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Framing politics

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Conclusion

A growing number of studies investigate news frames and their effects on citizens' political understanding, attitudes and behaviour. However, how news framing effects really "work", both in terms of the psychological processes and the variables they depend on is still debated in the literature. Moreover, for too long, researchers have ignored the question of how long framing effects last over time. In this dissertation, we report empirical evidence in support of *more than one psychological process* that mediates news framing effects. Moreover, we propose that effects depend to a large extent on the issue at stake and on how *important* that issue is. On the topic of duration, we find that news frames can have *more than flimsy effects* and that the *over-time persistence* of these effects depends on the amount of consonant or dissonant news framing an individual is exposed to. Given these findings, we believe that this dissertation contributes in a fundamental way to extant models of news framing effects. In this last section, we present these contributions, discuss some limitations of our research, and conclude with directions for future research.

Summary of Research Findings

In *Chapter 1*, we tested a multiple-mediation model of news framing effects on political attitudes. In a survey experiment, we investigated two mediation processes: belief importance change and belief content change. Our analysis showed that news framing effects are mediated by both processes. However, in terms of explanatory power, belief content change mattered more than belief importance change. We also tested whether this mediation model depended on differing levels of political knowledge. Our results indicate that participants with higher levels of political knowledge were affected to a greater extent via both mediation processes. The results of this study show that a news frame can cause different types of effects on political attitudes. They also corroborate recent findings (Slothuus, 2008) that indicate the ability of news frames to add previously inaccessible or unavailable content to a person's beliefs about an issue.

In *Chapter 2*, we argue that news framing effects depend on the importance of an issue. In two survey experiments, we examined to what extent different levels of issue importance moderate the processing of a framed message and the magnitude of a news framing effect. Our findings showed no news framing effects for a high contextual-importance welfare issue, and rather large effects for a low contextual-importance trade issue. However, news frames in the "low importance" issue experiment caused effects across the board, almost independently of how important an individual found the issue personally. We also found that if individuals attached higher personal importance to an issue, they were more affected by belief importance changes whereas if they attached lower importance to an issue, they were affected more via belief content changes. High personal importance did, moreover, increase the elaboration of belief importance considerations. This chapter is one of the first to present variation in framing effects between

different issues in one experimental study. Moreover, the results indicate that not only personal but also contextual levels of importance are likely to matter for the individual-level analysis of news framing effects.

In *Chapter 3*, we investigated how long news framing effects last over time. We conducted a “classic” framing experiment, but augmented it with three delayed measurement points (after one day, one week, and two weeks). Our results showed a news framing effect that was surprisingly resistant to dilution. We also analysed whether the rate of decay of a news framing effect depended on different levels of political knowledge. We found no immediate moderating effect of knowledge, but could show that individuals with more moderate levels of political knowledge were affected most persistently over time. This chapter contains one of only a few empirical studies that combine a framing experiment with delayed opinion measurements, and the first to include more than one delayed measurement. Our results challenge previous assumptions regarding the short-term nature of news framing effects.

In *Chapter 4*, we again tested the duration of news framing effects, but this time at four delayed time points (after 15 minutes, one day, one week, and two weeks). Moreover, we added multiple exposures to repetitive and competitive news frames over time to our experimental design. Our analysis showed that repetitive news framing had a consolidating effect on political attitudes. This means that additional exposure to news framing did not for the most part intensify the framing effect, but led to more or less consolidated opinions across time. Yet, news framing effects could become stronger, if the time span between first and second frame exposure was relatively short. Competitive news framing showed strong recency effects, i.e., the last news frame exposure was more influential for opinion formation. Yet, for one of our framing scenarios, this effect only took place when the delay was longer than one week. We also found that political knowledge had a short-term influence on both consolidation and recency effects. When the delay between first and second exposure was relatively short, individuals with higher levels of knowledge displayed more pronounced consolidation effects and weaker recency effects. The experiment in this chapter is the first to test both consonant and dissonant news framing across multiple delayed time points. The results contribute to our understanding of the real influence news frames have on political attitudes.

Implications for Framing Theory

Mediated News Framing Effects

Understanding by which psychological processes news frames can affect citizens’ sense-making of politics is critical to the study of framing effects (see e.g., Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Igartua & Cheng, 2009; Nelson et al., 1997). In fact, the study of mediation is the key to the conceptualization of framing as an autonomous media effects theory: The notion that a news frame works by rendering certain beliefs more important, and therefore more likely to be included in subsequent judgments, is central to several models of the psychology of framing

effects (e.g., Nelson et al., 1997; Scheufele, 1999). Based on this assumption, researchers have argued that framing is distinct from other communication effects such as persuasion and agenda-setting. Yet, as our research findings show, news frames can have other effects that go beyond this “traditional” news framing effect model. These results indicate that the news framing process can only be adequately explained by multiple mediation models (see e.g., Slothuus, 2008), which has consequences for our theoretical understanding of what a “framing effect” actually is.

In sum, our results showed that news framing effects are mediated by rendering certain belief considerations more important. But, we also found strong empirical evidence that news frames cause belief content changes, i.e., that they can add new beliefs to an individual’s mental stockpile. What is more, we report that this second mediator dominated the framing process. This corroborates recent findings by Slothuus (2008), who presented a “dual-process” model of news framing via both belief importance and belief content change. It extends Slothuus’ research findings by showing which process prevails, and by transporting this relatively new model to a different context and another set of news frames.

The integration of our research findings into framing theory requires a reconsideration of the boundaries between framing and persuasion theory (see Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Such reconsideration is not only valuable for the dual-process model, but also for framing scholars who test other mediators in news framing research, such as studies that investigate emotions versus cognition as mediators of framing. The road to a more integrative model of news framing begins with Scheufele’s (1999) suggestion that news frames ought to be considered as independent variables in the research process. Yet, despite introducing this potentially more integrative model, Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) continue to adhere to the old definition of a framing effect as belief importance change. Following this, any other process caused by a news frame, such as belief content change or emotional effects, could not be denoted as a “framing effect”, but as one possible “effect of a news frame”.

The distinction between these two conceptualizations is more than a play on words. The first, rather narrow, definition of news framing effects has helped to establish framing in the political communication literature. However, we consider this restricted conceptualization to be obstructive to research that seeks to investigate media content *in combination with* the effects this content may have. The strongest feature of the framing concept is that it allows researchers to study how the news “frame” an issue, and how these frames can affect the individual. We therefore agree with Slothuus (2008), who argued that a framing effect must be “any effect of a frame in communication on a receiver’s opinion” (p. 22). Nevertheless, we acknowledge that only future research that looks at mediators of framing can provide further insights into the exact relation between the different processing routes of news framing. Along these lines, a clear terminology is important, also because framing scholars have alluded to the “persuasive power” of news framing in the past (e.g., Callaghan & Schnell, 2009; Chong and Druckman, 2007a), and because there are studies of framing that adapt variables and theoretical assumptions developed

in persuasion. For instance, Igartua and Cheng (2009) argue that news framing effects are also mediated by heuristic processing, comparable to a peripheral route in persuasion's Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, see also Matthes, 2007).

How Importance Matters in News Framing Effects Research

In studying moderator variables, scholars show that framing is no "magic bullet" theory, but that there are individual and contextual differences that can limit how the media affect citizens' understanding of politics. Picking up on this, Chapter 2 tested *issue importance* as another moderating variable of news framing effects.

Our conception of issue importance was initially inspired by the so-called "*most important problem*" question. In public opinion polling, citizens are often asked to indicate what they consider the most important issues on the national agenda. This perception could also affect susceptibility to news framing effects, in that information on more important issues should be processed differently from that on issues citizens do not care about. However, a look at the psychological literature showed that importance is far more likely to matter on an idiosyncratic level, in the form of personal importance judgments (e.g., Boninger et al., 1995). When an issue is personally important, attitudes are stronger, more accessible and more elaborate – and therefore less likely to be affected by news framing (e.g., Krosnick, 1989). Low levels of importance, on the other hand, are connected with weak attitudes – so we expected larger news framing effects. However, our results showed that this is not necessarily the case. The effects we report vary mainly by issue, and can therefore not be fully attributed to personal importance. We tested two issues—welfare and international trade. News framing of a low contextual-importance international trade issue resulted in large effects, whereas the high-importance welfare issue did not result in any framing effects.

Some indication of *why* this was the case was provided by a mediation analysis of the dual-process model, which we also tested in Chapter 1. This analysis indicated that both individuals with high and low personal importance judgments were affected to a great extent via belief content, that is, via the addition of new beliefs about the issue. Even participants who found trade personally important did not resist the news frame, but were susceptible to changes in the content of their beliefs – probably because they did also not possess sufficient information on the issue to resist a frame.

This leads us to conclude that the moderating function of issue importance is likely to be connected with the information environment an individual finds her or himself in (see also Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Hopmann et al., in press). The low-importance issue, international trade, might literally have been "too" unimportant in public discourse. This means that even individuals with stronger attitudes did not possess enough information for an applicability effect to take place, due to a lack of contextual information on the issue (see Zaller, 1992). Conversely, continuous public attention to the high-importance issue of welfare in Denmark is likely to have equipped individuals with a good set of (competing) considerations to

resist the news frames. Thus, while attitudes towards welfare can be controversial, they might also be more stable given the higher importance attached to this issue (see Zaller, 1992). Our findings corroborate speculations by Kiouisis (2005, p. 7), who claims that the public attention an issue receives is connected with the strength of the attitudes associated with this issue. This attention tends to “stimulate more thinking and learning about objects and attributes in people’s minds”, and increased thinking about the issue might “lead to strengthened attitudes”. Yet, only further research investigating other political issues and news frames can clarify the relationship between contextual- and individual-level moderators.

Based on our findings, we believe that researchers aiming to tap individual-level framing effects must pay attention to the information environment experiments are conducted in, be it by controlling for pre-treatment exposure to a frame (Chong & Druckman, 2008), or by combining framing experiments with a content analysis that can assess the context of an issue frame (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Also, our results illustrate that studies aiming at attitudinal framing effects—which seems to receive increasing attention within the field—could benefit from the knowledge contained in the large body of social psychological literature concerned with attitude strength. To name only a few examples, framing effects could also depend on attitude extremity, interest, and involvement (for an overview see Krosnick & Petty, 1995).

The (Nonlinear) Effects of Political Knowledge on News Framing

The concept of knowledge is central to the study of political communication, where it can function as a moderator, but also as an independent or dependent variable (see e.g., Brewer, 2003; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006b; Neijens & de Vreese, 2009). Thus far, the empirical evidence regarding the role political knowledge plays in the framing process is somewhat inconclusive. Some authors argue that higher levels of political knowledge cause greater framing effects, because individuals have a greater stock of available considerations that can be rendered applicable by a frame (e.g., Nelson et al., 1997). Yet, such a wider stock of considerations is also likely to coincide with stronger and more stable attitudes, which would typically decrease the influence news framing can have (see Chapter 2). This assumption is supported by a second group of authors, who have reported stronger framing effects for low knowledge individuals (e.g., Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Given these mixed results, we also analysed political knowledge as a moderator of news framing. Specifically, we included knowledge into our analysis of the mediational processes of framing (Chapter 1), effect decay (Chapter 3), and the persistence of news framing effects over time (Chapter 4).

In Chapter 1, we found that both individuals with higher and with lower levels of knowledge were strongly affected by a news frame – via both belief importance and belief content change. Overall, knowledgeable individuals displayed stronger framing effects via both mediation processes, with belief content change playing a particularly important role. This supports assumptions of belief importance as a significant mediator of framing effects (Nelson et al., 1997). However, it also corroborates research findings that show the importance of belief

content change in the news framing process (Slothuus, 2008). The significant role belief content change played in our mediation analysis shows that, as far as political news framing is concerned, news frames are likely to convey previously unavailable information, even for knowledgeable citizens. While this provides some insights into the different mechanisms of news framing, it opens up new questions about the role that the accessibility and availability of beliefs plays in the framing process (see also Baden & de Vreese, 2008). For example, Lodge et al. (1995) argue that citizens do not retain information they are exposed to during the course of a political campaign, but stick to initial judgments that are then recalled and updated at a later point in time (see also Matthes, 2007). Accordingly, future research must determine the role that the acquisition of new beliefs really plays in the framing process, and how it is connected with a person's overall level of political knowledge.

We also reported a difference in the immediate and the time-delayed impact of political knowledge on framing effects (Chapter 3). In this study, political knowledge did not have an immediate moderating influence on opinion (potential reasons for this are argued in the discussion section of Chapter 3). However, we found that individuals with moderate levels of political knowledge displayed the most consistent news framing effects over time. We ascribe this to the nonlinear moderating effect of political knowledge as noted by Zaller (1992). While we still argue that low knowledge individuals are likely to be the most susceptible to immediate (forced) frame exposure and attitudinal framing effects (see Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001), these individuals are prone to not engage and process political information thoroughly after exposure (Zaller, 1992, p. 21). High knowledge individuals may have been initially affected in our study; however, they are more likely to encounter other (competing) information in the interim period, and have a higher ability of rejecting a political argument after some time (p. 121). Thus, we are left with the moderately knowledgeable, a group characterized by a certain level of cognitive engagement, but without access to a plethora of possibly competing considerations on the issue.

In Chapter 4, we assumed that different levels of political knowledge can affect the processing of framed information, and therefore the persistence of news framing effects. Our findings show that knowledgeable individuals displayed more stable news framing effects when exposed to repetitive news frames, probably because they possess higher levels of belief-accessibility, and were able to integrate framed information into their overall mental stockpile quickly. When exposed to competitive news framing, knowledgeable individuals showed less propensity for recency effects, i.e., they displayed greater inertia. However, we could only observe these mechanisms for some of our delayed measurements, namely for those up to one day after initial news frame exposure.

The fact that we only witnessed "short-term" results can be explained in terms of the propensity of high knowledge individuals to possess higher levels of belief-accessibility, and to process and recall information more quickly than individuals with lower levels of knowledge (e.g., Fazio, 1995; Haugtvedt & Wegener, 1994). As this accessibility diminishes rapidly, future

studies must concentrate on the role of learning from frames over time to determine, for instance, how many exposures are necessary to “learn” a news frame over time. We assume that the lack of a long-term moderating influence was also connected to the issue used in this study, EU politics. This issue is generally characterized by low levels of media interest as well as personal importance, which could have resulted in only minimal learning effects over time. In their seminal study of on-line learning, Lodge et al. (1995, p. 315) argue that “recall of campaign information appears dismal even under the best of circumstances, that is, when the information is processed by knowledgeable citizens or is processed in depth.” In sum, we argue that political knowledge is a variable that not only affects the *magnitude* of framing effects (as tested in extant studies), but also functions as a *processing* variable, i.e., it affects the way framing effects are synthesized and persist over time.

The Dynamics of News Framing Effects over Time

So far only a few scholars have evaluated the duration of framing effects (e.g., de Vreese, 2004; Tewksbury et al., 2000), and the question of how framing effects last when more than one news frame is supplied over time has received even less attention in the literature (see Chong & Druckman, 2008). Extant research findings on the duration of news framing are mixed, with some authors arguing that news frames can have persistent effects (e.g., Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009; Tewksbury et al., 2000), whereas others assume a quick dissolution of news framing effects (e.g., de Vreese, 2004; Druckman & Nelson, 2003). The results presented in Chapter 3 support a more long-term conceptualisation of news framing effects; we found significant effects for up to two weeks after initial exposure. These results provide substantial leverage to existing framing experiments that, based on their short-term experimental measurement of framing effects, could only speculate as to a long-term influence of news framing. Our results thus encourage the further use of framing experiments in the field, but under consistent consideration of the duration of framing effects, simply because “one frame’s effects [might] last longer than another’s” (Gaines et al., 2007, p. 6). In sum, we suggest that frames can actually generate more permanent and more influential attitude changes than has been assumed by some scholars (e.g., Kinder, 2007; Sniderman & Grob, 1996). Along these lines, our results provide the first contours of a theory of framing effects over time.

Chapter 4 applies the idea that the genuine significance of news framing effects in communication flows can be tested, namely by means of exposing an individual to either repetitive or competitive news frames over time. In doing so, this chapter built upon the groundwork of Zaller (1992, 1996), who developed a comprehensive model for the effects of dynamic media communication flows on opinion formation. According to Zaller, the media only have a substantial effect when their content is repeatedly presented in one consistent way; i.e. it must be one-sided (see also Noelle-Neumann, 1973; Peter, 2004). Two-sided information, the exposure to competing and conflicting messages, leads to an annulment of potential media effects (see also de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006a; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). In our study,

we report a consolidating effect when repetition took place, and a rather flimsy framing effect in competitive scenarios. These results provide initial support for Zaller's (1992) argument, and we are the first to test these by means of an experimental design.

In general, our findings support the idea that repetitive news framing leads to strong and consistent results. However, they do not sustain expectations of repetition as a multiplier of effects. We have discussed several works that allude to the assumption that repetition increases the accessibility of belief considerations, which in turn leads to stronger framing effects (e.g., Iyengar, 1991). However, as we could not find evidence for such a mechanism in our study, we concur with authors who tend to dismiss the notion of heightened accessibility as a facilitator of greater news framing effects (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007b, Scheufele, 1999). For example, Chong and Druckman (2007b) argue that "repetition plays a minor role in determining a frame's effect and seems to matter only when the frame is strong" (p. 646). Consequently, the magnitude of a framing effect may depend to a larger extent on other qualities of a frame, such as Chong and Druckman's concept of "strength".

Because we did not investigate the psychological processes of repetitive news framing over time, we can only speculate on the role accessibility and applicability really play in the repetitive framing process. The dismissal of accessibility as a mediator of news framing effects in the literature sometimes seems a little hasty, probably also because accessibility has proven to be difficult to tap by empirical investigation (see Baden & de Vreese, 2008 for a discussion). We conclude that while repetitive news framing does seem to impact consolidation and duration of framing effects, this repetition does not significantly increase the magnitude of effects. There seems to be a law of diminishing returns in effect. Nevertheless, future research projects must identify the intermediary processes that play a role for multiple frame exposure, also in light of the dual-process model we presented in the first two chapters of this dissertation.

A handful of studies have shown that competitive news framing generally results in a decrease of news framing effects, as individuals—when faced with dissonant information—tend to re-evaluate a framed message in light of pre-existing beliefs and values (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007b; Hansen, 2007; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). Yet, our analysis indicated that this pattern is not mirrored in the over-time impact of competitive news framing. Our results showed strong recency effects over time, which means that the latest news frame exposure was more influential on opinion formation. These results coincide with a recent argument by Chong and Druckman (2008), who find that "[e]ven when individuals have been previously exposed to alternative frames, they tend to be susceptible to the most recent frame they encounter, including weak frames." (p. 29-30). At first glance, these findings bode ill for an emancipated media user, as well as for a theory of long-term news framing effects. But, is news framing over time really characterized by a continuous sway of opinions? One of our news frame scenarios showed that, if the delay between two dissonant frames was relatively short (in our case, up to one day), then a second frame did not produce significant recency effects. This indicates that recency effects depend on the time that elapses between two exposures.

In sum, our analyses provide first insights into the dynamics of news framing effects over time. Nevertheless, what we could not supply, simply because this branch of framing theory is still so unexplored, is a more normative view of framing effects over time. As we have argued above, there are authors who conceptualize news framing effects as being “long-term” as opposed to “mid-“ or “short-term” (see Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Yet, what we do not know is when a framing effect can be considered long *enough* to matter in the political communication process. This is also a task for future integrative research projects. Without empirical investigation, any theoretical argument about the longevity of a frame is vague. However, the development of a theoretical argument about temporal framing effects is vital for the development of framing effects theory in the near future.

Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research

All four studies in this dissertation sought to investigate fundamental processes of news framing by means of survey experimentation. The limitations of the particular research findings are discussed in the respective chapters. However, in this section, we address some of the more general limitations of the research conducted, and combine them with directions and suggestions for future research.

A first limitation stems from the ongoing discussion in the literature about what actually constitutes a news frame and how it can be operationalized in research (e.g., Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Matthes, 2009; Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Since there is some disagreement about this issue in the literature, framing effect studies have made use of different frame conceptualizations in their study designs. Because different frames are likely to have different effects, the generalizability of the respective research findings could be at risk (see Druckman, 2004; Levin et al., 1998). For example, Iyengar (2009) suggests that the use of emphasis frames limits the commensurability of news framing effects, because “different words may convey more than differences in perspective and different individuals may “read” the same word quite differently” (p. 188). Consequently, he proposes the use of equivalency frames as a “more precise definition” (p. 190) in future effects studies (see also Shah et al., 2009). Thus, future research must determine the precise effects of varying frame conceptualizations. Such comparisons can, moreover, also shed light on what actually constitutes a “framing effect” as opposed to a persuasive, or learning effect. As we argue above, a news frame must be seen as an independent variable that can have a multitude of effects. The extent to which these effects depend on the respective precision or form of the conceptualized frame remains open for further empirical investigation.

A second limitation of the research reported in this dissertation is that all our findings are based on survey experiments. A majority of framing effects studies make use of survey experiments (e.g., Berinsky & Kinder, 2006; de Vreese, 2004; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Nelson et al., 1997). However, framing experiments have also been scolded for lack of external

validity, which could limit the generalizability of the research findings (Barabas & Jerit, 2008; Kinder, 2007). We have addressed this issue in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation, where we improved the experimental design by including a test for effect duration and multiple exposure sessions. While these measures are steps in the right direction (see also Gaines et al., 2007; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009), there are other points for improvement we could not take into account.

For instance, in our survey experiments, participants were forcefully exposed to a news stimulus. This does not mirror “real life” news exposure, where users can decide more or less actively to pay attention and process a news frame. Consequently, Kinder (2007, p. 157) suggests the use of real-life events to generate natural experiments. However, he also acknowledges that doing so requires a “decisive shift in the deployment of frames in some real world setting”, which is a condition that is very rarely fulfilled (see Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2007). On a similar note, Barabas and Jerit (2008) have compared the results from a laboratory experiment with a natural experiment and found that the latter only had a moderated effect on participants, while a laboratory experiment generated strong effects (see also Gerber et al., 2009). Consequently, we suggest that future studies make use not only of duration testing and multiple exposure settings to increase experimental realism, but also encourage the use of real-world settings in experimental studies.

Lastly, we want to mention the context of our research as a potential limitation. We purposely did not design the experiments in this dissertation as case studies, but aimed at showing the basic psychological processes of news framing effects. However, quite naturally, no study of media effects is devoid of the context in which it was conducted. The experiments in this dissertation were executed in European countries, and focused on European issues. Moreover, many of the attitudinal effects we analysed were concerned with European Union integration, a process that is of low salience even to many European citizens (see e.g., Eurobarometer 71). While our findings did convey some insights as to how individuals respond to news about the European Union (for example, we found that more positively valenced EU frames yield greater effects than negative valence), we did not focus on these findings in this dissertation (but see Lecheler & de Vreese, 2010).

In general, we believe that our results can adequately illustrate the fundamental psychological processes of news framing. Nevertheless, particularly our duration and persistence results are in need of further empirical investigation. By following up with the participants outside of the laboratory, we could test how powerful news frames are over time. Yet, this approach also increases the influence of a variety of cultural, national, or personal variables that could affect attitudes and opinions in the interim phase between frame exposure and delayed measurement. For example, the embedding of the frame in the national media culture could have played a role in that the familiarity with a specific frame concept could increase or decrease persistence of effects (see Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Also, the social integration of the

participants can affect decay, due to interpersonal contacts and discussions (see Druckman & Nelson, 2003).

In light of the differentiated media effects paradigm, researchers must also consider recent arguments by Bennett and Iyengar (2008, p. 724-5), who point to the increasing fragmentation of audiences into “smaller, like-minded subsets of the electorate”, which select media according to already existing beliefs. Here, the media should have little more than “reinforcement effects”, no matter if information is presented in a consonant or dissonant way (see also Bennett & Iyengar, 2010; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010). In light of this “minimal effects” argument, comparisons between US and European audiences could be made, where we would expect differing processes of fragmentation and therefore also different media effects.

Beyond these general limitations, we recommend that further studies strongly focus on determining other mediators of framing effects, such as emotions, narratives and perceptions of public opinion (Chong & Druckman, 2007a). Among these, emotions emerge as a most interesting—and long neglected—category. Indeed, there are a number of recent studies that recognize the importance of studying the role of emotion in news framing research (e.g., Nabi, 2003; Gross & Brewer, 2007; Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Schuck & de Vreese, 2009). Some of these studies take emotions as outcome variables (Gross & Brewer, 2007), while most presume that emotions must be an important mediator between frames in communication and their effects. These studies point to the lack of a systematic account of the role of emotions as mediators of framing effects. For example, Holm (2009, p. 24) argues that there is, thus far, no empirical investigation of “when the cognitive route is likely to dominate the emotional route and vice versa” in the framing process, and whether the interplay between the two routes depends on situational factors, or on individual characteristics of the citizen (see also Keer, van den Putte, & Neijens, 2010). Gross and Brewer (2007) highlight the normative implications of integrating emotionality into the framing process, both regarding the actual benefits of evoking specific emotions by framing an issue, and the unanswered question of whether emotions facilitate or inhibit public deliberation. Beyond that, future research projects must investigate the role of emotion for specific issues of different political contexts, for political participation and action, and disentangle the differences between discrete emotions that play a role in the framing process

Concluding, we believe that this dissertation has supplied a number of research findings that add to a theory of news framing effects, but also to the understanding of the role media effects play in political communication. We show that researchers must think more about what actually constitutes a “framing effect”, and that a dissociation of framing from other media effects concepts is not necessarily the ideal way to go in creating a more advanced framing theory. We also provide the first contours of a theory of news framing effects over time. Our results initially support the notion of a long-term influence of news frames on political attitudes, but also prompt questions about how stable these effects really are. Future research must

continue to determine in what ways and to what extent our daily life is affected by how the news “frame” politics.

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