lifestyle politics across the countries studied. In contrast, the relationship between social media use and lifestyle politics is moderated by national levels of postmaterialism and generalized trust, underscoring the importance of cultural context.

Green Lifestyle Politics as Political Action

Lifestyle politics refer to the politicization of everyday life (De Moor, 2017; Giddens, 1991). Micheletti and Stolle (2012) define lifestyle politics as an "individual's choice to use his or her private life sphere to take responsibility for the allocation of common values and resources, in other words, for politics" (p. 126). Thus, citizens engaging in lifestyle politics take political action by consciously adapting their lifestyles to contribute to solving societal problems. So-called lifestyle activists align their everyday lives with political goals and values, creating social meaning around their daily practices and making their way of life a political project (Haenfler et al., 2012).[1]

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[1] The concept of lifestyle politics is closely related to political consumerism. According to Gotlieb and Cheema (2017), lifestyle politics represent one relevant form of political consumption that is pursued as a highly individualized activity motivated by personal values in the private sphere. This is distinguished from

Green lifestyle politics build on the premise that "reversing the degradation of the environment depends upon adopting new lifestyle patterns" (Giddens, 1991, p. 221). Activists engaging in green lifestyle politics adopt everyday practices to address challenges such as climate change. To accomplish this, they follow sustainable consumption practices (e.g., buying local products), embrace environmentally friendly diets (e.g., veganism), use less resource-intensive modes of transportation (e.g., avoiding air travel), and preserve resources through recycling, reuse, and do-it-yourself practices (Lorenzen, 2012).

Green Lifestyle Politics and Media Use

The positive impact of media use on political participation generally is largely indisputable (Boulianne, 2015; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). In the case of green lifestyle politics, media exposure is crucial to environmental awareness and engagement (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018) as the complex global causes and long-term effects of environmental problems generally elude personal observation and judgment (Arlt, Hoppe, & Wolling, 2011). To be recognized as collective concerns requiring a solution, environmental problems must be defined as such and made visible through media discourse (Keskitalo, Westerhoff, & Juhola, 2012). Thus, media are indispensable to citizens' knowledge, attitudes, and intentions to act.

Traditional Mass Media and Lifestyle Politics

In past decades, people have received their information on environmental issues mostly from traditional mass media, such as television (Newman, Fletcher, Schulz, Andı, & Nielsen, 2020), which have continuously expanded their coverage of such issues (Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014). Thus, mass media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward environmental issues. In line with agenda-setting theory, studies have shown that mass media exposure puts environmental issues on people's political agendas and frames what people think and know about those issues (Shehata & Hopmann, 2012): regular news media users tend to show greater awareness of environmental issues (Arlt et al., 2011), hold more accurate beliefs about them (Feldman, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, & Leiserowitz, 2012), and perceive them as more threatening (Metag et al., 2017).

Because of these agenda-setting, framing, and learning effects, media use can also exert a persuasive influence on behavioral intentions. Various studies have found that the news-oriented use of television, radio, and newspapers not only informs beliefs and knowledge about environmental issues but can also motivate people to change their lifestyles to fight climate change and environmental pollution (Arlt et al., 2011; Ho, Liao, & Rosenthal, 2015; Östman, 2014). Moreover, this consequence is not limited to news consumption. The consumption of fictional films and documentaries also promotes green lifestyle politics by providing information about environmental issues and affecting motivations to engage in environmentally friendly behaviors (Arendt & Matthes, 2016; Leiserowitz, 2004). In sum, previous research demonstrates a positive relationship between the use of traditional mass media and green lifestyle politics,

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"contentious political consumerism" (Gotlieb & Cheema, 2017, p. 572), which, on the contrary, is rather collectively oriented and takes place in organized, publicly communicated boycotts.

indicating that mass media remain crucially important to how individuals understand, evaluate, and act on environmental problems (Metag et al., 2017). Consequently, it may be assumed that:

H1:   The use of traditional mass media is positively related to engagement in green lifestyle politics.

Social Media and Lifestyle Politics

An increasing proportion of the world's population also relies on social media for news and information (Newman et al., 2020), including on environmental issues (Schäfer & Painter, 2021). Social media offer a very different user experience to traditional mass media, shaped by specific communication logics and technological affordances (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Sundar, Jia, Waddell, & Huang, 2015). Two aspects may be relevant to lifestyle politics and will be considered here: (1) heterogeneous information environments and (2) discourse participation options.

First, social media offer a diverse range of content and communicators. Because of their interactive, open, and decentralized nature, they enable not only professionals but all users to participate in the production and distribution of content (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). Consequently, most content on social media stems from lay people, who often come with personal knowledge and experiences and bring multiple perspectives to the discourse (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012). Such diverse information environments are central to the practice of lifestyle politics. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube are some of the most important information sources on how to adopt a sustainable, proenvironmental lifestyle. On these platforms, prominent green lifestyle influencers and less prominent lay people provide do-it-yourself instructions and low-threshold recommendations for lifestyle engagement (Chwialkowska, 2019; Joosse & Brydges, 2018).

Second, in addition to offering information that varies in content and style, social media provide various ways to participate in editing, posting, judging, and commenting on media content, thereby enabling cooperation, mutual support, and mobilization for lifestyle engagement (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020; Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland, & Bimber, 2014; Kelm & Dohle, 2018; Leissner, 2020). Further, beyond the level of mobilizing content, the opportunities to contribute opinions and express political ideas also foster general competencies and skills needed for active engagement in lifestyle politics (Östman, 2012). Flanagin and colleagues (2010) argue that active participation in networked environments promotes a greater sense of individual agency and the confidence needed to take political action (see also Jenkins, Itō, & boyd, 2016). Based on these considerations, previous studies show that political discussion and opinion expression on social media are positively associated with engagement in lifestyle politics (Boulianne et al., 2022; Cheng et al., 2022; Gotlieb & Cheema, 2017). These theoretical considerations and previous empirical work indicate a positive relationship between the use of social media and engagement in green lifestyle politics, suggesting that:

H2:   The use of social media is positively related to engagement in green lifestyle politics.

Green Lifestyle Politics and Media Use in Diverse Cultural Contexts

The relationship between individual media use and lifestyle politics does not exist in a vacuum but is always embedded in an overarching cultural context. However, previous research on this relationship has largely neglected the role of macrolevel contexts (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020), producing scant evidence on how the link between media use and lifestyle politics unfolds in diverse societies. This study addresses this shortcoming by examining in more detail how cultural contexts may shape this relationship. The following sections first discuss the conception and potential moderating role of cultural context employed in this study and then consider national levels of postmaterialism and generalized trust as two specifically selected cultural context factors.

Cultural Context as Opportunity Structure

Comparative research on participation indicates that cultural contexts constitute relevant opportunity structures that either encourage or discourage people from taking political action (Koos, 2012). *Cultural opportunity structures* are embodied by civic culture as the *shared* values and norms prevalent in a given country (Schwartz, 2011; Wahlström & Peterson, 2006). Those shared values and norms constitute a "mindset" that "influences [citizens'] attitudes, beliefs, behavior, and thought" (Schwartz, 2011, p. 8) and guides citizens' general ideas of what is desirable in a society, their perception of public issues, and their notions about how to engage politically (Verba, 1969). Thus, cultural context, here described as cultural opportunity structures, represents a relevant macrocontext that frames political engagement, such as green lifestyle politics, at the individual level.

To date, the role of cultural context in green lifestyle politics has been highlighted primarily by studies in environmental psychology focusing on the relationship of proenvironmental attitudes and proenvironmental behaviors. Morren and Grinstein (2016) demonstrate that this attitude-to-behavior chain is strengthened when individual proenvironmental attitudes encounter a macrolevel cultural context in which commitment to the environment is understood as desirable and praiseworthy. In other words, when a society's prevailing ideals value environmental engagement, they constitute a cultural context that supports individuals in putting proenvironmental attitudes into action. However, when prevailing ideals do not value environmental engagement or subordinate it to other ideals, such cultural context hinders individuals from enacting proenvironmental attitudes (see also Soyez, 2012). In this way, cultural context moderates the relationship between proenvironmental attitudes and green lifestyle politics.

The extent to which cultural context may also moderate the relationship between media use and green lifestyle politics has not yet been explored. Although empirical evidence is lacking, plausible arguments can be made as to why this relationship may also differ depending on the specific cultural opportunity structure. Three rationales are proposed here: (1) Cultural contexts frame public information environments, as the agenda and framing established by media reflect and constantly reproduce the culturally dominant values and norms of the society in which they are produced and consumed (Boomgaarden & Song, 2019; Kim & Eom, 2020). Thus, when media messages inform the political actions of their audience, they also convey and potentially reinforce the dominant values of the cultural context. (2) Cultural contexts guide how citizens select and consume media. In general, people tend to selectively choose media that present and frame public issues in a way that is congruent

with their attitudes and values (Newman, Nisbet, & Nisbet, 2018). Consequently, a society's prevalent values should also guide which media messages most citizens consume and prefer. (3) Cultural contexts frame how citizens talk about public issues in social media (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2022). Culturally dominant beliefs shape what people debate on social media and which political views they express and how. Thus, when users are mobilized to political action via social media, they act under the impression of the cultural values communicated and expressed in social media.

Taking all three rationales together, we see that cultural contexts shape how a society uses media, including the agendas, frames, and debates that media convey; and that this shaping has the potential to inform citizens' political engagement. Similar to the role of cultural context in moderating the attitude-behavior chain discussed above (Morren & Grinstein, 2016), it can be further assumed that a cultural context valuing environmental engagement may also strengthen the relationship between media use and green lifestyle politics. Based on these considerations, this study empirically investigates how cultural context shapes the link between media use and lifestyle politics.

To examine the role of cultural context in individual action, research has developed various cross-cultural frameworks that allow countries to be classified and compared along different value dimensions (Kaasa, 2021). In this study, Inglehart's dimension of *survival* versus *self-expression* values is used to assess and differentiate the cultural context of the countries studied. On the dimension's self-expression pole, Inglehart and Baker (2000) place societies that are characterized by a climate of trust and tolerance and value postmaterial ideals such as personal autonomy and well-being. On the survival pole, societies emphasize the opposite and place material values above other goals. Cross-cultural research on environmental engagement has paid particular attention to two components of this dimension: both cultural levels of *postmaterialism* (Koos, 2012) and *generalized trust* (Tam & Chan, 2018) have been found to be particularly influential in shaping green lifestyle politics. Against this background, these two factors are selected as cultural contexts.

Cultural Context I: Postmaterialism

Postmaterialist values are an inherent feature of a country's culture (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Inglehart's (2018) postmaterialism thesis posits that affluent societies are undergoing a general shift from materialistic values (emphasizing personal security and economic well-being) to postmaterialist values (emphasizing individual freedom and a high quality of life). With increasing affluence, members of a society become less preoccupied with economic challenges and with striving for security and survival, giving them freedom to pursue postmaterialist goals, such as self-expression, political freedom, and environmental protection. Thus, the emergence of postmaterialist values leads to stronger proenvironmental attitudes and behavior (Inglehart, 2018). Following this argument, numerous cross-cultural studies show that a high level of postmaterialism in a country is positively associated with green lifestyle politics (e.g., Koos, 2012). Based on this, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H3:   *In countries with a high level of postmaterialism, citizens exhibit greater engagement in green lifestyle politics.*

As argued above, the national level of postmaterialism may also be reflected in how media report on political issues, how media users understand those issues, and how they discuss and express their opinions on those issues. In a postmaterialist context, postmaterialist ideals, including environmentalism, are likely to be relatively prominent in the public discourse in both mass media and social media, which may then guide users of these media in their political engagement. By contrast, public discourses in materialist countries would tend to be less dominated by postmaterialist ideals, potentially weakening the link between individual media use and lifestyles politics. Thus, it is assumed that a postmaterialist context is not only directly related to individual lifestyle politics but may also moderate the relationship between media use and engagement in lifestyle politics. Given the lack of empirical evidence, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1:   *Does the national level of postmaterialism moderate the relationship between media use and green lifestyle politics?*

Cultural Context II: Generalized Trust

Similar to postmaterialist values, generalized trust is an important element of a country's culture (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Generalized trust as a cultural value embraces a shared belief in the generalized other and the idea that "most people can be trusted" (Tam & Chan, 2018, p. 184). Levels of generalized trust vary across countries because of several conditions. Research shows that social polarization in the form of income inequality and ethnic diversity reduces generalized trust. Additionally, citizens of Protestant societies seem to have more trust in their fellow citizens, while postcommunist societies are less trusting than others (Bjørnskov, 2007).

Generalized trust is particularly significant for engagement in lifestyle politics because trust makes it possible to overcome social dilemmas, such as environmental pollution and climate change. Social dilemmas are situations in which the collective interest of a society conflicts with the interests and benefits of individual members (Irwin & Berigan, 2013). For instance, it is tempting and convenient for individuals to consume products from nonrenewable resources, given their accessibility, but society as a whole eventually suffers if individuals do not refrain from such behavior. The main challenge in solving social dilemmas is that even if citizens have collective interests at heart and share environmentally friendly values, they may be reluctant to contribute out of fear that so-called free riders will not contribute, thus exploiting the efforts of more committed individuals. However, if individuals generally trust others and expect them to act in solidarity, they will be more willing to contribute and act on their proenvironmental attitudes (Sønderskov, 2009). According to this argument, citizens in a high-trust context with less fear of free riders will be more likely to personally contribute and engage in lifestyle politics (Tam & Chan, 2018). This inspires the fourth hypothesis:

H4:   *Citizens in countries with a high level of generalized trust exhibit greater engagement in green lifestyle politics.*

Beyond this hypothesis, this study further asks whether a high-trust context also strengthens the link between media use and lifestyle politics. The fact that citizens in a high-trust context have greater confidence that others in their community will also engage may increase the likelihood that their individual

media use will lead to engagement in lifestyle politics. Generalized trust as a cultural context may serve as a precondition for citizens to even consider putting into action the knowledge, attitudes, and motivations for green lifestyles that they gain through media use.

Adding to this, the belief that others are generally trustworthy may be manifested in a society's media discourse. If the media convey the basic understanding that people are trustworthy and have in mind not only their own well-being but also that of the community, this could strengthen people's trust in others, making them more likely to engage in lifestyle politics for the good of society. These considerations inspire the second research question:

RQ2:   *Does the national level of generalized trust moderate the relationship between media use and green lifestyle politics?*

Methods

Sample and Data

This study relies on a multilevel analysis using data from the Eurobarometer survey program and the European Values Study. The individual-level data set was drawn from Eurobarometer 88.1, conducted in 2017, which included a module on European citizens' attitudes and actions toward the environment. The survey was based on representative multistage samples of the population aged 15 years and older. All the interviews were conducted face to face in people's homes and in their native language. After the listwise deletion of missing values, the data set provided information on 24,782 individuals in the 28 countries of the European Union before Brexit.

The context predictor of postmaterialism was gathered from the European Values Study, conducted in 2017, and the context predictor of generalized trust from the Eurobarometer 81.5, conducted in 2014.[2]

Outcome Variable

The outcome variable of the analysis was the participants' engagement in green lifestyle politics. To operationalize this construct, a sum index was created to indicate how many proenvironmental activities the respondents had undertaken in the recent past. On the questionnaire, respondents were asked which of the following activities they had carried out in the last six months: (1) bought local products; (2) cut down water consumption; (3) cut down energy consumption; (4) chosen a more environmentally friendly way of traveling; (5) avoided buying overpackaged products; (6) avoided single-use plastic goods other than plastic bags or bought reusable plastic products; or (7) bought products marked with an environmental label

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[2] Data and documentation can be downloaded from the following websites:
Eurobarometer 88.1: https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA6925;
European Values Study 2017: https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7500;
Eurobarometer 81.5: https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA5929

(multiple answers possible). The index indicates how many activities a person had undertaken, ranging from 0 = *no proenvironmental activities* to 7 = *all given proenvironmental activities*.

Individual-Level Predictors

At the individual level, the primary predictors comprised the frequency of traditional media use and of social media use. The survey separately asked participants, "Could you tell me to what extent you: (1) watch television, (2) listen to the radio, (3) read the written press, or (4) use online social networks?" The 6-point scale ranged from 1 = *never* to 6 = *daily*. To capture traditional media use (including television, radio, and print media) in one variable, a mean index was formed. The use of social media was used as a single item.

It should be critically noted here that other forms of digital media use, such as news websites, could not be included in the analysis, as they were not surveyed in the data set used. The respondents were asked only how often they used the Internet in general (again from 1 = *never* to 6 = *daily*), but whether this referred to online shopping, job-related use, or news consumption cannot be deduced. Therefore, Internet use was not used to test hypotheses about the relationship between media use and lifestyle politics. However, Internet use was included as a control predictor to isolate social media use from overall use of the Internet.

Further control predictors were included to ensure that the tested relationships were not spurious. Based on previous research on the predictors of green lifestyle politics (e.g., Pisano & Lubell, 2017; Tam & Chan, 2018), age, gender, education, social class, political interest, environmental involvement, and internal efficacy were selected for analysis. Age was measured in absolute years. Sex was coded as 0 = *male* and 1 = *female*. Education was operationalized as the number of years of education. As the Eurobarometer asked only at which age someone finished school, this was coded as follows: all respondents who stated that they *finished school before age 11* were recoded as 0, those who answered *11–30* were recoded as between 1 and 20 years of education, and those who stated that they *finished school after age 30* were removed.[3] For social class, the Eurobarometer used a self-assessment question. Participants were asked to identify with one of the following categories: 1 = *working class*, 2 = *lower middle class*, 3 = *middle class*, 4 = *upper middle class*, or 5 = *higher class*.

Unfortunately, political interest as such was not directly recorded by the survey used. However, because such an important predictor of participation should not be omitted, an available question on interest in European affairs was used as an alternative predictor. The participants were asked, "Would you say that you are very interested, fairly interested, not very interested, or not at all interested in European affairs?" (This ranged from 1 = *not at all interested* to 4 = *very interested.*) As this question reflects the participant's interest in only a specific area of politics, it is not an ideal operationalization. Nevertheless, it is assumed that this predictor highly correlates with general political interest and thus has explanatory potential.

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[3] In almost all European school systems, primary education is completed at age 11 or older, so cases of leaving school before age 11 were labeled as 0 = no formal education. Finishing one's schooling at or beyond the age of 31 often indicates an interrupted educational path. Because it cannot be assumed in such cases that an older age at the end of education means a higher level of formal education, these cases were removed from the sample.

Environmental involvement, defined as the affect or emotion associated with beliefs about environmental protection (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002), was also included as a control predictor. Environmental involvement was operationalized by a mean index of two items (Spearman-Brown = .55). The first assessed the personal value of environmental protection with the question "How important is protecting the environment to you personally?" (from 1 = *not at all important* to 4 = *very important*), and the second measured agreement with the statement "Environmental issues have a direct effect on your daily life and health" (from 1 = *totally disagree* to 4 = *totally agree*).

Finally, the analysis included participants' self-efficacy, which is defined as an individual's confidence in their ability to solve a problem (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). Here, the selected item refers specifically to the perceived ability to solve environmental problems. The respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "As an individual, you can play a role in protecting the environment in [participant's country]" (from 1 = *totally disagree* to 4 = *totally agree*).

Country-Level Measures

The cultural context was integrated into the analysis via macrolevel predictors for postmaterialism and generalized trust (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). The context predictor of postmaterialism was derived from the 2017 European Values Study. On the basis of the classic Inglehart index with four questions on postmaterialist value orientations, the participants were divided into three types: materialist, mixed, and postmaterialist. A country's percentage of postmaterialists was used to generate the value for the national level of postmaterialism. The predictor of generalized trust was similarly operationalized using an item derived from the 2014 Eurobarometer 81.5 that asked participants, "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" Again, the percentage of respondents per country who stated that "most people can be trusted" generated the values of the context predictor (based on Koos, 2012).[4]

In addition, a country's affluence was included as a macrolevel control, as it has been shown to be an important predictor of citizens' engagement in green lifestyle politics (Koos, 2012). Logged GDP per capita, derived from the World Bank for 2016, was used as an indicator of a country's affluence.[5]

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[4] In a further step, the 0–100 scale based on percentage was rescaled to a 0–10 scale by dividing a country's value by 10 (e.g., the value 16 for 16% postmaterialistic citizens in Denmark became 1.6). Thus, while a difference of one scale point corresponded to one percentage point on the original scale, a difference of one point on the newly created scale corresponded to 10 percentage points. A difference of one point thus became more substantial and meaningful. This approach was chosen to better interpret the unstandardized b-coefficients of the multilevel models. The countries' levels of postmaterialist values and generalized trust are shown in Table A.1 in the online appendix, which is available at: https://osf.io/9amf8/?view_only=1b77690fe94f45d99b95f48504742b91

[5] Data and documentation can be downloaded from: https://data.worldbank.org/

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	M / Prop.	SD	Min.	Max.
Outcome variable				
Green lifestyle politics	2.28	1.64	0	7
Individual-level predictors				
Age	51.50	18.10	15	99
Gender (% male)	45.02	-	-	-
Education	9.05	3.73	0	20
Social class	2.36	0.99	1	5
Political interest	2.58	0.87	1	4
Efficacy	3.29	0.76	1	4
Environmental involvement	3.38	0.58	1	4
Internet use	4.60	2.09	1	6
Traditional media use	4.71	1.12	1	6
Social media use	3.70	2.13	1	6
Country-level predictors				
Postmaterialism[a]	7.82	5.20	2.00	24.00
Generalized trust[b]	33.78	17.08	12.00	79.00
Affluence[c]	10.10	0.61	8.92	11.60

Notes. [a]percentage of postmaterialists per country; [b]percentage of respondents per country who stated that "most people can be trusted"; [c]logged GDP per capita.

Analysis

For analysis, several multilevel models were employed using the lme4 package for R (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2015). The procedure included several steps. First, a null model without predictors was estimated to determine how much of the total unexplained variance of the outcome variable was attributable to the contextual level. In the second step, predictors of the individual and contextual levels were integrated into random intercept models,[6] which enabled an assessment of which predictors at both levels were significantly associated with green lifestyle politics and allowed the testing of H1–H4. Finally, random-slope models were estimated to test cross-level interactions between cultural context and media use. These models were used to determine whether the relationship between media use and green lifestyle politics varied systematically across diverse cultural contexts by generating random slopes for the two different types of media use (RQ1 and RQ2). All individual-level predictors (except gender) were centered by the country mean, and country-level predictors were centered by the grand mean (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Culpepper, 2013).

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[6] In random intercept models, the intercept is allowed to vary from country to country while the effects at the individual levels (slopes) are fixed to be equal in all countries. Models with random slopes allow the individual effects to vary from country to country (Snijders & Bosker, 2010).

Results

For overall engagement in green lifestyle politics, the analysis reveals differences in the average distribution across Europe (Figure 1). The displayed mean shows how many of the considered activities were carried out on average in a given country. Although the average citizen in Bulgaria, for example, takes only one proenvironmental action, the average citizen in Sweden reports taking nearly four of the seven actions surveyed. Overall, green lifestyle politics seem to be widespread in the Scandinavian and Benelux countries, while only few people engage in Eastern and Southern European countries.
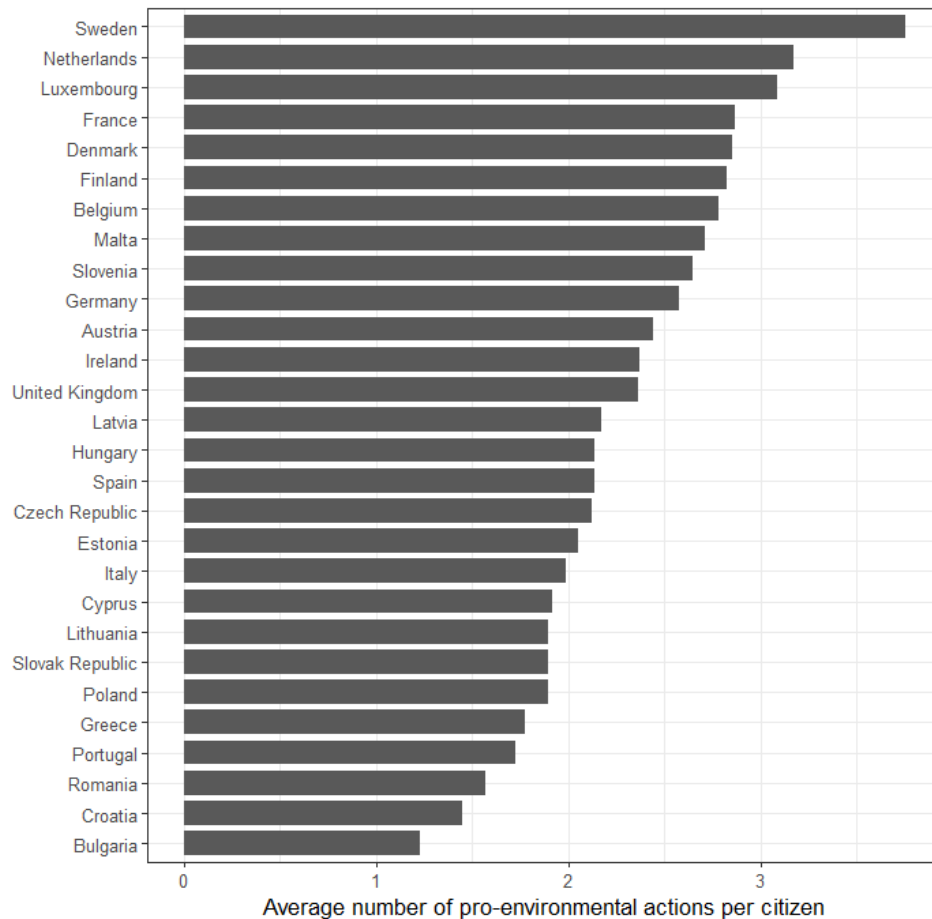

Figure 1. Mean of green lifestyle politics by country.

Random Intercept Models

Model 1 in Table 2 is an empty model with no predictors and uses only the outcome variable and country variable. The residual intraclass correlation (ICC) for the empty model is 0.12, meaning that 12%

of the total variation in green lifestyle politics is explained by differences between countries. This justifies estimating multilevel models (Snijders & Bosker, 2010).

Model 2, the full individual-level model, shows that the results align with previous research in terms of the sociodemographic and psychological controls. Being a woman, being highly educated, and belonging to a higher social class increase engagement in green lifestyle politics. A strong interest in political issues, a feeling of environmental involvement, and a high degree of self-efficacy are also positively associated with green lifestyle politics. Turning to media use, Model 2 shows a positive relationship between traditional media use and engagement in green lifestyle politics. Contrary to expectations, however, social media use is not significantly related to green lifestyle politics. Consequently, while the analysis confirms H1, H2 must be rejected.

Table 2. Multilevel Random Intercept Models.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Predictors	b (SE)		b (SE)		b (SE)	
Intercept	2.30***	(0.11)	1.91***	(0.11)	1.91***	(0.06)
Individual-level						
Gender (0 = male)			0.25***	(0.02)	0.25***	(0.02)
Age			0.00***	(0.00)	0.00***	(0.00)
Education			0.04***	(0.00)	0.04***	(0.00)
Social class			0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)
Efficacy			0.28***	(0.01)	0.28***	(0.01)
Political interest			0.18***	(0.01)	0.18***	(0.01)
Environmental involvement			0.50***	(0.02)	0.50***	(0.02)
Internet use			0.06***	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.01)
Traditional media use			0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)
Social media use			−0.01	(0.01)	−0.01	(0.01)
Country-level						
Postmaterialism					0.42*	(0.18)
Generalized trust					0.03	(0.05)
National affluence					0.46***	(0.12)
Random effects						
Within-country variance ($\sigma2$)	2.41		2.08		2.08	
Intercept variance ($\tau00$)	0.33		0.34		0.08	
ICC	.12		.14		.04	

Notes. Unstandardized coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Individual-level predictors are group mean centered; country-level predictors are grand mean centered. REML estimation. 24,782 observations for all models. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

        In the next step, the country-level predictors were introduced to Model 3, which shows the full random intercept model.[7] The results reveal that the national level of postmaterialism, as well as the control predictor of national affluence, is positively related to green lifestyle politics. In contrast, there is no significant relationship between national level of trust and lifestyle politics. Consequently, H3 is confirmed, and H4 must be rejected.

Cross-Level Interactions

        In the final step of the analysis, cross-level interactions were estimated between the media use types and the cultural contexts of postmaterialism and generalized trust. Each model presented in Table 3 uses Model 3 in Table 2 as its basis, including the same individual-level and country-level predictors. However, for clarity of presentation, only the coefficients of the individual-level and country-level predictors used in the cross-level interaction are shown.[8] Furthermore, although the cross-level interactions are shown together, each interaction was estimated separately in its own regression. Running all the cross-level interactions together resulted in a complex model that did not converge and could not be estimated. Therefore, the models were tested separately as recommended by Aguinis and colleagues (2013).

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[7] To check for multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor was used, which showed no evidence of multicollinearity. For results see Table A.2. in the appendix.

[8] The full random slope models with cross-level interactions are shown in Table A.3 in the appendix.

Table 3. Random Slope Models With Cross-Level Interactions.

Predictors	Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7	
	b (SE)		b (SE)		b (SE)		b (SE)	
Intercept	1.91***	(0.06)	1.91***	(0.06)	1.91***	(0.06)	1.91***	(0.06)
Individual-level								
Trad. media use	0.05***	(0.01)			0.05***	(0.01)		
Social media use			−0.01	(0.01)			−0.01	(0.01)
Country-level								
Postmaterialism	0.42*	(0.18)	0.47**	(0.18)				
Generalized trust					0.03	(0.05)	0.03	(0.05)
Interactions								
Postmaterialism × trad. media use	0.00	(0.03)						
Postmaterialism × social media use			0.04*	(0.02)				
Generalized trust × trad. media use					−0.00	(0.01)		
Generalized trust × social media use							0.01**	(0.00)
Random effects								
Within-country variance (σ2)	2.08		2.07		2.08		2.07	
Intercept variance (τ00)	0.08		0.08		0.08		0.08	
Slope variance (τ11)	0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	
ICC	.04		.04		.04		.04	

Notes. Individual-level predictors and national affluence (see Table 1) are included, but coefficients are not reported. Unstandardized coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Individual-level predictors are group mean centered; country-level predictors are grand mean centered. REML estimation. 24,791 observations for all models. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

For RQ1, Models 4 and 5 in Table 3 tested the interactions between national levels of postmaterialism and individual-level media use, computing random slopes for the latter. As in the full Model 3, the resultant random-slope models show a significant direct relationship between only green lifestyle politics and traditional media use, but not with social media use. Nevertheless, Model 5 reveals a significant positive cross-level interaction for social media use with postmaterialism. This shows a stronger association between social media use and green lifestyle politics in countries with high levels of postmaterialist values than in countries with low levels. For the use of traditional media, no interaction with postmaterialism was found (Model 4).

To further explore these interactions, the predicted coefficients of social media use for the various levels of postmaterialism were plotted. Plot C in Figure 2 shows that the coefficient of social media use increases with a country's level of postmaterialism. In particular, it shows that social media use has a negative association with green lifestyle politics in countries with low levels of postmaterialism but a positive association in countries with high levels, which leads to an overall nonsignificant coefficient of social media use across all countries. Unfortunately, the 95% confidence intervals are quite large, leading to a nonsignificant association between social media use and lifestyle politics in the postmaterialist countries on the right side of the x-axis, as there are only a few of them.
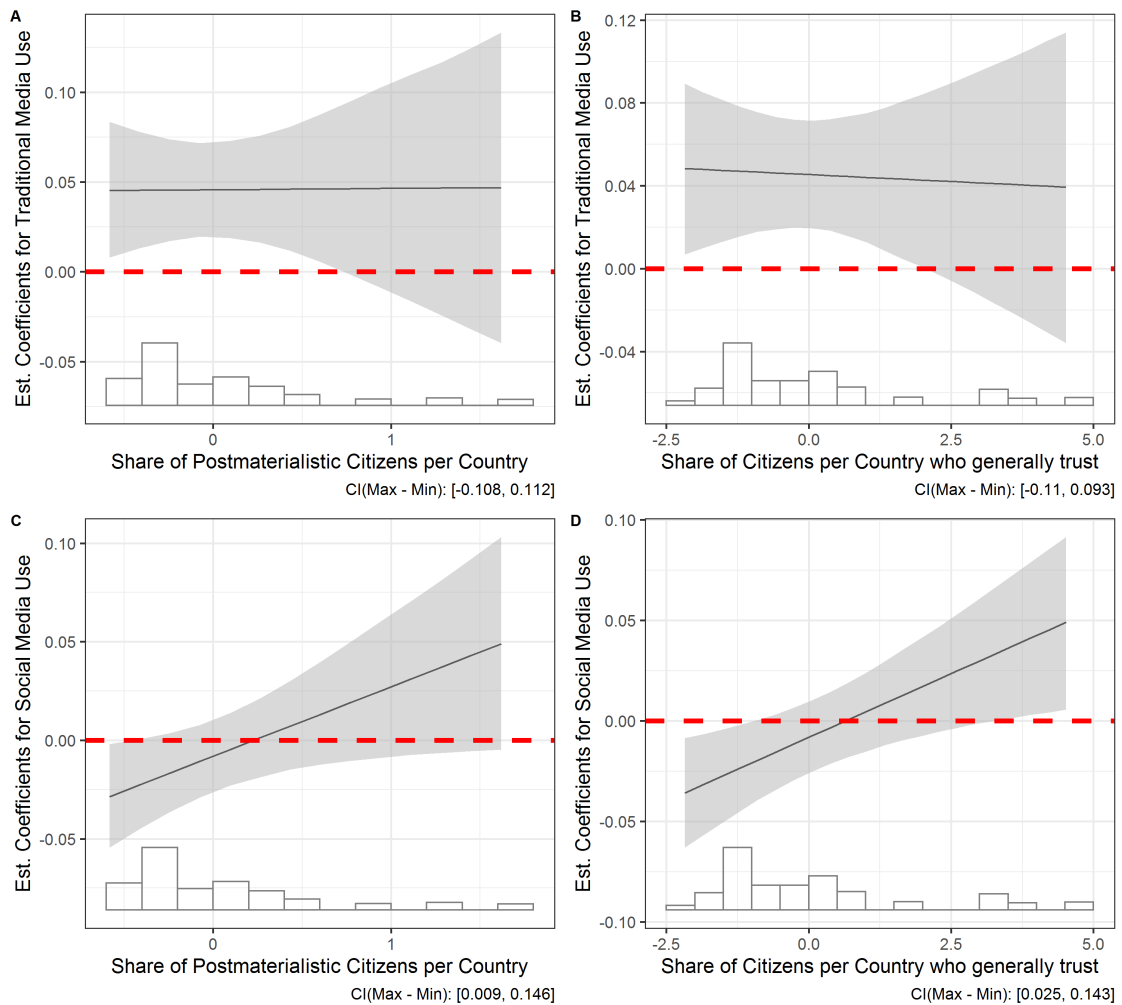

Figure 2. Estimated coefficients of media use on green lifestyle politics by cultural context.

To answer RQ2, the same procedure was repeated for the country-level factor of generalized trust (Models 6 and 7). Again, the models with the added random slope and interaction term repeated the results

of the full Model 3: while traditional media use shows a significant relationship with green lifestyle politics, the use of social media does not. Nevertheless, there is a positive significant interaction between social media use and trust (Model 7). Plot D indicates that in countries with low levels of trust, social media use is negatively associated with green lifestyle politics; in countries with high levels of generalized trust, the association is positive. The relationship between traditional media use and green lifestyle politics is not moderated by the respective national level of trust.

Discussion

This study examined the relationship of using traditional mass media and social media with green lifestyle politics across diverse cultural contexts as defined by postmaterialism and generalized trust. The results of a multilevel analysis using data from the 28 EU countries (before Brexit) yielded two key findings. As expected, the analysis first showed that traditional mass media use is positively related to green lifestyle politics, confirming previous research (e.g., Ho et al., 2015). Regular consumption of television, newspapers, and radio seems to create environmental awareness and mobilize citizens to act by adapting green lifestyles in response.

However, the expectations about social media were not met. Contrary to theoretical considerations and previous empirical research (Boulianne et al., 2022; Cheng et al., 2022), this study found no significant relationship between lifestyle politics and social media use across all countries. Nonetheless, this finding does not necessarily refute the idea that social media use *can* be an important driver of lifestyle politics. On closer inspection, the results show that the relationship between social media use and green lifestyle politics varies across countries depending on cultural context, constituting the second key finding.

For the study's question about the role of cultural context in shaping the relationship between media use and lifestyle politics, the following picture emerges: First, the positive association found for traditional mass media use and lifestyle politics is evident in all the countries studied. Regardless of national levels of postmaterialism and trust, it holds true that the more citizens consume media content from traditional mass media, the more likely they tend to be engaged in lifestyle politics. Second, by contrast, this is not the case for social media use, which varies in its relationship to lifestyle politics depending on cultural context. Although the association between social media use and lifestyle politics is negative in countries with a materialistic orientation and low levels of trust, it is positive in countries with a postmaterialistic orientation and high levels of trust.

These results may be explained by the different user experiences of the two media types. While information from mass media is mostly consumed passively, content in social media is (co)produced, discussed, and evaluated by users (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). In such productive and expressive acts, the commonly shared values and beliefs of a society should become particularly evident. For instance, when users share, discuss, and evaluate environmental issues online, they do so against the backdrop of their cultural context and incorporate the dominant value orientations of that context into their debates (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2022). In this way, social media potentially disseminates, reproduces, and reinforces those value orientations and may act as a catalyst for cultural contexts. This would mean that, as a consequence, using social media would promote lifestyle politics only if the cultural context reflected in social media

fostered lifestyle politics. The results of the analysis support this reasoning: while the relationship between social media and lifestyle politics is negative in countries with a materialist orientation and low levels of trust, it is positive in countries with a postmaterialist orientation and high levels of trust. In other words, social media use promotes lifestyle politics only within those cultural contexts that create an opportunity structure that encourages engagement in lifestyle politics.

Despite these findings, the study has limitations that require further discussion. Because of the Eurobarometer data's cross-sectional nature, the direction of causality could not be tested beyond doubt, as engagement in lifestyle politics could also lead to media use. Nonetheless, the theoretical discussion based on previous research (e.g., Cheng et al., 2022) makes it plausible that the causal relationship runs mainly from media use to lifestyle engagement.

In addition, the examined secondary data were not collected to answer the research questions proposed here, which imposes specific limitations, such as operationalizations not well suited to purpose (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985). The study's main problem of that kind was the basic operationalization of media use, which distinguished only between different media types without any information on the intensity, motivation, or content of consumption. This is a particular problem for social media, as the content consumed clearly depends on the user's interests and networks. Previous research indicates that social media use can have different consequences for lifestyle politics depending on the motives (e.g., informational vs. recreational use; see Leissner, 2020) and the mode of use (content consumption vs. production; see Gotlieb & Cheema, 2017). Here, such differentiations were not possible, which may explain why the hypothesis about social media use could not be confirmed.

Similarly, the operationalization of green lifestyle politics presents another limitation. The examined survey only asked whether a particular action was taken; underlying political motivations were not captured. Thus, we cannot know whether the purchase of local products, for example, was actually made for political reasons, such as climate protection. However, since the variable used for green lifestyle politics was highly associated with predictors known from previous research, such as environmental awareness (Pisano & Lubell, 2017), it can be assumed that the actions queried were based mainly on political goals and can be considered lifestyle politics.

Despite these limitations, the study provides clear evidence that the relationship between social media use and political lifestyle unfolds differently depending on cultural levels of postmaterialism and trust. For cross-cultural media research, this finding suggests that the impact of media use on political participation is very likely to vary by cultural context. Consequently, research on media use and participation should always critically reflect and situate its findings against the cultural background of the countries studied. Or better yet, such research should generally not rely solely on studies from a single country but should be conducted across cultures. Otherwise, we risk overlooking the central importance of cultural contexts. Consequently, political communication research—in its theory development, planning of empirical studies, and selection of samples—would do well to further investigate the role of cultural factors in the relationship between media and political participation.

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