izational culture is congruent with the values and beliefs of the employees. In line with their expectations, the authors found that commitment, satisfaction, and cohesion are strengthened if the organization is shaped by values which employees believe should exist. In addition, there are studies which indicate that the preferences-perceptions relationship affects consumers' satisfaction with products. For example, Cadotte, Woodruff, & Jenkins (1987) showed that if a brand (in this case a fast food restaurant) performs worse than expected, the dissatisfaction with the brand decreases.

Moreover, the argument that the relationship between preferences (i.e. some sort of a prototype or ideal image) and perceptions of reality predicts political support is in line with a variety of definitions of political trust or support. For instance, Miller (1974, p. 989) defined political trust as "the belief that the government is operating according to one's normative expectations of how government should function". And Barber (1983, p. 80f.) argued that political distrust is "a realistic critique of political performance and/or of fiduciary responsibility in the light of accepted democratic values." Walz (1996) contended that political support is based on the assumption that political institutions decide as expected. And Fuchs (1999a) maintained that one condition for the stability of democratic systems is the development of a political culture that is congruent with the implemented structure.

3.2. The Media's Impact on the Preferences-Perceptions Relationship

Although the media is hypothesized to be an important source of political information, previous research has tended to neglect the role of the media in shaping the preference-perception relationship. This section elaborates the media's impact on the preferences-perceptions relationship. An exception to the tendency of research to neglect the role of the media is a study by Kimball & Patterson (1997). This study considers the media's role in influencing the preference-perception discrepancy and the consequences for political support.[33] The authors assumed that

> "citizens exposed to the admittedly negative political news emanating from the media, and particularly those exposed to the drumbeat of 'Congress-bashing', may thereby experience larger expectation-perception discrepancies and, accordingly, be less supportive of Congress than the media-underexposed" (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 721).

In order to test this assumption, the authors investigated the impact of attention paid to political news in the media on the discrepancy variables. The findings support the assumption: Subjects exposed to the media showed higher levels of preference-perception discrepancies and, as a consequence, exhibited lower ratings of Congress. Thus, the authors concluded:

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33   For more information on the study by Kimball & Patterson (1997) see the description of this study in Section 3.1.

"Improving public perceptions of congressional integrity will depend upon changes in both Congress and the mass media so that citizens receive more positive information about members of Congress. An adversarial press no doubt focuses public attention on congressional scandal, and on politicians' motivations for pursuing power, status, and wealth (Kerbel, 1995; Patterson, 1993). But the changes for improvement seem not very good; if anything, press coverage of Congress has tended to be more, not less, negative in recent years (Mann & Ornstein, 1994)." (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 723).

The study by Kimball & Patterson (1997) does not provide empirical answers to the question whether media information shapes the preferences-perceptions relationship by affecting preferences, perceptions, or both. Kimball & Patterson (1997) argue that the perception of political realities is based on direct experiences, social interactions and media information. In line with this assumption, the present study builds on cultivation research and assumes that the media affect citizens' perceptions of political decision-making processes. Section 3.2.1 elaborates this assumption.

As regards the question where preferences come from, Kimball & Patterson (1997) argue that socialization may be one important source for the development of ideas of an congressional ideal:

"Citizens carry with them expectations, however rudimentary, about political institutions, Congress in particular, and about processes taking place within Congress. Such expectations may develop in the form of fuzzy images of the institution as a whole, arise from very partisan or ideological perspectives, biases, and distortions, focus on particular institutional actions or events, or concern the characteristics or attributes of the institution's members. Citizens' expectations about Congress may develop from specific socialization, perhaps in early life experience, about what Congress should be like. Civics textbook expectations about Congress's constitutional function, its members and their conduct, its representativeness, its accessibility, or its reliability in passing legislation may shape citizens' expectations, forming an image or 'prototype' of the congressional ideal." (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 701f.).

This assumption is in line with research showing that the political culture in which a citizen is socialized shapes preferences as regards political decision-making processes (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Kaase & Newton, 1995; Linder & Steffen, 2006). Seciton 3.2.2 elucidates the role of the socialization with a political culture in shaping citizens' process preferences. The ways in which the mass media may affect the audience's process preferences are also discussed. In order to inform propositions about the impact of media presentations of political processes on citizens' perceptions of such processes and their levels of political support, Section 3.2.3 presents research that investigates how the mass media present political processes.

3.2.1.   The Media's Impact on the Perception of Political Processes

Moy & Pfau (2000, p. 42) argue that it is not the performance of political institutions per se but "the public's perception of institutional performance that causes dissatisfaction." Hence, the authors contended that it is neither political processes nor per-

formances themselves that are vital for the support for political institutions but the citizens' subjective perception of them (Moy & Pfau, 2000; Pfau, et al., 1998). The subjective perception is affected by both a person's socio-demographic characteristics and the information a person has obtained. Past research shows that knowledge of political objects (issues, actors, institutions) exerts more influence than socio-demographic status (Pfau, et al., 1998, p. 731). Since in modern democratic societies citizens' knowledge of political objects mostly relies on mass information, the media are considered a relevant source for the perception of political realities. "Whether or not the media accurately reflect events, the point is that the mass media function as the critical conduit of perceptions of democratic institutions" (Moy & Pfau, 2000, p. 43).

The assumption that media information accounts for the audience's perception of political realities is in line with cultivation research. "Cultivation refers to the long-term formation of perceptions and beliefs about the world as a result of exposure to the media" (Potter, 1993, p. 564). Hence, cultivation effects refer to the media's impact on individuals' conceptions of reality over time. "Public beliefs are often shaped by subtle but repetitive messages contained in news and entertainment media content that are not overtly persuasive" (W. P. Eveland, Jr., 2002, p. 691). Pfau, Mullen, Deidrich, & Garrow (1995, p. 309) put cultivation effects in the realm of second-order socialization[34] (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and describe media information as an important source based on which people come to understand their environment during adulthood. Experiences, if available, are considered to be the main source of influence on perceptions. However, in cases when direct experiences are absent, people might accept the media's depictions of reality. "Television programming's depictions are influential mainly in those circumstances in which people have limited opportunity to confirm or deny television's symbolic images firsthand" (Pfau, et al., 1995, p. 310). In cases where direct experiences and media information are consonant, media might amplify the impact of experiences on reality perceptions.

Traditionally, cultivation research conceptualizes media use, television use in particular, as the factor influencing social reality perceptions (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Gerbner, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982). Early cultivation research was interested in the impact of violent television programming on viewers' perception of violence and criminality. Gerbner et al. (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner, et al., 1980; Gerbner, et al., 1982) argue that television does not provide an accurate portrayal of reality and hypothesize that, as a consequence, heavy viewers perceive crime and violence as much more prevalent than they are in reality. "For heavy viewers, television virtually monopolizes and subsumes other sources of information, ideas, and consciousness" (Gerbner, et al., 1980, p. 14). The authors reported empirical findings that lend support to their assumptions. A reanalysis of

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34   Whereas secondary socialization occurs during adulthood, primary socialization occurs during childhood.

the NORC[35] General Social Survey data set, on which much of the empirical support for Gerbner's hypothesis is based, revealed little support for this assumption, however (Hirsch, 1980). Mainstreaming and resonance hypotheses are further developments of the cultivation concept (Gerbner, et al., 1980). The resonance hypothesis describes an interaction effect: Media effects are greater when television content is consistent with real-life situations experienced by the viewer. The mainstreaming hypothesis proposes that original variances in attitudes diminish among heavy viewers as a result of television's impact on their attitudes. This results in "the sharing of that commonality among heavy viewers in those demographic groups whose light viewers hold divergent views" (Gerbner, et al., 1980, p. 15). As a consequence, the political spectrum is hypothesized to narrow down (Gerbner, et al., 1982).

In further research, television viewing was found to be responsible for a variety of social reality perceptions above and beyond the audience's impressions of violence and criminality. For instance, Pfau, Mullen, Deidrich, & Garrow (1995) investigated the influence of depictions of attorneys in television programming on the public's perception of attorneys. The study encompasses a content analysis of prime-time programming aired during one week and a mail survey with a random sample of attorneys in a Midwestern city as a real world check. The public perception of attorneys was measured with a telephone survey of a random sample. The authors found that public perceptions of attorneys, in terms of gender, age, class and specialization in criminal law, were significantly related to television's depictions of attorneys.

Whereas traditional cultivation research does not provide explanations of how cultivation effects occur (Shrum, Wyer, & O'Guinn, 1988), more recent studies focus on psychological process explanations. The idea of a two-step process of cultivation effects is of particular relevance. For instance, Bilandzic & Rössler (2004) suggest that cultivation effects first encompass the encoding and storage of information (knowledge), and second the construction of a judgment about reality. Similarly, Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler (1987) assume that a "viewer […] uses the multitude of viewing experiences to create summative beliefs" (Hawkins, et al., 1987, p. 555). These summative beliefs are, then, expected to influence reality perceptions. The findings of their study did not support this hypothesis, however. Factual knowledge about reality (first-order cultivation effects) did not appear to be a mediator for the effect of television use on reality perceptions (second-order beliefs).

Shrum (1996, 2001, 2004) tested the idea not of a two-step process of cultivation effects but of a two-part model of effects. Findings from an experimental study support the assumption of a two-part model of cultivation effects. In this study, first-order cultivation effects refer to media's impact on factual presentations of social realities, for instance in terms of how many percent of Americans have been involved in a violent crime. Second-order cultivation effects refer to media's impact on attitude and belief judgments such as being afraid to walk alone at night. The author suggested that demographic judgments (first-order cultivation effects) are

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35 NORC is the National Opinion Research Center. Its headquarters are on campus of the University of Chicago.

formed based on memory. Hence, the accessibility of certain aspects acts as a mediator for the media-judgment relationship. "Heavy television viewing creates an accessibility bias, and that bias has an effect on real-world frequency estimates of things often seen on television" (Shrum, 1996, p. 499). Second-order cultivation effects, in contrast, are assumed to be built during the time of exposure to the information. Thus, second-order effects are proposed to be separate effects above and beyond first-order cultivation effects.

In line with cultivation research, then, this study assumes long-term effects of media on the perception of political processes. Thus, regular patterns of information may account for changes in these perceptions. The media's influence on these perceptions is assumed to increase with a decrease in the impact of direct experiences (Pfau, et al., 1995, p. 310). Hence, in terms of political decision-making at the national level, media impact is presumed to be strong, because national decision-making processes are considered to be circumstances for which people have less opportunity to confirm or deny the media's presentations based on firsthand experiences.

3.2.2. The Media's Impact on Preferences Regarding Political Processes

Although media effects research provides some insights into how media affects policy preferences, little is known about the media's impact on citizens' preferences concerning political decision-making processes. Regarding the association between media and political preferences, there are studies which show that the media shape citizens' policy preferences (Jordan, 1993; M. McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Pan & Kosicki, 1996). For instance, Pan & Kosicki (1996) found that the use of information-oriented media affects the audience's ideological orientations. These orientations, in turn, were found to have an impact on racial policy preferences. Policy preferences were measured, for instance, as support for the government's efforts to assist blacks or support for increasing federal spending to assist blacks. Studies carried out in the framework of agenda setting research showed that the media may have an impact on which policy issues people consider to be important (M. McCombs & Shaw, 1972; M. E. McCombs & Shaw, 1993). For instance, the perceived importance of policy issues was measured with the following question: "What are you most concerned about these days? That is, regardless of what politicians say, what are the two or three main things which you think the government should concentrate on doing something about?" (M. McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 178). The media were found to affect what citizens think the government should do, i.e. their policy preferences.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine from these studies that investigate the link between media information and citizens' preferences regarding *what* should be done, whether media information also has an impact on citizens' preferences as regards *how* political decisions should be made. Based on the current state of research, it remains an empirically open question whether media information might

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