

sented by focusing on power struggles, articles are more likely to refer to the inability to solve political problems. The presentations patterns identified in the correlation analysis can contribute to the development of realistic stimulus material. According implications for the conceptualization of the stimulus material (see Section 6.2.3) are discussed in the following summarizing section.

4.4. Summary and Discussion

The results from the content analysis indicate that media information on political decision-making processes encompasses aspects of collective action and attribution, compromise-seeking endeavors and the role of mutual understanding as well as references to power struggles, accusations, and the inability to solve political problems. Altogether, the characteristics of press coverage of political decision-making processes in the Swiss press appeared to be rather stable when compared across newspaper types and media information about political processes in different political institutions. However, the focus on political discord has increased during the last decades, whereas consensus-orientation and the attribution of decisions to collective actions have become less frequent in the media coverage. This finding is in line with previous research which shows that parliamentary coverage in the U.S. increasingly focuses on political discord (Lichter & Amundson, 1994) and conflicts (Morris & Clawson, 2005). From a methodological point of view, however, it should be borne in mind that this study's content analysis is based on a restricted sample. Three Swiss newspapers and television news from one broadcast channel were investigated, all of which were from the German-speaking part in Switzerland. Thus, the results might not apply to the news coverage in Switzerland in general. In addition, the finding that news coverage contains references to political discord and inability cannot be taken as evidence of a lack of media attention to the efficiency of political processes, for instance, because the content analysis included only a selection of variables measuring aspects of political processes which were considered to be relevant in the framework of the present study. Whereas references to the inefficiency of decision-making procedures were measured, references to the efficiency of such processes were not.

One purpose of this overview was to inform the conceptualization of stimulus material for the experimental study (Chapter 6). The results presented here hold several implications in this respect. First, findings suggest that the external validity of the stimulus material is greater, if the articles refer to political processes in the legislative branch, because articles about the parliament were found to contain more evaluative aspects than articles about the government. Second, based on the results it appears reasonable to use articles from regional papers as the base material for the development of the stimulus material, because the regional paper contained more evaluative aspects than the tabloid. In addition, the regional paper's position in terms of how political decision-making processes are presented lies somewhere between the tabloid and the broadsheet. Third, stimulus articles should relate to aspects that

are characteristic for contemporary media coverage, because the comparison of news coverage from different points in time showed that there are specific patterns that are characteristic for this period. This is the focus on power struggles in particular. Fourth, the comparison of presentations between German and Swiss press articles showed that the evaluative aspects that were found to be characteristic of the Swiss news coverage are also typical for media information in Germany. In fact, the German media's tendency to emphasize conflicts is even stronger. This finding suggests a greater external validity of the stimulus material.

A second purpose of this overview of results from the content analysis was to serve as interpretational background for the investigation of the relationship between the use of political information in television and political attitudes (Chapter 7). This study is based on the assumption that routine media use reflects the impact of characteristic patterns of media content that subjects were exposed to. What, then, are these characteristic patterns of information in television newscasts? The findings indicate that television news about political decision-making is shaped by a strong focus on political accusations, particularly when informing about parliamentary processes, although television news focuses on aspects of consensus-orientation at the same time. In addition, television news referred to the inability of political actors to solve political processes, particularly when informing about political processes in the parliament. Overall, the results indicated that television newscasts, in general, are more evaluative than press articles. The findings warrant the assumption that television might decrease the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and the perception of political processes as efficient.

This chapter described the identification of characteristic media patterns in the presentation of political decision-making processes. The following chapter presents the development of a standardized scale to measure citizens' preferences concerning political processes and related perceptions in surveys.