

Effects of domestic media use on European integration¹

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Abstract

In recent research, the declining support for European integration is often attributed to the lack of a European public sphere. The comparatively low level of Europeanization in the news media is said to promote euroscepticism or at least hinder further integration. We ask if, and what kinds of, media effects are theoretically plausible and empirically observable in the context of European integration. Based on Eurobarometer data, we evaluate the impact of domestic media use of EU citizens on their attitudes towards the EU and Europe. Using structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques in a cross-national analysis, we can demonstrate that domestic media use has a positive but small effect on knowledge, attachment to Europe and support for the European Union.

Keywords: European integration, Public sphere, Media use, EU support

Introduction

Public opinion research on the European Union (EU) has seen a more or less steady decline of support for European integration during the last decade. What was initially called the “post-Maastricht blues” (Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007) has become a serious threat to the development of a politically unified Europe: Never has the turnout at European elections been so low, never the support for eurosceptic parties so high (Schmitt, 2005). The most prominent example of public contestation to European integration has, of course, been the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005, and subsequently of the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland in 2008. Ironically, the treaties that were supposed to improve the democratic deficiency that is rooted in the EU’s institutional setup (Crombez, 2003) have failed to gain enough support in public referendums.

In such a situation, one may ask whether another deficiency exists that hinders European integration: one of communication or intermediation which constrains public support. Gerhards (2001) noted that the democratic deficit and the lack of a European public sphere are two distinct but related obstacles for the development of European integration. He argued that the Europeanization of the public sphere, or, rather, the national public spheres of the member states, had lagged behind the economic and political integration in Europe, thus creating incongruence between input and output legitimacy in the European Union. This may explain the stagnation or decline in support of and identification with the European Union. In recent years, much research, based on the assumption that overcoming the public sphere deficit will have positive effects both on public support for the EU and on the formation of a European identity, has been conducted in order to better understand how (and how well) national public spheres in the EU are structured and how they function (see Trenz, 2008, for a review and critique).

In this paper we will test this assumption empirically, focusing on the individual attitude formation of Europe's citizens and the potential influence exerted by the national media. Specifically, we ask whether domestic media use promotes or hinders the process of European integration by shaping attitudes towards the EU. Does it have any effect at all?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: After introducing a conceptual frame to classify the functional properties of national public spheres in Europe, we narrow our focus to social inclusive effects of domestic news media use on the individual level. Based on well-established theories of media effects on attitude formation, we propose a theoretical causal model and present hypotheses that are empirically tested using survey data. We conclude with a discussion of the empirical results and their implications for further research.

Theory

Conceptual frame

In the following, we expand the perspective of a conceptual frame that was originally designed to point at the characteristics of the modern public sphere. The way we will subsequently focus on European integration and the role of domestic mass media within this process is largely inspired by the historical distinction between system integration and social integration. It was Lockwood (1964) who introduced this distinction to sociology almost fifty years ago. We argue that this classical distinction is fundamental to a mass communication research approach

which seeks to unite micro and macro levels of analysis and tries to gain a better understanding of the functional role of domestic mass media in a multi-level society.

The conceptual frame we subsequently refer to was published some twenty years ago by two German sociologists (Gerhards and Neidhardt, 1990). Drawing on Hilgartner's and Bosk's public arenas model (1988), Gerhards and Neidhardt developed an elementary model of the public sphere in a modern democracy. By combining elements of both sociological systems theory and action theory, the public sphere is conceptualized as an intermediate communicative system. Consonant with the theory of the public sphere as developed by Habermas (1989), open access for everyone is the core prerequisite of the intermediate communicative system (Neidhardt, 1993: 340): "The public is in itself nothing more than a socially empty field with free entry. Free entry for everyone is its constituting feature, and depends on a multitude of preconditions that are, historically, rarely given." According to Habermas (1980: 315), a discourse in a public sphere becomes democratic through its "non-coercively unifying, consensus building force" in which "participants overcome their initial subjectively biased views in favor of a rationally motivated agreement". To Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990), Habermas's normatively colored theory of the public sphere and its idea of a so-called "ideal speech situation", however, provides no empirical counterpart (some historical examples notwithstanding). Hence, the concept of the public sphere as an intermediate communicative system explicitly disclaims the normative ideal of consensus (Neidhardt, 1993: 340): "The public is no more and no less than a structured potential for particular social processes. A social substance within the public field develops with the entrance of social actors and their interaction".

Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990) separate three different forms of public sphere: chance encounters, public events, and mass media. It is assumed that the public sphere established through mass media is a system intermediate to the political system and both other subsystems and citizens. Furthermore, the public sphere constituted by mass media comprises several arenas and galleries (Gerhards and Neidhardt, 1990: 15–19) and is characterized by several actor roles (Neidhardt, 1993: 340): "For an elementary model of public communication, it seems to be sufficient to distinguish three classes of actors. There must exist: speakers, who say something; an audience, that listens; and mediators who relate speakers and the audience if they are not in immediate contact with one another – that is, journalists and the mass media. The peculiarities of public communication are determined by the characteristics of these actors and the dynamics of their interplay." However, due to the limited carrying capacity of any public arena established through mass media,

only a limited number of speaker roles is available in principle. Faced by the limited carrying capacities of the public arenas, occupants of performer roles (i. e. politicians, press officers, scientific experts etc.) permanently compete against each other by expressing their opinions on certain issues.

Needless to say, the “arena-gallery model” developed by Gerhards and Neidhardt is only one of several conceptual approaches to the public sphere (i. e. Habermas, 1989; Fraser, 1992; Luhmann, 2000; Ferree et al., 2002; Bennett et al., 2004). Drawing on the basic distinction between speakers, mediators, and the audience made by Gerhards and Neidhardt allows us to map the role of mass media within the process of European integration. For example, some research programs examining the Europeanization of national public spheres focus on speakers expressing their opinions on European issues (Koopmans and Erbe, 2003; Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslow, 2009). Within this branch of research, the concepts of vertical and horizontal processes of Europeanization represent further theoretical refinements which, in turn, provide a clearer picture of the mediating role of mass media.

In what follows, we adapt the idea of horizontal and vertical Europeanization by analytically separating processes of integration from processes of inclusion. While *integration* processes refer to the *horizontal interplay* between EU citizens (micro-level), between national and EU institutions (the meso-level), and between subsystems (macro-level), processes of *inclusion* refer to the *vertical interplay* between EU citizens and EU institutions (micro-meso-boundary) and between EU citizens and subsystems (micro-macro-boundary).

Inclusive mechanisms of national public spheres

According to McQuail (1994: 73), mass communication research on integrative media effects needs “to take account of different levels at which integration might be observed”. Consequently, a multi-level framework which considers both (horizontal) integration and (vertical) inclusive processes seems to be a good starting point for political communication theorists examining the mediating role of national public spheres within the process of European integration. The national public sphere constituted by mass media is said to be inclusive with regard to European integration by providing unlimited *audience roles* for domestic citizens in the galleries. From the gallery, the national citizens observe both European and/or national speakers within the national public *arena* expressing their opinions on certain EU-related issues. Moreover, national public spheres are, for example, indirectly stabilizing the EU polity and thus integrating the EU by supporting EU citizens in fulfilling their *client*

roles. More precisely, EU citizens may inform themselves about both supranational and EU-related national issues by actively adopting *audience roles* in the galleries of the national public spheres.

Whether domestic media provide sufficient information on EU topics is investigated by research programs like the “Europub” (Koopmans and Erbe, 2003), the “Transformations of the State” (Wessler et al. 2008) as well as other content analysis projects (Peter and de Vreese, 2004; Trenz, 2004), to name but a few. All these content analysis based projects share the problem that the impact of Europeanization is only assumed but rarely tested empirically. Viewed in terms of the “arena-gallery model”, this kind of research has been too narrowly focused on the arenas. Recently, EU integration research began to shift from the arena towards the gallery by adopting survey research techniques (Bruter, 2005; Schuck and de Vreese, 2008; Vliegthart et al., 2009).

Following the more gallery-orientated approach to European integration, we focus on the EU citizens and their use of domestic mass media. How can the reception of EU-related media coverage enhance inclusion in terms of client roles (i.e. political participation) within the EU context? We assume that domestic news coverage on European political issues furthers EU inclusion by (a) enabling people to adopt at least client roles in the political process, (b) informing them about the European polity, politics and policies, and (c) fostering support for European integration and a sense of political community within the EU.

For the remainder of this paper, we concentrate on (vertical) inclusive processes, although we agree that the (horizontal) integration between citizens (or peoples) of the European Union might be equally important for the development of a European demos (Fuchs, 2003). Following the tradition of European public opinion research (Niedermayer and Westle, 1995; see also Gabel, 1998; Rohrschneider, 2002), we examine the role of domestic media use as a criterion of inclusion into the EU and Europe as a political and social community. Consequently, we further focus on theories of mass media influence on individuals. More precisely, the following secondary analysis is restricted to important individual prerequisites of inclusion, that is, generalized long-term cognitions, orientations and attitudes toward the European Union.

Hypotheses

The most basic type of media effect in political communication is called awareness, that is, modern democracy requires its citizens to take note of political issues and politics. The provision of political knowledge is an essential inclusive function of the media, and “[w]hile factual knowledge is not the only standard by which to measure a citizenry, one can

make the case that knowledge about the people, institutions, processes, and substance of national politics is a necessary, if not sufficient, prerequisite for an effective democracy” (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1991: 606). In terms of EU integration, democratic representation cannot work unless voters know the respective political system and are able to make informed decisions. Who is to inform them, if not the domestic media?

H₁: *Domestic media use promotes the acquisition of factual knowledge about the European Union.*

Although a two-way interaction between news reception and learning, the so-called “virtuous circle” (Norris, 2000), is theoretically highly plausible, recent empirical research has shown that media effects are more likely to occur than selection effects (Eveland, Hayes, Shah, and Kwak, 2005). Additionally, these media effects are subject to individual cognitive processes like message elaboration (Eveland, 2001). Unfortunately, since we rely on cross-sectional survey data that lacks these measures we cannot examine such elaborated constructs of political psychology. Instead, we provide a simpler model focusing on the relationship between domestic media use and EU-related knowledge.

The notion that news coverage on European topics leads to higher levels of support is well-established in public opinion research and can be traced back to Ronald Inglehart’s cognitive mobilization theory. Inglehart (1977) argued that politically skilled and well informed people are more likely to understand a complex phenomenon such as the EU, and are, therefore, more supportive than less informed people. The exact causal mechanism between media use, being well-informed and political support is quite unclear yet, and covered by different theoretical arguments. One possibility is a positive inclusive effect caused by a pro-European bias in the media, as argued by Weßels (1995). Alternatively, media effects may be message-independent because “all information about integration promotes support” (Gabel, 1998: 335). Thirdly, the whole cognitive mobilization hypothesis could only be based on selection effects. Maybe the better educated and politically interested happen to be heavy media users and strong supporters of European integration (Janssen, 1991)?

Drawing on the concepts of Gamson and Modigliani (1966), we argue that two possible models can be used to explain pro-EU media effects. According to the Mainstreaming-hypothesis, people tend to conform to a mainstream opinion which is clearly transported by the media, a notion that lies at the centre of cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli, 1984). A necessary condition for this kind of persuasion effect is a pro-European bias in the media coverage and a pro-

European elite opinion, both of which have been shown to exist in previous research (Weßels, 1995; see also Koopmans and Erbe, 2003).

H₂: *Domestic media use* directly promotes the development of pro-European attitudes, i. e. *support for the European Union* and *identification with the European community*.

As a corollary of this hypothesis, we could expect a negative direct impact of media use in those countries where EU coverage is predominantly negative, like the United Kingdom. Alternatively, the Enlightenment-hypothesis postulates that given enough information about the EU, citizens will sooner or later develop positive attitudes towards EU integration as it guarantees peace and socio-economic welfare in Europe. Support is therefore a result of informed reasoning, independent of any bias in the media coverage on EU topics but, of course, dependent on knowledge about the EU. Therefore, we expect a positive effect of EU-related knowledge on support and attachment to Europe.

H₃: *Domestic media use* indirectly promotes the development of pro-European attitudes by enhancing individuals' *factual knowledge* about the EU, which in turn leads to higher levels of support and identification.

Finally, we assume that the effects of media use are different in the old and new EU member states. For many citizens in the old EU-15, information about the EU could be obtained from other sources than the news media, most importantly in school; the new EU citizens have not had the same European socialization, and should therefore depend more on the media for political knowledge. Moreover, in many of the "flattened societies" of Eastern Europe, the influence of traditional cleavages on people's attitudes towards the EU should be less pronounced, leaving more room for possible media effects (Weßels, 2007).

H₄: Effects of *domestic media use* on knowledge and attitudes towards the European Union are stronger in the *new EU member states* than in the *old EU member states*.

In order to account for the different causal relationships concerning the inclusive effects of domestic media use, we will test a model that comprises direct and indirect media effects as well as other possibly confounding variables such as education and political interest. However, we do not claim to cover all relevant predictors of EU-related attitudes (Gabel, 1998; see also Rohrschneider, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2005).

Rather, we seek to investigate the inclusive *potential* of domestic mass media use. Unfortunately, because of the inherent restrictions of the employed data set in use (Kiecolt and Nathan, 1996), we are not able to include well-established variables such as party affiliation, ideology, or policy preferences.

Method

Data

Our analysis relies on Eurobarometer data (EB 62.0) which was collected in November 2004 by TNS Opinion and Research on behalf of the European Commission. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes and in the appropriate national language. An electronic version of the complete questionnaire as well as the technical specifications can be found on the EB website at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf

Statistical methodology

First of all, we describe and inspect the amount and perceived tendency of EU-related news coverage in order to check whether the assumed effect of a positive bias in the media is possible at all. Subsequently, in order to test our hypotheses, we employ structural equation modeling (SEM), that is, all hypothesized causal relationships are included in a joint model. By doing this, we can simultaneously account for the latent factor structure of the two dependent variables (i. e. support for European Union and identification with the European community) and test the mediated and possibly moderated effects of domestic media use while controlling for third variables (Bollen, 1989).

Independent variables

Domestic (EU-related) *media use* is measured by means of an additive index of EU-related use of TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, and the internet. This index serves as a manifest predictor variable within the structural equation model. The exact wording of the question was: "When you are looking for information about the European Union, its policies, its institutions, which of the following sources do you use?" Using these EB items as an indicator of general media use is not straightforward as these items are clearly biased by EU-related attitudes, possibly inflating the expected media effects on the dependent variables. We nonetheless use this indicator for two reasons. First, there simply are no

better measures provided by the EB data set, and other waves that did include better indicators lacked important other variables for our analysis. Second, empirical comparisons using older EB data that included variables measuring both EU-related and general media use showed that EU-related media measures consistently underestimate the average number of media in individual use. The differences between these two measures become smaller over the years because the reported level of EU-related media use increases while general media use is effectively stable. However, since we are interested in interindividual differences between respondents, underestimating the number of media in use has no further consequences when covariance-based techniques of data analysis like SEM are employed (notwithstanding the above mentioned inflation of effects that must be considered when interpreting the results). Moreover, the EU-related indicator employed neither measures frequency nor, intensity of usage, only the number of sources used, which serve as a proxy for the probability of exposure. We acknowledge this problem but can only refer to the difficulties in obtaining better data for secondary analyses (Kiecolt and Nathan, 1996).

Knowledge was measured using the number of correct answers out of six quiz items on the European Union. These true-false items included questions about the number of current member states, the EU voting system, an alleged EU anthem and EU day, and the date of the last EU election. Within the structural equation model, knowledge is a manifest variable.

In order to keep the model as parsimonious as possible we include only two possibly confounding variables: *age of finishing full-time education*, and *political interest*, measured by the frequency of talking about politics with friends and relatives.

Latent dependent variables

Since a pro-European attitude is certainly a latent construct and therefore cannot be observed directly, we include two latent endogenous variables in the model that tap two central dimensions of this construct: *support for the European Union* (Support for EU) and *identification with the European community* (European Community) (Duchesne/Frogner 1995; Bruter 2005).

The first latent variable called support for the EU was measured using well-established manifest indicators of support (Niedermayer and Westle, 1995). The corresponding measurement model includes three manifest variables: *support for a further political unification of Europe* (Union), *the respondent's perceived country benefits from being EU member* (Benefit), and *whether membership in the EU is a good or bad thing* (Membership).

The second measurement model encompasses two manifest variables (i. e. *attachment to Europe* and *pride of being European* which tap a somewhat more affective dimension of European integration). The corresponding latent variable is called identification with the European community.

Multiple group comparisons

An inevitable prerequisite for any comparative research is to check whether the constructs of interest are measured equivalently across groups (Wirth and Kolb, 2004). With respect to our model, we can only make useful comparisons if at least metric measurement invariance is warranted. Technically, this requires equal factor loadings of the items of the same latent construct across groups (Davidov, Schmidt, and Schwartz, 2008; Vandenberg and Lance, 2000). In other words, we force the model to compute the same latent constructs across old and new EU member states. We tested multi-group measurement invariance by using the full specified model and by checking the unconstrained model (i. e. all factor loadings are freely estimated) against metric measurement invariance, where all factor loadings were set equal within in the two sub-models (old and new EU members). Due to the large size of the EB dataset, the χ^2 -Goodness-of-Fit-test (as well as the χ^2 -difference test for nested models) has far too much power and tends to overrate meaningless cell entries in the residual matrix. Therefore, we used descriptive goodness-of-fit indexes like Δ_{CFI} and Δ_{RMSEA} in assessing model invariance (Cheung and Rensvold, 2002). As the differences between the unconstrained and the metric invariance model are very small ($\Delta_{\chi^2} = 12.20(3)$, $\Delta_{CFI} = .00$, $\Delta_{SRMR} = .00$, $\Delta_{RMSEA} = .00$), we conclude that the two latent constructs are measured in the same way across the old and new EU member states. Moreover, as can be seen in the notes to Figure 2 in the next section, the two measurement models show an acceptable degree of composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Results

For reasons of brevity, we do not present overall descriptive statistics here². However, in order to control for the impact of a – supposedly positive – bias in EU-related domestic news coverage, we should first check whether such a bias exists, or rather is perceived by the respondents. Figure 1 shows that EU citizens perceive a significant positive bias in the domestic media coverage on European issues, except for the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. This holds true even if we control

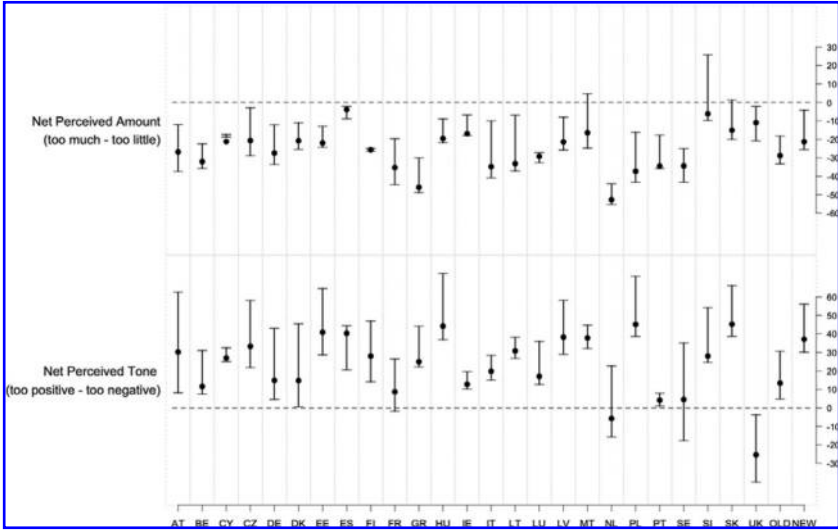


Figure 1. *Perceived EU-related news coverage by country and EU-support, percent differences.*

Dots represent net differences in percentage for perceived amount (top panel) and tone (bottom panel) of EU-related news coverage. The bar ends display means for EU sceptics (upper bar) and EU supporters (lower bar), measured by the top and bottom quartiles of the support variable.

for the different views of EU-friendly and EU-critical respondents in their assessment of media bias. For example, even euro-skeptic respondents in the UK admit that coverage is too negative, whereas even EU supporters in countries like Hungary or Poland acknowledge that news about the European Union is generally too positive. The precondition for a pro-European mainstreaming effect of media use is therefore considered fulfilled. Consequently, we expect to see direct media effects as well as indirect effects. Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that there is a popular demand for more news about the European Union, since practically all respondents agree that there is too little coverage of EU matters in the national media.

The structural equation model displayed in Figure 2 comprises direct and indirect effects of domestic media use on knowledge about the EU as well as on the latent variables EU support and identification with Europe as a community. As a first step, comparing the hypothesized to the empirical covariance matrix allows us to evaluate how good the theoretical model fits the data. All conventionally used goodness-of-fit

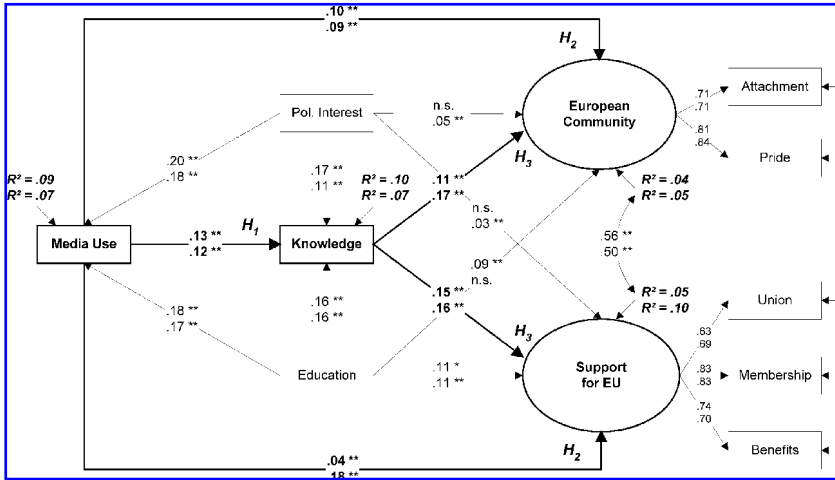


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model: Influence of media use on knowledge and attitudes towards the EU (multiple group comparison with metric measurement invariance).

Maximum likelihood estimation, $\chi^2(35, n_{\text{total}} = 20.163, n_{\text{EU-15}} = 12.824, n_{\text{EU-New}} = 7.339) = 423.76, p = .002, \text{RMSEA} = .023, \text{SRMR} = .018, \text{CFI} = .989$, Support for EU ($\text{CR}_{\text{EU-15}} = .78, \text{AVE}_{\text{EU-15}} = .54, \text{CR}_{\text{EU-New}} = .78, \text{AVE}_{\text{EU-New}} = .55$), European Community ($\text{CR}_{\text{EU-15}} = .73, \text{AVE}_{\text{EU-15}} = .58, \text{CR}_{\text{EU-New}} = .75, \text{AVE}_{\text{EU-New}} = .60$)

Note: Completely standardized estimates reported. *: $p \leq .05$; **: $p \leq .01$; RMSEA: root mean squared error of approximation; SRMR: standardized root mean squared residual; CFI: comparative fit index; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted.

indexes like RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI indicate a good fit, except for χ^2 , which is plagued by the issue of sample size (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Our first expectation is that domestic media use leads to better knowledge of the European Union. The positive path coefficient for H₁ in Figure 2 confirms this hypothesis. Both in the old and new EU member states, domestic media use has a significant positive impact on knowledge about the EU, even when controlling for common indicators of cognitive mobilization like education and political interest. The latter is a significantly stronger predictor for EU-related knowledge in the old member states, whereas educational effects are of equal size in both samples. In contrast to H₄, the effect of domestic media use on knowledge about the EU in the new member states is not stronger than in the old member states.

Having confirmed the first hypothesis, we return to the second key argument of this paper, namely that the reception of domestic news media leads to positive attitudes towards the EU and Europe as a com-

munity, both affected by a direct persuasion effect and indirectly by imparting news and information about the EU. A look at the control variables reveals that political interest has no direct effect on support or community attachment in the old EU member states. Remarkably, political interest has at most a small impact in the new EU member states. Furthermore, higher education causes a higher degree of inclusion, both directly as well as mediated through domestic media use and EU-related knowledge. This indirect effect is in line with Inglehart's cognitive mobilization hypothesis, which argues that better educated people are more likely to comprehend and appreciate the idea of a unified Europe. However, the direct effect of education could also be interpreted as a confirmation of Gabel's (1998: 337) view that the better educated face fewer risks in a liberalized labor market and that they are, therefore, more favorable towards the EU. Education also serves as a significant predictor for European community attachment, at least in the old member states. According to Janssen (1991), this can be explained by a general cosmopolitan attitude that is more prevalent among the better educated.

Looking at the path coefficients leading from knowledge to support and community, we can see clear support for the third hypothesis. In terms of effect size, factual knowledge about the EU is the strongest predictor of support for the EU and community attachment, even when controlled for education. All other things being equal, in most member states citizens will be more supportive if they are better informed about the EU. Considering that in most member countries respondents demand more EU media coverage, this indicates that an informational or public sphere deficit could possibly be amended with better and more extensive news. Since EU-related knowledge is positively associated to domestic media use, we also see a small positive indirect effect that could support the third hypothesis. However, since the standardized indirect effect of media use is about .02 for the two endogenous variables and in both samples, we cannot conscientiously speak of a large media influence according to the Enlightenment hypothesis.

Nevertheless, significant direct media effects on recipients' support for the EU and community attachment support our second hypothesis. In general, heavy media users are more supportive of the EU and are more likely to identify themselves as Europeans. The question is now whether these media effects are message dependent (i. e. caused by a positive bias in the media), or independent, in which case any kind of news would increase awareness, and, hence, further inclusion. Since we lack information about the de facto media content the respondents were exposed to at the individual level, we can only tentatively draw inferences from the aggregate level data. In countries where coverage is rare, and the perceived media bias is mostly negative, like in the Netherlands and the

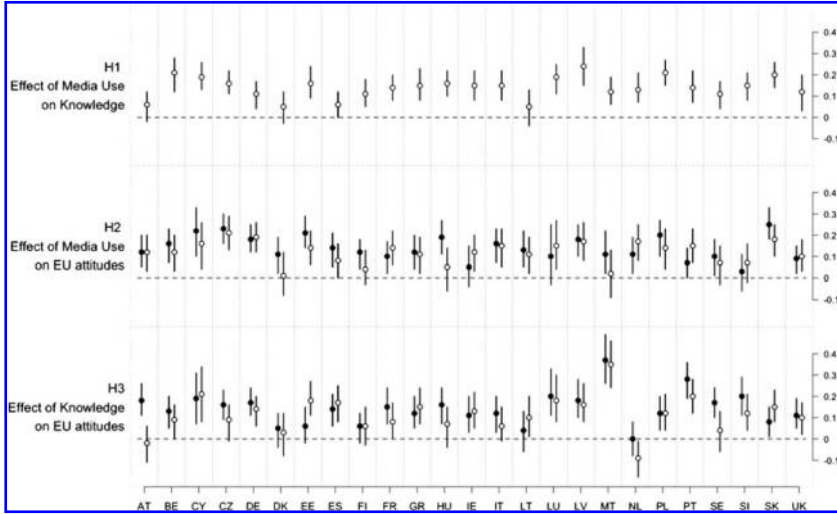


Figure 3. *Effects of media use and knowledge on attitudes to the EU, by country.*

Standardized path coefficients and 95 percent bootstrapped confidence intervals for the model displayed in Figure 1, estimated for each country sample (with metric measurement invariance). Black dots refer to the effect on *EU support*, white dots to the effect on *European Community*.

UK, direct media impacts are comparatively low (see Figure 3 for per-country model results), although no clear pattern is visible. Surprisingly, even the UK path coefficient is positive, which leads us to suspect that some purely informational effects exist that are not properly tapped by the structural equation model.

However, relatively strong media effects in the new member states in Eastern Europe correspond to a strong positive perceived tendency in the domestic media. Focusing on multiple group results, the hypothesized moderator effect becomes clearly visible. The domestic media effect on support for EU is four times larger (.18 vs. .04) in the new member countries than in the old EU-15 member countries.

Discussion

In a nutshell, we can say that domestic media use indeed provides necessary prerequisites for inclusion as it leads to better knowledge and more positive attitudes towards the EU and Europe as a community, respectively.

Computation of structural equation models for all 25 EU member countries as well as pooled across all respondents demonstrated that

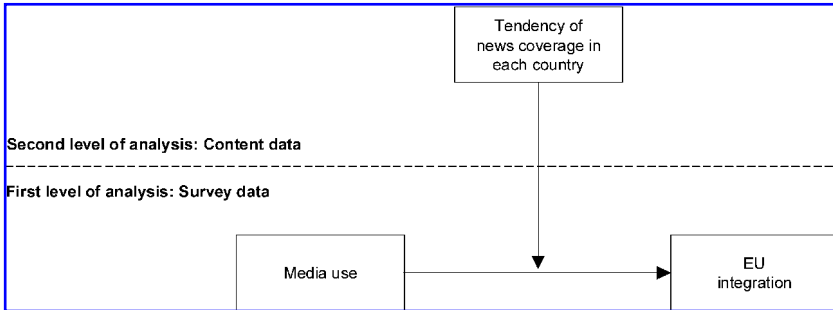


Figure 4. *Impact of news coverage tendencies in each country on the relationship between media use and EU integration.*

inclusive media effects are ubiquitous but quite small. One explanation is that our model lacks several theoretically important variables, and that the effects would be clearer if we had included additional measures like prior political knowledge, cognitive elaboration of EU-related information and, most importantly, actual news (and content frame) reception rather than self-reported measures of media exposure (Price and Zaller, 1993; Eveland, 2001; Matthes 2008).

The results presented here do not reject the notion of inclusive media effects but the evidence is not conclusive. Of course, more research is needed that validates and further refines the hypotheses presented here. By employing EU-related media use as a predictor variable, we may have captured only the instrumental dimension of media use, but not the habitual dimension. Future research would certainly benefit from more elaborate measures of media use which reflect not only devotion to several types of media, but also measures of frequency and intensity, and possibly content preferences. This would certainly enhance the validity and reliability of measurement, which would lead to a better understanding of how media affect the EU integration process.

So far, the full potential of trend data like the Eurobarometer has not been utilized by communication scientists. For example, as shown in Figure 4, survey data from EU citizens may be combined with aggregate data generated by national and comparative content analyses carried out in recent years, for example the analysis of the EP election coverage in all 25 member states (de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, and Boomgaarden, 2006). Specifying two-level causal models (first level of analysis: survey data; second level of analysis: the media contents that shape national public spheres) makes it possible to account for conditional effects of media use. Figure 4 depicts how the effect of domestic media use is dependent on the properties of the national public sphere (e. g. amount

and tone of coverage, actor evaluations). However, accounting for conditional media effects can only be seen as a first step bridging the gap between the *arena* and the *gallery* stream of EU integration research. Unfortunately, in contrast to the Eurobarometer series, comparatively few longitudinal content analysis data about the development of EU-related media coverage is available. In the long run, only such a combination of both survey and content data will enable researchers to grasp the full picture of the dynamics of EU integration and the role of mass media within it.

Notes

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- ² The European Commission provides a website including comprehensive EB reports containing item-specific descriptive statistics at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

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