Does the Media System Explain Individual Media Use and Media Effects?

Findings From a Systematizing Literature Review

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Abstract
Based on a comprehensive literature review, this article explores evidence about connections between the media system as explanatory macro-level for media use and media effects on an individual, micro-level. Addressing this context from a comparative, media system-related perspective, N=42 papers were reviewed and systematized by thematic area. Core results show that systematic connections exist between structural differences of media systems and patterns of individual media use and media effects. More findings are available for newspapers and television than for the internet and social media. Empirical evidence is given for media system-related differences in political knowledge, and the degree of political parallelism in media systems matters for political participation. Overall, the studies show that the media system as a context matters for explaining individual media use and effects. Perspectives for future research are derived from the current state of research.

Media use and media effects depend on multiple factors, and the micro-level plays a key role in explaining them. Beyond that, however, the question of whether micro-level findings are universally valid between different media environments arises. Concurrently, the question of whether there are explanatory factors at the macro-level, specifically the media system, that can explain communication phenomena at the micro-level is raised. These issues constitute the starting point for the following remarks. Based on a comprehensive literature review, this paper elaborates on the relationship between media systems, media use, and media effects and systematizes insights by thematic area.

In comparative media system research, we seek to explain why media for a certain area, usually a country, are the way they are, why they differ from media in other countries, what connections exist between media

and other characteristics of the respective society, and how these relations differ between countries. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm defined this research interest in 1956, and it continues to guide researchers engaged in media system research today. Thus, comparative media system research is also about the explanatory relevance of the macro-level, the "contextual environment for communication outcomes" (Esser & Pfetsch, 2020, preprint, p. 5) and how this macro-level shapes communication phenomena differently. The comparative research "is based on the assumption that different parameters of political and media systems differentially promote or constrain communication roles and behaviors of organizations and actors within those systems" (Esser & Pfetsch, 2020, preprint p. 5) The analysis of media systems involves the actual status as well as developments and interdependencies over time. It is about the answers to questions *within individual* media systems, as well as *comparing between* media systems. The latter is the focus of this paper.

Thus, comparative research examines the context of media and communication, and this context is relevant in two ways: "Not only are individual-level processes better understood through the consideration of contextual factors, but the significance of macro-level characteristics only becomes visible when different national political communication arrangements are compared with each other" (Esser, 2019, p. 680). Against the background of rapid media change and globalization, Livingstone pointed out that "it is no longer plausible to study one phenomenon in one country without asking, at a minimum, whether it is common across the globe or distinctive to that country or part of the world" (Livingstone, 2012, p. 417). Consequently, the comparative perspective can also be profitable for understanding media use: "Considering media use as embedded in higher-level structures will thus enable a more comprehensive, encompassing, and arguably theoretically enhanced understanding of the role of media in contemporary societies" (Boomgaarden & Song, 2019, p. 547). As such, we are interested in how different types of media systems are aligned with different patterns of media use and effects.

Different Models of Media Systems

The most prominent and widely employed study to date by Hallin and Mancini (2004) presented the "three models of media and politics." The authors examined 18 Western countries in Europe and North America in regard to their media and political systems and applied political science concepts to communication studies issues. They referred to historical press

and media development, political parallelism between media and politics, the professionalization of journalism, and the role of the state in the media system. The authors drew on the criteria elaborated by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) to capture the relationship between media and politics. Based on an elaborated theoretical discussion, Hallin and Mancini (2004) derived their typology of three models of media and politics: the Mediterranean model (polarized pluralistic), the Northern European model (democratic corporatistic), and the North Atlantic model (liberal). Hallin and Mancini saw the models in the sense of ideal types according to Max Weber: "(...) and the media systems of individual countries fit them only roughly" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 11). Their typology has been used as the common ground for many comparative studies; thereby, Hallin and Mancini laid an essential foundation for the further development of comparative media systems research. However, this typology is "far from the last word" (Benson, 2010, p. 615). Empirical "tests" do not completely reproduce the typology (e.g., Brüggemann et al., 2014; Humprecht et al., 2022). Although Hallin and Mancini (2017) did not consider this to be a refutation of their model, they considered different approaches behind it, namely a theoretical and a data-centric one.[1]

In any case, there are clear differences between media systems in European and North American countries, with strong similarities between some countries. At the same time, clear differences between other countries can be identified. Hallin and Mancini's 2004 typology is important to mention here because it is often used to select countries for comparative empirical studies, as shown by the studies reviewed below.

Media Systems and Media Content

Shortly after the publication of Hallin and Mancini's typology, comparative media system studies increased significantly (Wallner, 2016). Initially, these studies focused particularly on whether and how media content differs between media systems, and it was consistently found that the differences in media content were related to the specific structures of the media

1 There is still a focus on Western countries in comparative media systems research that is definitely worthy of criticism (e.g., Sparks, 2018). In recent years, few works have been published that broaden the geographic scope. For an overview of media system typologies based on Hallin and Mancini (2004) and expanding their model in terms of indicators and geographic scope, see the overview in Hallin (2016, updated 2021).

systems. Studies of Western media systems have shown a relationship between the structures of a media system and the political information environments, i.e., "the supply and demand of political news and political information within a certain society" (Van Aelst et al., 2017, p. 4). In the case of television, the information environment varies depending on the degree of commercialization of a media system (Aalberg, van Aelst, & Curran, 2010), and media systems with public service broadcasting provide increasingly more frequent opportunities to consume political news content (Curran et al., 2009; Iyengar et al., 2010). In countries with *strong* public service broadcasting, the news supply is greater, especially during prime time (Esser et al., 2012). Thus, political information environments differ between media systems, which, in turn, offer different information opportunities, i.e., "access points in the political information environment that provide incentives for people to enter the news discourse" (Esser et al., 2012, p. 249).

Moving on, the question of whether the media system structures are accompanied by certain patterns of media use or even media effects arises. One of the first studies on structural influences of media use (Prior, 2007) in the US found "that news consumption, learning about politics, and electoral volatility have changed not so much because people are different today, but rather because the media environment is different. People have not necessarily changed; they have merely changed the channel" (Prior, 2007, p. 19). Althaus et al. (2009) demonstrated that, for the US, the demographic characteristics of a region together with the supply-side characteristics, market size, and complexity explain *more of* the self-reported news exposure than the demand characteristics for news at the individual level.

Based on an extensive literature review, I discuss the state of research regarding the relationship between media systems, their structures, and media use and effects.

Systematizing Literature Review

First, a note on the unit of analysis: macro-perspective studies, such as the one in focus here, continue to use a nation-state as the unit of analysis. Although the state is becoming increasingly inadequate as a unit of analysis due to global-communication networks, this continues to be necessary for empirical studies at the same time, in particular due to the data situation (Esser, 2013). Herein, studies are considered that explicitly address the

media system as a contextual level of individual media use/effects and/or societal media effects.

The literature search strategy was limited to articles published in peer-reviewed journals collected from the database Communication & Mass Media Complete. Journal articles were chosen for their relevance in determining the status of a subject (Brosius & Haas, 2009; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1988). No contributions from edited volumes or monographs were included (for the procedure, c.f. Hanusch & Vos, 2020; Matthes et al., 2019; Wallner, 2016). The database was searched through April 2022, with defined search terms (media system OR cross-cultural AND media use OR media exposure OR media effect OR screen time). For the selection of studies in the sense of comparative research, the criterion of multilevel comparison was applied, i.e., studies with at least three elements of comparison (i.e., media systems) related to an object of investigation relevant to communication studies (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012) were selected, in this case, media use or media effects and media systems. These are multilevel comparative approaches in the sense of cross-national research (Boomgaarden & Song, 2019). Intra-state analyses were excluded, as well as research unrelated to the key interest of the review. The initial result yielded 330 articles, which were reviewed based on title, keywords, and abstract, and after removing duplicates, the literature search comprised 24 papers. This result was supplemented by other thematically related, peer-reviewed journal articles known from my own work on the topic and others not published in journals listed in CMMC (e.g., in sociological journals). Finally, 42 articles were included in the literature review.

Results

The aim is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research that is as complete as possible. An interpretation of the (increasing) number of articles (c.f. Table 1) in the field of comparative media system research is not possible due to the steadily growing number of journal publications (e.g., Engels, Ossenblok, & Spruyt, 2012).

Table 1: Year of Publication

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Q1 2022
1	1	2	3	3	2	4	6	2	2	3	3	1	4	3	2

Table 2 provides an overview of the publication journals.

Table 2: Journals

Political Communication	6
The International Journal of Press/Politics	5
European Journal of Communication	3
International Journal of Communication	3
Journal of Communication	3
Communication Research	2
Communication Today (under evaluation)	2
Digital Journalims	2
Information, Communication & Society	2
International Communication Gazette	2
Acta Politica	1
Central European Journal of Communication	1
International Journal of Comparative Sociology	1
International Journal of Public Opinion Research	1
Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media	1
Journal of Elections, Public Opinions and Parties	1
Journalism	1
Journalism Practice	1
Journalism Studies	1
New Media & Society	1
Political Science and Research Methods	1
Social Media + Society	1
Total N =	*42*

In all, 24 studies examined more than 10 countries (multi-state comparisons), and 17 examined between three and 10 countries. For one study, which was a meta-study (Matthes et al., 2019), the number of countries could not be coded. About half of the data sources used are existing sources such as the European Social Survey, the European Election Survey, or the Reuters Institute Digital News Report. A number of studies additionally or exclusively use self-collected data, and some use combinations of surveys and content analyses as well as experimental designs (Steppat et al., 2022) and web-tracking data (Stier et al., 2020). The studies examine the relationship between media system structures and media use as well as media effects at different levels and include the following categories:

1. Studies that look at media use and/or media effects in a comparative perspective, examining in general differences between certain countries;
2. Studies that make comparisons between countries in terms of specific characteristics and classify country similarities and differences; and
3. Studies that include the media system in their statistical explanatory models for selected phenomena (i.e., country as a variable) and show explicitly the explained variance contributed by the media system.

Political communication is the focus in all studies, in particular, news usage, political knowledge, political interest, political participation, diversity of topics and opinions, fragmentation of audiences, selective exposure, media freedom, and the development of democracy. The following overview of key findings is structured along the thematic focus.

Media Use

In Western countries, television is the most important medium for political news (Nielsen & Schröder, 2014), with online media and traditional daily newspapers coming in second. In television-centric countries, the internet is used more for political news than the press (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013). At the individual level, the studies examine the well-known relationships between media use of political media content and education, age, socioeconomic status, political interest, and political knowledge, each of which also has explanatory power. Across many countries, there is a positive correlation between social status and television use for information purposes, as well as an "upper-class bias" in daily newspaper use (Shehata, 2010).

Research shows cross-country variations in the use of social media for news and, in particular, the use of online news videos (Kalogeropoulos, 2018). Internet use in general is explained by individual factors but also by the media system at the macro-level, with people in Northern and Central European and North Atlantic countries using the internet more than people in Southern European countries (Meilan & Wu, 2017). However, interestingly, the explanatory relevance of individual characteristics for social media news use is obviously lower than for traditional media. Höhlig, Hasebrink, and Behrig (2021, p. 1816) pointed out that "sociodemographic patterns of news use are structurally similar *within* a range of otherwise distinctive countries but also sociodemographic characteristics only predict differences of news use *between* countries to a limited extent," which indi-

cates the relevance of macro-level explanations rather than individual ones for social media news use.

For traditional media, the explanatory power of the macro-level for individual media consumption has previously been examined in several studies. Using data on media use from the European Social Survey for European countries, Elvestad and Blekesaune (2008) showed, by means of multilevel analysis, that 6.5% of individual newspaper use can be explained by variables at the country level. However, there is no uniform picture according to the country classification of Hallin and Mancini (2004): Not all countries that are assigned to a type show uniform patterns regarding newspaper consumption. Aalberg, Blekesaune, and Elvestad (2013) found a similar result for television: 5% of individual television-viewing time, in general, and 5.1% of individual television-news viewing can be explained by systematic differences across countries. Shehata and Strömbäck (2011) also revealed a connection between media system characteristics and individual media use: There is a positive relationship between newspaper centrism and the use of daily newspapers and television for political information that goes beyond individual explanatory factors. Political interest has a stronger influence on television-news use in television-centric countries than in newspaper-centric countries: "A one-unit increase in political interest increases television news consumption by 0.370 units in the least newspaper-centric country, a one-unit increase in political interest amounts to roughly 11 more min of viewing in the least newspaper-centric country, compared to 6 min in the most newspaper-centric country. That is, political interest has a positive influence in all countries but is substantially weaker in media environments that are newspaper-centric" (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011, p. 126). Regarding individual characteristics, their study suggests that "the influence of education and political interest on television news consumption does depend on media environment characteristics" (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011, p. 127).

Similarly, Perusko, Vozab, and Cuvalo (2015) highlighted the relevance of structural macro characteristics for explaining individual media use. By adding structural macro characteristics to individual characteristics, the explanatory power of models of individual media use improves, from 53% to 64% for television, from 36% to 40% for daily newspapers, and from 17% to 27% for mobile television use.

Political Knowledge

A central question in several studies is the role of the media for political knowledge and participation. Differences in people's knowledge about current affairs can be partially explained by the available media outlets in their respective countries (Curran et al., 2009; Elenbaas et al., 2014) and thus by different media system structures. For example, 25% of knowledge about international news topics can be explained by the amount of international news coverage (Aalberg et al., 2013), and this amount differs across media systems. Here, the use of public broadcasting has a significant positive effect on knowledge about political issues (Park & de Zuniga, 2021), while the use of commercial TV shows a negative effect (Fraile & Iyengar, 2014; Curran et al., 2014). Thus, it can also be stated that "the virtuous circle of democratic reinforcement operates primarily in relation to public service television" (Curran et al., 2014, p. 823).

A similar finding was made regarding the use of print media. The use of quality newspapers, which typically contain more hard news, has a positive effect on political knowledge, while the use of tabloids, which contain more soft news, has a negative effect (Fraile & Iyengar, 2014). This, again, refers to different types of media systems with different degrees of importance regarding quality press.

Nir (2012) found that cross-national differences explain 10% of the variability in political knowledge and 6% of the variability in political interest, where the characteristic "shared news" (operationalized as the share of regular newspaper readership of the largest newspaper and the share of regular viewership of the most-watched prime-time news program per country) is found to be an important covariate for the relevance of the country variable (Nir, 2012).

Obviously, the information environment matters. Accordingly, we distinguish information-rich media environments (strong public broadcasting, strong quality newspapers) and information-poor media environments (weak public broadcasting or only commercial TV and tabloids) as characteristics of media systems as well as differentiations between them. In information-rich environments, the explanatory power of individual characteristics such as interest or socioeconomic status on political knowledge is lower than in information-poor environments (Iyengar et al., 2010; Fraile, 2013). Very few cross-country comparative results are available on the role of social media for political knowledge; thus far, it is known that social media use has minimal effects on political knowledge (Park &

de Zuniga, 2021).[2] However, for non-institutional political participation (e.g., boycotts, legal and illegal demonstrations, occupations), Mosca and Quaranta (2016) showed that there is no influence from media system characteristics such as the degree of commercialization or from political characteristics such as a majoritarian or consensual system on patterns of non-institutional participation.

The Relevance of Political Parallelism

Another feature of media systems is political parallelism, "...a pattern or relationship where the structure of the political parties is somewhat reflected by the media organizations" (de Albuquerque, 2018), which Hallin and Mancini (2004) considered a crucial distinguishing criterion of media systems and which proves to be explanatory for distinguishing media systems in empirical comparative media system studies (Brüggemann et al., 2014). In countries with strong parallelism, citizens are more likely to go to the polls (Van Kempen, 2007); at the same time, the responsiveness of political authorities is perceived to be lower; the (biased) portrayal of political reality in the media influences perceptions of politics (Bene, 2020); and satisfaction with democracy is lower (Lelkes, 2016, with parallelism on television playing a somewhat greater role than parallelism in daily newspapers).

In an exhaustive analysis with data from the World Values Survey, Tsfati and Ariely (2014) showed that trust in media, in addition to individual-level predictors, was positively associated on the macro-level with post-materialism. However, and of special interest from the perspective of media system researchers, government ownership has no significant influence on trust in media when controlling for democracy and economic development. In contrast, Machácková and Tkaczyk (2020) found higher levels of trust for democratic corporatist countries, and they concluded that higher newspaper circulation and lower control on Public Service Broadcasters (PBS) are positively related to trust in media. These findings, as well as possible moderation effects, are certainly important factors for future media system research.

2 For a case study in Sweden, Dimitrova et al. (2011) showed a low effect of social media use on political knowledge but more-significant effects on political participation.

Cross-Cutting Exposure

The greater the parallelism in a media system, the less cross-cutting exposure recipients have, referring to confrontation with opinions that do not correspond to their own (Goldman & Mutz, 2011). Thus, if a country has many media with a higher degree of parallelism to political parties, it may be easier for individuals to avoid cross-opinion or cross-party political discourse. The preference for news with a shared point of view is partially explained by the country as a variable, and together with interest for politics, they explain news preference better than individual sociodemographic characteristics can (Rodriguez-Virgili et al., 2022).

At the country level and considering national media-use patterns, it appears that television provides more opportunities for cross-cutting exposure than daily newspapers do (Goldman & Mutz, 2011). In countries with strong public broadcasting, the degree of individual political interest plays a smaller role for cross-cutting exposure (Castro-Herrero et al., 2018), and individuals from a country with strong public broadcasting are more willing to consume news from sources that disagree with their views, reducing the risk for echo chambers (Castro-Herrero et al., 2018). At the same time, differences by political system emerge: "The news media made a greater contribution to citizens' cross-cutting exposure in consensus systems that represent people and political interests more inclusively than in more power-concentrating systems or settings with a hegemonic tradition" (Castro & Nir, 2020).

Matthes et al. (2019) conducted a statistical meta-study on cross-cutting exposure and found that its effects regarding political participation were not larger for online vs. offline exposure (Matthes et al., p. 533). As an individual characteristic of the respondent, the region of origin (Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, Central and South America) was examined as a moderator. Yet the effect of cross-cutting exposure on political participation does not depend on respondents' regions. However, it is important to note that the "region" level in this case does not consider the differences between media systems within a region—which are evident, for example, between European media systems.

Audience Fragmentation

Another question is whether the development of high-choice media environments leads to a fragmentation of media users. Here, little overall fragmentation of recipients is shown for offline and online media, and

therefore, it is not possible to speak of audience fragmentation (or echo chambers) (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Steppat et al., 2022). However, there are, again, differences between media systems. Fletcher and Nielsen (2017) found the UK to have a more fragmented audience than Denmark, Germany, France, Spain, and the US, and Denmark to have a more fragmented audience than Spain and the US. In countries with a higher degree of fragmentation, a higher selective exposure is found (Steppat et al., 2022).

Regarding the media use of individuals with populist attitudes, web-tracking data showed that these people use more hyper-partisan news but still get their news primarily from established sources. A strong correlation was found between individual news diets and national media supply, although no consistent patterns have yet been identified across countries (Stier et al., 2020).

Online Political Participation

In regard to social media, participation aspects are compared between countries. Online participation in political discourse is more widespread in Italy, Spain, and the United States than in Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Kalogeropoulos, Negredo, Picone, & Nielsen, 2017; Nielsen & Schröder, 2014). In this regard, Nielsen and Schröder (2014, p. 472) noted that these country differences in participation do not correspond to differences in internet use, leading them to conclude that "more than mere availability shapes the role of social media as part of people's news habits."

When it comes to the spread of fake news via social media, the intensity of the use of social media, the use of alternative media, and the following of populist parties are explanatory factors across all the countries studied. People with higher social media use and activity are less likely to refrain from spreading disinformation, with some differences between countries. Thus, country-specific differences and, therefore, the respective information environments are significant deciding factors in whether fake news is further disseminated. Interestingly, the use of public service broadcasting does not strengthen resilience against disinformation except in France (Humprecht et al., 2021). This is particularly noteworthy because in several studies, as explained earlier, the country characteristic of strong PBS or the use of it seems to be consistently explanatory.

Political expression on social networks is positively related to the heterogeneity of the social network on which users share discussions, with this relationship being stronger in countries with lower freedom of expression

(Barnidge et al., 2018). Freedom of the media and freedom of expression are, in turn, positively related to political knowledge (Schoonvelde, 2013; Park & de Zuniga, 2021), and lower media freedom, i.e., a strong state role, is associated with higher information-seeking media behavior (Loveless, 2015).

Media and Social Change

Finally, the question of what role media change plays in social change arises. To answer it, Groshek (2011, 2010, 2009) examined the relationship between media distribution and the development of democracy over time. The correlation analyses are based on the assumptions of the media system dependency theory formulated by Ball-Rockeach and De Fleur (1976), which discusses the connections between media, recipients, their environment, social structure, and the economy. Groshek (2011) investigated whether media have a positive effect on the development of institutionalized democracy in those countries where media are widely distributed and, therefore, fulfill key social functions, including the information function, as well as in those countries with greater sociopolitical instability. Both assumptions were partially confirmed. The results revealed that, in countries where a certain level of media penetration already exists, a positive influence of TV and radio—but not newspapers—on the development of democracy could be seen. Media distribution also promotes the development of institutionalized democracy in countries with sociopolitical instability. In regard to the internet, for the period 1994–2003 Groshek (2009) showed that increasing internet penetration is associated with increasing democratic development in the context of developed countries or countries where democratic approaches are at least partially in place. A correlation also emerges in countries with high political instability. However, Groshek (2010) demonstrated that internet penetration has no *causal* effects on the development of democracy. Thus, mere media dissemination cannot be seen as a guarantor but rather as a component of democracy development. In addition, a certain minimum level of democratic politics must be in place for the internet to lead to an increase in democratic politics because if national politics restrict communication freedoms on the internet, then even relatively high internet penetration will *not* lead to a democratization effect. A study of Asian and African countries concluded that internet *penetration* is not a predictor, but internet *use* is a predictor of "demand for democracy," and internet penetration strengthens this relationship (Nisbet, Stoycheff, & Pearce, 2012). Similar to Groshek (2009),

these authors found that, in countries with higher democratization, the relationship between individual internet use and demand for democracy is higher.

Synopsis

This systematizing literature review aimed to provide a comprehensive picture of the current state of research regarding the relationships between media systems and media use as well as media effects. Several overarching findings can be derived from the studies discussed, and these may add to the question of whether certain parameters of media systems shape communication differently or, in other words, how context matters. Important for research on media systems as well as research on media use and effects, the critical finding is that media use differs depending on media system characteristics and that the media system can proportionately explain individual media use.

Furthermore, empirical evidence is provided for media system-related differences in political knowledge, with information-rich environments having a positive influence on political knowledge. The role of the state and political parties in the media sector appears to be an important characteristic for differentiating media systems. The "political parallelism" of a media system proportionately explains political participation in terms of voter turnout, perceptions of politics and democracy, and cross-cutting exposure. In summary, low political parallelism and strong public broadcasting seem to lead to higher news usage and more political knowledge, while more-commercialized media markets offer less political information and fewer information opportunities. Thus, based on studies of media use and effects, information-rich media environments with various opportunity structures are desirable characteristics of media systems from the perspective of democratic theory.

Comparative studies of media systems revealed that fragmentation of online and offline audiences is consistently low, but apparently, there are differences between media systems. More in-depth research on this issue is desirable. For online media in general, the country-specific information environment is an explanatory factor for media use and participation. Media change at the macro-level shows the role of the internet for social change, i.e., democratization processes.

In summary, the results of this systematizing literature review illustrate that we have well-documented empirical findings on certain relationships between structures and use, especially for newspapers and television. Re-

garding the internet and social media in particular, evidence for associations between structures and use and effects is scarce, and based on the current state of research, concluding statements can be made only with caution.

Concluding Remarks

Encouragingly, we already know quite a lot about the connections between the macro- and micro-levels of communication. However, many questions remain on a wide variety of topics that have not (yet) been addressed in empirical research. To name a few, these include questions regarding gradual expressions of media freedom at the macro-level and individual communication phenomena; historical developments of media systems and individual communication, especially regarding the merging of old and new media logics in hybrid media systems (Chadwick 2013); and the role of individual media effects for the development of the media system.

From a methodological point of view, in addition to the now well-established multilevel analyses, more moderator and mediator analyses should be encouraged in order to explain the multiple interrelationships within the macro-level as well as at the micro-level. Furthermore, Esser (2019) pointed out the necessity of qualitative research for a deeper understanding of the context. In the field of political communication, Matthes et al. (2019) suggested that states with varying degrees of democracy need to be studied in order to better examine structural influences on political participation aspects.

This leads me to a critical yet decisive remark. Inherent in almost all studies is a normative view of public communication in that more political information is considered beneficial; political knowledge as well as participation in the political process is considered important; and ultimately, a functioning democracy is implicitly or explicitly assumed as the target variable of public communication in the sense of a public sphere as well as in the sense of the political organization of a country. And here the reflection also ties in with what Wolfram Peiser (2009) expressed regarding the question of what ideas about media effects are held by communication scholars themselves. Reflecting on these implicit assumptions at the theoretical level for media systems research would be an important contribution, especially in the sense of international comparative media systems research that goes beyond Western countries. If one applies the normative criteria of the Western public sphere to non-Western and non-democratic

states, one will always find a deficit in public communication. If one wants to examine public negotiation processes, which may well include political negotiation—also in less-free media environments—and analyze the relevance of media (structures), then a different heuristic concept must be used as a basis, one that enables a search not for deficits but for realization options of political communication.

Finally, the results discussed could also be considered on a meta-level, with an interesting task for scientific research. If we assume, based on the findings presented here, that media system structures matter, at least to some extent, for media effects and, at the same time, assume based on Wolfram Peiser's remarks (2009) on "general ideas about media effects" that the perspective taken when researching media effects also depends on the individual media socialization of the researcher, we can ask what the socialization of communication scientists into a certain media system means for the research of media effects.

Altogether, the review of the literature shows that the media system context and, thus, comparative media system research can provide important contributions to explaining communication at the individual level.

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