

FORMATION OF ANTI-CORRUPTION CULTURE IN KAZAKHSTAN: THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA

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ABSTRACT. *In recent years, Kazakhstan has undergone an active institutional transformation of the anti-corruption system, and the media is one of the important aspects in the formation of this culture.*

The purpose of the research is to analyze the influence of media on the formation of anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan, where attention is paid to the consumption model, trust in sources of information, and how people interact with corruption-related content.

The analysis is based on a population survey, covering all regions of Kazakhstan (N = 2685). Data was collected through a combination of face-to-face and online interviews. The survey assessed the frequency of consumption of media content, trust in public, independent, and digital media, views on media coverage of corruption, evaluative interaction with media, and anti-corruption policies. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were used to test the proposed theories. The results show that media content related to corruption is weakly and inconsistently linked to anti-corruption policies, indicating the limited influence of passive media consumption. The reliability of media sources has only a partial, context-dependent relationship with the perception of objectivity and effectiveness of the media. However, active interaction with media content through critical evaluation, checking information, and awareness of media influence is the strongest predictor of media effectiveness in shaping an anti-corruption culture.

The results show that media influence manifests itself through reflexive and interpretative processes, rather than through simple familiarization or blind reliance on specific sources. The practical significance of the study is that anti-corruption reforms in Kazakhstan are focused on legal and institutional measures, and less attention is paid to the social and cultural impact of media on public opinion and ethical norms. This study fills in the gap, as well as examining how media use and audience engagement relate to perceptions of corruption and how effectively media promote anti-corruption values.

KEYWORDS: *anti-corruption culture, mass media, media trust, media engagement, Kazakhstan.*

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a serious problem affecting governance, public confidence, and socio-economic development in many countries, including Kazakhstan. Despite ongoing

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reforms and national anti-corruption strategies, the success of these efforts depends not only on legal and administrative measures but also on cultivating a stable anti-corruption culture in society and shaping public perception. In this context, the media play an essential role in shaping public opinion, values, and attitudes toward corruption (Rifai et al., 2021). The media are not just tools for disseminating information; they also actively shape social reality through agenda-setting, framing, and narrative construction (Bandura, 2009). By selecting, highlighting, and providing context for corruption-related content, the media influence how people perceive the causes, consequences, and moral acceptability of corrupt actions. The regular exposure to media narratives can either foster a culture of tolerance toward corruption or lead to cynicism when corruption is portrayed as inevitable or systemic (Bandura, 2009). Such a problem is especially acute in Kazakhstan, where the media landscape is rapidly changing, and besides traditional television and print media, digital platforms, social networks, and messengers have become the primary sources of information for the population. Changes significantly affect how anti-corruption messages are disseminated and understood. International studies show that digital media can increase civic engagement and awareness, but they can also heighten disinformation risks and erode trust in institutions (Mo, 2013; Amannah & Adeyeye, 2018). However, there is little empirical data on how exactly these processes operate in the Kazakh context. Studies of anti-corruption policy in Kazakhstan mainly consider the legal framework, the effectiveness of institutions and measures to ensure compliance with legislation, while the sociocultural aspect, which is mainly how the media form anti-corruption values, receives less attention (Burakanova et al., 2025; Keegan, 2024). This result creates a gap in research, as the success of formal anti-corruption strategies is closely linked to public perception and confidence in the media and daily judgments about acceptable behavior. Studying the influence of the media on the development of anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan is timely and important, as it will contribute to sociology and media research by examining the relationship between different types of media use and levels of trust and attitude towards corruption. In practice, the results obtained can inform the development of media strategies, public communication policies, and educational programs to increase social intolerance of corruption and promote ethical standards in Kazakh society.

The research aims to investigate the influence of mass media on the formation of anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan. It will examine in detail how people use the media, their trust in sources of information, and how these factors are related to their views on corruption and personal values.

The object of the research is the population of Kazakhstan aged 18 to 65 years and older, living in all regions of the country, and who participated in a sociological survey.

The subject of research is the process of influence of the media on anti-corruption culture in the country, also considering the frequency of consumption of media, the main types of media used, the credibility of information in the media, and how these aspects influence their views on corruption and understanding of its extent in Kazakhstan.

During the study, the following hypotheses were put forward:

H1. The higher degree of impact of news content media is related to the higher level of anti-corruption relations among the population of Kazakhstan.

H2. The credibility of information about corruption disseminated through the media significantly reinforces the link between media impact and the formation of an anti-corruption culture.

H3. Regular consumption of digital media is associated with a higher level of critical awareness of corruption and a stronger anti-corruption attitude than the prevailing use of traditional media.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Within the framework of this study, an integrative theoretical model is applied where the theory of the agenda and influence of media, with the theory of social attribution are considered, which explains how media contribute to the creation of an anti-corruption culture. According to the model, anti-corruption beliefs through media content are formed on the basis of such processes as evaluation, interpretation, and verification of information. Moreover, the credibility of the source is not seen as the main reason for the formation of an anti-corruption culture, but as a factor influencing how information is interpreted. The combination of theories within this model helps to define the scope of media impact on public perception of corruption. The model is based on the following theories, namely the theory of day shaping (Vargo, 2018; Nasser, 2020), shaping theory (Oliver et al., 2019; Berti, 2019), and the study of anti-corruption culture using perception and learning theory (Chumachenko et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2025). A higher-order theory is observed, according to which the media pay attention to public opinion regarding the system's social problems. Many studies show that coverage often increases perceived severity and sensitivity to the problem (Camaj, 2019). Accordingly, radiation exposure during this measurement limits consumption of network media across various channels, including television, news sites, social networks, and instant messengers. Similar indicators are effectively used in political communication studies to assess political education and media views (Vargo, 2018; Berti, 2019). The media also pay attention not only to what people think but also to how they interpret information. Moral, legal, and systemic frameworks influence citizens' tolerance of corrupt practices and their accountability (Lee et al., 2025). Moreover, people internalize norms and behaviors by observing role models in the media, and multiple-exposure stories that focus on punishment, social condemnation, or civic duty help them internalize anti-corruption norms (Nasser, 2020). Accordingly, they play a role in establishing an anti-corruption culture, measured by additional indicators, including intolerance of corruption, moral rejection of corrupt behavior, perceived social harm, and a sense of personal civic responsibility. Trust also influences the quality of the most important link between access to information and attitudes toward people. Media are significantly stronger when audiences perceive their information sources as trustworthy (Tsfati et al., 2020). Therefore, trust in the media is measured using Likert scale indicators that provide confidence in state, independent and digital media, in line with the instruments used in comparative trust studies.

The significance of the research lies in its elucidation of efforts to combat corruption by examining the impact of media on public attitudes and values, and in its emphasis, from a predominantly legal and institutional perspective, on how media influence these views, thereby filling a significant gap in existing research. The study provides clear

evidence of a link between media use, trust in sources of information, and attitudes towards corruption based on national survey data. The results can help shape media strategies, public communication policies, and media literacy programs aimed at strengthening social counter-corruption and promoting civic responsibility. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to a sustainable anti-corruption culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers emphasize the importance of the information environment in shaping norms, values, and citizens' expectations regarding honesty and accountability (Junisbai et al., 2015; Frolova et al., 2017). Media systems act as key intermediaries between anti-corruption institutions and society. They affect how corruption is perceived, discussed, normalized, or challenged. The main theory for understanding the influence of media on public attitudes is agenda-setting theory, which suggests that the media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. More recent studies have extended this idea to include second-level agenda shaping and intermedia agenda shaping, which are particularly relevant in modern mixed media environments (Camaj, 2019; Vargo, 2018). In the context of corruption, agenda-setting theory suggests that media attention to corruption scandals, transparency initiatives, and ethical norms increases the perceived importance of citizens' issues of integrity, contributing to the development of an anti-corruption culture. However, the digital shift in media space has complicated traditional ideas about agenda shaping. Naser (2020) and Vargo (2018) argue that in fragmented and convergent media environments, agenda formation is no longer carried out exclusively by traditional news publications. Social media platforms, blogs, and online activists are now part of the agenda-forming process, changing the ways to spread and enhance corruption stories. The shift is particularly important for post-Soviet and transition societies, where trust in traditional media can vary, and digital platforms provide alternative ways to discuss corruption issues (Junisbai et al., 2015; Bokayev et al., 2023).

In addition to shaping the agenda, research on media influence provides a deeper understanding of how the multiple impacts of corruption-related content affect citizens' attitudes and behavior. Oliver et al. (2020) show that media influence is exercised through emotional and regulatory mechanisms. Lee et al. (2025) show that awareness of anti-corruption policies, formed through communication and access to information, significantly increases ethical motivation among public servants. Their results emphasize the importance of learning effects and internalization of evaluation. Anti-corruption reforms tend to work best when accompanied by clear and consistent communication strategies. This understanding is critical for analyzing how media narratives can support formal anti-corruption policies and facilitate the transformation of legal norms into meaningful social values. At the same time, scientists warn that media influence does not always bring benefits. Tsfati et al. (2020) provide a critical overview of how mainstream media can inadvertently spread misinformation and fake news, even when trying to correct them, and this issue is significant for anti-corruption communication, where sensational coverage, untested claims, or politically motivated narratives can undermine public trust and breed cynicism instead of honesty. In such cases, media coverage can reinforce the idea that corruption is widespread and inevitable, weakening the foundations of an anti-corruption culture.

Research on Kazakhstan shows that the influence of mass media on the formation of anti-corruption culture is related to the unique post-Soviet political, institutional, and social context of the country. Here, corruption is often seen as a widespread and common problem, not just an individual offence (Junisbai et al., 2015; Sheryazdanova et al., 2020). Research shows that Kazakh media play an important role in shaping public opinion, highlighting corruption, transparency, and accountability as national issues, particularly during periods of political reform, digital transformation, and public-sector renewal (Bokayev et al., 2023; Khamitov et al., 2023). At the same time, the literature indicates that the effectiveness of media influence depends more on public opinion-forming strategies, credibility, and audience trust than on the number of anti-corruption messages. Coverage that focuses solely on statements or campaigns can lead to increased public cynicism and a growing belief in the inevitability of corruption. Research on digital governance and e-government efforts in Kazakhstan shows that the media plays a crucial role in transforming official anti-corruption policies and technological changes into clear stories, and in turn, helps to build public understanding and acceptance of the values of honesty among citizens (Amannah & Adeyeye, 2018; Bokayev et al., 2023). It is also stressed that the influence of both traditional and digital media is inconsistent due to differences in media literacy, selective perception, and persistent skepticism towards political messages. Factors limit the adoption of anti-corruption norms in everyday behavior (Sheryazdanova et al., 2020; Nurkey et al., 2021). Overall, studies on Kazakhstan agree that the media contribute to the formation of an anti-corruption culture primarily through agenda-setting, normalization of ethical standards, and symbolic support for state reforms. However, their influence depends on the congruence between media messages, institutional actions, and citizens' everyday experiences.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, a sociological survey was conducted to examine the media's influence on the development of anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan. Data collection was conducted from March to September 2025, enabling regional coverage and a representative sample of diverse social groups. Before the main field work began in February 2025, a pilot study was conducted in several major cities where the pilot sample included 94 respondents and was aimed at checking the clarity, reliability, and consistency of the questionnaire. The pilot study also assessed the appropriateness of the scales chosen, and it was only after the pilot study that minor changes were made to the wording in order to improve paragraph clarity and consistency. Data from the pilot study were excluded from the final analytical sample. The study covers the country's population aged 18 to 65 and above, living in all regions. The initial core survey collected responses from 2,987 participants, but after data cleansing, which included deletion of incomplete questionnaires, conflicting responses, and quality check cases, the final analysis included 2,685 valid questionnaires. The survey was conducted partly face-to-face in large cities, and in more remote locations. An online survey was conducted through the Qualtrics program with a licensed version. Distribution was carried out with the assistance of social and state institutions. The study used a quota sampling strategy in which quotas were established according to key socio-demographic characteristics, including sex, age groups, and region of residence. The socio-demographic composition of the final sample reflects the diversity of the adult population by sex, age, education, region of residence,

employment status, ethnicity, and self-reported household income. A detailed overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N = 2,685)

Characteristics	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	966	36.0
	Female	1,719	64.0
Age group	18–24	754	28.1
	25–34	782	29.1
	35–44	540	20.1
	45–54	367	13.7
	55–64	179	6.7
	65 and older	63	2.3
Marital status	Single (never married)	1,049	39.1
	Married	1,394	51.9
	Divorced	155	5.8
	Widowed	70	2.6
Education level	Primary / General secondary	285	10.6
	Secondary vocational (college)	553	20.6
	Higher education (Bachelor's degree)	1,580	58.8
	Postgraduate (Master's / PhD)	226	8.4
	No formal education	41	1.5
Ethnicity	Kazakh	2,281	85.0
	Russian	112	4.2
	Uzbek	134	5.0
	Other	158	5.8
Employment status	Employed in public sector	628	23.4
	Employed in private sector	339	12.6
	Entrepreneur	209	7.8
	Self-employed	170	6.3
	Student	805	30.0
	Homemaker	185	6.9
	Pensioner	60	2.2
	Unemployed	115	4.3
Other	174	6.5	
Self-assessed household income	Not enough for basic food	129	4.8
	Enough for food, difficulties buying clothes	253	9.4
	Enough for daily expenses, difficult major purchases	743	27.7
	Enough for necessities, not for car or housing	822	30.6
	Enough for all needs, including expensive purchases	513	19.1
Difficult to answer	225	8.4	

Source: compiled by the authors based on the survey

The survey included several thematic clusters measuring media content consumption, media credibility, perceived media influence, anti-corruption attitudes, and media critical analysis skills. Most variables reflecting the ratio were measured using 5 Likert scales, and media consumption frequency was measured on a scale from «never» to «daily». The credibility of sources was assessed on a five-point scale from complete mistrust to complete confidence. The culture of fighting corruption has been defined by a composite index that includes many indicators, such as normative intolerance for corruption, moral rejection of corrupt practices, perceived harm to society caused by corruption, and personal civic responsibility. Composite indices were created by averaging standardized item scores. Data analysis was performed using licensed SPSS version 27 and included descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to test the

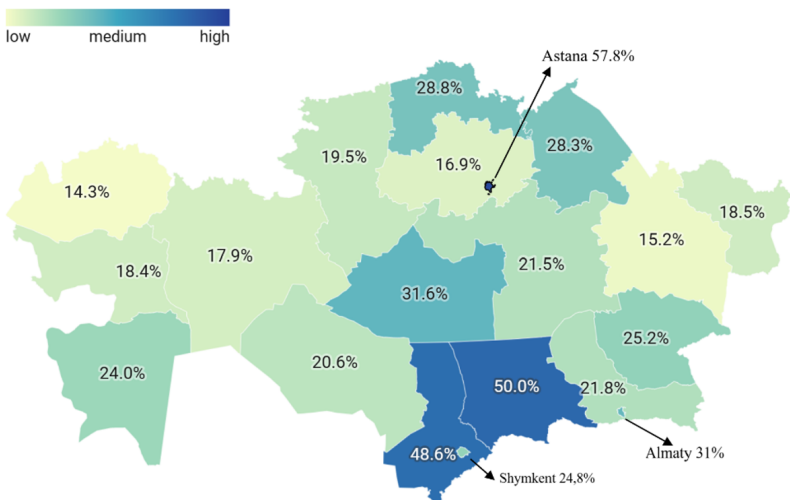
proposed research hypotheses. The internal consistency of the multicomponent scales was assessed using the alpha Cronbach coefficient, with values above 0.70.

Methodological limitations. This study has a number of limitations, where the data does not prove the direct causal links of media influence on the development of anti-corruption culture, as the relationships may be bilateral. People who have strong anti-corruption beliefs will also be highly likely to subject information to analysis and fact-checking, rather than just being influenced by the media. Moreover, the study focuses on social attribution, where the influence of social desirability and differences in the interpretation of information may affect perception. Therefore, it is important to further address this issue through longitudinal approaches. However, the empirical evidence provides valuable insights into how different forms of media engagement relate to perceptions of media effectiveness and anti-corruption culture. The results should be considered as a basis for future research using causal methods, such as panel surveys or experimental studies, to further explore the mechanisms underlying the influence of media on anti-corruption activities.

RESULTS

The results of the study showed that public opinions on how media form anti-corruption culture are significant, and given the diversity of geography, socio-economic factors, and institutions in Kazakhstan, it is advisable to consider these views from a regional perspective. In this context, the links between the region and the opinion on the effectiveness of the influence of media on the development of anti-corruption culture were considered (see fig. 1).

Figure 1. Regional differences in the assessment of the influence of media on the formation of anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan, %



Source: compiled by the authors using <https://www.datawrapper.de/>

The analysis shows significant regional differences in public opinion, where the criteria of chi-square Pearson ($\chi^2 = 342.385$; $df = 57$; $p < 0.001$) show a strong relationship,

but a slight linear dependence ($p = 0.839$) indicates the absence of a simple linear trend in different regions. This highlights the complex and diverse nature of regional representations. The highest percentage of positive ratings, including answers «very effective» and «quite effective», is observed in Astana (57.8%), Zhambyl region (50.0%), and Turkestan region (48.6%). Considering Astana as the capital, one can infer that this trend may be attributable to the presence of national institutions and media there. The high level of positive assessments in the Turkestan and Zhambyl regions is explained by their possible common cultural and communication context, as in the southern regions of Kazakhstan. In the regions, the media often focus on collective values, moral norms, and social responsibility. Rhetoric can better resonate with the local audience and increase the perceived impact of media reports on corruption. In addition, a closer link between regional media and their audiences, as well as an emphasis on local information, can foster greater trust in media narratives. However, most regions tend to negative ratings, with East Kazakhstan, Karaganda, Abai, and Akmola having a total share of negative responses, «quite inefficient» and «completely inefficient», which is over 70%, indicating a low level of public confidence in the ability of the media to influence anti-corruption culture. The result may reflect a gap between media reports and people's everyday experiences, as well as a perception of anti-corruption reporting as formal or superficial, with no significant impact. Almaty (31%) and Shymkent (24.8%) are in the middle, but with a high level of media consumption and access to various sources of information, positive assessments are moderate. This indicates that the city's audience is more critical and may have higher demands on journalistic investigations, transparency, and the media's role as a watchdog.

The identified regional differences show that public perception of the role of media in promoting anti-corruption culture varies across the country, but regional differences alone are not sufficient to fully explain the differences in the public's assessment of media effectiveness. Additional analysis examined various socio-demographic aspects, which made it possible to clarify whether these views are related to individual characteristics (see Table 2). Further analysis of the social and demographic factors was conducted.

Table 2. Socio-demographic differences in perceived effectiveness of mass media in shaping anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan (N = 2,685)

Socio-demographic variable	χ^2 (df)	p-value	Spearman's ρ	p-value	Interpretation
Gender	5.324 (3)	0.150	0.024	0.215	No statistically significant association
Age group	53.626 (15)	< 0.001	-0.062	0.001	Significant but weak negative association
Education level	13.770 (12)	0.316	0.044	0.022	Weak but statistically significant association
Ethnicity	30.059 (27)	0.312	-0.031	0.109	No statistically significant association

Source: compiled by the authors based on the survey

The results show that socio-demographic factors have some influence, but not all, as for example gender does not demonstrate a significant relationship with views on media effectiveness. This indicates that men and women generally share similar views

about the impact of the media on anti-corruption culture. Similarly, ethnicity does not have a significant relationship with perceived media effectiveness, which also indicates that there is sufficient consistency in the assessments of media influence among ethnic groups, despite Kazakhstan’s multicultural composition. In contrast to the above two aspects, age shows a weak but significant relationship with media effectiveness perception ($\chi^2 = 53.626, p < 0.001$); the negative correlation means that young respondents tend to assess more positively the role of the media in shaping anti-corruption culture than senior groups (Rifai et al., 2021; Thu et al., 2023). The pattern may reflect generational differences in media habits, digital activity, and expectations of media functions. Young people who are more likely to use digital and social networks may find media content more relevant and influential in shaping ethical standards. On the contrary, older respondents may be more skeptical due to longer experience of interaction with institutional communication (Thu et al., 2023). The level of education also shows a weak but significant connection, although the general criterion of chi-square did not reach the standard level of significance ($\chi^2 = 13.770, p = 0.316$), the result may all point to a small trend towards that people with a higher level of education give more critical assessments of the influence of the media (Charron & Annoni 2021).

Links between the frequency of receipt of information on corruption from various media sources and important indicators of anti-corruption attitudes are shown below (see Table 3).

Table 3. Correlations between media exposure, cognitive media engagement, and perceived effectiveness of mass media in shaping anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan (N = 2,685)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
How often do you receive information about corruption from the following sources? Television	1,000													
How often do you receive information about corruption from the following sources? Online news portals	-.187**	1,000												
How often do you receive information about corruption from the following sources? Social media	-.538**	.290**	1,000											
How often do you receive information about corruption from the following sources? Newspapers / Print media	.389**	-.157**	-.342**	1,000										
The media objectively covers cases of corruption.	.072**	-.050**	-.114**	.133**	1,000									
The media contribute to intolerance toward corruption.	-.008	.020	.008	-.014	-.011	1,000								
The media often distorts information about corruption.	.002	.003	-.002	.016	.059**	-.022	1,000							
Coverage of corruption in the media is perfunctory.	-.002	.037	.010	.001	.021	-.022	.100**	1,000						
The media pay attention to the consequences of corruption for society.	.017	.000	-.013	.014	-.009	.011	.048*	.068**	1,000					
Has media coverage influenced your personal attitude toward corruption?	.000	.003	-.003	-.004	-.018	-.036	-.003	.019	.039*	1,000				
I critically evaluate anti-corruption materials in the media.	-.025	-.012	.026	-.016	-.007	-.047*	-.022	.016	.008	.492**	1,000			
	.193	.523	.184	.396	.721	.016	.254	.406	.678	.000				

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
I verify information about corruption from several sources.	-.042*	-.014	.035	-.012	-.007	-.030	.003	.022	.004	.391**	.479**	1,000		
The media can manipulate public opinion on corruption.	-.017	-.016	.007	-.008	-.033	-.001	-.035	-.013	.001	.329**	.508**	.375**	1,000	
How effectively are the media in Kazakhstan in shaping an anti-corruption culture in society?	-.069**	-.001	.061**	-.060**	-.040*	-.041*	.005	.034	.010	.346**	.595**	.389**	.447**	1,000

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Source: compiled by the authors based on the survey

The results show that the frequency of receiving information about corruption from various media sources, such as television, online news, social networks, and print media, tends to have little or no relation to anti-corruption sentiments. This pattern assumes that mere exposure to corruption information does not increase anti-corruption beliefs or alter personal attitudes. The results emphasize that media influence does not depend solely on the amount of information consumed and reveal limits to the passive influence of media. On the other hand, the analysis reveals strong and significant interrelationships among variables reflecting evaluative interactions with media content. Respondents who expressed criticism of anti-corruption materials in the media were much more likely to check information on corruption using different sources ($\rho = 0.479, p < 0.001$); also, critical assessment was related to the belief that media can shape public opinion about corruption ($\rho = 0.508, p < 0.001$), which suggests that a higher level of media literacy goes hand in hand with a better understanding of both the positive and potentially manipulative aspects of media narratives. It is important to note that the extent to which respondents consider the media effective in fostering an anti-corruption culture is closely related to signs of reflexive interaction with the media, rather than to the frequency of their exposure to it. Perceived media effectiveness has a strong positive correlation with critical evaluation of media content ($\rho = 0.595, p < 0.001$), verification of information from multiple sources ($\rho = 0.389, p < 0.001$), and recognition of the ability of media to influence public opinion ($\rho = 0.447, p < 0.001$). Communication shows that respondents who actively analyze, question, and understand media reports are more likely to see the media as a significant player in promoting anti-corruption norms.

Further, the following analysis presented in Table 4 clarifies the role of credibility to various sources of information and its relationship with the perception, involvement, and perceived effectiveness of media in shaping anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan.

Table 4. Trust in media, cognitive engagement, and perceived effectiveness of mass media in shaping anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan (N = 2,685)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
How much do you trust information about corruption spread by state media ?	1,000													
How much do you trust information about corruption spread by independent media ?	.026	1,000												
How much do you trust information about corruption spread by social media ?	-.313**	.074**	1,000											

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
How much do you trust information about corruption spread by bloggers and influencers ?	1,000													
The media objectively covers cases of corruption.	-.271**	.200**	.817**	1,000										
The media contribute to intolerance toward corruption.	.000	.000	.000											
The media often distorts information about corruption.	-.019	.061**	-.092**	.033	1,000									
Coverage of corruption in the media is perfunctory.	.320	.002	.000	.090										
The media pay attention to the consequences of corruption for society.	-.030	.019	-.054**	.005	-.011	1,000								
Has media coverage influenced your personal attitude toward corruption?	.117	.337	.005	.802	.567									
I critically evaluate anti-corruption materials in the media.	-.019	.024	-.007	.008	.059**	-.022	1,000							
I verify information about corruption from several sources.	.326	.212	.699	.690	.002	.247								
The media can manipulate public opinion on corruption.	-.012	.011	.017	.018	.021	-.022	.100**	1,000						
How effectively are the media in Kazakhstan in shaping an anti-corruption culture in society?	.521	.567	.383	.355	.279	.250	.000							
	-.015	-.009	.004	.013	-.009	.011	.048*	.068**	1,000					
	.425	.636	.838	.496	.648	.571	.012	.000						
	-.003	-.010	.010	-.001	-.018	-.036	-.003	.019	.039*	1,000				
	.890	.591	.599	.942	.360	.060	.866	.328	.045					
	-.015	.010	.026	.027	-.007	-.047*	-.022	.016	.008	.492**	1,000			
	.423	.615	.181	.163	.721	.016	.254	.406	.678	.000				
	-.021	.007	.023	.023	-.007	-.030	.003	.022	.004	.391**	.479**	1,000		
	.288	.713	.235	.241	.715	.126	.895	.245	.851	.000	.000			
	.009	.004	.033	.019	-.033	-.001	-.035	-.013	.001	.329**	.508**	.375**	1,000	
	.655	.824	.088	.337	.092	.971	.068	.502	.939	.000	.000	.000		
	-.039*	.008	.011	.012	-.040*	-.041*	.005	.034	.010	.346**	.595**	.389**	.447**	1,000
	.045	.661	.567	.531	.038	.034	.806	.081	.610	.000	.000	.000	.000	

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Source: compiled by the authors based on the survey

The credibility of media sources is only weakly correlated with assessments of content. The credibility of independent media is weak, but significantly related to the perception that the media objectively cover corruption cases ($\rho = 0.061$, $p = 0.002$). On the other hand, higher trust in social networks is associated with lower acceptance of the idea that media objectively cover corruption ($\rho = 0.092$, $p < 0.001$) and lower support for media that promote intolerance of corruption ($\rho = 0.054$, $p = 0.005$). The findings show that trust in alternative media does not necessarily translate into greater confidence in journalistic standards or anti-corruption reporting. The perception of media coverage demonstrates a significant internal coherence, where agreement that media distort information about corruption is positively correlated with opinion on the formalistic nature of coverage ($\rho = 0.100$, $p < 0.001$) and, to a lesser extent, with the recognition that the media take into account the social consequences of corruption ($\rho = 0.048$, $p = 0.012$). This combination points to a subtle public opinion, in which critical evaluation of media performance coexists with recognition of selective information value. Most importantly, the analysis highlights a strong link between evaluative interaction with media and perceived media influence on anti-corruption culture, where valuing the impact of media information on personal views on corruption strongly correlates with critical evaluation of anti-corruption materials ($\rho = 0.492$, $p < 0.001$), verification of information from multiple sources ($\rho = 0.391$, $p < 0.001$) and perception that the media can manipulate public opinion ($\rho = 0.329$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, the perceived effectiveness of the media in forming an anti-corruption culture demonstrates a powerful link with critical evaluation of media content ($\rho = 0.595$, $p < 0.001$), behavior regarding information verification ($\rho = 0.389$, $p < 0.001$), and recognition of manipulative potential ($\rho = 0.447$,

$p < 0.001$). There is little or no direct correlation between the credibility of media sources and the perceived overall effectiveness of the media. Trust in public media is poorly and negatively correlated with perceived efficiency ($\rho = 0.039$, $p = 0.045$). In contrast, trust in independent media, social networks, and blogs does not show statistically significant links, where the results show that trust alone cannot explain the perception of media effectiveness, and instead, the key factor is how the audience processes, critically evaluates, and contextualizes media content.

DISCUSSION

The results contribute to the growing volume of studies on the influence of media on anti-corruption culture, providing empirical data from Kazakhstan, a post-Soviet context characterized by institutional reforms, the transformation of the media, and the continuing public skepticism about governance. The results show a simplified interpretation of the theory of agenda formation, which equates wider media coverage with stronger anti-corruption policies. While classical studies of agenda formation suggest that frequent exposure increases the relevance of the problem (Vargo, 2018; Camaj, 2019), this study shows that the frequency of exposure alone is not sufficient to form an anti-corruption culture. The conclusion is consistent with more recent studies emphasizing the formation of a second-level agenda and audience activity in a fragmented media environment (Naser, 2020). In the Kazakh context, the multiple impacts of corruption-related information do not necessarily lead to moral intolerance or behavior change, which supports the argument that passive consumption can lead to normalization or fatigue rather than mobilization (Bandura, 2009; Tsfati et al., 2020). The study develops prospects for the formation of frays and social learning, emphasizing the central role of evaluative interaction with the media. People who are critical of media content, cross-check information from multiple sources, and recognize the manipulative potential of the media are more likely to perceive the media as effective in building an anti-corruption culture. The pattern is consistent with a theory of social perception that emphasizes learning through interpretation, reflection, and judgment rather than mere observation (Bandura, 2009). Similar mechanisms have been identified in studies of political communication and ethical learning, in which the internalization of norms depends on evaluation processing rather than on exposure intensity (Lee et al., 2025; Oliver et al., 2019). The results also clarify the role of media credibility, partially supporting the H2 hypothesis. While previous studies have emphasized trust as a necessary condition for media influence (Tsfati et al., 2020; Beldibekova et al., 2024), this study demonstrates that trust itself has limited explanatory power in shaping perceptions of media effectiveness. The credibility of independent media is weakly associated with perceptions of objectivity. In contrast, the credibility of social networks is inversely proportional to the confidence in journalistic standards and anti-corruption coverage, which are consistent with international data, showing that trust in alternative or digital media does not necessarily correspond to higher quality of information or ethical coverage (Mo, 2013; Tsfati et al., 2020). In Kazakhstan, trust appears to function as a contextual filter rather than as a direct determinant of anti-corruption sentiment.

Also, the fragmentation between institutional and non-institutional media reflects wider changes in post-Soviet and hybrid media systems. Strong trust in social networks and influencers, along with mistrust of state media, aligns with earlier conclusions about selective information perception and parallel information spheres in Central Asia (Junisbai et al., 2015; Bokayev et al., 2023). However, this study develops this literature by showing that none of these areas alone guarantees a stronger anti-corruption position. Instead, people who interact in both environments those who check information and keep a critical distance are more likely to see the media's role in promoting accountability. The regional differences noted in the study provide additional context for these mechanisms. Higher perceived media effectiveness in the southern regions and the capital indicates that local cultural norms, proximity to institutions and communication styles can increase confidence in media narratives, which confirms interpretations of media influence taking into account regional differences, as seen in studies of transition societies, where media credibility is shaped by everyday experience and institutional appearances, not just national communications (Sheryzdanova et al., 2020; Khamitov et al., 2023). The results also confirm the hypothesis that H3 is stronger than H1 and H2. Regular use of digital media does not in itself strengthen the anti-corruption relationship. However, it is associated with a higher level of critical perception and reflective assessment and is consistent with research that highlights media literacy as a crucial factor in democratic and ethical outcomes in digital societies (Amannah & Adeyeye, 2018; Charron & Annoni 2021). The example of Kazakhstan shows that digital media can serve as a resource for civic education or a space for skepticism and alienation, depending on users' interpretive abilities.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that the study has achieved its goal and that trust and involvement interact, shaping perceptions of media effectiveness and anti-corruption attitudes in Kazakh society. The hypotheses put forward have received varying degrees of confirmation. H1, which assumes that a higher degree of influence of media content related to corruption will lead to stronger anti-corruption attitudes, has been supported only partially, as the analysis shows, that the frequency of media consumption has little or no relation to anti-corruption attitudes and perceived media effectiveness, and this suggests that the simple impact of corruption-related information, does not automatically create an aversion to corruption or lead to significant changes in personal attitudes. Further H2, which argued that media credibility would significantly strengthen the link between media impact and anti-corruption culture, was also only partially confirmed. Although the credibility of independent media is, to some extent, consistent with perceptions of objective coverage, the credibility of public and digital media shows a weak or inconsistent association with anti-corruption sentiments and perceived media effectiveness. The results show that while trust is important, it is neither a direct nor a sufficient factor in the media's influence on anti-corruption culture. Instead, trust interacts with other factors, especially with evaluative and interpretive engagement. However, the H3 hypothesis has been thoroughly supported, so regular use of digital media is closely related to a higher level of critical appraisal, verification of information, and awareness of the role of media in shaping public opinion. Furthermore, reflective practices demonstrate the strongest and most consistent link with perceived media

effectiveness in promoting an anti-corruption culture, confirming that anti-corruption attitudes are more likely to be formed among those who actively interpret, evaluate, and contextualize media content than among those who consume it. In general, the study concludes that the influence of mass media on anti-corruption culture in Kazakhstan occurs mainly through evaluation mechanisms, rather than through the volume of media consumption or unconditional trust in specific sources. Media can have a significant impact on anti-corruption culture when audiences are critical of information, review content across various channels, and understand both regulatory and strategic elements of the media. The results complement a broader body of studies on the impact of media on combating corruption, showing that effective anti-corruption communication relies not only on institutional reporting and media coverage, but also on improving media literacy and promoting thoughtful citizenship. From a practical point of view, the results show that policies aimed at enhancing an anti-corruption culture should focus on educational and communication strategies that improve critical interaction with the media, and rely only on increased dissemination of information or formal media campaigns..

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

AB: development of the research concept, formulation of the theoretical framework, review and analysis of the scientific literature, organization and implementation of the empirical study, data collection and processing, and drafting of the main manuscript; MA: methodological support of the study, statistical analysis, interpretation of the results, and scientific editing of the manuscript; DN: contribution to the theoretical framework, review and analysis of the scientific literature, conduct of the pilot study, refinement of research instruments, verification and validation of analytical results, and participation in formulating the conclusions.

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