# Pre-analysis plan for a conjoint experiment on trust in alternative media sources

Erik Knudsen*& Silje Nygaard

Department of Information Science and Media Studies, University of Bergen

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## 1 Introduction

This study is a follow-up study on an experiment on trust in alternative and mainstream news sources. The first study was conducted in Norway in the Norwegian Citizen Panel. This follow-up study tests the robustness of the findings from the Norwegian study with a different design and in a different country: the U.S.

Based on the findings from the Norwegian study we expect *conservative (liberal) respondents to be 1) more (less) likely to trust a source with a reputation of writing negatively (positively) about immigration, and 2) a source that is distanced (close) to the practices and formats of mainstream media sources.*

We further assume that *respondents who are skeptic (optimistic) towards immigration are 1) more (less) likely to trust a source with a reputation of writing negatively (positively) about immigration, and 2) a source that is distanced (close) to the practices and formats of mainstream media sources.*

We also ask: *what are the relative effects of each attribute?*

*Corresponding author of the pre-analysis plan: Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bergen, Department of Information Science and Media Studies/ the Digital Social Science Core Facility (DIGSSCORE), erik.knudsen@uib.no.

## 2 The design and data

This conjoint experiment is designed to explore the relative effect of different factors of a news sources on people's trust in news sources. The study was conducted among American adults using a conjoint experimental design (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014; Knudsen and Johannesson, 2018).

The attributes in the experiment is shown in Table 1. The experiment consists of two different randomly constructed vignettes in a row asking all respondents:

"People write regularly in both mainstream and alternative news media about issues associated with immigration. Below you can read the description of one such source of news."

The randomly constructed vignettes are shown as follows:

**The news source is [mainstream] [type] that is reputed to [Immigration_standpoint]. The source [Code]. The source's editor [Editor][Anti_mainstream]**

An example of a possible vignette would be:

**The news source is a mainstream online newspaper that is reputed to report stories about immigrants in both a positive and negative tone. The source adheres to mainstream journalism's codes of ethics. The source's editor has experience from mainstream journalism. The source has on several occasions criticized mainstream media outlets for withholding facts.**

We use two dependent variables: 1) "Based on this information, would you trust this source to report immigration news in a fully, accurate, and fair manner?" - "Yes/No", and 2) Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? This source can be trusted in terms of reporting immigration news in a fully, accurate, and fair manner" - with a seven point scale from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree".

The survey will be fielded to about 500 respondents on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk). Eligibility to take the survey will be restricted to U.S.-based MTurk Workers.

## 3 Pre-analysis plan

We will adopt the statistical approach developed by Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) and estimate average marginal component effects (AMCEs). The AMCE will show the average

**Table 1:** Attributes in the Conjoint Experiment

| Treatment attribute | Value |
|---|---|
| Mainstream | A mainstream / an alternative. |
| Type | web page / online newspaper / blog. |
| Code | adheres to mainstream journalism's codes of ethics / does not adhere to mainstream journalism's codes of ethics |
| Editor | has experience from mainstream journalism / has no experience from mainstream journalism |
| Immigration_standpoint | report stories about immigrants in a positive tone / report stories about immigrants in a negative tone / report stories about immigrants in both a positive and negative tone. |
| Anti_mainstream | . The source has on several occasions criticized mainstream media outlets for withholding facts. / . |

difference in the probability of a source being more or less trusted. Each attribute level is compared to a different attribute level within the same attribute.

The attributes tests two different dimensions of trust in alternative news media: 1) attitude alignment in regards to immigration attitudes, and 2) distance from factors pertaining to the mainstream media. We will explore the relative effects of each attribute by plotting the AMCEs (for an example see e.g., Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014; Knudsen and Johannesson, 2018).

In the second step, we will explore the patterns of these effects among ideology and immigration attitudes.

In the third step, to measure like-minded immigration attitudes, we will match the attribute "Immigration_attitude" with a variable measuring immigration attitudes: "In your opinion how great an advantage or disadvantage is it for the United States that immigrants come to live here?" with a seven-point scale from "A very great advantage" to "A very great disadvantage".

We will also explore whether the patterns in the three different choice tasks differ substantially and significantly among different age-groups, gender, education, and party preference.

## References

Hainmueller, Jens, Daniel J Hopkins and Teppei Yamamoto. 2014. "Causal inference in conjoint analysis: Understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments."

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