

## ESS Round 8 Question Design Template – New Core Items

**Concept: Time spent consuming news media**

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Aim
<p>To develop a single item measure of respondent’s exposure to news media via all relevant channels including the internet.</p> <p>The single item replaces items <a href="#">A1 – A6</a> that were part of the ESS core questionnaire in Rounds 1-5. The items were dropped following Round 5 as part of a wider series of cuts to the questionnaire intended to reduce questionnaire length. The media items were dropped for several reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- there were concerns that they did not adequately capture media exposure in the digital age;</li> <li>- the answer scales used with the existing items ask respondents to be unrealistically precise in recording their media consumption;</li> <li>- there were felt to be too many items on the one topic given competition for space from other topics.</li> </ul> <p>The aim is not to provide a detailed picture of respondents’ media consumption or study media use per se but to provide a measure of media exposure which could be used (alongside the ESS media claims data) as an explanatory/contextual variable when studying wider attitudes and behaviour.</p>

SECTION A. Theoretical rationale for including topic on ESS
<p><b>Why is the topic important? How will including items on this topic in the ESS enhance our understanding of public attitudes and behaviours across Europe?</b></p> <p>A necessary condition for democracy to function properly is that information is available that allows citizens to make decisions and behave in a manner that maintains accountability and popular sovereignty (Key, 1961). As the dominant source of political information for citizens there seems to be little question that the media matter as providers of information in politics in general and in elections in particular. But another aspect to this relationship is whether media influence attitudes and behaviour, and here researchers have been hard pressed to demonstrate media effects (Mondak, 1995). Media coverage is a critical component of understanding social attitudes: in their interactions with the parties and parties’ desired agendas, in telling voters what to think about, sometimes in changing minds, and ultimately in providing narratives about the nature of the government’s mandate. And this is just traditional media. Social media is a relatively new component in these information dynamics of unknown influence. Indeed, our understanding of media effects across Europe remains limited. Some research claims minimal effects that are largely confined to reinforcement of existing partisan predispositions (Newton 2006) while still other research argues for effects that can be short term and not merely reinforcing of partisan predispositions (Stevens et al. 2011.) The inclusion of a question capturing media use and exposure to information, therefore, has the potential to allow researchers to assess the influence wielded by the media as well as under which conditions (e.g. media systems, political systems) these influences are stronger or weaker. Furthermore the ability to link to new data being collected on claims in media, will give greater leverage to any research conducted.</p> <p>In general, one might consider 3 possible motivations for measuring media use:</p>

- Media use as part of a time use study to assess how different types of media are used and what are the purposes of use of media (entertainment, news gathering).
- Media use to capture exposure to information that is relevant to the dynamics of social attitudes.
- Finally, we are interested in information processing and what citizens learn or are aware of from media exposure.

While the ESS measure that was available the first five rounds of the survey reflected the first objective, our proposed measure focuses on the second objective but allows one to investigate questions that might fall under the third.

## **SECTION B. Relationship with other topics in ESS questionnaire**

**Briefly describe how the proposed topic relates to other items in the ESS core questionnaire and/or rotating modules**

**Are the items intended to be used primarily as explanatory/background variables or is the topic primarily of interest as a dependent variable?**

**Are the items intended to improve the measurement of topics already included in the core questionnaire or is it a new topic?**

A media use item could potentially be related to several other items in the ESS survey. A single item capturing overall traditional news media use is generally considered in relation to items of political interest, knowledge and social and political attitudes. On the other hand, media use used alone or as a dependent variable would provide users of the EES with more detailed knowledge of media consumption and its associations both to explanatory factors such as socio-demographic characteristics and characteristics of the supply of the media (i.e. media systems). However, the additional aim is also to allow the linkage of the media question with ESS media claims data that is based on the analysis of (mostly) two newspapers in each country. When combined with the media use measure, the claims indicators will give us a measure of an individual's overall exposure to news about specific issues in specific outlets.

We have demonstrated the potential for the linking of contextual information on the environment with media exposure in a number of surveys (see <https://mediaeffectsresearch.wordpress.com> for working papers) and have done so with the first five waves of the ESS. In particular, we merged a database containing thousands of national events with five waves of the ESS to conduct analyses across countries and individuals as well as within countries and subjects. The results suggest that there is an impressive degree of heterogeneity when it comes to how citizens react to political developments. In particular, some events generate significant opinion changes when groups of individuals who are "treated" (i.e. are exposed to news media) are compared to "control" cases. However, other events produce modest or even null findings with methods that employ different counterfactuals (Pollock et al, 2015).

## SECTION C. Potential methodological or practical difficulties

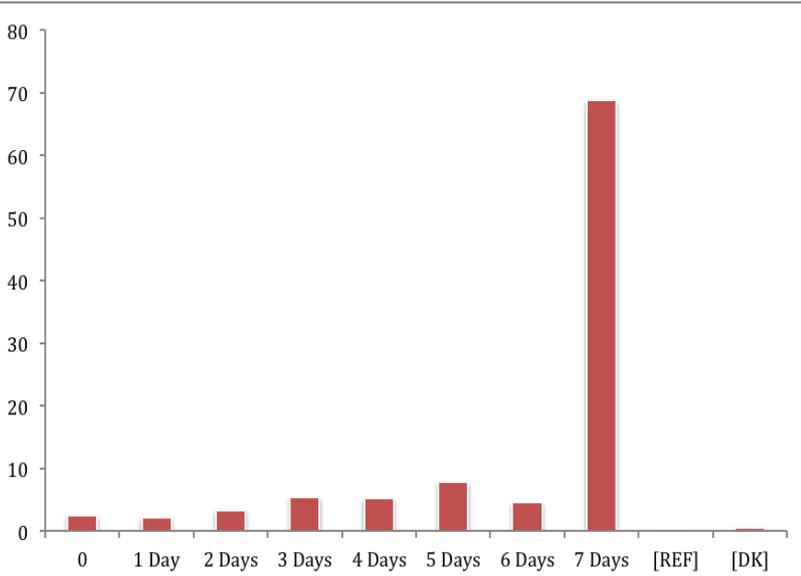
**Provide brief details of any potential methodological or practical difficulties associated with asking about this topic on a face to face cross-national survey  
If no particular problems are anticipated please note this**

In terms of developing a rationale for a particular measure, several issues should be considered.

### Over reporting

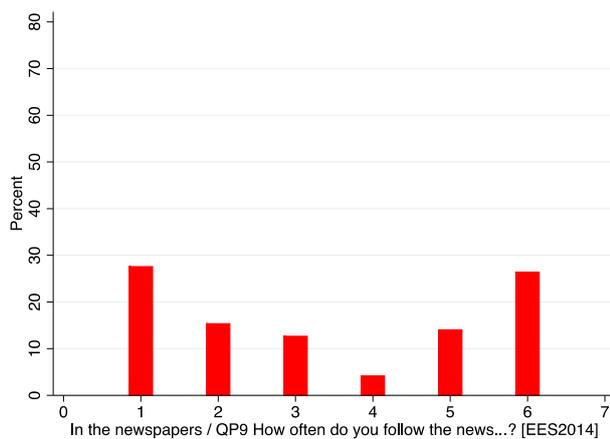
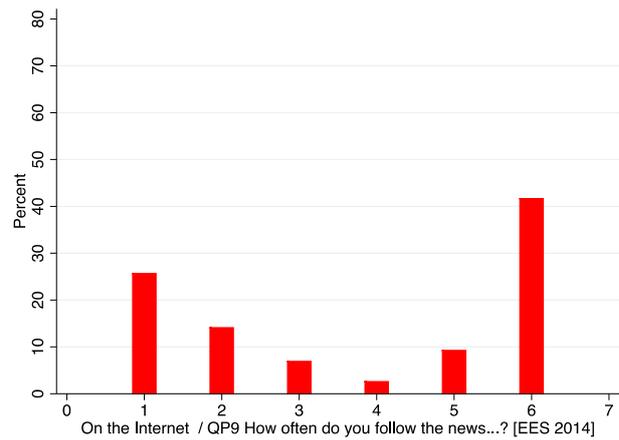
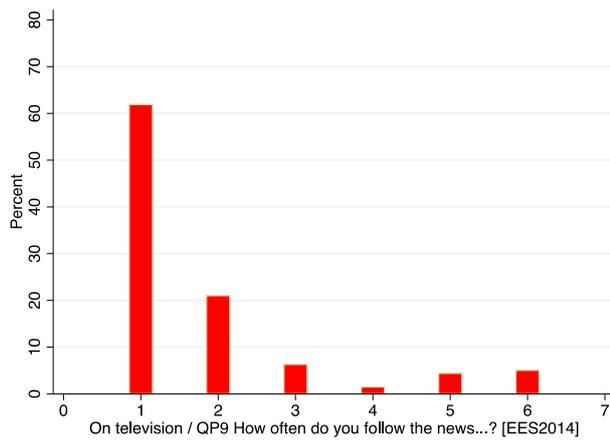
One question to address is whether we are capturing self-reports of media use as accurately as possible. Although there is considerable debate in the literature regarding the measurement of media exposure (Prior, 2009; Stevens, 2008), there is agreement that the best measures minimise over-reporting. In comparing Nielsen audience estimates to self-reports of viewing from the National Annenberg Election Study (NAES), Prior (2009a) finds that the National Annenberg Election Study survey, based on a question about “How many days in the past week did you watch the national network news on TV?” over-reports national news audiences by a factor of 3. Because overreporting is more likely due to real than social desirability effects, Prior (2009b) recommends assisting respondents with recall. Furthermore, non-response bias will tend to produce a sample that has higher levels of political interest and a greater likelihood of news exposure (or a propensity to report news viewing). These factors should be considered in constructing the item.

As an example of over reporting on a single item intended to capture overall exposure to news information, the 2009 European Election Study asked respondents- *“In a typical week, how many days do you pay attention to the news?”*



For the cross-national sample in the European Election Study (n=approx. 27,000), the distribution is shown in the graph. Close to 70% of respondents report paying attention to news 7 days a week. There is little variation in the responses and no way to differentiate different types of media. Given that the question asks about paying attention to the news it may not capture the probability of being exposed to different messages.

In the 2014 EES a revised version of the question was used which asked respondents to give the days a week spent watching or reading news separately for each source. This has a wider variation and is more likely to reduce over-reporting at the same time capturing use of the different sources. The distribution from the 2014 EES is shown below for TV news, newspapers and Internet. The sample size is approximately 30,000 respondents. As one can see when comparing the 2014 distributions to the 2009 question, the variation is greater and the reported exposure is lower (and more reasonable). There is also the advantage of picking up variation across the sources of news.



Based on data from the American National Election Study in 2008, a study comparing the properties of asking time spent using the news in days per week, hours or minutes in a day demonstrated little difference (Trewksbury et al 2011):

*The measures of exposure as days per week, minutes per day, and minutes per week (the product of the first two) operate similarly as predictors of political knowledge, perceived issue distances between presidential candidates, days per week talking about politics, levels of community involvement, and voter turnout.*

Therefore, while a set of general news media use question and then specific questions on specific outlets would be ideal (Dilliplane et al. 2013), space limitations require a more restricted set of questions. Therefore, while a set of general media questions and then specific questions on the coded outlets would be ideal, space limitations require a more restricted set of questions. The experience of the EES in 2009 and 2014 suggests prompting respondents to think about news media use rather than attention to news in general is likely to reduce over reporting. Below, the recommendation is to also not fix category responses of days but instead to ask for a report of time spent consuming news.

### **Capturing time spent consuming news vs. more detailed info:**

Most evidence suggests that asking only one “days a week” question has obvious limitations, such as the inability to discern what kind of information respondents were exposed to. As a result, researchers have begun to ask media specific measures of exposure (e.g., regarding exposure to particular outlets or news programmes. Examples of these question are given in the Appendix). In these studies, the researcher can link survey responses about media use to the content appearing in those media sources (e.g., Banducci and Xezonakis, 2010; Barabas and Jerit, 2010; Stevens et al.,

2011; Stevens and Karp, 2011). This variant of the media use question has many advantages, the most important of which is the ability to link individual respondents with the media content they were likely exposed to (see Druckman, 2005 for discussion). In the case of the ESS respondents could be asked about the specific outlets coded in the media claims analysis (as was done in EES 2009). However, this is usually done alongside asking questions on general news media use as, where there is a diversity of news sources, the outlets from the claims analysis could potentially capture media use by only a small segment of the sample.

Ideally we would want to be able to link the potential for exposure to media coverage (media use) to the actual messages in the media (news content). The degree of specificity in the link should be considered. The ESS media claims analysis captures content of two newspapers and exposure to these two newspapers could be captured (for examples of this type of linking with survey data, see Stevens 2009). While this allows for a direct link between the content and the exposure level, it requires a battery of several questions and does not capture exposure to other sources of information.

We may be interested in capturing the diversity of news media sources that individuals use and how they use them. In previous Eurobarometer and the 2004 European Election Study [EES2004] surveys, respondents were asked to name all newspapers they read and news broadcasts they watched. When asked in this way, we found a correlation between education and number of news sources listed and we concluded that this was a measure of cognitive ability (remembering names of outlets) more so than measuring exposure to news. We would, however, expect that exposure to news will also partly be driven by the supply of news. Where there is greater diversity in news sources there is likely to be more variation in exposure. This variation across sources of news is lost if all sources (newspapers, radio, TV, Internet) are asked all in one question.

That said, evidence has shown that the general media question asking for days of use in the past week is superior (in terms of variance explained) to questions asking about exposure to specific content, quality of information and attention to information. For example, in a study by Romantan et al. (2008), the general media exposure question was better at predicting knowledge of cancer than any of the other measures.

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### Response scale effects

A lot of previous research points to the fact that offering fixed response categories to questions asking about frequency behaviour (e.g. how many hours they watch TV) can influence respondents and bias their answers i.e. their response varies depending on the answer categories offered (Schwarz et al, 1985; Gaskell et al, 1994). This is a particular problem in cross-national surveys where scale effects and, for example, respondents' tendency to gravitate to the mid-point may vary across countries. The recommendation is generally therefore to use open questions for such frequency items to try and minimise measurement error and maximise equivalence across countries.

## SECTION D. Concept definition and measurement

### Time spent consuming news media

The aim is to provide a measure of the amount of exposure individuals have to news media. This is expected to influence their attitudes towards social and political issues discussed in the media.

Exposure may be influenced by a number of things including type of media consumed and attention paid. With only one question item available to devote to the topic of media consumption, total time spent consuming media is felt to provide the best summary measure for predicting attitudes and knowledge.

### Question wording

**A1** On a typical day, about how much time do you spend watching, reading or listening to news about politics and current affairs<sup>1</sup>? Please give your answer in hours and minutes.

**INTERVIEWER:** If no time spent, enter 00 00.

**WRITE IN DURATION**

**hours      minutes**

(Refused)                      77

(Don't know)                      88

<sup>1</sup> About "politics and current affairs": about issues to do with governance and public policy, and with the people connected with these affairs. VARIATION of item A2 in ESS7. Please refer to this item for translation.

## SECTION E. References

### Please provide full references for any studies mentioned in the template below

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- Stevens, Daniel. 2008. "Measuring Exposure to Political Advertising in Surveys." *Political Behavior* 30: 47-72.
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- Tewksbury, David, Scott L. Althaus & Matthew V. Hibbing, (2011) Estimating Self-Reported News Exposure Across and Within Typical Days: Should Surveys Use More Refined Measures? *Communication Methods and Measures* 5:4, pages 311-328.