

empirical results provided by the author support the assumption that politically aware people²⁶ are more resistant to media effects than individuals with low levels of political awareness. For instance, the author found that highly aware individuals were able to resist the dominant pro Vietnam War messages in media information in the period from 1964 to 1966. As a result, patterns of support differed for politically aware compared to politically unaware people.

Others argue that political expertise is a factor that facilitated information storage and retrieval and, hence, increases the likelihood of media effects. For example, Price & Zaller (1993) found that the more political knowledge a person has, the better is the individual recall of media information. And Tewskbury (1999) showed that politically knowledgeable people are more likely to engage in systematic information processing than people with low levels of political knowledge. Information storage and retrieval, in turn, may enhance media effects (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993, p. 956). For instance, Krosnick & Brannon (1993) found greater priming effects for political knowledgeable, when the effects of political knowledge, media exposure and political interest were investigated simultaneously. Similarly, Wolling (1999) reported findings which indicate that the effects of negative media information on perceived internal political efficacy are stronger if political interest is high. The author concluded that people need to be interested in political information and process the information thoroughly for the information to have an effect on political attitudes (Wolling, 1999, p. 215).

2.3.3. The Role of Intensity of General Media Use

The traditional dosage perspective in media effect research assumes that “the greater one’s dosage of media content, the more one should be influenced by it” (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993, p. 956). Empirical support for this assumption is given in a study by A.H. Miller et al. (1979, p. 75ff.), for instance. The results indicate that the impact of media criticism on respondents’ political cynicism is greater for those respondents with high media exposure levels compared to respondents with low media exposure levels. The alternative hypothesis, in contrast, assumes smaller media effects under the condition of greater dosages. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that people who are only minimally exposed to the news “will absorb little other than the ‘big message’ contained in the lead stories and repeated regularly across media and across time” (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993, p. 956). In support for this assumption, the study by Krosnick & Brannon (1993) showed that media priming effects are stronger for people with lower levels of general media exposure compared to individuals with high levels of exposure.

26 Political awareness is measured with questions about factual knowledge about politics, because this captures “what has actually gotten into people’s minds” (Zaller, 1992, p. 21).

2.3.4. The Role of Information Processing Strategies

Recent research investigates the mode of attitude formation as an important variable that moderates media effects (Matthes, 2007a, 2007b). Two strategies of attitude formation are discussed in the literature, namely memory-based attitude formation and online attitude formation. Memory-based models focus on attitude accessibility and assume that individuals form evaluative attitudes based on information that is “on top of their heads” and hence more easily available (D. A. Scheufele, 2000, p. 299). Opinions are constructed at the time the judgment is expressed, attitudes rely on information recall and specific items must be retrieved from memory in order to construct an overall evaluation (Hastie & Park, 1986). Thus, in case of memory-based attitude formation, there is a strong correspondence between retrieved information in memory and the evaluative attitude (Hastie & Park, 1986; Lichtenstein & Skrugl, 1987). Judgments that are built online are made at the time the information is acquired. The updated evaluation is then transferred to the long-term memory (Kinder, 1998, p. 184f.). Aspects that alter evaluations might vanish from memory, and people just retrieve the overall evaluation from memory “without reviewing the information upon which it is based” (Rahn, Aldrich, & Borgida, 1994, p. 193). Hertel & Bless (2000) mention that a precondition for online information processing is that there are pre-existing attitudes. Likewise, Tormalla and Petty (2001, p. 1600) state that if there was no opinion formed prior to information exposure, the judgment will be built in a memory-based fashion at the time a decision is required. Whereas some authors speak of contrasting models, others argue that both models “are ‘right’ but under different conditions” (McGraw, 2000, p. 813).

The most current and comprehensive investigation of media effects as a function of the information processing strategy was recently provided by Matthes (2007a, 2007b). The author argues that the impact of media frames is greater for memory-based attitudes than for online-built attitudes. Using group comparison in structural equation modeling, the empirical results support this assumption. This finding is in line with empirical results from other studies in media effects research (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). However, these studies fall short in actually investigating the role of information processing strategies and merely refer to such strategies when explaining the obtained results.

2.3.5. The Role of Individual Predispositions

Considering the role of individual predispositions, the “reception-acceptance model” of attitude change by Zaller (1992) is of particular relevance in public opinion research. Zaller (1992, p. 22) defined predispositions as “stable, individual-level traits that regulate the acceptance or non-acceptance of the political communications a person receives.” Predispositions are argued to be part of lifetime experiences, to be shaped by socialization and to depend on personality factors and tastes. Moreover, political predispositions are assumed to be rather independent from mass media