Chapter 5
The Demand Side of Negativity and Privatization in News: Experimental Study of News Consumer Habits

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Abstract Negativity in media and emphasis on personal side of politics are often cited as a common journalist practice which is harmful to democratic processes. Journalists and media houses are often held accountable for these phenomena because they prioritize profit over the quality of content. However, we offer an analysis focused on demand side of both negativity and privatization of political news. Using the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment (DPTE), we test the assumption that both of these features of political media coverage may be driven by audience demand for negative and personal news. According to the available literature, personal news can serve as a useful heuristics in citizens' political judgment. We have confirmed a negativity bias; however, a tendency to select news about politicians' private affairs was not confirmed. Even thought respondents preferred political news, personal news showed to be more memorable, which might have further implications for formation of political attitudes.

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5.1 Introduction

Scholars of political communication are often concerned with two important characteristics of media coverage of politics. First, politics is often captured in a negative light, and second, there is a shift of focus from political parties to individual politicians and their private lives. Both of these features—negativity and focus on personal stories—of media coverage of politics may be understood as parts of a more general process of strategic media frames (Capella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1994). But regardless their mutual relation, both concepts are common phenomena of current media practice, both are also considered to be negative and harmful and a result of journalistic malpractice. Growing negative coverage of public affairs, as a result of the shift from descriptive to interpretative journalism (Patterson 1994), together with greater attention to personal affairs and the private lives of political actors are conceptually linked to strategic news coverage (Trussler and Soroka 2014; de Vreese and Semetko 2002; Capella and Jamieson 1997) and are both seen as a part of a media malaise contributing to general political cynicism and distrust (Jerbil et al. 2013; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2006; Calepella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1994). Our research examines these traditional views of negativity and privatization of political news as a result of solely journalists' preferences. We also focus on how these types of news can influence citizen information processing and whether citizens use these types of information as cognitive shortcuts. We base our experimental study on two assumptions. First, media content is a result of an interplay between journalist supply and reader demand. Second, even if media consumers prefer a type of news which is normatively considered to be inferior to hard news, they are still able to use acquired information to form political attitudes. While most of the research of media coverage of politics is focused on the character of the news, we focus on the audience and on their preferences in order to clarify whether the current state of media content is a result of any demand-driven processes. We believe that this perspective has been rather unexplored and our research may contribute to the empirical knowledge of how citizens select news and how they use the acquired information in their political reasoning. Our basic research questions ask what type of news do people really prefer. Do negative and personal stories about politicians really sell better than serious policy oriented news? Moreover, if this assumption holds true, we are interested in its' implication for political attitudes of those who consume this type of news. Do those people who prefer to read negative and personal news about politicians systematically differ in updating their political attitudes compared to those who prefer policy oriented and more positive news?

Both negative and personal news may have an increased information value, which plays an important part in evaluation of politicians and generating political attitudes. We base our theoretical assumptions on research of cognitive shortcuts in a low-rationality environment. Citizens rely on various heuristics to compensate for knowing very little about politics (Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Popkin shows that citizens are able to assimilate various cues about politicians and identifies media as

the key source of these shortcuts (Popkin 1991). We study the demand-side of media usage and the way citizens use personal and negative news about politicians as effective heuristics. We combine interest in citizens' approach to personal news about public figures with the overall tendency of media towards negativity (Chytilek and Tóth 2016).

5.2 A Supply-Side Perspective

Media play a crucial role within the democratic process, since democracy requires journalists to perform important functions in relation to political information (Strömbäck 2005). Regarding these normative assumptions about work of journalists, it is often the case that media practice is criticized for prioritizing other aspects of news. As media is the watchdog of democracy, the journalistic approach towards political actors is supposed to be naturally critical. However, the overall high levels of negative and strategic frames in the media are often regarded as a result of a general journalistic cynicism towards politicians and public officials (e.g. Trussler and Soroka 2014; de Vreese and Semetko 2002; Capella and Jamieson 1997). Additionally, negative frames and a focus on conflict often mean more exciting and sensational stories, and both journalists and their editors understand that bad news sells better (Zaller 1999; Allport and Lepkin 1943; Diamond 1978; Patterson 1994; Niven 2000).

Apart from more attention paid to bad news, there has also been a shift in the media focus towards individual politicians as the key political actors (personalization of politics and political news). Together with a shift towards personally-oriented political coverage of politics there has also been an evident shift from perception of politicians as public office-holders to reporting about politicians as private individuals, their personal lives and characters. This change of discourse from political to non-political characteristics of politicians is called *privatization* (e.g. Van Aelst et al. 2011; Rahat and Sheafer 2007; Holtz-Bacha 2004). Stanyer writes about *intimization*, defined as a process of information circulation in which information flows between the private sphere (personal lives and relationships) and the mediated public sphere of politics. Intimate politics consists of publicizing information and imagery of personal character, public scrutiny of personal relationships, and family life (Stanyer 2013: pp. 12–15). This phenomenon is facilitated by the willingness of politicians across countries to disclose aspects of their personal lives (e.g. Dakhlia 2008; Kuhn 2010; Langer 2012; Holtz-Bacha 2004). Although it has been established that increase of privatization is affected by structural factors, such as the media environment the degree of legal protection for public figures etc. (Stanyer 2013), there is still a surprisingly large gap in the state of knowledge about the role of the public in this process. We believe the increasing negativity and privatization of political news to be a two-way road, which depends not only on the intention of journalists but also on the habits and preferences of consumers.

5.3 A Demand-Side Perspective

The presence of both negativity and privatization of news has been documented, as well as their pervasively negative effects on the citizens (Jerbil et al. 2013; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2006; Calepella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1994). We, on the other hand, are interested in these phenomena from the consumer-side perspective. We believe that audience habits in media consumption is a rather underexplored topic, although it is highly relevant in respect to the perception of political communication. Research (Lichter and Noyes 1995; West 2001) shows that citizens express discontent with negative news frames. Unfavourable attitude towards negativity in the news was expressed by experimental subjects in Trusser's and Soroka's study (2014). The same subjects, however, showed a gap between attitude towards such news and their actual behaviour. There is a reason to believe in a discrepancy between citizens' expectations about media and the type of news they actually prefer (Graber 1984).

Media negativity bias seems to be a function of a natural human inclination towards negativity. Evidence shows that negative information simply matters more and invokes certain cognitive reactions compared to positive information. Research in psychology has documented negativity bias in information processing (Ito et al. 1998; Pratto and John 1991) and impression formation (Hamilton and Huffman 1971; Rozin and Royzman 2001). Bad things in general consume more thinking than good things (Abele 1985; Fiske 1980) and recipients show more cognitive processing when they are in a bad mood (Isen 1987; Schwarz 1990).

The prevailing emphasis on negativity also applies in politics. Citizens prefer to receive information about politicians' personal failures, scandals, and gaffes to information about their performance (Ryan and Brader 2013). There has been a large body of research on negative campaigning, showing that negative ads are more powerful than positive (for a review see Lau and Rovner 2009). Klein has proved that political impression formation is vulnerable to negativity bias, negatively perceived traits of candidates matter more in the overall evaluation of the candidates (Klein 1991, 1996).

This negativity bias can be explained by the utility of negative information, which is considered to be more perceptually salient and informative (Skowronski and Carlston 1989). Atkin emphasized the need for surveillance that produces specific information-seeking behaviors. All pieces of information pose possible threats or opportunities. Negative information evokes more intense inspection because of the higher level of possible danger or negative consequences (Atkin 1973). Negativity bias was demonstrated in relation to readers' selection of political messages (Trussler and Soroka 2014; Soroka and McAdams 2015; Meffert et al. 2006; Donsbach 1991). Meffert also shows that voters read more negative messages about their preferred candidate compared to the less preferred candidate (Meffert et al. 2006), which supports the assumption that negativity requires more scrutiny, since a negative story about one's own favourite politician may pose more of a threat to one's attitudes and evoke more rigorous inspection.

If the negativity bias—based on a greater information value of negative news—applies, then we predict that:

H1a: Participants will be more likely to select negative news compared to positive news about politicians.

H1b: Participants will pay more attention to negative news and therefore spend more time on reading negative news.

H1c: Negative news will provide subjects with information of better accessibility, and therefore subjects will be able to recall more negative information compared to positive information gained from positive news.

The demand side of the privatization of political news is a much less explored. It is possible that reporting about politicians' private lives is also a demand-driven media practice stemming from citizens' bias towards personal information about politicians. Newspaper editors themselves agree that however much the private affairs of political candidates are overrepresented in the news, the situation is driven simply by public interest in this type of information because people want to hear gossip (Splichal and Garrison 2003). The argument that people actually prefer personal stories about political actors to more substantial political news has, however, not been empirically tested so far.

There are assumptions that would suggest higher attractiveness of this kind of news leading to a privatization bias in news selection. Personal information can serve the public as a cue to evaluate a politician. It was already noted by Sennet (1974) that politicians are continually being scrutinized and any misconduct in one sphere of their lives is automatically equated with their capability and competence in all other spheres. Personality politics is a deflection of public interest away from measuring personal character in terms of effective public action and it makes personal character symbolic in sense that any flaw can become an instrument of self-destruction (Sennet 1974: 286). Personal information about politicians thus serve citizens, whose cognitive capacities and interest in politics are rather limited, as a useful source of information. People usually don't follow political news, even when they report paying attention to public affairs, they actually prefer more entertaining stories. Still, voters are informed enough to make sense of the political world. Popkin argues that they use their "gut rationality" to gain information quite effortlessly in everyday life. Cognitive shortcuts enable them to evaluate the acquired information and maintain running tallies about political actors (Popkin 1991: 44). Personalities of politicians work as heuristics for voters to form attitudes and make political decisions. Popkin summed up the importance of politicians' personality in Gresham's law of political information: a small amount of personal information about a politician can drive out a large amount of previous impersonal information. Personal news help voters generate narratives about politicians; it is easier to take personal data and fill in the political facts and policies than vice versa. These narratives are easily compiled and stored in memory longer than hard facts (Popkin 1991: 79). As other research shows, voters often use a candidates and their reputation as a source of their policy evaluations and as a means to connect with political issues (Mondak 1993; Capelos 2010).

Based on the theory of privatization of news, we predict that if privatization of political news applies:

H2a: Participants will be more likely to select personally focused news compared to political news about politicians.

H2b: Participants will pay more attention to personally focused news and spend more time on reading personal news about politicians.

H2c: Personally focused news will provide subjects with information of better accessibility and subjects will be able to recall more personal information compared to political information gained from politically focused news.

Theoretical assumptions suggest that personal news about politicians is not only attractive because it is more entertaining than strictly political news, but also it may have a specific information value for political judgment. Therefore, if personal information about politicians works as a heuristic, those who are interested predominantly in the privatized news would be able to make inferences similar to those who prefer the hard news. The assumption of political heuristic as a useful decision making tool has been accepted in political science literature (Popkin 1991; Lupia 1994; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). However, there is not a consensus on the effectiveness of heuristic reasoning. The original heuristics research in psychology (Tversky and Kahneman 1974) understands heuristics as a biased way of thinking which leads to errors in inferences. Part of the political science scholars also challenge the assumption of heuristics as a tool to make "as if" fully informed decisions by uninformed voters (Bartels 1996; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). Therefore, it is necessary, to test the potential of heuristics to overcome cognitive limits of the public and to contribute to political reasoning. Even though the issue of heuristic inferences in politics has been studied for some time, we suggest that it is still useful to test and retest heuristics-based hypothesis in new contexts and settings. Based on the theory of personality as heuristics in political judgment we predict that:

H3: Reading personal news affects the ability of the subjects to update their evaluation of persons as politicians in the same way as reading political news does.

5.4   Experimental Design and Procedure

We test which kind of information voters deliberately search for and how they use the information in the evaluation of political leaders. We designed an experiment to see how people process information and what kind of impact various types of political information have. Our design involved no obvious "control group" (people who would receive no treatment) but we still report it as an "experiment" as we have a rather strong "theoretical baseline" (c. Morton and Williams 2010: 311) about how the subjects' information seeking strategies should look like, which has never been properly tested at the individual level. We also use a common practice for framing experiments (Kinder and Sanders 1990; Nelson and Kinder 1996) that also mostly do not conflate experimentation and necessary and sufficient conditions

for causal inference; comparing alternative treatments that we describe in this and following section of the article. Still, it wouldn't be meaningful to define one of them as "baseline".

For our purpose, we used information about the previous presidents of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel and Václav Klaus. We have intentionally used politicians who were not politically active at the time of the experimental sessions.[1] Using contemporary political leaders would pose an ethical threat to the integrity of the experiment, since we believe that experimental reality should in no possible way intersect with subjects' real lives (Gadarian and Lau 2011).

Havel and Klaus, although not personally present in the political life of the Czech Republic, still represent very important symbolic values. Their political fates were largely similar: in every election, the parliament voted them into office by very narrow margins (Havel in 1993 and 1998, and Klaus in 2003 and 2008, with the last election requiring a full seven rounds of voting). The trajectories of their presidencies also developed comparably, and were marked by frequent disputes with the political elites, especially over the formation of governments. In a post-communist country where democracy consolidated itself slowly and hesitantly, their long periods in office led to the gradual erosion of their images, so that at the end of their second terms they were leaving the office as relatively controversial public figures, particularly criticized for their remoteness from the problems of ordinary citizens.

Both Havel and Klaus also had to deal with rather detailed public examinations —not limited to the tabloids—of their personal lives. Speculations about Havel's health, connected with his proneness to alcohol and tobacco consumption attracted significant attention and the public long found it difficult to relate to his second wife Dagmar, with whom Havel already kept a close relationship while his first wife Olga was still alive; he married her soon after Olga's death. With Klaus, there was a string of affairs with younger women, but speculations also surfaced as to whether he might have been a homosexual. Although the intellectual impact of Havel and Klaus in the world has been of unequal influence, all of the above makes them comparable research subjects for a study which focuses on the Czech population and poses research questions about perception, reception, and evaluation of personal and political messages about politicians.

Only part of the Czech public considers the personal lives of politicians to be relevant to how they evaluate them. In 2002, 36% of respondents believed that politicians ought to be rated solely on the basis of their discharge of duties, whereas 59% said that they would include private life into the evaluation. In 2013 46% indicated that they would judge politicians solely on the basis of performance in office, and 50% would consider private life as well (Tuček 2013). The importance of personal life for the evaluation of politicians remained fairly stable throughout the period under consideration, fluctuating between 49% and 61%. Yet almost two-thirds of respondents (62% in 2002 and 64% in 2013) demanded the morality of

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[1]Václav Klaus was six months out of office at the time of experiment. Václav Havel's last term ended in 2003; he died in 2012.

politicians to be judged more stringently than that of ordinary citizens. This number too remained extraordinarily stable throughout the period. All of this suggests that personal stories, especially negative ones, have a potentially significant impact on the public's evaluation of politicians, and it is the mechanisms of these evaluations that we sought better to understand in our experiment.

5.4.1 Procedure

For the purpose of this study, we used part of the data we collected in experimental sessions held in the computer facilities of Masaryk University in Brno, the Czech Republic. Part of the subjects were undergraduate students at the university and part of the subjects were recruited from general public via online advertising to achieve a greater variation in political sophistication. A total of 186 participants (120 women, 66 men; 112 student subjects and 71 non student subjects; mean age 25) took part in the study. All participants were paid 150 CZK (approx. €5.50).

Subjects were randomly divided into experimental groups. The experiment was performed in the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment created by David Redlawsk and Richard Lau—a computer-based dynamic information board designed to simulate the information environment of political campaigns (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Redlawsk 2002, 2004). In DPTE, subjects can see a flow of newspaper-style headlines that are directly linked to articles. After reading the articles, subjects return to the headline flow. The system tracks the information search by each of the subjects (including the sequence of opened articles and the time of processing of each article).

Subjects filled in a questionnaire of political sophistication consisting of questions about their interest in politics, political participation, and political knowledge. Basic demographic questions followed and then subjects had to evaluate political leaders. According to the assigned experimental group participants evaluated one of the former presidents, either Václav Havel, Václav Klaus, or both presidents. Evaluation focused both on personal and political profiles of the politicians.

After this introductory questionnaire, the dynamic information board followed. Subjects could click on any of the headlines in the information flow on the computer screens and open a full article to read. Depending on the experimental group, some subjects read articles about one of the former presidents and others were exposed to articles about both presidents. The main reason for creating these experimental groups was to have greater control over the procedure and to see whether participants' strategy of selecting articles to read differs when they have the chance to read about one or two politicians.

Subjects were informed that the articles were fully authentic. The articles were based on real various sources—(1) media, (2) blogs, (3) official presidential websites —and were edited so that they were similar in length and complexity. There were 38 texts about each politician; 18 about their personal lives, 20 about their political activities. One half (of both personal and political) articles presented positive information about the president and the other half was negative. Political articles

focused on the same policy issues for Havel and for Klaus. For each issue there was one positive and one negative article about both Havel and Klaus. Positive and negative impressions of the articles and their headlines were tested in a pre-test.

Subjects could open any of the articles that were flowing down their screens. In the meantime, the headlines kept flowing in the background. Whenever they wanted, subjects could close the story and return to the information flow. This part of the experiment lasted for 13 min in one-politician condition; the subjects in the two-politicians condition had 20 min to search for information. Each article showed up three times. After the information flow, the subjects were asked to evaluate the presidents once again with questions identical with those at the beginning of the session. Finally, they were invited to state everything they could remember about the politician or politicians based on the previously read information. The session was ended with a short debriefing.

5.4.2 Variables

In our analysis we work with following variables:

Evaluation of Václav Havel and Václav Klaus as a politician and as a personality: We asked participants "What was the overall contribution of Václav Havel/Václav Klaus as a politician for the Czech Republic since 1989 to today like?" (0 = very negative, 100 = very positive)" and "How do you rate Václav Havel/Václav Klaus as a personality? (0 = very negatively, 100 = very positively)" to find evaluations of both of them.

Change of evaluation We asked participants to evaluate politicians before and also after they read the articles about them, and we measured the difference in the evaluation. We used absolute values to determine how much each participant changed his or her evaluation.

Read articles: In our experiment, we used four types of articles: negative personal, negative political, positive personal and positive political. DPTE allowed us to track which articles participants read and also how much time (in seconds) they spent reading them.

As a control variable, we used *political sophistication*: We calculated how politically sophisticated a participant was by adding the answers from the questionnaire about political participation and the test of political knowledge. We also controlled for *gender* and *age*.

5.5 Results

We divided the results by groups and politicians. Since some participants read articles only about one politician and others about two, we report them as Havel 1 (results of group that read articles only about Vaclav Havel), Klaus 1 (participants

Table 5.1 Total number of read articles, how much time participants spent reading them and total number of recalled articles about each politician

	Total read	Time	Total recalled
Havel 1 (N = 58)	12.36 (3.22)	50.18 (14.05)	7.34 (3.94)
Klaus 1 (N = 45)	12.91 (6.44)	49.54 (20.49)	6.72 (2.89)
Havel 2 (N = 83)	9.13 (4.35)	49.04 (16.85)	7.81 (3.29)
Klaus 2 (N = 83)	9.65 (4.11)	48.43 (15.14)	6.67 (2.32)

Note Table entries are means (with standard deviation in parentheses), time measured in seconds

that read articles about Vaclav Klaus), Havel 2 and Klaus 2 (results from a group that read about both Havel and Klaus) (Table 5.1).

There was not much difference in the amount of read articles and the time spent reading them in different groups. Since the participants in a group with two politicians had more time to read, they read about 18 articles, comparing to less than 13 in a groups with one politician, but they read approximately the same number about Havel and Klaus. People could recall more information about Havel than about Klaus, but the difference is small.

We can observe similar behaviour even when we take a closer look at the articles that people selected to read. In each group the highest number of the articles read were negative articles about presidents' personal lives. Participants also recalled these articles the most. On the other hand, they spent most time reading negative stories which focused on political issues (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Number of specific articles read, time spent reading them a number of specific articles recalled about each politician

	Read N Per	Read N Pol	Read P Per	Read P Pol
Havel 1	3.57 (1.98)	2.86 (1.56)	3.09 (1.83)	2.84 (1.47)
Klaus 1	4.02 (2.27)	3.65 (2.10)	2.27 (2.35)	3.00 (1.79)
Havel 2	3.07 (1.92)	2.04 (1.40)	1.93 (1.57)	2.10 (1.81)
Klaus 2	3.25 (1.79)	2.70 (1.81)	1.81 (1.72)	1.89 (1.48)
	Time N Per	Time N Pol	Time P Per	Time P Pol
Havel 1	53.86 (14.51)	59.83 (18.90)	43.66 (12.74)	53.71 (17.36)
Klaus 1	50.52 (18.17)	58.77 (24.16)	42.12 (20.13)	54.66 (20.09)
Havel 2	53.61 (19.52)	60.52 (20.38)	45.73 (16.45)	55.83 (23.22)
Klaus 2	50.51 (16.92)	57.54 (21.21)	44.86 (15.54)	55.18 (24.12)
	Recalled N Per	Recalled N Pol	Recalled P Per	Recalled P Pol
Havel 1	2.80 (1.52)	1.86 (1.02)	2.10 (1.57)	2.00 (1.07)
Klaus 1	2.56 (1.46)	1.83 (0.86)	1.75 (0.91)	2.06 (0.99)
Havel 2	2.55 (1.29)	1.52 (0.74)	1.66 (0.89)	1.55 (0.94)
Klaus 2	2.01 (1.18)	1.56 (0.99)	1.57 (0.83)	1.40 (0.63)

Notes Table entries are means (with standard deviation in parentheses), time measured in seconds
Abbreviations: N Per/N Pol/P Per/P Pol—read negative personal, negative political, positive personal, positive political

To determine whether participants preferred negative over positive news and personal over political, we combine the types of articles together (it means, e.g. negative news = negative personal + negative political, personal news = negative personal + positive personal). While we can confirm that participants read more negative articles than positive ones (H1a), they spent more time reading them (H1b) and there is also statistically significant difference between recalled number of negative and positive articles (H1c).

However, results concerning the personal-political character of news aren't obvious. Even though there was statistically significant difference between recall of personal and political stories (H2c), we cannot say that participants in every group preferred personal over political news (H2a). This is evident in the group that read articles only about Klaus, when people had preferred more political articles. What is more, subjects spent more time reading political stories than personal ones (H2b). Nevertheless, the results show that even though participants spent more time cognitively processing political articles, they could recall more of the personal ones. We may also conclude that behaviour of participants across groups was very similar.

Read articles and change of evaluation
Our results confirm that the exposure to the information flow led subjects to update their evaluations of the presidents. In around 80% of cases participants changed their initial evaluation of Havel and Klaus as politicians and in 86% of cases evaluation of them as personalities. To measure the change of evaluation, we subtracted initial evaluations from the evaluations that participants made after the information flow.

To test our third hypotheses, we used an OLS regression where the dependent variable was the size of change in evaluations and independent variables were the numbers of read of articles. In addition, we assessed political sophistication, gender and age as control variables in the model (Table 5.3).

We found no evidence that any of the various types of articles influenced the change of evaluation of Havel and Klaus as politicians (H3). Even though change in some cases certainly happened, we are not able to conclude that it was the news that participants chose to read to be the reason. Similar result can be drawn about the change in evaluation of politician as personalities. The only exception is group Havel 1. If subjects read more negative personal stories, their evaluation of Havel decreased, on the other hand, if they read more of positive personal articles, their evaluation of the former president increased. However, we did not find this effect for any other group. Type of articles selected by subject does not to seem to affect change of evaluation. This also applies to control variables—political sophistication, gender and age. We can conclude that even thought people were changing their initial evaluations, we cannot identify the reason for this changes.

Table 5.3 The effect of articles on change of evaluation

	Havel				Klaus			
	Group 1		Group 2		Group 1		Group 2	
	Eval. Pol	Eval. Per	Eval. Pol	Eval. Per	Eval. Pol	Eval. Per	Eval. Pol	Eval. Per
Read N Per	0.134 (0.841)	−2.406* (0.902)	−0.74 (0.680)	−0.891 (0.983)	0.169 (0.999)	0.597 (1.354)	−0.876 (1.088)	0.021 (0.976)
Read N Pol	−2.400 (1.214)	0.619 (1.302)	−0.157 (1.035)	0.514 (1.495)	−0.194 (0.876)	−0.327 (1.188)	0.18 (1.031)	0.598 (0.924)
Read P Per	−0.259 (1.082)	2.572* (1.103)	−0.651 (0.849)	1.367 (1.226)	−0.059 (1.044)	1.518 (1.415)	1.204 (1.138)	1.745 (1.021)
Read P Pol	−1.154 (1.186)	0.891 (1.272)	1.201 (0.761)	2.022 (1.100)	−1.344 (1.056)	−0.263 (1.432)	1.264 (1.216)	0.110 (1.090)
Pol sophisti	0.482 (0.581)	−0.397 (0.623)	0.694 (0.374)	0.327 (0.541)	1.890 (0.603)	0.440 (.817)	−0.287 (0.540)	−0.361 (0.484)
Const	5.141 (7.925)	−3.523 (8.500)	−10.476 (4.958)	−19.806 (7.166)	−15.215 (6.363)	−16.003 (8.625)	−0.588 (6.977)	5.221 (6.254)
R2	0.091	0.202	0.095	0.098	0.245	0.190	0.048	0.063

$*p < 0.05$

Note Table entries are unstandardized regression weights (with standard errors in parentheses)

All regressions are controlled for gender and age

Abbreviations: Eval Pol—change of evaluation of politician as a politician, Eval Per—change of evaluation of politician as a personality, Read N Per/N Pol/P Per/P Pol—read negative personal articles, negative political, positive personal, positive political, Pol sophistic—political sophistication, Const—constant

5.6 Conclusion

We focused on the demand side of media coverage of politics. Our goal was to test what kind of information concerning political personalities people tend to select, and whether the selection of such information influenced their political opinions. We confirmed negativity bias (Meffert et al. 2006) meaning that when free to choose people prefer to read negative news to positive ones. Not only did participants show a tendency to naturally select negativity over positivity, they also paid more attention to negative news and thus spent more time processing it. Higher levels of negativity in the media thus might mirror higher demand for this type of news. Moreover, our subjects were also able to recall more negative information, which shows that negativity relates to better accessibility of information in memory and this way could have important implications for attitude formation (Zaller 1992). Negativity bias has been a topic of a scientific inquiry for some time; our experimental study has confirmed its presence in the way subjects select information about real-life political leaders. The general tendency of the news to report negatively about politicians might not be solely a manifestation of journalists' cynicism towards political elites but also a reflection of the natural interest of public in this type of news.

Our research also asked whether a similar type of bias applies for privatized news, another important feature in the media political coverage. In this case we

were not able to confirm that people prefer tabloid-style personal stories about politicians over the ones of substantial political matter. Surprisingly, we found that when people can choose, they read more personal news compared to political news, but simultaneously they tend to spend more time reading political articles than personal ones. This indicates that purely political news requires more attention and that it is more cognitively demanding than information about politicians' private affairs. In the light of this finding, it is quite interesting that in spite of more attention paid to political news, subjects still recalled more personal than political articles. Therefore, we can conclude that personal news is easily accessible in the memory despite the lack of higher interest or cognitive effort paid to it by readers. People do not have to actively search for personal information about politicians. Also, we found out that the complexity of the information environment does not affect our findings, because there was no difference between a complexity of information environment in which subjects were exposed to stories about one politician and a situation where there was a possibility to choose between the two presidents.

We were also interested in implication of personalized news (which supplies people with more accessible information than politically focused news) for citizens' political attitudes. We did not find any variable that would influence the change of evaluation of the presidents and our participants' opinions. Our results suggest that people do update their opinions after being exposed to the news. However, there is no evidence that different types of news content (either personal or political) have different effects on the degree of change in the evaluation of politicians. We haven't found evidence that people use personal stories about politicians heuristically to asses their political profiles. Based on our data we cannot either confirm that political news has a different effect on political judgement than personal news. Further research focused on the effects of various types of information on political attitudes is necessary.

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