

compared to exposure to the civil condition. For respondents who find disagreements somewhat enjoyable, exposure to the uncivil condition generated slightly higher levels of political trust than exposure to the civil condition.

Predispositions can also be understood in terms *individual schemas*. For example, Shen (2004) suggested that media framing effects are moderated by individual differences in political schemas. Schemas are defined as knowledge structures that describe chronically accessible and organized knowledge about a given concept. A schema is hypothesized to moderate media effects by influencing the “encoding, selection, abstraction, [...] storage [...], retrieval and interpretation of information” (Shen, 2004, p. 133). Based on an experimental study, the author showed that subjects with different schemas responded to media stimuli significantly differently. Individuals with issue political schemas were more likely to draw upon issue-related thoughts after being exposed to issue messages than participants with character schemas. In contrast, individuals with character political schemas were more likely to draw upon character-related thoughts after being exposed to character messages than participants with issue schemas.

2.3.6. Summary and Conclusion

Research shows that a variety of factors may moderate the relationship between media information and political attitudes. Studies are largely consistent in their finding that media effects are stronger if *trust in media* is high. Although several studies indicate that *political sophistication* enhances the strength of media effects, other findings indicate less intense media effects for politically knowledgeable people compared to novices. In general, then, the empirical evidence regarding the moderating role of political expertise is inconsistent (De Vreese, 2004; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). The diversity of findings might to some extent be explained by different operationalizations of political sophistication, ranging from the single-item measures as the level of formal education (Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001), a combined index encompassing awareness of, interest in and knowledge about a political institution (Moy & Pfau, 2000), to factual knowledge (Zaller, 1992). In addition, Druckman & Nelson (2003, p. 732, emphasis in original) suggested that a possible confounding of political knowledge and prior opinions may explain the variance in research findings:

“The problem with past work is that while individuals with prior opinions may be more knowledgeable, it is not the knowledge *per se* that is at work; rather, it is the existence of prior opinions based on other information that vitiates the impact of a new frame.”

The differences in research findings might also be accounted for by varying context factors, such as trust in the media. For instance, Miller & Krosnick (2000) suggest that knowledge only enhances priming effects among people who trust the media. Moreover, the impact of political knowledge appears to differ with respect to the type of media effects under study. Whereas political knowledge is found to hamper the media’s persuasive impact on evaluative political attitudes (for instance

Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001), political knowledge contributed to the effects of media information on political cognitions (for instance Price & Zaller, 1993).

With respect to the conditionality of media effects on the *general intensity of media use*, research also provides inconsistent findings. Whereas some studies indicate that a high intensity of media use might strengthen media effects, other studies reported lower media effects in the condition of high intensity media use. Differences in the operationalization of media use might account for the diversity in findings. For instance, A. H. Miller et al. (1979, p. 75ff.) investigated the role of general exposure to national politics in the media. And Krosnick & Brannon (1993, p. 966) built an index of media exposure that combined media use in general and media use about the 1990 elections. In addition, the lack of consideration given to context factors such as trust in the media might explain the diversity in findings.

The findings on the moderating impact of the *information processing strategies* generally suggest that media effects are larger when judgments are made based on memory (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Matthes, 2007b). As of yet, only a few studies include explicit measures of the information processing strategy (for instance Matthes, 2007b). Other authors use proxy measures, such as the “Need to Evaluate” concept (for instance Druckman & Nelson, 2003). In order to facilitate the use of applicable measures of information processing, Matthes, Wirth, & Schemer (2007) discussed concepts to measure the mode of information processing in surveys.

Other studies suggest that individual *predispositions* moderate the relationship between media information and political attitudes. Studies exploring the moderating role of political values, schemas, personality factors, or expectations about language use were presented. All these aspects of predispositions were found to act as significant moderator of media effects. With respect to this study’s research question on the impact of media depictions of political processes on political support, literature from political science emphasizes the role of preferences regarding political decision-making processes (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Hence process preferences as a form of predispositions will be the focus of the present study. To date, media effects research has tended to neglect the role of preferences regarding political processes.²⁹

With regard to the data analytical procedures applied to test the role of moderator variables, some studies do not provide solid empirical evidence for the assumed

29 However, the argument that individual preferences matter shows some similarity with the assumption that priming effects depend on the relevance of an issue with regard to the evaluative task (Iyengar, et al., 1984; Kiouisis, 2003). But whereas the general relevance of an issue is conceptualized as characteristic of an issue, preferences in this study are understood as the individual perceived relevance of an issue and, hence, are conceptualized as characteristics of the individuals. For more information on the theoretical arguments of the present study see Chapter 3. The argument also seems compatible with the argument by Pfau (1987) that expectations regarding language use matter. Whereas Pfau considers expectations regarding language use, the present study is interested in expectations regarding aspects of decision-making political processes.

moderator effects (for instance Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). Regarding those studies that did so, a variety of approaches was found. Most studies included interaction terms as well as the original predictor and moderator variables into regression models (J. M. Miller & Krosnick, 2000) or analysis of variance models (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Another approach found in more recent studies is testing interactions by means of group comparisons using structural equation modeling (Matthes, 2007b).

2.4. Summary and Suggestions for the Present Study

Based on the reviewed literature, it seems that the relationship between political media information and citizens' attitudes can best be described as a dynamic process. The media's impact on political support appears to be influenced by reality perceptions, issue accessibility or political knowledge, for instance, and is contingent upon a variety of factors that describe the individual susceptibility to media effects, such as the perceived credibility of media information, the level of political sophistication or individual values. Overall, media effects on political support tend to be strongest when the level of political sophistication of the recipients is low (Zaller, 1992), the audience holds low levels of partisanship (Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001) and the media information is perceived to be highly trustworthy (Druckman, 2001b). Whereas negative media content is found to weaken approval, positive media content does not necessarily strengthen support (Maurer, 2003b).

Several limitations of previous research were discussed. This section summarizes suggestions for the investigation of the impact of media presentations of political decision-making processes on political support in this study. First, the *majority of studies focus on election and campaign coverage*. Little is known about the impact of the media's presentation of political decision-making processes on citizens' political support: "There have been no attempts to tie media coverage of legislative process to citizen approval" (Morris & Clawson, 2007, p. 3). Studies from political science, however, indicate that political decision-making processes are an important factor in shaping citizens' political support. "The frustrating conflict and unsatisfying compromise inherent in the process erode public confidence in the institution's membership and leaders" (Morris & Clawson, 2005, p. 311). Hence, the *present study will look at the effects of media depictions of day-to-day political decision-making processes*. Stimulated by findings provided by studies that investigate the effects of distinct aspects of media coverage on political attitudes, the impact of media presentation of political processes in terms of conflict-orientation and procedural maneuverings will be the focus.

Second, previous research concentrated on examining the direct relationship between media information and political attitudes. Thus, studies neglected to explore the way *how media information affects political attitudes*. The question of how the effects occur is addressed by studies that consider mediating variables in order to explore effect mechanisms. The overview of literature that is summarized in Appen-