7.3.3. The Role of Process Preferences as Moderator of Effects on Political Support

One important objective of the present study is to explore the conditions under which media information about political processes affects political support. This study makes the argument that the impact of media-shaped perceptions of political processes on political support is particularly strong for subjects for whom related aspects of decision-making procedures are important. A variety of structural equation models were analyzed in order to test this assumption. In all of these models, socio-demographic control variables (gender, age, education, political experience, and political ideology) were included. They are not displayed in the figures in the interest of clarity.

Drawing on discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), this study assumes that process preferences moderate the relationship between process perceptions and political support. More precisely, it is hypothesized that the perception of political processes in terms of their consensus-orientation affects support particularly for those individuals who hold strong preferences as regards the consensus-orientation of political processes (H3a). Likewise, it is proposed that the perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency affects support particularly for those individuals who hold strong preferences as regards the efficiency of political processes (H4a). Because process preferences were measured continuously, I refrained from a multigroup comparison based on arbitrary cut-off values. Instead I specified a latent interaction model to test the hypotheses (Marsh et al., 2004). For the two process perceptions-preferences interaction factors (efficiency interaction and consensus interaction) there were three perception items and three preferences items each. I generated three indicators for each of the two latent interactions by multiplying items with similar factor loadings on latent predictor and moderator variables with each other (Marsh, et al., 2004). In order to build the discrepancy variables, the perception variables were recoded so that high scores indicate that the according aspects are perceived to not apply to decision-making processes in Switzerland. High scores on the preference variables indicate that according aspects of decision-making processes are important to the respondent. High scores on the interaction variables, then, indicate a large negative discrepancy between process perceptions and process preferences (negative discrepancy = aspects are important but do not apply to reality). Process perceptions (with reversed scale, mean-centred indicators), process preferences (with mean-centred indicators) and the latent interaction thereof were specified as predictors of political support. All predictors were allowed to correlate. The model showed a significant effect of consensus perception on support ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < .05$), a significant effect of efficiency perception on support ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < .05$), a significant effect of consensus preference on support ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .05$), a significant effect of the latent interaction between consensus perception and consensus preference on support ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < .05$), and a significant effect of the latent interaction between efficiency perception and efficiency preference on support ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < .05$). There was also a significant effect of age on political support ($\beta = -0.14$, $p <$

.05). Model fit was satisfactory with CFI = .93, RMSEA =.04 (90% CI = .03, .04), Chi-Square = 674.42, df = 431.

The significant effects of both the consensus preference - consensus perception interaction and the efficiency preference - efficiency perception interaction support the assumption that the relationship between process preferences and perceptions predicts political support. When interpreting interaction effects, one has to bear in mind that "the inclusion of a multiplicative term converts a general statement of relationship into a conditional statement of relationship" (Friedrich, 1982, p. 804). It therefore makes sense to evaluate the conditional relationship between process perceptions and political support within the observed range of process preferences (cf. Friedrich, 1982; Ping, 2003), in order to test whether stronger effects of the perception-preference relationship on political support are associated with a larger preferences-perceptions magnitude (i.e. strong preferences regarding certain aspects of political processes on the one hand and the perception that these aspects do not apply to reality on the other hand). Since consensus preferences range from -4.9 to 1.1, the relationship between consensus perception and political support varies, over the observed range of consensus preference, from 3.28 to -1.20 (see Table 7.3). Similarly, since efficiency preferences range from -3.3 to 2.7, the relationship between efficiency perception and political support varies, over the observed range of efficiency preference, from -0.03 to -0.89. The negative impact of consensus perceptions on political support increases with increasing levels of consensus preferences. Hence the results indicate that the more an individual values the consensus-orientation of political processes, the stronger a negative perception of political processes in terms of their consensus-orientation contributes to a decrease of political support. Interestingly, for subjects with consensus preferences below the mean, negative perceptions of the consensus-orientation of political processes are related to an increase in support. The negative impact of efficiency perceptions on political support increases with increasing levels of efficiency preferences. Hence the results indicate that the more an individual values the efficiency of political processes, the stronger a negative perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency contributes to a decrease of political support. Thus, H1a and H2a are supported.

Level X[a] Consensus preference		Coefficient Z[b] Consensus perception	Level X[a] Efficiency preference		Coefficient Z[b] Efficiency perception
high	1.1	-1.20	high	2.7	-0.89
	0.5	-0.75		2	-0.79
mean	0	-0.38		1	-0.65
	-1	0.37	mean	0	-0.50
	-2	1.11		-1	-0.36
	-3	1.86		-2	-0.22
	-4	2.60		-3	-0.07
low	-4.9	3.28	low	-3.3	-0.03

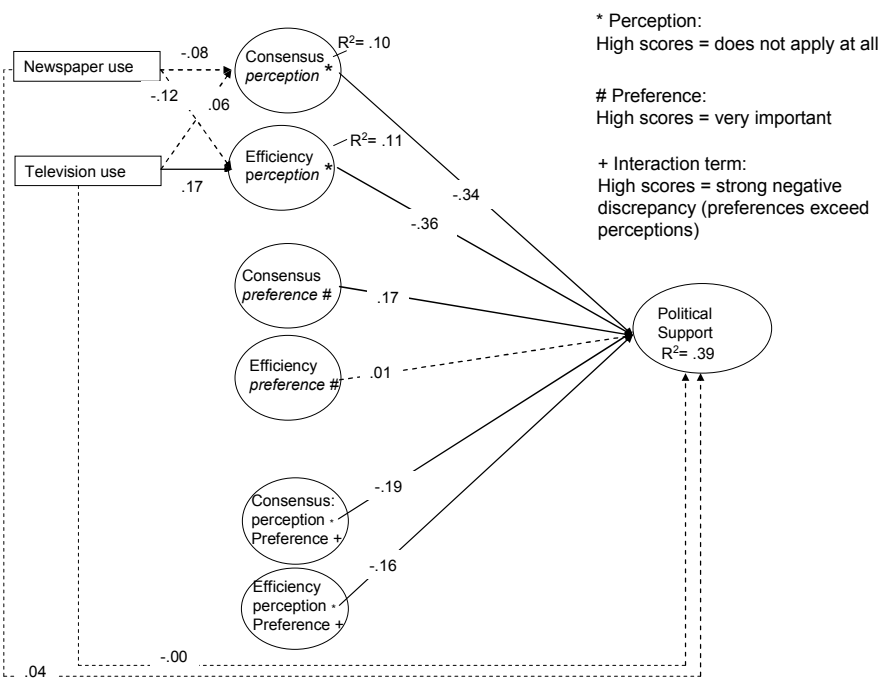
a As suggested by Ping (2003), the level X of consensus preference is determined by the observed variable (indicator) with the loading of 1 on the consensus preference factor. This indicator ranged from -4.9 (= low) to1.1 (=high) in the study.

b Shown are the unstandardized coefficients. The coefficient of Z was (.-0.380-.0.746X)Z. For example, when X = 1.1 the coefficient of Z was -0.380-0.746*(1.1) = -1.20

Table 7.3. Perception-Support Relation Moderated by Preferences

In order to examine whether the indirect effect of television use on support via efficiency perceptions varies systematically as a function of efficiency preferences (H6), the mediation model in Figure 7.4 was tested with interaction effects between process perceptions and process preferences included. The so-called moderated mediation model (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) is shown in Figure 7.5. Process perceptions (with reversed scale, mean-centred indicators), process preferences (with mean-centred indicators) and the latent interaction thereof were specified as predictors of political support. Television use and newspaper use were specified as predictors of consensus perception and efficiency perception. The model showed a significant effect of television use on the efficiency perception of political processes ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .05$). Efficiency perception, in turn significantly affects political support ($\beta = -0.36$, $p < .05$). The effect of the latent interaction between efficiency perception and efficiency preference on support was significant ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < .05$). Because there is no effect of television use on consensus perception of political processes, H5 assuming moderated indirect effects of television use on political support via consensus perceptions is not supported. In line with previously reported findings (see Section 6.5.1), the model shows significant effects of gender ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .05$), education ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and a significant effect of age ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .05$) on the efficiency perception of political processes.[98] There is also a significant effect of gender ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < .05$) on political support. Model fit was satisfactory with CFI = .90, RMSEA =.04 (90% CI = .04, .05), Chi-Square = 867.78, df = 481.

98 Differences in the signs of coefficients are caused by the reversed recoding of process perceptions in models that include interaction effects.



Note. Shown are standardized path coefficients. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above. Dashed lines indicate insignificant paths. Chi-Square (df=481, N 346) =867.78, Comparative fit index is .90, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .04 with a 90% confidence interval .04 - .05.

Figure 7.5. Differential Effects on Political Support Depending on Process Preferences

The finding of a significant effect of the interaction between efficiency preference and efficiency perceptions on political support does not necessarily warrant the suggestion that the indirect impact of television use on political support via the perception of political processes as inefficient is moderated by efficiency preferences. In order to test this assumption, the conditional relationship between television use and political support via efficiency perceptions can be evaluated within the observed range of process preferences (cf. Friedrich, 1982; Ping, 2003). Since efficiency preferences range from -3.3 to 2.7, the indirect relationship between television use and political support via efficiency perception varies, over the observed range of efficiency preference, from -0.01 to -0.14 (see Table 7.4). The results show that the negative effects of television use on political support via efficiency perceptions increased with increasing levels of efficiency preferences. Hence the findings suggest that the impact of television use on political support via its influence on the perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency is particularly strong for individuals for whom efficient decision-making procedures are important. Thus, the assumption of moderated mediation formulated in H2b is supported.

Level U[a] Efficiency preference		Coefficient Z[b] Efficiency perception	Coefficient TV use on support X[c] mediated by efficiency perception
high	2.7	-1.01	-0.14
	2	-0.90	-0.13
	1	-0.75	-0.11
mean	0	-0.60	-0.08
	-1	-0.45	-0.06
	-2	-0.29	-0.04
	-3	-0.14	-0.02
low	-3.3	-0.10	-0.01

a As suggested by Ping (2003), the level U of efficiency preference is determined by the observed variable (indicator) with the loading of 1 on the efficiency preference factor. This indicator ranged from -3.3 (= low) to 2.7 (=high) in the study.

b Shown are the unstandardized coefficients. The coefficient of Z was (-0.598-0.152U)Z. For example, when U = 2.7 the coefficient of Z was -0.578-0.152*(2.7) = -1.01.

c From path analysis (see Wright 1934), the (unstandardized or standardized) structural coefficient of X's association with Y via or mediated by Z is the product of the (unstandardized or standardized) structural coefficient on the X-Z path, c, with the (unstandardized or standardized) moderated structural coefficient on the Z-Y path, (-0.598-0.152U), which equals 0.14*(-0.598-0.152U). For example, when U = 2.7 the coefficient of X was 0.14*(-0.598-0.152*(2.7)) = -0.14.

Table 7.4. Television-Support Relation Moderated by Preferences

7.3.4. Chronical Accessibility as Moderator

With respect to the role of political awareness, for subjects high in the magnitude of the discrepancy between process preferences and process perceptions, the effects of the preferences-perceptions relationship on political support are hypothesized to be stronger for people with high levels of political awareness compared to people with low levels of political awareness (H7). In order to test this assumption, a model was investigated that tests whether the moderating effect of preferences was different for individuals with high levels of political awareness compared to individuals with low levels of political awareness. Therefore, in a first step, those participants who show either a discrepancy between consensus preferences and consensus perceptions (in the sense that preferences exceed perceptions) or a discrepancy between efficiency preferences and efficiency perceptions (in the sense that preferences exceed perceptions) were selected. Those participants who show values > 0 on either one of the two discrepancy factors[99] were included in the analysis (n = 227). In a second step, groups were built based on a median split of the political awareness variable (MD = 7). All subjects with political awareness values < 7 were put in the low awareness

99 The discrepancy items were subjected to factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation. The formation of the discrepancy factors is described in Section 6.3.3.