Values of German media users : 1986-2007

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2 What Are Values?

Values have been called the central integrative concept that could bring all social sciences together (e.g., Kluckhohn, 1951; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). They are part of many theories, from psychological approaches to personalities and individual differences, to studies of social learning and socialization, to comparative studies of cultures, to theories of (political) modernization and human development. Subsequently, the literature on values is extensive and stretches across a wide variety of disciplines.

In their review of the sociological literature on individual behavior, Hitlin and Piliavin (2004) observe that values are often referred to matter-of-factly. There is a broad consensus about their importance, but exactly how and why they are linked to other social and individual phenomena is often not explored. Media share a similar fate with respect to value theory. Value scholars tend not to mention mass media in their discussion of values, although two assumptions seem to be accepted by most of them: People are assumed to acquire individual value patterns through socialization, and the media are widely accepted as important agents of socialization. What makes it even more plausible to study media and values are the findings from the media and communication literature that illustrate how distinct value patterns are displayed in the media on an everyday basis. Hence in this chapter, I argue for a theory of values that includes the media, from media contents to media uses and effects. Based on an overview of value theories from the last 60 years and a variety of disciplines, this chapter proposes a model of the relationships between values and media.

Values are considered to be long-term and basic attitudes that serve as guiding principles for individual behaviors and judgments. Once internalized, values prove to be considerably stable over the entire life-span; thus value change is a relatively slow process with few sudden upheavals, as many studies have shown (Duncker, 2000; Gensicke, 2000; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Klages, 1992; Rokeach, 1974; Schwartz, 1992, 2006). The process by which individuals develop their value system is socialization. They become members of a society through social learning. They learn about norms and rules of behavior by observing others, mostly through direct contact with family, peers, but also in institutions like
schools, clubs, churches, companies, etc. (see, e.g., Bandura, 1986; Mischel, Cantor, & Feldman, 1996). However, in today’s world much of the information necessary to understand the workings of modern societies cannot be learned from direct personal experience. Rather, it is conveyed by media. Inevitably, what values are transported via the media also affects what an individual comes to accept as the rules and principles of his or her society. Television—in many countries the mass medium most frequently and most extensively used by large parts of the population—has been of special interest in the few studies on values and media. But other media, like newspapers and magazines, also display values, or at least value-driven behavior, on a daily basis. Within mass media, values can actually be addressed in much the same ways as, for instance, in schools and churches.

So when studying values and media, one could try to isolate the socializing effects of using possibly value-laden media. On the other hand, it also makes sense to assume that people who already hold certain values will be influenced in their behavior by these same values. This behavior could also include their media choices. The directions of causality between values and related factors (among them media use) will be a recurring theme throughout this chapter.

2.1 Values and Value Change in the Social Sciences

Values are an integral part of individual personalities, but they also constitute, on an aggregate level, the basis of cultures and societies, which can often be distinguished by these same values. Consequently, the concept has been applied in a broad range of disciplines, from sociology and political science to psychology and ethnology, to name just a few. Likewise, there exist hundreds of different definitions of the concept. While an exhaustive discussion of the respective branches of research can be found elsewhere (e.g., Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Kluckhohn, 1951; Lautmann, 1969; Rohan, 2000; Spates, 1983), this chapter will focus instead on three major approaches to values¹ that raise central questions about the origin of values and their relationship to behavior—two pivotal issues in a study on the relationships between values and media use.

¹ Based on the hundreds of citations each of the three main authors has received in the databases “Social Sciences Citation Index” (Thomson & Reuters), “SocIndex,” “PsychArticles” (both EBSCO) as well as on thousands of citations listed by Google Scholar, these can be considered the most influential approaches to values across the social sciences.
Interestingly, the starting point of the two most prominent approaches to values coincides with a major shift in the importance of certain values in many Western societies, i.e. the late 1960s and early 1970s. Then civil rights activists marched for equal rights for all ethnic groups in the United States, students in France and Germany protested against societal and university elites, and women in many countries fought for emancipation. At the same time, scholars like Rokeach (1967, 1973) and Inglehart (1971, 1977) laid the foundations for a new wave of research in values that would prove to be highly influential to this day. In the 1990s, a second wave developed that analyzed values from a broader, culturally comparative perspective (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Schwartz, 1992, 2006).²

Rokeach’s and Inglehart’s seminal works from the 1960s and 70s are still included in contemporary introductions and dictionaries of the social sciences and psychology (e.g., Braithwaite & Scott, 1991; Graumann & Willig, 1983; Hepp, 1994; A. G. Johnson, 1995; Karp, 2000; Koschnick, 1993; Outhwaite, 1993; Papcke & Oesterdiekhoff, 2001; Stengel, 2001), and they underlie much of the literature to be discussed in this chapter. Inglehart’s operationalization of values continues to be replicated in a number of studies (Eurobarometer, ALLBUS), while Schwartz’s works constitute a more recent approach that promises to become the third seminal branch of values research (see, e.g., the summary in Besley, 2008; Schwartz (n.d.) claims his value scale is currently the most widely used in social psychology).

In a first step, definitions of values and basic operationalizations will be presented, followed by major findings from the respective approaches. These will illustrate the main delineations of values research, which will provide a framework in which to view the media.

2.1.1 Definitions and Operationalizations

Underlying two of the three approaches to values to be discussed (and countless other studies) are Kluckhohn’s (1951) seminal considerations about values in the framework of Parsons’s theory of action (Parsons & Shils, 1951). Kluckhohn sees a value as “a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or charac-

² Earlier, Hofstede (1980, 2001) had used values as indicators of cultural differences. His work continues to influence a considerable number of scholars especially in culturally comparative studies in economics and management. Compared to Rokeach, Inglehart, and Schwartz, however, his importance is not as central.
teristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action” (p. 395). Values thus have an impact on motivations and actions, and they are central to who a person is or how a group identifies itself. For Kluckhohn, individual values are constituted through the imitation and respect of rules of behavior and goods valued within a given society. They are thus “cultural products” (p. 398). Hence individual and group-level values are inextricably linked—for instance through the complex ways in which behavior of others influences the values of an individual, who then expresses his or her values through behavior. Lastly, individual behavior feeds back into a group’s values, either confirming them or contributing to their change. In sociology and psychology, group or cultural comparisons of values are an important aspect of values research. But due to the rather large variance between members of a same society, the average value priorities of all members do not necessarily reflect the values of their society or culture as a whole. Schwartz (1992) is one of the few scholars to explicitly state that his approach is centered on individual, rather than collective values. This takes into account that a person usually can distinguish his or her own values, as a German, for example, from German values in general.

Rokeach’s (1968, 1973) approach to values has built upon Kluckhohn’s definition and includes a more extended discussion of what values actually are. His definition of the term is commonly drawn upon in the literature (see, e.g., studies in communication as diverse as Beaudoin & Thorson, 2001; B. W. Becker, Brewer, Dickerson, & Magee, 1985; Besley, 2008, May; Gandy, 1984; McCarty & Shrum, 1993; Miegel, 1994; Rosengren & Reimer, 1986; Selnov, 1990). For Rokeach (1968) a value is “a kind of belief, centrally located within one’s total belief system, about how one ought or ought not to behave, or about some end-state of existence worth or not worth attaining” (p. 124). Thus values can be either instrumental, telling individuals what kinds of behavior are acceptable within a given society, or terminal, stating what one should strive to achieve in life.

At about the same time, but with a different background and research aim, Inglehart (1971, 1977) was more concerned with the preconditions and change mechanisms of values than with a discussion of the nature of values as such (see, e.g., the somewhat diffuse introduction of the concept in Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 2). For him, individual values are acquired through formative experiences made early in life. He claimed, for instance, that people who had never known existential needs during times of crisis, like war or economic depression, could “afford” to entertain what he called post-materialist goals in life instead of materialist ones. Underlying this hypothesis, which quickly became
known as the “post-materialism hypothesis,” is Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. This theory postulates that individual needs are ranked in an order of exigence, from very basic physiological needs, such as food and sleep, to relational stability and lastly to more abstract and psychological needs, such as creativity and morality. Only when needs on a lower echelon are satisfied do needs of a higher priority come into focus. The implicit suggestion is that needs and the values arising from them have a strong impact on the behavior of individuals.

Already Kluckhohn’s analysis of values illustrates that it is not so easy. His discussion of the relationship of values to needs on the one hand and motivations on the other puts into question Inglehart’s rather simple tracing of the origins and effects of values. Kluckhohn argues that apart from basic (physical) needs, almost all others can be seen as mere desires. These are not as centrally anchored in an individual’s personality, and they are influenced more easily by situational factors. Furthermore, desires may reflect a given society’s values, whereas needs would be more universal. For example, what Maslow called a “medium level” need for “relational stability” could be fulfilled by any number of complex relationships that would vary from culture to culture. Kluckhohn expects that the desire for stable relationships would be more or less urgent, relative to the significance of different complex relationships within a culture.

In sum, our understanding of the relationship between needs, motives and values will affect how we define the latter. Needs have a biological connotation, while values are of a more social character (see Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004, p. 361). But only the more basic needs clearly derive from absolute necessities, while higher-order needs border on socially relevant or desirable values. There is thus a link between needs and values, and both may, through motives, impact individuals’ behavior.

For the purpose of this study, I posit the following hierarchy of factors guiding action in a more and more determined way: Values refer to long-term and abstract goals in life. They reflect either individual or societal needs. Both are considered long-term, underlying patterns, while motives are of a more short-term and situational nature. Motives thus precede actual behavioral decisions, while values form a background that may interfere more or less heavily with this relationship. Reiss and Wiltz (2004) argue for a “logical connection between end motives and core values” (p. 367), because people attribute value to things they try to achieve through their actions. This desire is translated into motives for actions and results in behavior. Yet, as Kluckhohn (1951) has illustrated, motives can very well conflict with values. In addition, there are often several ways to
achieve a given aim which can result in a variety of actions that need not be equally compatible with a person’s values. Thus, motives are most directly linked to actual behavior. They can be close to values, but possibly reflect many more aspects. Often enough, motives and values are even in conflict (see, e.g., Rohan, 2000).

The nature of values (versus needs and motives) calls for a much more differentiated conceptualization in empirical research than, for instance, Inglehart’s two-dimensional scale of materialism versus post-materialism allows for. The Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1967) has employed one of the first multi-faceted instruments to adequately measure the whole scope of values within American society. With the distinction of 18 terminal values (e.g., equality, freedom, inner harmony) and 18 instrumental ones (e.g., ambitious, helpful, obedient), Rokeach has proposed value dimensions that are fine-grained, but concrete. Instrumental values in particular can be easily linked to actual behavior—whether or not there is congruence between the two. This may be why they have been adopted by media and communication scholars more often. The instrumental values which state how one should behave can be adapted to codebooks for the analysis of (mainly narrative) media contents.

In the 1990s, the Rokeach values scale was further developed by Schwartz. He proposed a third influential approach to values, whose conceptualization of values allows for a broader range of applications than most other definitions. All in all, Schwartz’s approach takes into account a broader horizon of neighboring concepts and is thus more systematic and of wider theoretical range than most other works in the field. In addition, his resulting operationalization of values presents a differentiated, yet apparently culturally universal continuum of values. Although his approach is (still) less known than the seminal works of Rokeach and Inglehart, Schwartz’s scales are used in large studies such as the European Social Survey. Building on evolutionary theories, Schwartz (1992) has unfolded a systematic and differentiated discussion of values and how they should be related to personality traits, motivations, needs and behavior. For him, values tap three universal requirements of human existence, thus partly reflecting Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: “needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction and survival and welfare needs of groups” (p. 4). Hence, values are closely linked to quite specific goals in life. In a more recent article Schwartz presented the following conceptualization of his ideas:

1) Values are beliefs that are linked inextricably to affect.
2) Values refer to desirable goals that motivate actions.
Values transcend specific actions and situations (e.g., obedience and honesty are values that are relevant at work or in school, in sports, business, and politics, with family, friends, or strangers). […]

Values serve as standards or criteria that guide the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events.

Values are ordered by importance relative to one another to form a system of priorities. […]

The relative importance of values guides actions. The tradeoff among relevant, competing values is what guides attitudes and behaviors. (Schwartz, 2006, p. 143; original emphasis)

Although this list does not constitute a definition in the proper sense of the term, it reflects the core facets of meaning of the term “value,” discussed by Lautmann as early as in 1969. Values are core beliefs about what is “of value,” i.e. desirable. This can motivate behavior, but different values can also come into conflict. As a result, actions are not necessarily compatible with all values a person may hold.

In sum, there is not just one definition of the term “value.” Most authors assume today that values are multidimensional basic attitudes, linked to needs and motivations, on one hand, and to preferences and actions, on the other. Survey instruments currently used to measure values or value scales reflect these assumptions. And empirical research has uncovered many links between values and other individual and societal factors.

2.1.2 Factors Influencing Values and Their Change

Value change has been of importance for many scholars studying values. Mostly, this term does not refer to a change in a value as such (for example, a change in meaning or the disappearance of a value), but to changes in the relative importance of one value over another. What exactly motivates these changes is the central question that can help distinguish different strands of values research. Some, like Inglehart, take a more macro-economic standpoint; others look at social variables describing how life is organized in different countries (following Schwartz’s conceptualization, for instance). Still, most approaches refer to more than one of these traditions. They differ in the complexity of their catalogs of values, in the sophistication of techniques of analysis and in the extent of their discussions of third variables that influence value change. The role of media in the transformation of values is largely neglected, although some of the relationships studied suggest that media are involved.

It has been the subject of considerable dispute whether value change (mainly between individuals) is due to life-cycle effects, generational replacement (also known as cohort effects) or defining historical experiences (period effects). Age is
a central variable possibly representing all three of these influential mechanisms. But age is also linked to a number of other variables prone to be related to values (such as education and income). The following overview presents findings grouped by how age-related differences were treated.

In his studies of the American population, Rokeach (1974) found correlations between certain values and age, ethnicity and gender. He proposed to assume that value change is connected to life-cycle phenomena, rather than to the succession of cohorts: Rokeach observed that values changed systematically more strongly among younger age-groups. Young Caucasians in their 20s and, to a lesser degree, in their 30s placed less emphasis on tradition and religion, but attributed higher importance to equality, ecology, peace and peace of mind. This finding also supports Kluckhohn’s (1951) assumptions about values and life-cycle effects: Older people “whose personalities are both well adjusted and internally harmonious” (p. 400) are far less prone to changing their values than younger people.

Inglehart (1971) related generational differences apparent in his data from six European countries to formative experiences made early in life. The cohort that had grown up after WWII was significantly more inclined to rank “post-bourgeois” or post-materialist items (“protecting freedom of speech” and “giving the people more say in important political decisions”) over “acquisitive,” in other words, materialist items (“maintaining order in the nation” and “fighting rising prices”). Least partial to post-materialist values were those in the oldest group, born in 1905 or earlier, with a more or less linear decline in preference between the two extremes of the age range. The relationship between value preferences and cohorts was affected in part by the higher education level of the younger cohorts and their (higher) socioeconomic status. The more educated and the wealthier groups showed an even stronger preference for post-materialist goals. However, Rokeach’s (1974) findings did not support the importance of either income or education for values.

Some critics have seen the differences between older and younger age groups that Inglehart interpreted as generational effects as merely due to changes in the life-cycle (Klages, 1992; Klein & Ohr, 2004; Pleiffer & Côté, 1991) or historic periods (Namenwirth, 1973). Others have proposed alternative explanations for differences in values between older and younger people (Betz, 1990; Clarke & Dutt, 1991; Klein, 2005).

Clarke and Dutt (1991; Clarke, Dutt, & Rapkin, 1997) have shown that the four-item index of materialism versus post-materialism used by Inglehart is “very sensitive to short-term changes in economic conditions that alter the public.
political issue agenda” (Clarke & Dutt, 1991, p. 918). Thus, the increase in post-materialist value patterns observed by Inglehart since the mid-1970s coincides with the sharp increase of unemployment that took place in several of the observed countries at the beginning of the 1980s. Furthermore, panel surveys conducted in three countries have shown massive individual instability in the ranking of the four items, classing between 38 and 48% of the respondents into the opposite category during the second wave (see Clarke & Dutt, 1991, p. 915).

This criticism lead to the question of whether the adoption of value patterns in the early years of socialization is actually decisive or whether, instead, values are subject to change during the entire lifetime of a person. Indeed, in a re-analysis of Inglehart’s data, Klages (1992) points out the dominance of period effects as well as significant life-cycle effects over the mere cohort effects that Inglehart suggested. Namenwirth (1973) and his disciple Weber (1978) even proposed a cyclical model of ever-returning patterns in value priorities. Their analyses are based on American party programs from 1844 to 1964 and British speeches from the throne, 1689 to 1972, respectively. In these large time-frames, they argue, recurring value patterns emerge that follow superposing short- and long-wave cycles. What Inglehart interpreted as a major and unidirectional trend over time would thus be but another phase in a quasi-eternal cyclical movement.

In the 1990s, empirical values research shifted toward a broader, culturally comparative perspective. Inglehart and associates continued their work on values worldwide and extended their surveys to more and more countries. In addition, they developed a more differentiated, two-dimensional measurement of values that forms the basis for a broader theory of modernization and value change as studied by the World Values Survey (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). The much more sophisticated value items they now use form a two-dimensional field, one axis representing survival versus self-expression values, the other traditional versus secular-rational values.

These recent studies represent a more differentiated approach to values, however the underlying assumptions strongly resemble those of the post-materialism hypothesis: Changes in values are expected and also observed more frequently in countries where clear economic progress or, in the opposite direction, crises occur. Economic stability furthers the adoption of post-materialist or “modern” values. It is thus the key factor in advancing any society to an assumed (and “enlightened,” in the historical meaning) ideal. In addition, changes in value priorities are analyzed mostly by comparison of differences across age cohorts. Thus, the generational interpretation of values and the origin of value change is continued (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Education is identified as
a moderating factor, with educational elites being more in favor of “modern,” i.e. secular-rational and self-expression values (Welzel, 2002). Consequently, the understanding of value change still follows a “Western” model of a unidirectional development toward secularization and rationality as well as an ideal of personal freedoms, be it the (political) freedom of self-expression or freedom from needs. In this process, value change is based on generational as well as on periodic effects (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Inglehart and associates call this the modernization hypothesis of human development.

As in virtually all studies discussed so far, the role of (mass) media in the “modernization” of societies remains largely unaddressed. Although education-related differences in values have been studied by many scholars, media use of the respective groups has been neglected. Educational and intellectual resources, however, influence how people use media or what attitudes they hold toward them. And they could also influence what role media play in the adoption or change of individual values. This touches upon an important and ongoing debate about the media’s role in social change, or in this case, value change: Are media mere platforms that disseminate value patterns from one member or system of society to another, mirroring what is already present (as, e.g., results from Emons, Scheepers, & Wester, 2008, suggest)? Or do they actively contribute to the process of communication by shaping messages, and thus as actors or molders that take part in ongoing processes (as discussed in Emons, Scheepers, & Wester, 2009)?

Following the latter perspective, would people with more or less education be affected differently by value-molding media? And if, as, e.g., Rokeach (1974) as well as Clarke and Dutt (1991) have shown, values (can) change throughout the entire lifespan of a person, they would then also always be prone to media impact. To study relationships between people’s values (on top of the demographic variables discussed so far), the values media actually carry would have to be elucidated. However, this is rare in values research.

One could argue that studying value change through content analysis of party programs (Namenwirth, 1973) integrates mediated contents into values research. However, the author sees values apparent in these published programs merely as an indicator of people’s values of the time. Which is not to say that parties, by putting certain values on the agenda, could not also contribute actively to changes in the importance of these values among the population (thus not resolving the molder/mirror-issue). Unfortunately, this systematic analysis of historical documents has not been contrasted, in contemporary settings, with survey data, for instance. Thus, it is even unclear how mediated values may differ from or concur with values of the audiences who use them.
The neglect of the media in the modernization paradigm is especially surprising considering that in political communication and theories of the public sphere, mass media are seen as indispensable prerequisites for the development of modern democracies (J. Gerhards & Neidhardt, 1990; Habermas, 1962/1989; Rhomberg, 2008). Inglehart and Welzel (2005) only briefly mention the reinforcing effect a free media system may have on modernization and democratization processes. Yet, upon a closer look their operationalization of modernization at least to some degree presupposes the existence of a free press (freedom of self-expression being a major indicator of modernized value patterns). So without a pluralistic media system and freedom of the press no country would be likely to accede to the group of (ideal) modern societies. To come back to the molder/mirror-question, the media’s use of the freedom of the press should affect how the people think about this value as well.

Taking a very different stance, one last critic of Inglehart’s works is psychologist Schwartz, whose analyses are comparable to the literature on values and modernization for their claim of global applicability. Building on Rokeach’s works, Schwartz (1992) has proposed a culturally universal approach to value theory. He has tested variants of the Rokeach Value Survey in different cultures and identified a number of underlying value dimensions that seem to be more or less culturally invariant. Based on previous research (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, 1990), ten dimensions were hypothesized and most of them confirmed for 20 different countries: stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism and self-direction (Schwartz, 1992). In Schwartz (2006), these were further condensed into six overarching dimensions that can be organized as opposites: autonomy, both intellectual (broadmindedness, curiosity, creativity) and affective (pleasure, excitement, variety), versus its counterpart embeddedness (social order, respect for tradition, security, obedience, wisdom); hierarchy (social power, authority, humility, wealth) versus egalitarianism (equality, social justice, responsibility, helpfulness, honesty); and mastery (ambition, success, daring, competence) versus harmony (world at peace, unity with nature, protection of the environment).

In his more recent works, Schwartz (2006) has conceptualized values as, among other things, indicators of cultures, and he discusses findings from Inglehart’s analyses with regard to his own studies. He addresses major concerns with the underlying assumptions of the modernization hypothesis. Although democratization is related to values, this is not a unidirectional relation, as has been assumed by Inglehart and associates. Other factors, such as average family
size or social attitudes dominant in a country, impact the values of a given culture and moderate the relationships between values and the indicators of modernization (socioeconomic level, democratization).

The first sections of this chapter have presented an overview of the three most influential (i.e., most frequently cited) strands of research of values and value change whose survey scales have been applied by numerous others. All of these studies implicitly or explicitly assume that individual values are the product of or at least depend on the social milieu of a person. They differ in the importance ascribed to various factors, from individual differences (most importantly, age-group or cohort) to social class and lastly national or cultural spheres. But across these different studies values are naturally understood as the result of socializing factors. In the next section, I will complement the findings and assumptions presented above with studies from psychology and family sociology that have looked in more detail at how values are related to an individual’s personality on the one hand and to social background on the other. The resulting model of the socialization of values will allow me to clarify the role media play in the adoption and transformation of values.

2.1.3 Values as Products of Socialization

The seminal approaches to values, their definitions and operationalizations consider values as basic stable attitudes closely connected to an individual’s personality. But values are not only individual, as we have seen, they are heavily influenced by the culture or society in which an individual lives. As a general rule, one could say that the closer a subsystem of this society is to the individual the more influence it exerts on the values of this individual (Hurrelmann, 2006).

In the process of primary socialization, which usually sets in right after birth, families explicitly and implicitly (e.g., through their behavior) transmit their values to their children (see, e.g., Boehnke, Hadjar, & Baier, 2007; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Rohan & Zanna, 1996). As the people most closely related to a child they exert the most decisive influence on the development of the child’s values. But families are, of course, part of larger contexts, such as religious, ethnic, or other communities (Kohn & Schoenbach, 1993; Whiting, Chasdi, Antonovsky, & Ayres, 1966) or socio-economic strata that also set standards with regard to values (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Barry, 1997; Kasser, Koestner, & Lekes, 2002). Thus other so-called agents of socialization complement the (immediate) family: more distant relatives, friends, peers, and neighbors, as well as
institutions like kindergartens, schools, or clubs contribute to the “education” of the individual in terms of values. On a more global level, large societal institutions and organizations, e.g., constitutional bodies, NGOs, or professional associations, are added. Families are embedded into these larger social groupings and institutions. Thus the influence of parents in the transmission of values interacts with a variety of other formative influences (Goodnow, 1997). Likewise, the ranges of influence of entities contributing to an individual’s socialization overlap, and a broader influence may encompass more minor ones. Figure 1 shows a possible visualization of contexts relevant to the socialization of values.

With this model I propose that the strength of influence on the values of each individual is inversely proportional to the range of influence of an agent of socialization, in terms of people affected. The larger an institution, the less direct its influence on single members’ values. Agents of secondary or tertiary socialization stand behind primary agents who moderate or mediate the influence of other entities. This is symbolized by the decreasing color intensity in the outer areas of the illustration. The outer limit in this figure is marked by the level of the society. The society itself is based upon certain norms and values, but also laws and regulations (often, but not necessarily, an expression of values) that set standards for what is considered good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate. Values, as guiding principles or ideals, are the most abstract in this respect. Norms, on the other hand, are implicit or explicit expressions of values that state how one should or should not behave. Lastly, these norms are codified in the generally binding laws and regulations of a society. (For mere reasons of simplicity, larger contexts are omitted here, although they might affect values within a society as well—see, e.g., the discussion of “European values” in connection with Turkey’s application to accede to the European Union.)

Within one society, institutions or social (sub)systems act as agents of socialization (Hurrelmann, 2006). Some primary institutions important in the early years of life have been enumerated above; other institutions include companies, churches, or political parties—and mass media, which will be discussed below. The influence of an institution on the individual can vary in directness, length and intensity. They are represented here by one placeholder to distinguish them from the strictly interpersonal levels of peer groups and family. These impact most heavily what an individual comes to accept and internalize in terms of values. However, as on any other level, it is of course possible to reject the values of others and even adopt opposing values (Kluckhohn, 1951).
At the core of the overlapping spheres of influence is the individual whose values Vernon and Allport (1931) called an “expression of the individual personality.” The different shape of the hexagon in the center of Figure 1 is meant to illustrate a change of perspective at this point. The outer squares of the model represent a socialization framework of individual and collective actors that influence what an individual internalizes in terms of values. Seen from the psychological rather than sociological direction, scholars have been interested in how the values of an individual are related to this individual’s actions. And while from a meso-perspective we find consistency between the values of an individual and his or her primary agents of socialization, the relationships between an individual’s values and behavior are less congruent.

As stated above, values are closely linked to an individual’s personality. Personality traits equally influence behavior, but they are to a considerable degree inherited (see, e.g., Bouchard & McGue, 2003), while values are socially
acquired. They are derived from the observation of others and thought to steer individual decision-making and behavior (Mischel et al., 1996). How strong the guidance of these values is in concrete situations, however, differs across various types of personalities and circumstances (Triandis, 1980). From the earliest empirical findings (e.g., LaPiere, 1934), inconsistencies between self-reported values and behavior have been noted. For instance, in a study of AIDS volunteers, Omoto and Snyder (1995) found only limited explanatory power in the individual importance of altruistic values.

Different explanations for these inconsistencies have been proposed. With her model of values and attitudinal or behavioral decisions, Rohan (2000, p. 271) distinguishes personal and perceived societal values, which are not necessarily the same, and posits that people may act in accordance with their own or with their peers’ values. In addition, depending on how aware people are of their actions in a given situation, they may resort to justification patterns that they base on either their own or others’ values. This offers four possible paths between a person’s value system and their decisions and could lead to as many different behaviors—while one’s own values remain unchanged. So, results documenting little or no congruence between personal values and behavior may be due to people behaving in accordance with what they perceive as socially accepted or to what they think would be a good argument or justification for their actions in the face of others.

Maio, Olson, Allen and Bernard (2001) saw lack of cognitive support for values (usually not questioned) as a reason why people do not act according to their value priorities. In a model proposed by Kristiansen and Hotte (1996) the relationship between values and behavior is mediated by action-oriented personal norms and, more concretely still, attitudes. Empirically, the exact relationships between values and behavior are still unresolved, however (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Karp, 2000). This may be partly due to the latent character of value priorities. Maio and associates (2001) found that increasing the awareness and salience of personal values reduces discrepancies between self-reported values and behavior. The scholars argue that lack of cognitive support for values—indicated by the inability to give reasons for them—may explain why people often do not express their values in their behavior. If values are inadequately grounded in people’s frames of reference they may still report having these values in, for instance, a survey. Yet the importance of these (allegedly held) values for their actions may be relatively small. Subsequently, when values are not made salient, large discrepancies between values and
behavior can be expected, but these could be attributed to e.g. the unobtru-
siveness of the situation in which a behavior occurs rather than inner conflict.

Another explanation for these inconsistencies could be methodological in
nature, similar to Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1977) analysis of attitudes and behavior.
They argued that congruence between attitudes and behavior can only be
expected when the correspondence between measures employed for both entities
in a study is high. Often, the scholars argue, items used to gauge attitudes and
categories meant to classify observed behavior are not even close matches. For
values, this could prove to be even more difficult than for attitudes because
values are of a more abstract nature and thus possibly more difficult to record
with high validity and applicability for concrete behavior. Yet, as Kristiansen and
Zanna (1988) demonstrated, attitudes are often directly related to personal
values—or values are used as justifications for certain attitudes.

But additionally, it may simply be the case that many behaviors are indeed
only slightly influenced by values while other factors play a more important role.
And from Wegner and Bargh’s (1998) discussion of automatic versus controled
behavior results the finding that many actions are taken without much thought,
especially when the mind is occupied with other things. One could expect that
this would lead to a higher prevalence of values in automatic behavior. But
bearing in mind the often latent character of values (see above), they may not
even be considered in many everyday actions. If, on the other hand, values are
strongly present in someone’s mind, this person will notice and consider these
values more in his or her decisions and actions. This is one of the mechanisms
Maio and colleagues (2001) cite as an explanation of higher congruence between
values and behavior when reasons for values are made salient.

So, psychology offers a different perspective on values than the sociological
literature discussed at the outset of this section. How can the two approaches be
combined? I propose that communication and media science can create links to
the other disciplines. It bridges the gap between the study of motives leading to
individual behavior and societal outcomes of this behavior. However, mass
media, which are at the center of this field, are understudied in the others, even in
the macro-approaches from sociology and political science.

As the reader may recall, most studies presented in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2
are concerned with the societal level of values only and neglect psychological
aspects. But many of them report great differences in values between members of
a given society or even within subgroups of a society. As we have seen, age, as a
proxy for place in the life-cycle, and education seem to be of great importance in
this respect. Other moderators include socio-economic status, unemployment,
gender and party affiliation. These are the most commonly cited factors that influence an individual’s possibilities and liberties to actively choose what values to adopt. Yet, Schwartz (1992) states that even if people do not share the values of their society, they are still conscious of the discrepancy with their own values. So, what is it that helps create this form of collective knowledge?

If values are so strongly dependent on socialization, then the mass media as another important agent of socialization (Hurrelmann, 2006; Rosengren & Windahl, 1989) have been surprisingly neglected by almost all scholars cited so far—except for, e.g., Gensicke (2000), who regards the media as scapegoats for all kinds of, in his eyes, negative developments in society in general and political discourse in particular (negativism, media campaigns and the like). Authors who address the national or societal sphere of influence on individual values tend to quasi automatically name mass media as transmitters of culture-specific values to individual members of a society (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Luhmann, 2002; Schwartz, 1992). Yet, they rarely tackle questions about how media are related to other influencing factors and what role the selectivity of media users plays, let alone whether media take an active part in the process as molders rather than mirrors (Hurrelmann, 2006).

So what are the effects of media in the process of the socialization of values? For the study of values and their relationships to media, it is helpful to think about how media use behavior and media contents could be incorporated into the model presented in Figure 1. Of course, media use can be seen as one type of action that, following Schwartz’s definition, could be motivated by personal values. On the other hand, the values of one’s environment shape individual values and justify individual decisions and actions. Cultural value priorities could be reflected or even actively shaped by mass media contents that should, in turn, influence individual values. Thus, the content of media outlets could play a part in presenting role models or ideas of acceptable values. The norms and values that the media system itself has to obey could be expressed in codes of conduct, but also as laws and regulations. Finally, on the interpersonal level, media use of others (family, peers) and their attitudes toward media could modify media influence on individual values as well. However, there is little systematic research in this area. Do media contain values at all? I will give an overview in sections 2.2 and 2.3.
2.2 Values in Media Content

Strangely enough, whether cultural products such as media contents actually display the values of a given culture is an old question (see, e.g., Albrecht, 1956; Arnheim, 1944; Johns-Heine & Gerth, 1949; Martel & McCall, 1964; Wayne, 1956; White, 1944). Since the early days of the media and communications field, numerous studies have revealed, quite plausibly, that mass-media messages indeed depict values that could resonate or conflict with the values of their recipients. Since the 1970s, a number of US-based studies have analyzed values indirectly through the mediated images of certain groups (women, African-Americans) and the respective norms of their conduct (e.g., Barner, 1999; Douglas, 1996; Drew & Miller, 1977; Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Entman, 1994; S. Johnson & Christ, 1988; Licata & Biswas, 1993). Following Gerbner’s cultivation approach, many scholars studied the violation of societal values regarding sex and violence, especially on television, thus deriving implicit patterns of TV values (e.g., Estep & Macdonald, 1983; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1977; Greenberg & D’Alessio, 1985; Kunkel et al., 1999; Lowry & Shidler, 1993; Lowry & Towles, 1989; O’Kelly, 1974).

Beaudoin and Thorson (2001) examined values that media made explicit as cultural indicators. What values are mentioned in the foreign news reported by American newspapers and what images of countries and continents are thus promoted (see also Schuppe, 1988)? Similarly, what “American values” are ascribed to ABC’s “person of the week” (S. G. Larson & Bailey, 1998)? And in advertising research, differences in values displayed in advertisements from different cultural spheres have been studied repeatedly (e.g., Chan & Cheng, 2002; Cutler, Erdem, & Javalgi, 1997; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Lin, 2001).

But most analyses study fictional content, e.g. TV series (Bruns, 1996; Großkopf, 1996; Nitsche, 2000; Skill & Robinson, 1994; Wünsch, Decker, & Krah, 1996), analyzing general value patterns within a show or genre. Another special focus has been directed towards values depicted on children’s television (Barner, 1999; Grimm & Horstmeyer, 2003; Heintz, 1992; M. S. Larson, 1989; O’Kelly, 1974; Rosenkoetter, 1999). Many of these scholars motivate their research through the assumption that children in particular learn a lot about desirable and undesirable behavior from watching TV.

Only a few studies examine a broader range of genres (Krüger, 1988; Lukesch, Bauer, Eisenhauer, & Schneider, 2004; Selnow, 1990). For American television, Selnow concludes:
The personal values that are endemic to American culture are deeply embedded in the programming material of its most favored entertainment medium. These values are played out in endless scenarios and in countless dialogues, and range in magnitude from subplot foundations to passing observations. (p. 72)

Media content appears to be permeated with representations of values which vary depending on type of channel (public-service broadcasting (PSB) versus commercial, in Germany, for instance), time of day or genre (Krüger, 1988; Lukesch et al., 2004). This points to the fact that media purposely decide which societal values to present to different target groups.

What do we know about the effects the value-carrying media have on their users? In the literature on media and socialization it is commonly assumed, though never tested, that values are learned through media consumption (see, e.g., the summaries in Hurrelmann, 2006; Lukesch, 1999). Or, as Miegel (1994) puts it:

There is no doubt that popular culture and the mass media constitute leading sources from which young people receive the images and ideas they use in their identity and lifestyle work. The mass media, therefore, have an important role as agents of socialization and as transmitters of values, norms and attitudes, something which obviously has considerable impact on the importance of the role of the family in the process of socialization. (p. 238)

However, few studies have actually addressed the relationships (be they causal or not) between individual values, values displayed in the media and individual use of these media. I will describe them in the next section.

2.3 Values and Media Use

Studies on values and media use mostly have not pursued a socialization concept, but have regarded media use as a way to reinforce values, beliefs etc. Thus, following the uses-and-gratifications approach to media and their audiences (see, e.g., Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980), media use was operationalized as dependent on users’ values. The uses-and-gratifications concept assumes that people tend to select media offerings that promise to satisfy their needs. Over time, users learn which media fulfill their needs best in a variety of situations, and the fit between gratifications sought and obtained improves, especially for heavily consumed media (Palmgreen, 1984; Palmgreen et al., 1980). Yet the gratifications sought need not reflect personal values. It is even possible that people purposefully use media
that go against their values, for example to learn about the arguments of political
opponents, let off steam and frustration or escape to a care-free world based upon
values that would be incompatible with one’s own lifeworld.

Many studies have shown that media users expect, and indeed get,
gratifications such as information, advice, entertainment, emotional release,
material for conversations and escape from the real world (see, for instance, the
summary in R. B. Rubin, Rubin, & Piele, 1996). As early as the 1940s,
reinforcement of one’s own beliefs about the world was discovered as another
major reason to turn to media content (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; see
also L. B. Becker, 1979; Ehrlich, Guttmann, Schönbach, & Mills, 1957; Freedman &
Sears, 1965).

Festinger (1957) explained this phenomenon in his theory of cognitive
dissonance: People try to avoid messages that are dissonant with their opinions
and tend to use those messages that at least promise to stabilize their worldviews.
Thus motives for watching or reading certain media also reflect values—at least
to some degree (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). From the 1950s through the early 70s, a
number of studies tried to support the idea that selective exposure to media is a
means of reinforcing one’s own views and beliefs.

These studies procured evidence for the assumption that viewers indeed
watch programs that (at least seem to) promote their personal values (Ball-
Rokeach, Grube, & Rokeach, 1981; Tate & Surlin, 1976; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974;
Wilhoit & de Bock, 1976). For example, people with highly prejudiced
worldviews tend to avoid programs featuring egalitarianism and to ignore satire
in television shows supposed to ridicule bigotry (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). But
this evidence rests on case studies about only one specific audience value and
how it is related to viewing one specific TV program, respectively. Results of a
wider range are missing. In sum, the selective exposure paradigm has produced
ambiguous findings, with some studies indeed documenting preferences for
information supportive of the individual’s opinions or behaviors, others
reporting the opposite or no such preference at all (for a recent summary on
selective exposure research, see Smith, Fabrigar, & Norris, 2008).

Studies on selective exposure to television have identified channel loyalty,
expressed through a clear preference for and frequent use of a given channel, as
an important factor guiding media use (see, e.g. Brosius, Wober, & Weimann,
Webster & Wakshlag, 1983). Could this choice be based on values? Lin, Atkin and
Abelman (2002) found that people searching for certain gratifications through
television use had a fairly clear idea about which channel, independently from
individual programs, would satisfy their needs best. Apparently, channels can function as brands, fulfilling audience expectations in a trustworthy, reliable way. This may entail expectations about value patterns typical of certain channels. For German television, for example, Krüger (1988) and Lukesch et al. (2004) have shown that value patterns differ between different types of stations—in this instance public-service broadcasting versus commercial channels. Given these differences and people’s tendency to seek reinforcement, values can be added to other individual characteristics that guide selective exposure to media (whose values possibly match their users’ own values, see below).

In spite of the heterogeneous results on selective exposure in general, I assume that in the majority of cases, media content concurs with the values of the user who made the selection. Even if this choice is based on habits, one may have been implicitly or explicitly taught by family members, peers or others what media are supposed to be enjoyable and appropriate. These standards will also be based upon the values of certain media offerings (most notably for the depiction of sex and violence, but also for sophistication). And even seemingly value-free amusement-oriented media use may reflect one’s general value priorities. To take an example of value dimensions from Schwartz (2006), in the aim of entertaining oneself at the end of a workday, media choices may reflect whether people rank “intellectual autonomy” (focusing on broadmindedness and curiosity) over “affective autonomy” (more oriented towards pleasure). The choice to spend one’s leisure time with a classic novel rather than a chick flick would issue from value priorities. Media repertoires can be quite varied, but in the long run, habits should reflect users’ priorities, including values.

Yet some scholars doubt that approaches centered on an actively choosing audience adequately model the relationships between values and media use. If media carry values on a daily basis should their usage not affect the value priorities of the users? What are the effects of this use? Being unable to convincingly disentangle the uses and effects perspectives, some scholars cautiously report correlational patterns. Based on the Schwartz values inventory, Besley (2008, 2008, May) has examined general media use and a broad set of values. His analysis draws on a cultivation framework (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002), assuming effects of media use on the audience’s values. But confined to cross-sectional data, Besley interprets his findings as mere concurrences, rather than effects. He finds that a preference for entertainment television and Internet is associated with accepting existing power structures and strengthens a consumerist self-perception (see also Paek & Pan, 2004; Shrum, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2005). Similarly, Sotirovic and McLeod (2001) assume
that habitual use of news versus entertainment media may cultivate attitudes about political participation and ultimately affect participation itself. The scholars see post-materialist and materialist values as antecedents for use of public affairs news and entertainment television, respectively. But again, their cross-sectional data do not allow a distinction between the cultivation effects of media use on values and exposure guided by values (see also Besley, 2006; Holbert, 2005).

Thus the question remains what cultivating effects media use actually has on users’ values. Answering this question is challenging, and some approaches cannot adequately study intricate interrelations between a number of relevant variables. As in cultivation research in general (e.g., Hirsch, 1980, 1981), ad-hoc comparison of heavy versus light media users cannot discern whether differences in values are the cause or the effect of media use. Thus, in Potter’s (1990) and Rosenkoetter’s (1999) studies on the cultivation of values among young television viewers, it is unclear whether differences in value patterns between heavy users of certain TV genres actually have to be attributed to this use.

Likewise, in a study of values depicted on television in the Netherlands and values held by the population, Krijnen (2006) interpreted findings as an effect of television. She found that the most salient moral issues on the small screen also occupied its viewers the most. Yet, it is possible that television picked up the most important issues of its viewers, thus inverting the causal relationship.

To escape this ambiguity, advertising scholars have conducted experiments in order to control the direction of causality and single out the effects of values in ads on consumer’s attitudes and behavior. Hornikx and O’Keefe’s (2009) meta-analysis of this literature documents that ads that are culturally adapted to a target audience, i.e. in terms of the values they display, are more persuasive and result in more desirable behavior outcomes.

A more general approach to influencing values in an experimental setting, for instance through television, has found few followers, although research conducted by and around Rokeach (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984; Rokeach, 1971; Sanders & Atwood, 1979) found that long-term effects on personal values can indeed be observed.

A critical examination of the study of Ball-Rokeach and associates (1984) can illustrate some intricacies of linking media-use behavior and (self-reported) values. Their experiment consisted of a television program that was broadcast on PBS in eastern Washington with subsequent mail surveys of residents in the area versus a control city where the program was not aired. The program was created and promoted to produce maximum impact on viewers’ values. These values were measured through a self-administered questionnaire, while behavior
resulting from changed value priorities was operationalized through the willingness to donate time, effort or money to charities campaigning for the values targeted by the TV stimulus. The authors found surprisingly different results between subjects who had seen the program and those who had not. The question remains, however, how these differences in reported values and behavior have to be interpreted. It is possible that the program, rather than really changing values, merely brought viewers their value priorities to attention. In a survey asking about values (including exactly those the TV show had been about) these may have subsequently been rated higher by people in the experimental group than in the non-viewer group and then led to a change in behavior in the first, but not the second group.

In addition, since the program explicitly and intensely focused on viewers' personal values it may have directed viewers' attention to their personal value ideals—especially since the program focused on what “Americans” thought to be important values for society. Viewers perceiving themselves to be different from their own ideal or from an assumed societal one may have put their priorities into question and their ideal could have become more salient than the values truly guiding their daily lives. This interpretation would be in line with research reported in section 2.1.3 (e.g., Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Kristiansen & Hotte, 1996; Kristiansen & Zanna, 1988; Maio et al., 2001; see also Seligman & Katz, 1996; P. Sparks & Durkin, 1987).

Still, Bortz and Braune (1980) report that in a field experiment long-term reading of conservative versus liberal newspapers indeed shifted readers' values toward more congruence with their paper’s political stance (see also Boden, Bortz, Braune, & Franke, 1975; Bortz & Leitner, 1979). And recently, Defever, Pandelaere and Roe (2009, February) found that experimentally controlled exposure to advertisements that put forward certain values could lead participants to behave in accordance with those values. The underlying mechanism could be the same as in Maio’s et al. (2001) experiments that raised value salience through presenting reasons for values (see chapter 2.1.3). To explain why participants expressed these values more often in subsequent actions, one could follow Wegner and Bargh’s (1998) arguments: It is possible that exposure to value-laden advertisements made them conscious of their values which led to more controlled (and value-congruent) rather than automatic behavior. In sum, there are two possibilities of how using media can have an effect on users' values: a) media use changes values, or b) media use makes the audience aware of its preexisting values without changing them.
The relationships between media use and values are unresolved, and valid arguments have been proposed to explain different causalities. In whatever way values and media use are related, some findings indicate that these relationships differ for different kinds of media contents (e.g. news versus entertainment). Thus measures of what media outlets people use globally may be too coarse-grained to study interrelations with values. Instead, genres within one medium should be distinguished.

2.3.1 Values in TV Genres and Their Audiences

Some of the media-content analyses mentioned in chapter 2.2 investigated the value patterns provided by specific genres and found that values may even define genres in fictional entertainment (Nitsche, 2000; Selnow, 1990). Prosocial values are put forward by family and children’s programs, for instance (Grimm & Horstmeyer, 2003; Heintz, 1992; M. S. Larson, 1989; Rosenkoetter, 1999). Values in foreign news seem to differ across the nations covered (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2001; see also S. G. Larson & Bailey, 1998).

The function of genres for the selection behavior of the audience has been investigated by numerous studies since Webster and Wakshlag’s (1983) and Heeter’s (1985) general models of program choice. But only a few studies have examined the relationship between genre preferences and the values of the recipients. These studies have tended to follow the selective exposure paradigm and have examined values as independent variables in the study of program choice. Most of them have looked at the audience of only one genre or one value dimension (C. K. Atkin, Greenberg, Korzenney, & McDermott, 1979; Ball-Rokeach et al., 1981; Gandy, 1984; Prommer, 2008; Tate & Surlin, 1976; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974; Wilhoit & de Bock, 1976), with the exception of Potter (1990), Hawkins et al. (2001) and La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) who covered a broader set of values and genres.

In general, Preston & Clair (1994) concluded, somewhat vaguely, that people watch what is “consistent with their self-perception” (p. 280). Only a little more specifically, people who rank the value of accomplishment higher like to watch violent action movies (B. W. Becker et al., 1985). Rosengren and Reimer (Reimer & Rosengren, 1990; Rosengren & Reimer, 1986) found that consuming “heavy,” i.e. serious, content, such as news, documentaries and culture, correlates strongly with values such as “inner harmony,” “wisdom,” “self-respect,” and “equality,”
whereas users of “light” material (e.g., entertainment and sport) prefer “a comfortable life” as well as “true happiness” and “mature love” (Rosengren & Reimer, 1986, p. 17).

Conway and Rubin’s (1991) analysis revealed that personality traits are related to motivations to turn to informational versus entertainment TV (see also Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). Other studies have shown that psychotic personalities, rejecting the values and rules of society, prefer deviant genres, e.g. violent and sexually explicit programs (Shim & Paul, 2007; Weaver, 2000; Weaver, Brosius, & Mundorf, 1993; Zillmann & Weaver, 1997; Zuckerman & Little, 1986) and enjoy violent films more (Bruggemann & Barry, 2002). Psychoticism itself has been shown to be negatively related to values such as “secure and satisfying relationships,” “positive orientation to others,” “propriety in dress and manners,” “traditional religiosity” and “personal growth and inner harmony” (Heaven, 1993, p. 309-311).

In sum, studies on values and the use of media genres examine the explanatory power of personal values for genre choice. The possible cultivating effects of exposing oneself more to a given genre than to others have to my knowledge not been studied. And only scarce evidence is available about the importance of audience values in the process of selecting media content—relative to other factors. As we have seen, demographic and psychological variables play a major role in values research, and they are also regularly associated with media use. For instance, research on personality features and media preferences has a comparably long history. Psychological factors have been related to media use as antecedents, competing explanations or mediating factors. Since they are also related to value priorities, the interrelationship of values, media use and third factors come into focus. What mediators, moderators, common causes or effects have been studied? Personality dimensions are certainly not the only important external variables. The next section is devoted to different possibilities of how values, media use and third factors could be related.

2.3.2 External Variables: Antecedents, Moderators, or Alternative Explanations?

In the small body of research on values and media use, there are very few studies on third factors in this relationship. One can generally distinguish two approaches. Most of the experimental studies presented in the previous section randomly assign participants to conditions, and many do not control for any
external factors. On the other hand, studies based on non-experimental surveys usually control for demographic variables, following different theoretical assumptions.

In a selective exposure paradigm, which considers values as independent variables, age, gender, regional or cultural origin and education are important (Oliver, 2002). Some of these factors have been discovered by values research as antecedents to specific value patterns (age, gender, life-cycle, education, social, ethnic or regional origin, income; see chapter 2.1.2). Since media use is to a large extent a habitual, long-term behavior (A. M. Rubin, 1983), it is not surprising that research on selective exposure and values should control for these “usual suspects” (e.g., Tate & Surlin, 1976). In the logic of selective exposure, the above-mentioned demographics would be antecedents to values, and both values and demographics (directly—and indirectly through values) could have an impact on media use. Situational motivations often complement these factors, making predictions highly uncertain about what media will be used by a given group of people at a given point in time.

These short-term and situational factors are possible moderators in the relationships between values and media use. Likewise, age, gender, education and income have been identified as moderator variables in cultivation processes (Gerbner et al., 2002). And they are controlled for in studies that examine the cultivating effects of media use on values, (Besley, 2008; Paek & Pan, 2004; Reimer & Rosengren, 1990; Shrum et al., 2005).

Another strand of research on values, media and third variables focuses on long-term life-cycle related factors. Generational differences are ascribed to typical experiences and common goals at certain ages and are related to typical forms of media-use behavior (Peiser, 2000). The so-called TV-generation—having grown up with television as an established medium—has a more relaxed and distanced approach to watching television than the older generations—for whom TV continues to hold a somewhat special or extraordinary status (Hackl, 2001; Peiser, 1996). It is possible that these different reception modes also imply different importance to values in the selection of media, thus moderating the relationship.

But some scholars give reason to doubt whether the relationships between values and media use are adequately modeled either way. A recent study taking a closer look at cultivation and personality traits identified the latter as stronger predictors of cultivation effects than media use (Nabi & Riddle, 2008). With regard to values (as products of socialization and, to a lesser degree, cultivation processes) this finding hints at only weak media effects, but a more extensive
influence of personality traits. And in some experiments that aimed at cultivating value priorities, personality variables were considered important predictors (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984; Bortz & Braune, 1980). Media would thus merely complement other factors in the learning of values.

The social context of media use is another focus in this perspective, particularly with regard to the appropriation of media by children and adolescents and media effects on them (Rosengren & Windahl, 1989). Media use of parents and peers exerts an additional influence on children’s and adolescents' attitudes as well as their media use (Hackl, 2001; Rosengren & Windahl, 1989). Thus, parental and peer influence are interpreted similarly in media and values research, and age-related effects are at the core of both fields.

This makes it difficult to distinguish the extent to which differences between the media use of older versus younger people and between their value patterns may be related to one another. Instead of different values leading to different media use, it is also possible that both are dependent on the same external factors. Peiser (2003) argues that since formative experiences at a young age and primary socialization are responsible for the emergence of individual value patterns, media use habits and attitudes toward mass media just happen to develop at the same time. Thus differences in values and media use across generations may have parallel causes; yet the relationships between them could be mere artifacts.

These theoretical considerations and findings both support and expand the model shown in Figure 1. Scholars from different backgrounds underline the importance of personality as well as social context for the adoption of values. How does media use fit into this? On the micro-level, it could be seen as a behavior influenced by personality traits and individual values—rather than influencing values. From a meso-perspective, family and peers may be responsible for much of the influence on both values and media use that is otherwise captured by variables such as origin, education or even gender. I do not deny the cultivating potential of the media, but critical acclaim of the literature in the field makes it plausible that media effects on values are much more elusive than the effects of values—acquired through social learning from a multitude of sources—on a person’s media choices. Careful consideration of the literature suggests that people, in the first place, select media most of the time that at least do not contradict their values. Of course, what media someone consumes can feed back to, and reinforce (or maybe change), the value patterns that contributed to using these media in the first place. So, values seem a prime example for the phenomenon of reinforcing spirals of influence between selectivity and effects (Slater, 2007).
The review of the literature on values and media use has shown that in spite of this admittedly heterogeneous body of work, McCarty and Shrum’s (1993) analysis still holds true to this day and should be expanded to all mass media: “Studies indicate a values-television viewing relationship, [yet] a theoretical framework articulating precisely how and why these relationships occur remains unaddressed” (p. 79). As an answer to this gap, the last section of this chapter will integrate media into the model of socialization of values from section 2.1.3.

2.4 A Model of Values and Media in Socialization

Essentially, both studies on media and socialization and values research are concerned with long-term personal traits and regular patterns of behavior. As we have seen, the same possible preconditions (personality traits, formative experiences and attitudes, gender) and moderators (phases in the life-cycle, education, income) come into focus. In addition, mass media are commonly cited among the most important socializing factors in modern societies—and thus also contributing to individual acquisition of values. Yet, a model of what role media may play on different stages of this process is missing. Based on the model proposed in Figure 1, inclusion of the media could lead to the following extension of this model (Figure 2).

Generally, the term “media” may refer to three different levels: media use as a type of behavior, media outlets as content providers and the media system with its norms and regulations as an overarching framework for content production. These norms and regulations can be understood as an expression of (a society’s) values, e.g., privacy values, freedom of speech and expression etc. All three aspects are related to individual and societal values—albeit in different ways.

Of course, media law is but one aspect of the general legal system—it is merely spelled out in Figure 2 to highlight the different roles “media” play in the socialization of values. Yet, some areas of media legislation have a direct relation to values, for example regulations about content deemed unsuitable for minors. Consequently, as discussed in chapter 2.2, research on values in the media has focused especially on the area of sex and violence and children’s use of these contents. Underlying these studies is a fear of the detrimental influences of media on young people, not yet completely socialized. But in a larger context, all kinds of value-related contents may affect the worldviews or available modes of actions of media users. And since values are ever present in today’s mass media, one can
suspect long-term effects on users’ perceptions and attitudes as well as on their values. There are very few long-term studies on the socialization of values (e.g., Kasser et al., 2002), and to my knowledge, none has looked at effects of long-term media use on people’s values. With regard to the methodological difficulties experienced for example by scholars researching the use of violent media and the aggressive behavior of users (a recent discussion is provided by G. G. Sparks et al., 2009), media effects on values would be a very challenging subject of study indeed.

As I have argued above, the socialization of individual members of the audience takes place through the learning of values for which media provide additional input. In Figure 2 this is represented by a placeholder for a media outlet that, in this case, spans all interpersonal levels. This could be a key medium for a given society the agenda and/or personalities of which more or less every member of that society would recognize. Of course, most media would be limited to smaller ranges of influence. Furthermore, the influence of values disseminated
by mass media that merely display contents but do not allow direct user-
interaction is probably weaker than that of institutions with which individuals
have direct contact, such as a place of employment, or a church or association.
Nevertheless, media even play a part in these contexts since they give people
abundant material to talk about. This is a well known gratification of media use
especially for loose relationships (see, e.g., R. B. Rubin et al., 1996). Thus mediated
value patterns permeate social interactions and may contribute to cohesion by
providing a common frame of reference for people only weakly connected to one
another.

Lastly, on the level of close relationships, behavior of family, friends and
peers affects what individuals come to accept as values in their society, as we
have seen in Figure 1. In addition, what importance parents and peers place on
media and mediated value patterns, is passed on to young people or at least
influences them in their adoption of media use patterns and, possibly, of personal
values (D. J. Atkin, Greenberg, & Baldwin, 1991; Pasquier, Buzzi, d’Haenens, &

But how strong can we expect relationships between media use and
audience values to be? In my illustration values are depicted as influencing
individual behavior (including media use). The direction of influence is
theoretically ambiguous and empirically unresolved. With regard to the literature
discussed above (see sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2) the relationship between personality
and media use can be assumed to be stronger than that between values and
media use. For mere reasons of simplicity the respective arrow has been omitted
in the figure, but we can very well assume that a considerable number of
behaviors, even those routine or habitual in nature, are only slightly related to an
individual’s values—if at all.

Values are often not very present to the mind, so behavior can come into
conflict with personal values (see above; Maio et al., 2001). And Rohan (2000)
suggests that individual worldviews may differ from perceived societal value
systems. People can choose which values to follow, thus actions are sometimes
consistent with only either individual or societal values. When people conform to
to values they imagine to be socially desirable, this can produce paradoxical
situations not unlike the dual climate of opinion as described by Noelle-

For media use, other people’s values—and the way a person perceives
these—may be especially relevant for media that are often or typically consumed
in the presence of others, such as television or cinema, or the use of which is
socially desirable. But collective media use is not the only form related to
individual values in indirect and ambiguous ways. Other situational factors (moods, time of the day, multi-tasking, etc.) influence how much attention is paid or how much cognitive effort is applied when choosing certain media offerings over others.

As I have stated above, the uses-and-gratifications framework offers explanations for media use that is, at first sight, not in accordance with personal values. Thus even if personal values contribute to the process of selecting media, I expect to find rather weak effects of specific values on actual behavior (see, e.g., Hornikx & O’Keefe, 2009; Zaller, 1996). Apart from the difficulties in measuring values and behavior with high correspondence (see, e.g., the discussion by Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), a variety of situational and other factors can be much more decisive. Indeed, Besley (2008) found only medium to weak relationships between values and media use (operationalized in his study as use of media (television versus Internet) or types of contents (news versus entertainment)). Values are basic traits that usually do not change quickly. In contrast, media use is often heavily situational—although long-term habits or preferences do exist. Plausibly, it is these long-term dimensions of media use that are most likely to be linked to values.

Lastly, relationships between values and media use may be small because of the nature of the mediated offer. So far, content analyses have revealed the commonplace nature of values in media contents. Yet, there is no evidence for decisive differences in value patterns across channels or publications. Nor do we find indications for media that propose value patterns radically out of society’s bounds. With the exception of a few scandalous programs or special interest publications most media aim at a public in the middle of society and do not wish to repel large parts of their potential audience or readership. This makes eccentric value patterns in mass media highly improbable, but underlines the integrative potential of the mass media. In complex modern societies, media are inextricably linked to other agents and spheres of socialization; and they provide integrative contents and role models for the discussion and the acquisition of values in contexts that go beyond direct and personal experience. Rather than actively participating in the changing of values, media can be assumed to have more reinforcing power, supporting existing and perhaps traditional value patterns.

This section has focused primarily on media use as dependent on personal values. As discussed in section 2.3.2, media may contribute to the development of individual value patterns, while effects of value priorities on the selection of media will be stronger. And the fact that differences between mediated value patterns of channels, for instance, are for the most part not substantial further
complicates the study of media effects on users’ values. This study will thus focus on the opposite causal relationship and analyze media use as a type of behavior that is influenced by a person’s values.