

### 2.2.3. Trough Effects on Emotions

Most research in the field of political media effects focuses on cognitive, not on affective responses. Hence, Kinder (1998, p. 190) argues that “about the emotional requirements of citizenship, or the emotional foundations of political opinion, little is heard”. Until now, only a few studies have explored the relationship between media information, emotional responses and political attitudes. For instance Schemer (2009) reported findings that indicate that the news coverage in tabloids fuels negative emotions. Those negative emotions, in turn, affected subjects’ political attitudes. Based on data from a three-wave panel survey the author showed that political media information in the context of a referendum on the asylum law in Switzerland raised negative emotions, such as fear and anger. These emotions were found to have consequences for policy judgments, more precisely attitudes towards the modification of the asylum law, in turn. This finding is consistent with results from a study by Sotirovic (2001). The author showed that fear acts as a mediator of media use on attitudes towards punitive policies. In line with these results, Holbert (2004) found that police reality show viewing predicts fear of crime. Fear of crime, in turn, was found to lead to the endorsement of capital punishment and handgun ownership.

### 2.2.4. Trough Effects on Political Knowledge

A variety of studies indicate that media information increases the audience’s political knowledge (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997). For instance, Benoit, McKinney, & Stephenson (2002) found that watching primary campaigns enhanced the viewers’ knowledge of the candidate’s policy positions. Studies that address the question of how media effects on political knowledge are related to changes in political attitudes are rather rare. Interesting findings in this respect are provided in a study by Moy & Pfau (2000). Using structural equation modeling, the authors not only investigated direct effects of media information on confidence in political institutions, but also indirect effects through the media’s impact on political knowledge. Findings indicate that newspaper use increased political knowledge, which in turn enhanced trust and confidence in the presidency and Congress. Talk show viewing, in contrast, had a negative indirect effect on trust and confidence in Congress via political knowledge. Overall, the authors found more positive indirect effects than negative indirect effects. On the whole, then, the findings suggest that media’s impact on political knowledge might lead to an increase of political support. Findings from a study on trust in the World Trade Organization (WTO) do not confirm this assumption (Moy, Torres, Tanaka, & McCluskey, 2005). The authors found no indirect effects of media reliance through institutional knowledge on trust in the WTO.

## 2.2.5. Summary and Conclusion

A variety of studies presented in this section give explanations for the question of how media information influence political attitudes. Studies investigating the relationship between media information, *perceptions of social reality* and political attitudes provide some evidence for the assumption that reality perceptions act as a mediator of the mass media's impact on political attitudes. On the side of the independent variable, studies investigated effects on individuals' policy satisfaction and satisfaction with the performance of political leaders. It seems plausible to argue that the results may generalize media effects on political support. Thus, conceptualizing perceptions of political decision-making processes as a factor that mediates the relationship between media presentations of decision-making processes and political support appears to be promising.

Studies in the tradition of priming research provide evidence for the assumption that perceived *issue accessibility or perceived issue importance* might mediate the relationship between media information and political attitudes, and presidential evaluations in particular. In general, research so far has tended to neglect the question whether citizens consider the national importance of an issue and, hence, engage in a cognitive process, or whether priming is just a function of accessibility and occurs unconsciously (J. M. Miller, 2007). The influence of the assumed mediating variables is not explicitly investigated in most studies: "Despite the normative implications of the conventional wisdom that accessibility mediates agenda setting, to date the hypothesis has not been subject to empirical tests" (J. M. Miller, 2007, p. 691) because "in virtually every past agenda-setting study, content and accessibility are confounded" (J. M. Miller, 2007, p. 707). The same is true with respect to priming research.

Other studies provide empirical evidence for the assumption that *emotional responses* may mediate the effects of media information on policy attitudes. Although emotions appeared to be a relevant mediator of the relationship between media information and policy attitudes, little is known at present with respect to the role of emotions as a mediator of the media's impact on attitudes towards political institutions, actors or democracy. It appears that emotions are less likely to mediate the relationship between media presentations of day-to-day political decision-making processes and political support.

*Political knowledge* may mediate the effects of media information on confidence in political institutions. The findings are rather diverse, indicating positive indirect effects of media exposure on confidence in some cases and negative indirect effects in other cases. With regard to the research purpose of this study, I may assume that political knowledge might mediate the relationship between media information about political processes and citizens' political support. By increasing the knowledge about political processes, the media might also shape their perception. The two concepts, hence, appear to be closely related in that case.

The majority of studies which investigate media effects and consider mediating variables did not apply the data analytical procedures to estimate indirect effects in a