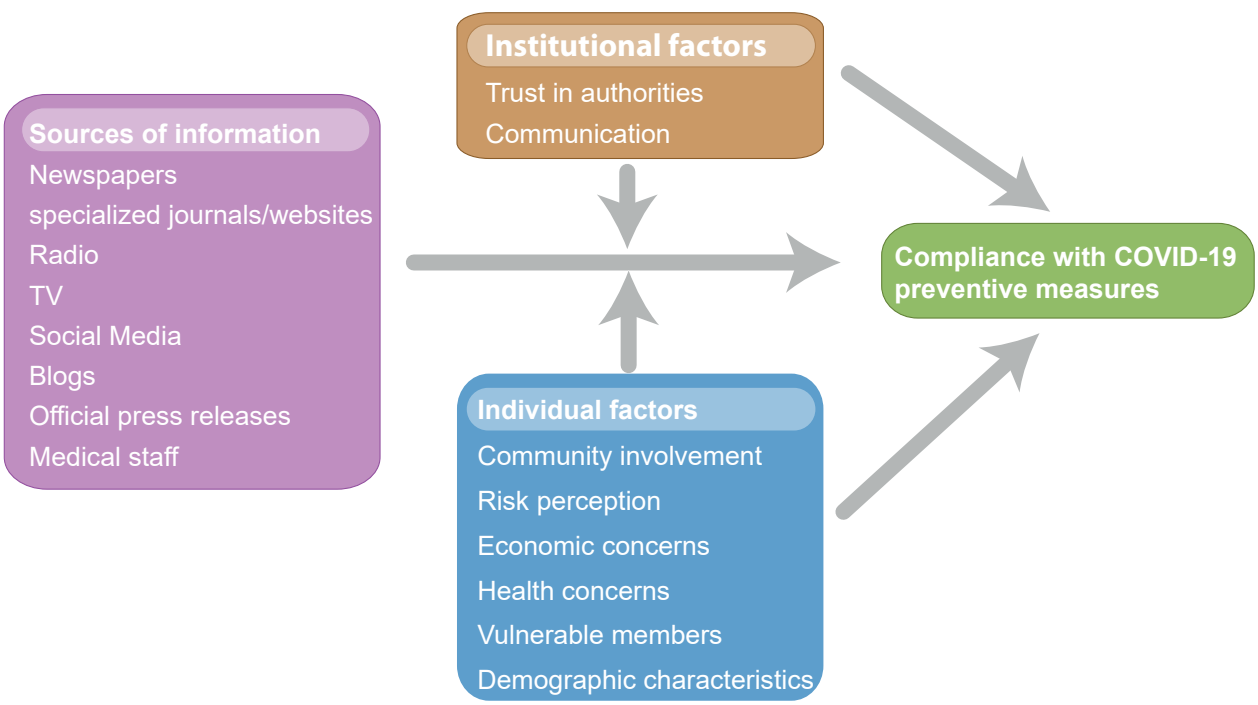
Social media & compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures

Since March 2020, public authorities around the world have faced a new global shock. In order to stop the spread of the virus and protect their citizens various preventive measures have been either recommended or enforced through law. Although various vaccines have since been developed and made available to the public, not all counties have been equally successful in immunizing their citizens. According to the European Centre for Disease and Prevention Control, in August 2021 Romania was second-last in terms of percentage of people vaccinated. Thus, Romanian authorities still rely on mask wearing and social distancing in order to contain the COVID-19 virus. As such, factors that have an influence on compliance with the preventive measures should be understood, as this would allow authorities to adopt specific measures to increase compliance. In this case, high levels of compliance with preventive measures are considered a measure of resilience of communities in the face of this shock. The present case study investigates: (1) the extent to which people complied with the preventive measures and (2) the factors that influence compliance in the case of the metropolitan area of Cluj-Napoca. From a policy perspective, such studies help to identify the measures that authorities can take in order to increase the ability of communities to face the pandemic. The factors that were considered, as well as their connections with compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures are presented in the graph below.

Methodological approach



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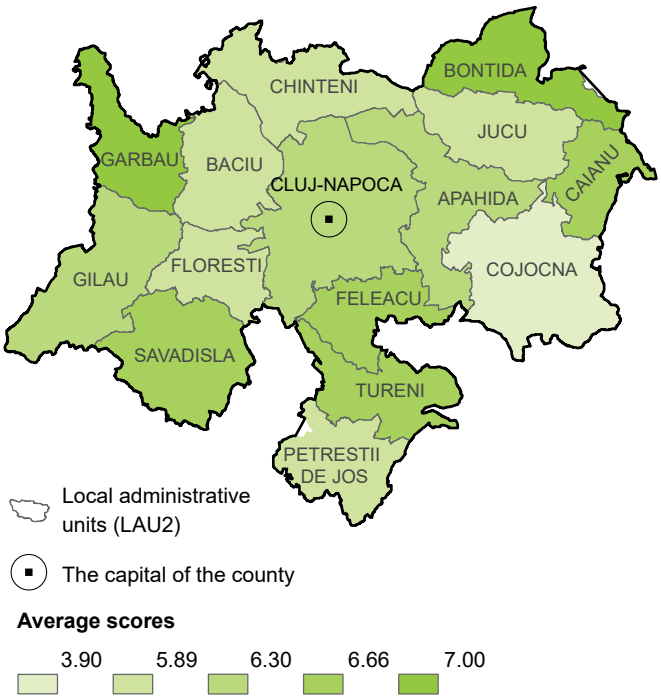
Cluj-Napoca Area



The data was collected through a representative survey conducted in December 2020, during the second wave of COVID-19. The survey relied on a simple random sampling, using randomly generated telephone numbers. The target population was represented by the residents, aged 18 or above, of the metropolitan area of Cluj-Napoca. The map presents the study area, as well as the compliance scores obtained at the level of communities studied. As it can be observed, there are large differences between communities.

The results show that out of the sources of information considered, specialized journals/websites, TV and official press releases have a positive effect on compliance with the preventive measures, while social media have a negative effect on compliance. This is in line with other research (Bridgman et al., 2020; Fridman at al., 2020; Pedersen and Favero, 2020) which concluded that reliance on social media is negatively associated with accurate knowledge about COVID-19 and reduced willingness to comply with the preventive measures. However, the effect social media have on compliance is reduced once we control for the perception of how authorities communicate, risk perception, health concerns and demographic variables. In terms of demographic variables, compliance is higher in the case of older people, females and highly educated population.

	Model 1	Model 2
Newspapers	-.032	-.048
Specialized journals/websites	.092*	.057
TV	.116**	-.059
Radio	-.042	-.065
Social Media	-.118**	-.107**
Blogs	-.570	-.170
Official press releases	.101**	.050
Medical staff	.035	-.002
Communication		.158***
Trust		-.044
Community involvement		.074*
Risk perception		.233***
Economic concerns		-.067
Health concerns		.098**
Vulnerable members		-.067
Age		.102*
Gender		.075*
Education		.093*
R^2	.043	.193
Adjusted R^2	.032	.172
F	3.882	9.302
Sig.	.000	.000