

The Dynamics of Issue Fatigue:

Investigating the Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences of Fatigue from Ongoing
Political Issues in the News

Dissertation

Zur Erlangung der Würde eines Doktors der Sozialwissenschaften
Vorgelegt der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät
der Universität Freiburg (Schweiz)

von

Gwendolin GURR
aus Deutschland

Genehmigt von der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät
am 08.11.2021 auf Antrag von
Frau Prof. Dr. Julia Metag (erste Referentin) und
Frau Prof. Dr. Annie Waldherr (zweite Referentin)

Freiburg, 2021

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Mit der Annahme einer Dissertation beabsichtigt die Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät der Universität Freiburg nicht, zu den darin enthaltenen Meinungen des Verfassers Stellung zu nehmen. (Fakultätsbeschluss vom 23. Januar 1990)

Contents

List of Papers	II
List of Figures (Synopsis).....	III
List of Tables (Synopsis)	III
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 High-Choice Media Environments	4
1.2 Media and Public Attention to Issues	9
1.3 Informed Citizens and the Role of News Media.....	12
1.4 The Dynamics of Issue Fatigue.....	17
1.4.1 Issue Fatigue’s Dimensions	18
1.4.2 Issue Fatigue’s Causes	19
1.4.3 Issue Fatigue’s Emergence Process	24
1.4.4 Issue Fatigue’s Consequences.....	26
1.5 Research Questions and Corresponding Papers.....	27
1.6 Research Design.....	30
2 Papers	34
2.1 Paper I.....	35
Supplemental Analysis Paper I: Confirmation of Issue Fatigue’s Conceptual Definition	64
2.2 Paper II.....	78
Paper II Appendix	109
2.3 Paper III	112
Supplemental Analysis Paper III: Validation of the Findings	142
2.4 Paper IV	147
Paper IV Appendix	177
2.5 Paper V.....	182
Paper V Appendix.....	210
3 Discussion	221
3.1 Summary of the Findings.....	221
3.2 Discussion and Contribution.....	225
3.3 Limitations and Outlook	239
3.3.1 Content Limitations and Outlook	239
3.3.2 Methodological Limitations and Outlook.....	242
3.3.3 Further Outlook.....	247
4 Concluding Remarks.....	252
References.....	254

List of Papers

This cumulative dissertation is based on the five papers as of July 30, 2021, listed on this page. The list of papers indicates which papers were written with co-authors. This accords to the regulations for obtaining the doctoral degree of Economics and Social Sciences (Dr.rer.pol) and of Social Sciences (Dr.rer.soc) at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Fribourg, from March 22, 2005 (dated February 26, 2018).

- Paper I: Gurr, G., Schumann, C., & Metag, J. (under review). Negative Effects of Long-Lasting Media Attention to Public Issues on Recipients: Conceptualizing Issue Fatigue. *Studies in Communication Sciences*.
- Paper II: Gurr, G., & Metag, J. (2021). Fatigued by Ongoing News Issues? How Repeated Exposure to the Same News Issue Affects the Audience. *Mass Communication and Society*, published online. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2021.1956543>
- Paper III: Gurr, G., & Metag, J. (2021). Examining Avoidance of Ongoing Political Issues in the News: A Longitudinal Study of the Impact of Audience Issue Fatigue. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 1798–1809.
- Paper IV: Gurr, G. (revised and resubmitted / under review). Does Fatigue from Ongoing News Issues Harm News Media? Assessing Reciprocal Relationships between Audience Issue Fatigue and News Media Evaluations. *Journalism Studies*.
- Paper V: Gurr, G., & Metag, J. (under review). What Leads to Audience Issue Fatigue? A Linkage Analysis Study on the Effects of News Coverage on Fatigue from Ongoing News Issues. *Political Communication*.

List of Figures (Synopsis)

Figure 1 Issue Fatigue's Dynamics	18
Figure 2 Issue Fatigue's Dimensions	19
Figure 3 Issue Fatigue's Direct Causes	22
Figure 4 Issue Fatigue's Indirect Causes	24
Figure 5 Issue Fatigue's Emergence Process	25
Figure 6 Issue Fatigue's Consequences	27
Figure 7 Multi-Method Approach	31
Figure 8 Second-Order Model of Issue Fatigue (Brexit)	73
Figure 9 Second-Order Model of Issue Fatigue (Referendum)	74

List of Tables (Synopsis)

Table 1 Dimensions and Items of the Issue Fatigue Scale (Brexit and Referendum).....	66
Table 2 Item Correlations (Brexit)	68
Table 3 Item Correlations (Referendum)	69
Table 4 Factor Loadings (Brexit and Referendum)	71
Table 5 Factor Correlations (Brexit and Referendum).....	75
Table 6 Model Fit Indices of the Issue Fatigue Scale (Brexit and Referendum)	76
Table 7 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability per Wave.....	142
Table 8 Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of the Issue During Selection	144
Table 9 Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of the Issue During Exposure.....	145
Table 10 Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of Interpersonal Discussions	146

1 Introduction

Today's high-choice media environment provides people with an abundance of news via various outlets and online platforms, such as online news sites, TV news, social media, and messengers (Andersen et al., 2016; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Newman et al., 2021). When the news media cover a political issue extensively during a prolonged period, news users are likely to encounter the issue repeatedly in a variety of sources. Recently, journalists and scholars addressed the idea that people become fatigued from public issues the news media cover extensively during weeks, months, or years: Coronavirus news fatigue (Bedingfield, 2020), Brexit fatigue (Newman et al., 2019), Trump fatigue (Ignatius, 2019), climate change fatigue (Morrison et al., 2018), and election campaign fatigue (Gottfried, 2020) are discussed.

Extensively covered issues have so far been examined by research on media attention to issues, for instance, under the labels of media hypes (Chung, 2018; Vasterman, 2005) and media storms (Boydston et al., 2011, 2014). The audience perspective on extensively covered issues has attracted less attention. Some researchers (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018) posited that news users experience fatigue from issues extensively covered by the news media during a prolonged period, leading to avoidance of the issues. However, audience fatigue from ongoing issues has not yet been comprehensively researched.

From a democracy theory perspective, which considers informed citizens as crucial for the functioning of democracy (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), fatigue from and avoidance of ongoing political issues would be problematic. Issue fatigued citizens could be less well informed about current developments and decisions regarding the issue. In addition, the news media currently face several challenges in their democratic function to inform the citizenry (van Aelst et al., 2017), for instance, fading trust (Hanitzsch et al., 2018) and parts of the citizenry generally avoiding news (Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020; Villi et al., 2021).

Against these backgrounds, the present dissertation considers fatigue from ongoing political issues relevant and aims to study its characteristics, causes, and consequences comprehensively. The overall question guiding this dissertation is:

How can the dynamics of issue fatigue be described and explained?

Before issue fatigue in the audience is theoretically conceptualized and empirically investigated in Switzerland within the five papers of this cumulative dissertation, the new concept is embedded in a broader research context, more precisely, viewed from three perspectives. The first perspective focuses on news supply and use in high-choice media environments (van Aelst et al., 2017). The saturated media environment allows news users to encounter an ongoing issue frequently in various sources. At the same time, avoiding unwanted content, for instance, about the ongoing issue, is facilitated due to the amount of alternative media content (Prior, 2007; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013). Studies have found evidence that people feel generally overloaded by the amount of news available these days (A. M. Lee et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2018), leading to avoiding news overall (C. S. Park, 2019; Song et al., 2017). These structures and developments are considered the context in which issue fatigue's dynamics presumably occur.

The second perspective focuses on research on media and public attention to issues (Geiss, 2018; Stanyer, 2014), which investigates how media attention to issues can be modeled and how it emerges and develops, such as in the form of waves (Geiss, 2011; Waldherr, 2014). A few studies have examined whether the public interest in issues on the media agenda decreases over time (Henry & Gordon, 2001; Neuman, 1990). However, the audience perspective on issues extensively covered during a prolonged period has not yet been carefully conceptualized and investigated.

Third, issue fatigue is viewed from a normative perspective. Issue fatigue and avoidance could counteract a citizenry well informed and knowledgeable about politics (Aalberg &

Curran, 2012; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). However, the demands on how well citizens should be informed and what role the news media play differ among normative understandings of democracy (Ferree et al., 2002; Strömbäck, 2005).

Before the five papers of this cumulative dissertation are presented, the first three sections of this introductory chapter embed issue fatigue's dynamics in a broader research context by focusing on the three perspectives mentioned above. Subsequently, Section 1.4 outlines issue fatigue's dynamics.¹ Section 1.5 presents the research questions and describes how they are addressed within the five papers. Finally, Section 1.6 outlines the research design. Chapter 2 includes the dissertation's papers.² Paper I is supplemented by an empirical analysis of issue fatigue's theoretical conceptualization. Paper III is supplemented by a validation of the findings. Chapter 3 summarizes the findings of all papers, discusses them, and points to their contributions. Finally, this dissertation discusses its limitations and presents future research directions.³

Before proceeding, the fatigue object—*issues in the news*—will be clarified. Generally, *news* can be defined as “novel information about relatively recent affairs” (Schudson, 2019, p. 1)—more specifically, about national and international public affairs (Schudson, 2019) or affairs of interest and importance to the public (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). News is published either directly by professional news providers or transmitted by other actors, such as social network sites (Kümpel, 2019; Schudson, 2019). Van Aelst et al. define *political news* as “news related

¹ Since Paper I presents a theoretical conceptualization of issue fatigue, the concept will not be comprehensively theorized in a separate theory section.

² The papers appear in the format of their publication in or submission to the respective journal. Deviations from the otherwise underlying standards of this dissertation (e.g., APA-Style, formatting of tables, American-English language, and grammar) are due to the journals' standards and requirements. Solely, the font of title, abstract, paragraph text, footnotes, and references have been adapted to the synopsis style for consistency reasons. Figures and tables remain in the journals' formats and do not appear in the synopsis' lists of figures and tables.

The papers of this dissertation were written within a project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

³ The Synopsis consists of the Introduction chapter, the additional analyses accompanying Papers I and III, the Discussion chapter and the Concluding Remarks. The work cited in these chapters and sections is listed in the References at the end of the Synopsis document.

to political issues, actors and institutions, which are produced by journalists and aimed at a larger public” (2017, p. 4).

Issues refer to public and media agenda issues instead of private issues (e.g., Neuman, 1990; Palmgreen & Clarke, 1977). While some researchers view issues as similar to societal issues and as public concerns involving conflicting positions (e.g., Downs, 1972; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Vonbun et al., 2016), research on political media effects refers more narrowly to *political issues*, which involve policies, political actors, and their ideas (e.g., Aadriansen et al., 2010; Aalberg et al., 2012).

Following the broad definitions of *news* and *issue*, an *issue in the news* denotes a matter of public concern covered by professional news media. According to the definition of *political news*, a *political issue in the news* can be defined more narrowly as an issue involving political actors and policies, covered in the news. This dissertation does not assume that citizens can become fatigued solely from political issues in the news; citizens potentially become fatigued from any issue in the news, whether primarily political or not. Since fatigue and avoidance are particularly problematic when it comes to politically relevant issues, the dissertation will focus on *political issues in the news*. When it comes to issue fatigue’s dynamics, the terms *news issue*, *political issue*, *public issue*, or *issue* will always refer to *political issues in the news*.

1.1 High-Choice Media Environments

This section sheds light on selected developments in today’s media environment, in which issue fatigue’s dynamics are embedded. How issue fatigue relates to these developments will be discussed in Chapter 3, based on the findings.

The transition from low-choice to high-choice media environments took place in the second half of the 20th century with the advent of cable television and particularly the web (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). While the low-choice media environment was characterized by a manageable number of media offers, contemporary high-choice media environments provide users with an

abundance of media content (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Panek, 2016). Due to the proliferation of media offers, especially online, users can be more selective; personal preferences are the central driver of media selection (Prior, 2007). Likewise, users can choose from a high number of political news that varies in formats, topics, and viewpoints (van Aelst et al., 2017). However, increasingly available political content competes with increasingly available entertainment content for the users' attention (Aalberg et al., 2013; van Aelst et al., 2017).

In addition to the quantity of political news available, the question of declining quality of news is discussed concerning the substance, facts, and diversity in the news (Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; van Aelst et al., 2017), blurring boundaries between political information and entertaining content, such as satirical shows (Moy et al., 2014), and between hard news and soft news (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015; Reinemann et al., 2012). Furthermore, the framing of politics as a strategic game, as opposed to substantial issue framing (Aalberg et al., 2012), is analyzed in the news. Several studies identified these characteristics in the news in different settings (see Aalberg et al., 2012; Lengauer et al., 2012; Reinemann et al., 2012) and found effects on political attitudes. For example, exposure to higher levels of soft news as opposed to hard news (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015) and to strategy-framed political news (Elenbaas & de Vreese, 2008) leads to higher levels of political cynicism. However, a clear empirical proof of the overall decrease in news quality and the increase in the mentioned news content characteristics in the last decades is missing (van Aelst et al., 2017).

The supply of news—quantity and quality—interrelates with the audience demand (Althaus et al., 2009). Trends in news use inform about the audience's demand for news. According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* studying 40 countries, online media (including social media) and television were the most frequently used news sources, followed by social media only, radio, and print, including daily newspapers and magazines, in the last years (Newman et

al., 2017; Newman et al., 2020). While younger people (18–24 years) in 2017 used predominantly online media (64%), social media (33%), and television (24%), they hardly used printed newspapers (5%) and radio (4%). In contrast, those older than 55 years used primarily television for news (51%), followed by online (28%), newspapers (11%), radio (7%), and social media (7%) (Newman et al., 2017). Online, news is accessed in various ways. In 2021, 25% accessed online news directly from the news provider, 26% via social media, search engines (25%), mobile alerts (9%), aggregators (8%), and email (5%) (Newman et al., 2021). Also in Switzerland, most people (82%) used news online, including social media, in 2021 (Udris & Eisenegger, 2021). The share of online news users, including social media news users, has remained relatively stable since 2016 (82%). The percentage of Swiss people using print media as a news source has decreased from 63% in 2016 to 37% in 2021; television use for news has decreased from 69% to 59%. When it comes to social media and messaging, notably *WhatsApp* (30%), *Facebook* (27%), and *YouTube* (24%) were used as a source of news in 2021. The majority of Swiss people (76%) used the smartphone for news (Udris & Eisenegger, 2021).

Particularly in the context of high amounts of information online (Schmitt et al., 2018) and information technologies such as push notifications and alerts (V. Y. Chen & Masullo Chen, 2020), news overload has been observed. Since news users' attention and capacity to process information is limited, high amounts of information can cause overload (Ji et al., 2014; York, 2013). News overload refers to feeling overwhelmed with the amount of news available. Data from the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* from 2019 showed that 28% of the respondents perceived too much news and felt worn out by them (Newman et al., 2019). The Pew Research Center found that 66% were worn out by the amount of news in 2019; in 2016, 59% said so (Gottfried, 2020). Newman et al. (2019) argued that constant news updates and repeated exposure to the same news story play a role in news overload perceptions. Previous research found that younger people are more likely to experience news overload (Ji et al., 2014; Schmitt

et al., 2018) and that lower levels of self-efficacy (Ji et al., 2014; C. S. Park, 2019) and the use of online news and social media (V. Y. Chen & Masullo Chen, 2020; S. K. Lee et al., 2016) positively predict news overload.

One consequence of news overload is news avoidance and increased selective media use (A. M. Lee et al., 2019; C. S. Park, 2019; Song et al., 2017). The high amount of political news available is accompanied by a high amount of non-political media content, such as entertainment (van Aelst et al., 2017). Thus, political news represents only a small share of the total media supply. High-choice media environments facilitate avoiding unwanted content like news (Bode et al., 2017; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013). Choosing alternatives to political news is easily possible. Researchers of news avoidance have focused on either intentional or unintentional news avoidance (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). Unintentional news avoidance is conceptualized as a low frequency or absence of news use due to other content preferences (Karlsen et al., 2020; Strömbäck, 2017). Studies found a decline in news use in the last decades and observed increasing gaps between news seekers and news avoiders (Aalberg et al., 2013; Shehata et al., 2015; Strömbäck et al., 2013). While some citizens increasingly use news, others increasingly avoid them altogether. While unintentional news avoidance is not an active decision, intentional news avoidance results from a conscious choice (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*, 32% of the internet users actively avoided the news at least sometimes in 2019, pointing to an increase since 2017, when 29% said so (Newman et al., 2019). Both individual characteristics, including lower age and the predominant use of social media for news, and country-specific factors, such as low levels of press freedom, predict news avoidance (Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020; Villi et al., 2021).

Those who seek news can select precisely the content they want, such as news from alternative media, partisan and non-journalistic sources (Castro et al., 2021; Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019; Jakob, 2010). Against this background, the question arises as to whether news

use is fragmented in high-choice media environments (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Fragmentation—how the audience’s media use is divided into subsets—results from increased numbers of available options (Webster & Phalen, 1997). Selecting media content based on personal preferences leads to a small number of users being exposed to the same news content (Prior, 2007; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Especially the selection of media outlets and content that match one’s political beliefs and predispositions while avoiding challenging viewpoints is considered problematic. Citizens no longer exposed to opposing viewpoints would harm deliberation and opinion formation (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Garrett, 2009) and lead to a polarized citizenry (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2010; Sunstein, 2007). However, findings on opinion-based selective exposure are inconsistent. While some studies found evidence for politically motivated selective exposure (Barnidge et al., 2020; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), others did not (Kobayashi & Ikeda, 2009; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2015).

Another question concerning the selectivity and fragmentation of news use is whether individuals come across the same set of issues in high-choice media environments (H.-T. Chen, 2012; Porten-Cheé & Eilders, 2019). The concept of issue publics posits that the citizenry consists of groups concerned about particular issues (Converse, 1964; Krosnick, 1990). Members of an issue public are intensely interested in a set of issues or who attribute high importance to these issues, expose themselves to news about these issues and hold stronger opinions on these. They use news media selectively and expose themselves more to issues that belong to their issue public than to issues from other issue publics (Converse, 1964; Y. M. Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990). Recently, studies found indications for selective information seeking and avoidance, knowledge, and political behavior based on issue preference and issue public affiliation (Bolsen & Leeper, 2013; Y. M. Kim, 2009; Porten-Cheé & Eilders, 2019).

So far in this section, news use structures and related phenomena—news overload, news avoidance, and selective exposure—have informed about the use of news in current media

environments. Related to news use is news media trust—the use of news media depends, amongst others, on the extent to which citizens trust news media (Ladd, 2011; Prochazka, 2020; Strömbäck et al., 2020). Studies pointed to an overall decline in trust in the media over the last decades in some countries (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019; Strömbäck et al., 2020). Hanitzsch et al. (2018) observed a decline in news media trust from 1981 to 2014 in about half of the 50 countries studied. This finding aligns with Jones' (2018) observation of a decline in media trust from 68% in 1972 to 45% in 2018 in the USA. In the EU countries in 2019, 49% tended to trust TV and 46% the written press, both slightly declining since the previous years (European Commission, 2020). The share of those trusting news most of the time in 2021 was 44%, and thus slightly higher than in the last few years, which can be due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Newman et al., 2021). In Switzerland, trust in news media was still high compared to other countries in 2021: 51% said they trust news overall, and 58% trust the news they use (Udris & Eisenegger, 2021). This overview of selected news supply and use developments in high-choice media environments described the context in the dynamics of issue fatigue are likely to occur.

1.2 Media and Public Attention to Issues

Limited scholarly attention has so far been directed toward audience perceptions of extensively covered issues (e.g., Beyer & Figenschou, 2014, 2018). In contrast, the media's (extensive) attention to public issues has been studied more comprehensively and under various concepts, for instance, hypes (Chung, 2018; Vasterman, 2005; Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009) and storms (Boydston et al., 2011, 2014).

Regardless of the intensity, media attention to issues can be modeled in cycles (Brossard et al., 2004; Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Kolb, 2005; Waldherr, 2014). The issue-attention cycle refers to a pattern of media attention to an issue that consists of four to five phases. The first phase comprises the discovery of the issue, which is followed by a growth in coverage (second phase). After its boom (third phase), the coverage declines (fourth phase) before finally disappearing

(Kolb, 2005; Waldherr, 2012, 2014).⁴ This cycle can occur several times for the same issue (Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009).

Issue coverage differs in its duration, dynamics or volatility, and peak(s) (Geiss, 2018). When news coverage of an issue increases strongly over a period, a news wave is created (Geiss, 2011). A steep and high news wave triggered by a key event is considered a media hype (Beyer & Figenschou, 2018; Paimre & Harro-Loit, 2018; Vasterman, 2005). Vasterman (2005) defined a media hype as “a media-generated, wall-to-wall news wave, triggered by one specific event and enlarged by the self-reinforcing processes within the news production of the media” (p. 515). On the contrary, Wien and Elmelund-Præstekær (2009) conceived a media hype solely by the intensity of the issue’s news coverage. Boydston et al. (2014) addressed that the news media, in some cases, suddenly pay extensive attention to an issue, which they labeled a media storm—“sudden, high, and sustained media attention to an event or issue” (p. 509). They set three criteria for a media storm—the size of media attention conceptualized as the issue’s share of the overall news agenda over a period, the suddenness or explosiveness with which the news coverage increases, and duration longer than a day.

It is assumed that media attention drives public attention to extensively covered issues (Boydston et al., 2014; Chung, 2018; Paimre & Harro-Loit, 2018). The public pays increasing attention to these issues, perceives them as increasingly important, and engages with them, such as commenting on and searching for news. This is in line with agenda-setting theory, assuming that media attention to issues generally guides public attention to these issues (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Vice versa, public attention to and interest in issues impact media attention to these issues (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990, 1995; Moeller, 1999). According to Down’s (1972) issue-attention cycle, which includes not only the media’s

⁴ Kolb (2005) suggested two phases following the boom—the issue experiences a downturn, before it is marginalized.

but also the public's attention, the phases "pre-problem stage," "alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm," and "realizing the cost of significant progress" are followed by a "gradual decline of intense public interest" and, finally, "the post-problem-stage" (pp. 39–40). In the fourth phase, some people feel bored by the issue and pay less attention. Saturation and boredom effects and declining audience interest make issues disappear from the media agenda (Downs, 1972; Moeller, 1999; Neuman, 1990).

However, issues can remain on the media agenda for prolonged periods due to their ongoing topicality on the political agenda (Berkowitz, 1994), a lack of solutions and decisions (Kolb, 2005), and issue-related events that continue to bear news values (Stanyer, 2014)—despite decreasing audience interest. A few studies have addressed that at some point, the public loses interest in the issues that media continue to cover (Henry & Gordon, 2001; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Neuman, 1990). They elaborated on public boredom and saturation effects and investigated them by measuring the audience's issue importance. Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) argued that the audience becomes saturated from receiving redundant messages for social problems. Evidence for saturation effects for several issues in the US from 1945 to 1980 was provided by Neuman (1990). Similarly, Henry and Gordon (2001) observed that, after a phase of increasing interest in the air quality issue in Atlanta in 1998, the audience attributed less importance to the issue due to boredom and the perception of a lack of novelty of the messages about the issue.

These findings imply that an issue can remain on the media agenda, although the public no longer approves of the issue. However, it remains unclear how the audience thinks, feels, and behaves toward issues extensively covered during a prolonged period. If the audience develops fatigue from the issue and reduces their attention to its media coverage, their knowledge about it could decrease. Research has not yet comprehensively studied the audience's perspective on extensively covered issues.

1.3 Informed Citizens and the Role of News Media

That citizens pay attention to issues in the news to become informed is essential from a democracy theory perspective. Being informed allows citizens to make informed and responsible choices, build and hold stable, meaningful attitudes, participate in politics, and control the government (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Delli Carpini, 2000; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). The news media play a central role in transmitting political information, informing citizens, and forming a public opinion (Holbert, 2005; Scammell & Semetko, 2000). Hence, fatigue and resulting avoidance of ongoing political news issues would pose problems. However, normative democracy understandings differ in their demands on citizens and the news media's role (Ferree et al., 2002; Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; Strömbäck, 2005). Therefore, the demands of three normative democratic perspectives—deliberative, participatory, and competitive—and scholarly opinions will be described in the following.

Deliberative understandings of democracy (Elster, 1998; Fishkin, 2009; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004) pose comparatively high demands on how citizens should be informed about current affairs (Strömbäck, 2005). They emphasize the importance of discourse and reasoning in collective decision-making (Cohen, 2009; Scammell, 2000; Vitale, 2006). The aim is to reach a public opinion and legitimate collective decisions (Cohen, 2009; Fishkin, 2009). Therefore, citizens discuss public issues in the public sphere through mediated and interpersonal discussions (Habermas, 1974, 2006; J. Kim et al., 1999). Discussions should be equal, rational, respectful, dialogue-oriented, lead to agreement (Elster, 1998; Ferree et al., 2002; Strömbäck, 2005) and take place at different levels, for instance, between citizens and between citizens and their representatives (Strömbäck, 2005). Therefore, citizens must be interested and engaged in politics. They need to seek information to understand and discuss political issues in line with the deliberative criteria (Strömbäck, 2005). The deliberative perspective suggests that the news media provide extensive coverage of current issues and diverse viewpoints by groups in society

and foster debates about these issues among citizens and the state (Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; Strömbäck, 2005). Media coverage needs to be factual, diverse in speakers, balanced in positions, and trustworthy. In addition, deliberative democracy emphasizes the news media's role in actively fostering integrative discussions which fulfill the requirements of deliberation among all citizens.

Participatory democracy equally expects citizens to be well informed (Ferree et al., 2002; Scammell, 2000; Strömbäck, 2005). Citizens should actively participate in public life and decisions and discuss their needs and opinions (Barber, 1984; Elstub, 2018; Vitale, 2006). Participatory democracy highlights that participation in the form of voting is not sufficient. Instead, citizens should participate at different levels, for instance, in interpersonal discussions, at the workplace, or in civic organizations. While dialogue and communication are necessary for participation (Barber, 1984; Fishkin, 2009; Vitale, 2006), the quality and criteria of discourse are not as central as in deliberative understandings of democracy (Cohen, 2009; Ferree et al., 2002; Scammell, 2000; see also Vitale, 2006). However, participatory democracy equally expects citizens to be informed and active (Ferree et al., 2002; Strömbäck, 2005). They need to be interested in and knowledgeable about current political issues and alternatives and hold their own opinions. The news media have an inclusive and empowering function (Ferree et al., 2002; Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; Strömbäck, 2005). Therefore, the news media must integrate the citizens' demands and enable them to set issues on the media agenda. In addition, their political news coverage should mobilize citizens and encourage them to participate.

Competitive understandings of democracy make lower demands on citizens' participation and information behavior than deliberative and participatory democracy (Strömbäck, 2005). Competitive democracy emphasizes civic liberties as the key of democracy; citizens participate in elections and choose among competing political actors and parties (Schumpeter, 1994; Strömbäck, 2005). While political actors are active, citizens have only a reactive role (Ferree et

al., 2002; Strömbäck, 2005). By participating in elections, they express their will and exert power on the government (Sartori, 1987). Thus, citizens should be informed about the most important current problems and developments in society, political alternatives, and how political actors perform. To participate in elections, they need to hold opinions and assess the current political situation (Ferree et al., 2002; Strömbäck, 2005). However, they do not need to participate in discussions of various policy issues (Schumpeter, 1994; Strömbäck, 2005). Only some knowledgeable citizens take the role of experts and contribute to public discourse. According to competitive understandings, the news media should provide citizens with information about current political issues and different political positions (Strömbäck, 2005). Information should be trustworthy for citizens to make decisions. The news media should especially monitor and control the political elites (Scammell, 2000). They should encourage dialogue among the informed experts (Ferree et al., 2002).

While many political communication scholars argued that the better citizens are informed, the better functioning is a democracy (e.g., Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Castro et al., 2021; Delli Carpini, 2000), others proposed lower demands on citizens (Graber, 2003; Schudson, 2002; Zaller, 2003). According to Schudson (2002) and Zaller (2003), democracy cannot require citizens to be informed and competent about a wide range of issues. Instead, expectations on citizens should be plausible and consider their private lives. Schudson (2002) suggested the *monitorial* rather than the *informed* citizen. The concept of the *Monitorial Citizen* suggests that citizens are obliged to know enough to participate intelligently in public affairs. However, they can be monitorial and defensive rather than informed and proactive. Watchfully scanning and surveilling the informational environment is sufficient to be alerted on potentially relevant issues. Active engagement in information seeking and deliberative discussions are not necessary. Similarly, Zaller (2003) argued that it is sufficient for citizens to monitor their environment to gather the necessary information. Instead of the *full news standard*, he

suggested the *Burglar Alarm News Standard*. Accordingly, the news media alert citizens to acute problems only rather than to various issues. Zaller stated that intensive and dramatic coverage of essential issues across all channels catches citizens' attention, while less urgent issues should receive less attention. In sum, normative democracy theories and political communication scholars vary in their expectations of the informed citizenry and the news media's role therefor.

Especially competitive understandings of democracy emphasize that the news media should provide information citizens can trust and base their actions on (Strömbäck, 2005). Communication researchers generally argue that the news media can only fulfill their information function if citizens trust news media (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017; Ladd, 2011; Strömbäck et al., 2020; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Thus, the news media's role for an informed citizenry is dependent on how citizens perceive and evaluate news media (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Citizens are uncertain about real-world happenings and cannot verify all information they receive from the news media (Strömbäck et al., 2020; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). In addition, they cannot use all media sources available. Therefore, they should use predominantly those media they trust to provide them with accurate information.

In addition, other attitudes toward news media, for instance, media skepticism (Tsfati, 2003), credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986), and media quality evaluations (Wolling, 2009), matter for how the news media fulfill their information function. The transfer of David Easton's (1965, 1975) concept of political support to news media support (Fawzi & Obermaier, 2019) allows to include these attitudes. Political support denotes "a reflection of orientations towards the nation-state, its agencies and actors" (Norris, 2017, p. 19). Easton (1975) defined political support as an attitude, positive or negative. Citizens can support political objects; support ranges from specific to diffuse. Specific support is directed toward politicians, i.e., authorities and representatives. It refers to satisfaction with their performance and emerges from recent

experiences (Easton, 1975; Norris, 2017). Diffuse support as a “generalized attachment” (Easton, 1975, p. 444) is more abstract and comprises trust and legitimacy (Easton, 1975). In contrast to specific support—evaluations of output and performance—, which is variable over time, diffuse support is more consistent. Thus, it is possible that citizens disagree with the politicians’ decisions (specific support) for some issues, while they still find them and their affiliation trustworthy (diffuse support). However, if discontentment with politicians’ performances continues, it can decrease diffuse support. Over time, single evaluations become detached from the performances and turn into a generalized attachment to responsible politicians. These mechanisms can be applied to news media (see Fawzi & Obermaier, 2019). Specific news media support, such as news coverage quality evaluations, can, over time, become detached from direct experiences with news coverage and turn into more diffuse support for news media, such as trust or skepticism. Thus, not only trust in news media, but news media support ranging from specific to diffuse is considered relevant for how the news media can inform the public.

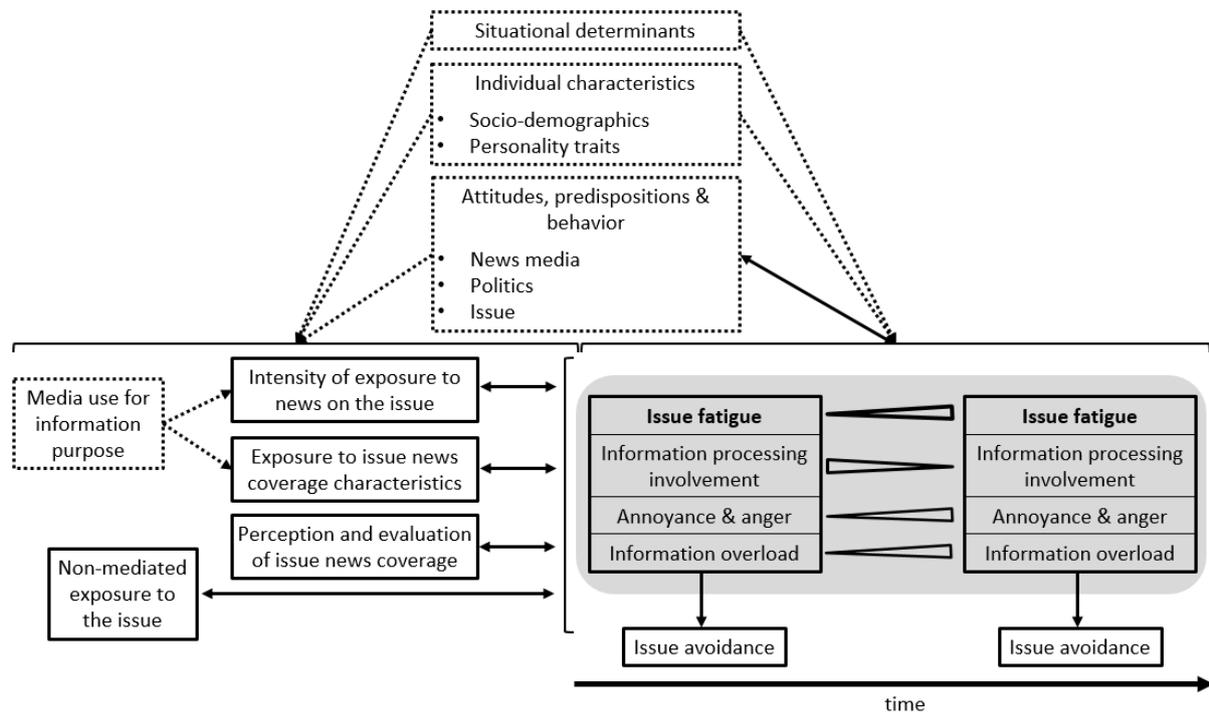
As becomes apparent from expectations of how well citizens should be informed according to normative democracy theories, interpersonal discussions are another democratically relevant source of political information. Particularly deliberative understandings of democracy highlight the importance of deliberative political conversations (J. Kim et al., 1999). Conversations as structured deliberation are public, formalized, and rational (Conover & Creve, 2002; Scheufele, 2000; Searing et al., 2007). Informal conversations about politics, on the contrary, are not tied to formal settings and include discussions and arguments performed voluntarily, casually, and spontaneously with other individuals (J. Kim et al., 1999; Wyatt et al., 2000). However, the value of informal political talk for democracy is disputed (e.g., Schudson, 1997).

1.4 The Dynamics of Issue Fatigue

The previous sections pointed to important features of high-choice media environments, in which the dynamics of audience fatigue from ongoing issues likely occur. Second, it became apparent that the audience's perspective on extensively covered issues during a prolonged period has not yet been comprehensively studied. The last section presented normative perspectives on informed citizens and the role of news media therefor. Against this background, the following sections describe the dynamics of issue fatigue. The guiding assumption is that news users become fatigued from issues extensively covered by the news media for a prolonged period and avoid further information.

Figure 1 depicts the assumed dynamics of issue fatigue, more precisely, potential causes and consequences at the individual level.⁵ While the present dissertation investigates some of the displayed relationships, others are empirically disregarded and remain for further research. Since the five papers underlying this dissertation address several parts of issue fatigue's dynamics in detail, these parts will not be described fully in the following sections. The aim is to provide an overview of issue fatigue's dynamics and to position the central research questions and the papers (Section 1.5).

⁵ Influences and effects beyond the individual level, e.g., the media system, are neither considered in the model nor in the present dissertation generally.

Figure 1*Issue Fatigue's Dynamics*

Note. The model should be read from left to right. Directional arrows represent one-directional effects (except for the timeline); bi-directional arrows represent reciprocal effects. Black arrows represent direct effects on and of issue fatigue and its emergence. Dotted lines and boxes represent indirect effects and causes, respectively.

1.4.1 Issue Fatigue's Dimensions

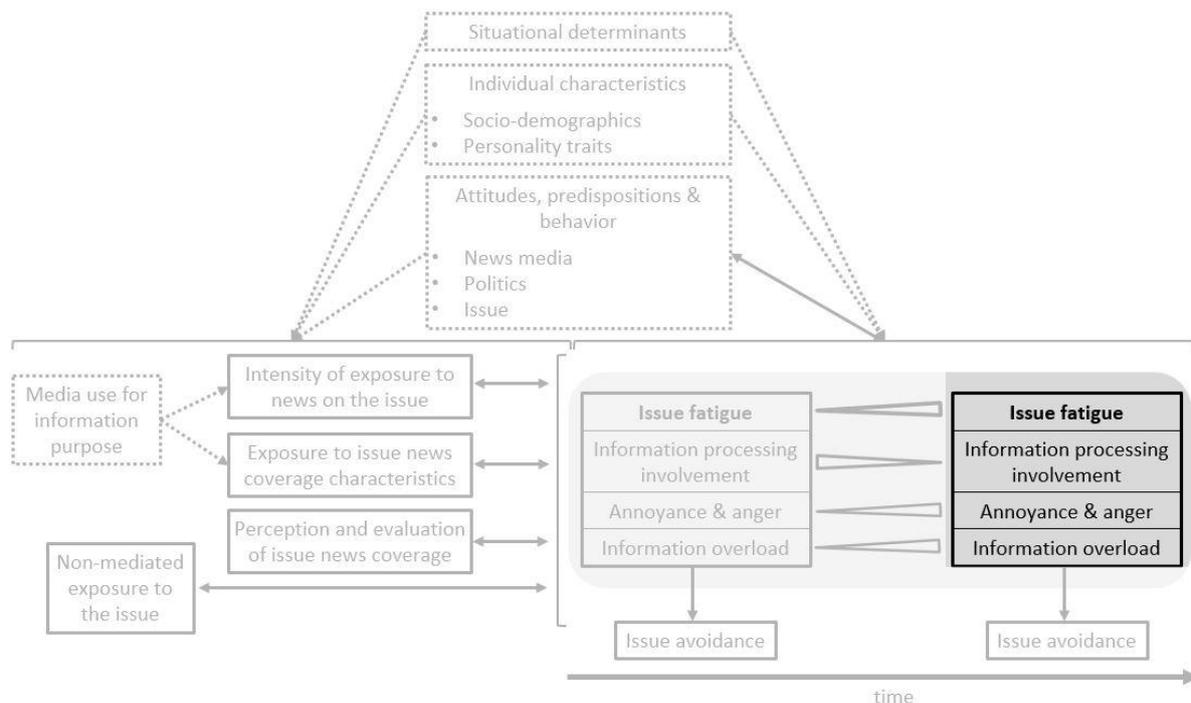
In the following, the core of the issue fatigue concept will be explained. Issue fatigue denotes an individual's negative state that emerges from overexposure to an issue that is covered intensively by the news media during weeks or months (see Paper I). Research has so far dealt with adverse effects, e.g., exhaustion, decreased credibility, from repeated exposure to several media stimuli—health messages (Keating & Galper, 2021; S. Kim & So, 2018; So et al., 2017), advertising (Corkindale & Newall, 1978; Kinnucan et al., 1993), and persuasive political messages, e.g., campaign posters (Ernst et al., 2017; Koch & Zerback, 2013). Compassion fatigue (Kinnick et al., 1996; Moeller, 1999) and news overload (Ji et al., 2014; York, 2013) can be considered overexposure effects resulting from news exposure. However, they do not represent effects from repeated exposure to the same stimulus, such as an advert. Based on

findings on these overexposure effects, it is assumed that repeated exposure to the same political issue at some point causes negative cognitive and affective responses. Transferring these overexposure effects to ongoing issues in the news results in three conceptual dimensions of issue fatigue (see Figure 2): decreased information processing involvement, increased negative emotions of anger and annoyance, and increased information overload regarding the issue.

- Paper I explains issue fatigue's theoretical conceptualization, notably its dimensions, in more detail.

Figure 2

Issue Fatigue's Dimensions



1.4.2 Issue Fatigue's Causes

Issue fatigue has several direct causes (see Figure 3). One necessary condition for its emergence is the exposure to the issue. In addition to direct contacts with the issue, such as personal experience and interpersonal conversations about the issue online and offline, people encounter the issue during their exposure to offline and online media outlets, social media, and

alternative media. For most people, content from professional offline and online news media is the primary source of information on current affairs news (Geiger, 2019; Mitchell, 2018; Newman et al., 2017). Users are exposed to content from professional news outlets directly or indirectly when published and shared on social media, particularly on *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter* (Karnowski et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2021; Shearer & Mitchell, 2021).

- Paper II can be positioned here; it explores cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to repeated contact with an issue during several weeks.

Taking a closer look at the exposure to the issue indicates that several dimensions of exposure need to be differentiated. The first dimension is the intensity of exposure. Media-related overexposure and fatigue phenomena, for instance, health message fatigue (So et al., 2017) and information or news overload (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; A. M. Lee et al., 2019; York, 2013), suggest that the intensity of exposure to the stimulus predicts overexposure effects. Studies on advertising wearout posit more precisely that three intensity-related factors are relevant for a shift in the stimulus' evaluation into a negative direction—the frequency of exposure, the intervals between the exposure situations, and the overall duration of exposure (Burke & Edell, 1986; Corkindale & Newall, 1978).

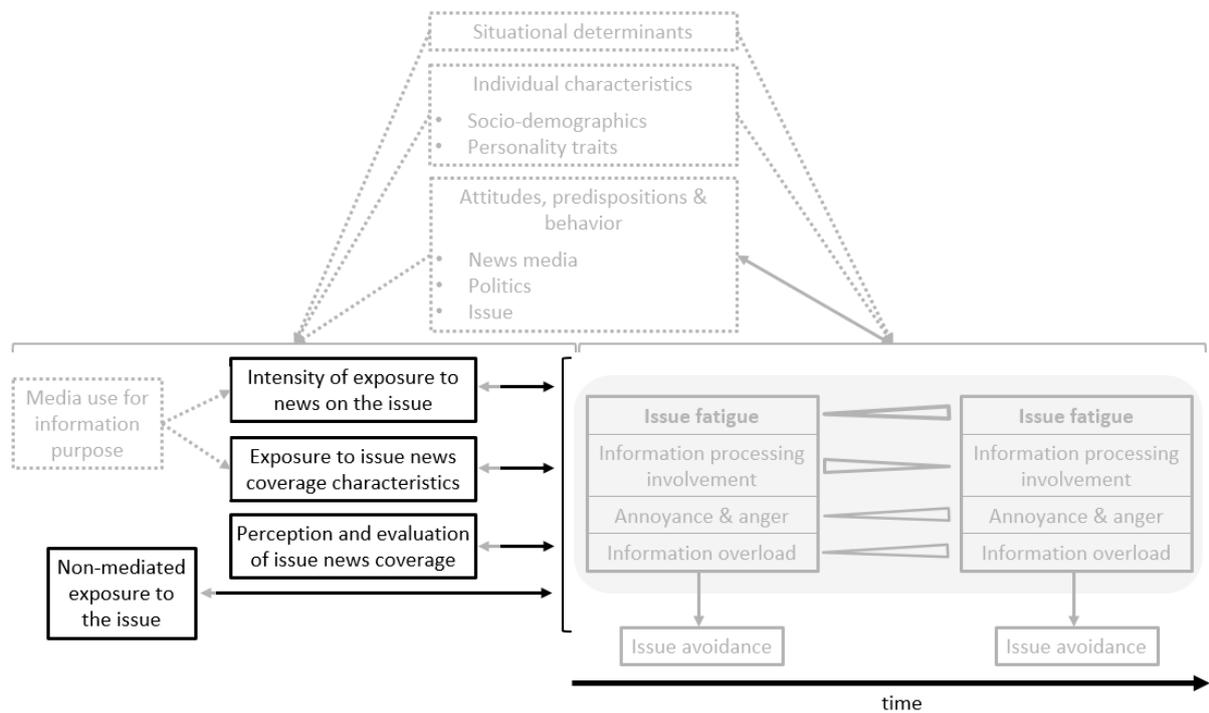
In addition, the characteristics of the news coverage the individuals are exposed to might have an impact. For example, redundant information cause fatigue from health messages (So et al., 2017); conflict rather than solution-centered information and sensationalism result in compassion fatigue (Kinnick et al., 1996; Moeller, 1999). Furthermore, effects of news coverage characteristics on issue fatigue's dimensions are plausible. First, research on information overload points to effects of information characteristics, such as complexity and ambiguity (Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012; S. C. Schneider, 1987). Second, the motivation to process information on the issue (Matthes, 2013) is likely determined by the characteristics of

the information. Third, political news generally can provoke negative affective reactions (see Schemer, 2014), and thus possibly anger and annoyance associated with the issue.

- Paper V is positioned here; it investigates the effects of exposure intensity and news coverage characteristics on issue fatigue.

A third media coverage-related aspect potentially contributing to issue fatigue is the perception and evaluation of news coverage on the issue. Previous approaches to issue fatigue showed that issue fatigue relates to a negative perception and evaluation of the issue's news coverage regarding quality, credibility, and impartiality (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016). Since users encounter the issue via news reports for a period before becoming fatigued, negative perceptions and evaluations of the issue's news coverage likely precede and affect their stance toward the issue. However, negative news coverage and perceptions are not necessary conditions for issue fatigue. It is equally possible that an individual becomes fatigued from the ongoing issue due to overly frequent exposure while evaluating its news coverage positively (see Paper II).

- Paper IV is positioned here; it sheds light on the relationship between issue fatigue and news coverage perceptions and evaluations.

Figure 3*Issue Fatigue's Direct Causes*

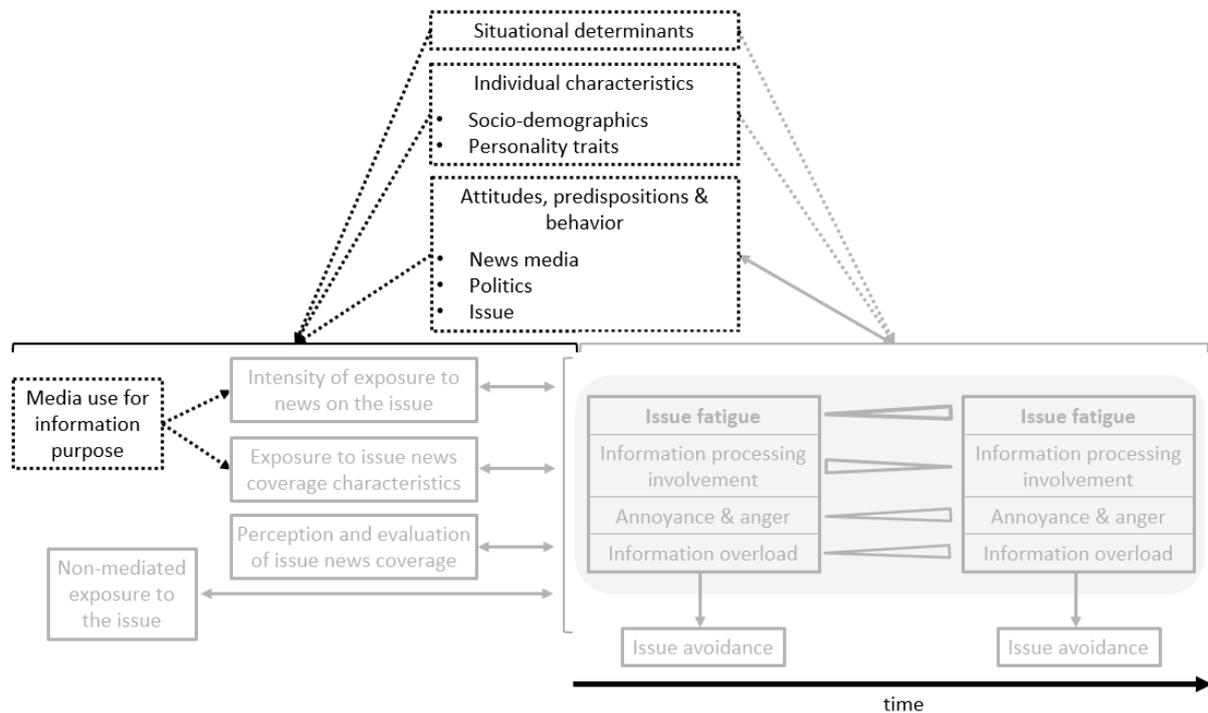
In addition, secondary factors determine issue fatigue indirectly (see Figure 4). How frequently and which types of news media, social media, and alternative media an individual uses for information purposes are contingent on, first, sociodemographic characteristics, personality, and other relatively stable traits, such as political self-efficacy and the perceived duty to remain informed (Hughes et al., 2012; Müller & Schulz, 2021; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013).⁶ Second, attitudes and predispositions determine news use. Political interest (Strömbäck et al., 2013; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013), political trust (Aarts et al., 2012; Strömbäck et al., 2015), and news media trust (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019; see also Strömbäck et al., 2020) affect news media use frequency and the choice of news sources. Thus, sociodemographic characteristics, traits, and attitudes determine news use and,

⁶ Beyond the individual level, structural factors, such as the supply of news in the media system, and the situational context, determine news exposure (Aalberg et al. 2012; Strömbäck et al. 2020). These will not be considered further.

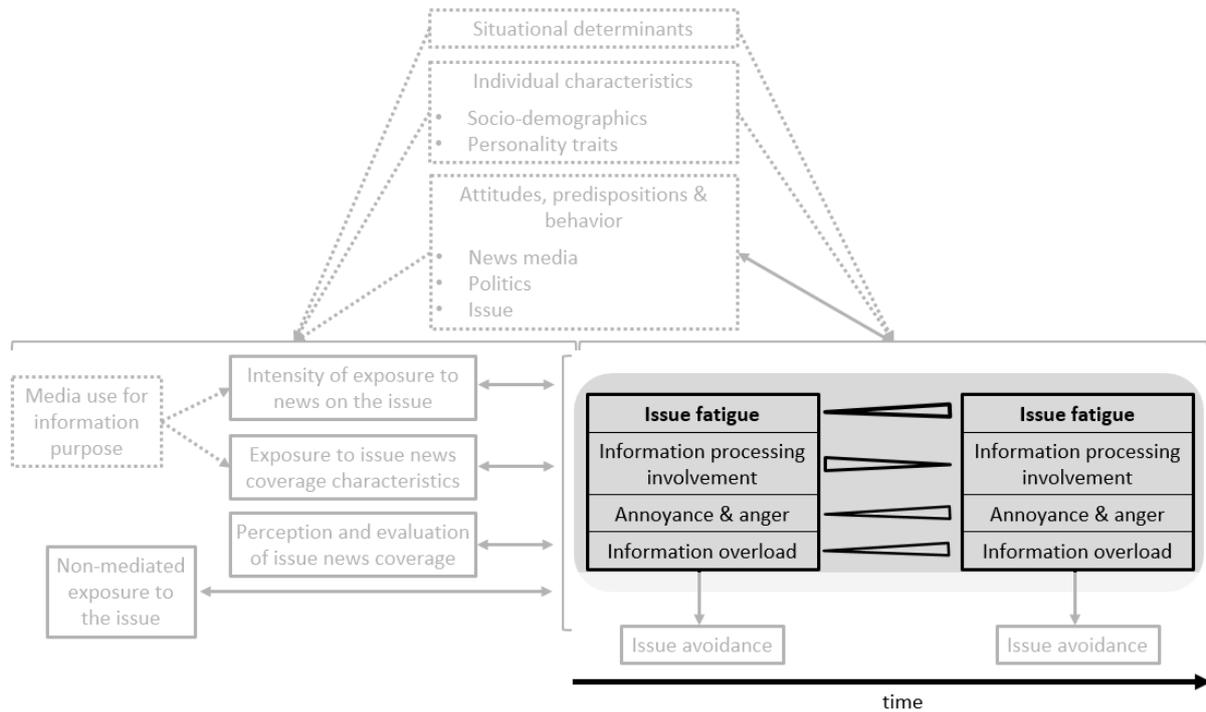
in turn, exposure to the ongoing issue.⁷ Similarly, sociodemographic and other characteristics, including political efficacy and knowledge, influence how often individuals talk about politics with others offline and online (Gerber et al., 2012; Stromer-Galley, 2002), and thus potentially how they encounter the issue.

Furthermore, issue predispositions, e.g., interest in the issue and personal or general issue importance (Donnerstag, 1996; Y. M. Kim, 2008, 2009), potentially impact how frequently an individual comes across the issue. For example, if an individual does not consider an issue relevant, their exposure to information on the issue is expected to be initially limited. Hence, a minimum level of perceived issue relevance is a precondition for issue fatigue to emerge. Alternatively to the intended exposure, frequent incidental exposure to the issue in the news and particularly on social media (Feezell, 2018; Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018) can lead to issue fatigue.

⁷ In the issue fatigue context, the terms *news use* and *news exposure* are used. Based on Eveland et al. (2009), *news use* includes *news exposure*. While *news use* is used to refer to generally turning to news, *news exposure* is used in the context of effects from exposure to news content.

Figure 4*Issue Fatigue's Indirect Causes**1.4.3 Issue Fatigue's Emergence Process*

In the beginning, the negative fatigue-related emotions and information overload are absent or on a low level, and a certain level of information processing involvement is present. Over time, the intensity of exposure to the issue, news coverage characteristics, and perceptions and evaluations of the issue's news coverage potentially cause the emergence of issue fatigue. Issue fatigue's dimensions develop throughout repeated exposure (see Figure 5): Once associated with the issue, the emotions of annoyance and anger are more accessible in mind, can be activated quickly and automatically when individuals are re-exposed to it (Fazio, 1990; Klauer, 1997), and increase. Simultaneously, the users' motivation to process information on the issue decreases when they perceive the issue as less novel, interesting, and stimulating, similar to other repetition and overexposure effects (Berlyne, 1970; So et al., 2017; Stang, 1975). Cumulative exposure to information on the issue can cause overload regarding the issue, similar to news overload in general (Ji et al., 2014; A. M. Lee et al., 2019; Song et al., 2017).

Figure 5*Issue Fatigue's Emergence Process*

Issue fatigue's emergence process is contingent on individual characteristics, attitudes, and predispositions. For example, news enjoyment moderates the effects of news exposure on news overload (York, 2013). Hence, such characteristics might affect issue fatigue's emergence. In addition, political attitudes, such as dissatisfaction with issue-related policies (Arlt et al., 2020), potentially influence the emergence of fatigue from the ongoing news issue. Lastly, those with high levels of personal concernment, issue importance, and a positive attitude toward the issue might become less easily fatigued; their motivation to process information on the issue (Donnerstag, 1996) might remain higher, and they might feel less anger and annoyance (Pe & Kuppens, 2012) when frequently re-exposed to the issue than less involved and less positive users.

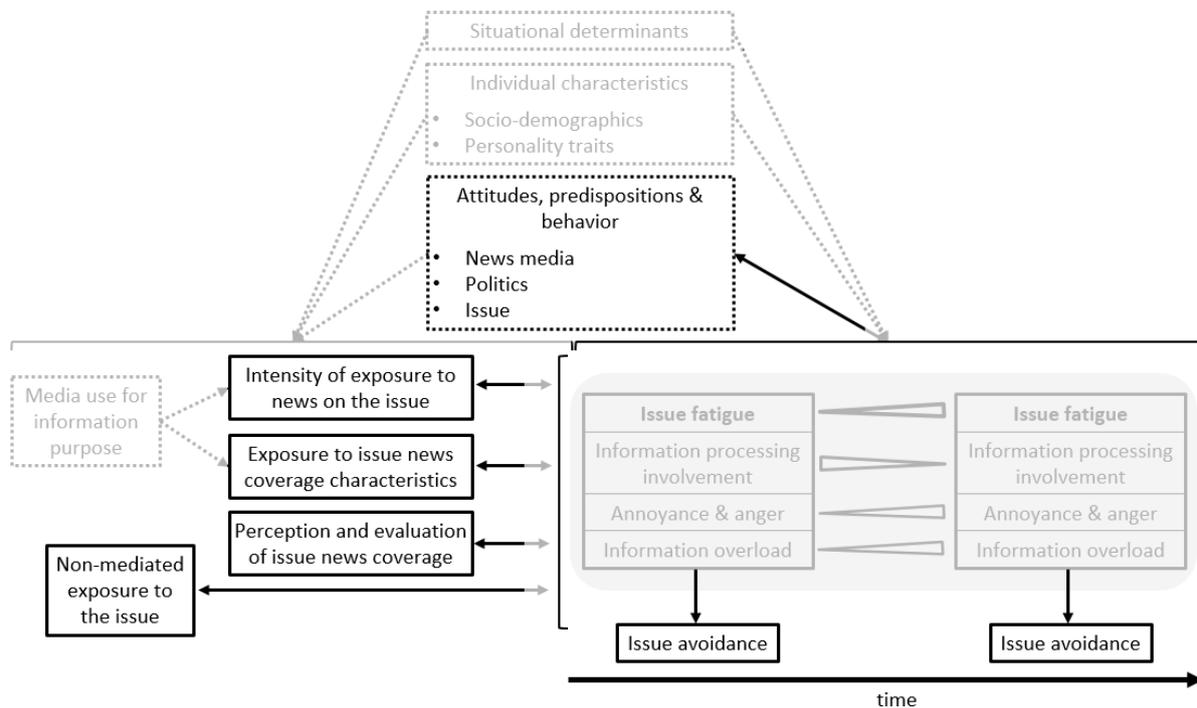
1.4.4 Issue Fatigue's Consequences

The cognitive and emotional state of issue fatigue is likely to have several consequences for the individual (see Figure 6). When a stimulus, such as an issue, is appraised as unfavorable, avoidance is a plausible consequence (Alexopoulos & Ric, 2007; Frijda, 2004). The negative cognitive and affective dimensions of issue fatigue are likely to cause a subsequent avoidance of the issue, for instance, during media exposure and interpersonal discussions.

- Paper III is positioned here; it investigates whether issue fatigue leads to issue avoidance.

Issue fatigue has other potential consequences on attitudes toward the issue, news media, and politics. Priming effects (Domke et al., 1998; Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1997) suggest that issue fatigue can affect perceptions and evaluations of news media and politics. News users could use their fatigue from the prominent issue in the news as a benchmark when evaluating news media and politics.

- Paper IV is positioned here; it investigates reciprocal effects between issue fatigue and news media evaluations.

Figure 6*Issue Fatigue's Consequences*

Personality traits and situational determinants can moderate how issue fatigue leads to issue avoidance. For example, the perceived duty to maintain informed (McCombs & Poindexter, 1983; Poindexter & McCombs, 2001) and situational determinants such as being obliged to exposure for social or work-related reasons can inhibit avoiding the issue despite issue fatigue. Avoidance, in turn, has further potential consequences, such as a decrease in knowledge about the issue, since news exposure and interpersonal discussions increase political knowledge (Liu et al., 2013; Scheufele, 2000). However, this dissertation does not study these aspects. Lastly, if issue fatigue leads to issue avoidance, the intensity of exposure to news on the issue and, consequently, to news coverage characteristics are reduced.

1.5 Research Questions and Corresponding Papers

Several research questions arise from the assumed dynamics of issue fatigue that require further elaboration and empirical investigation. The five papers of this dissertation address

central research questions on issue fatigue's core, causes, and consequences.

The first paper (**Paper I**) concerns the phenomenon of issue fatigue overall, including its dimensions, causes, and consequences. Accordingly, it addresses the following research question:

RQ1: *How can the phenomenon of issue fatigue be theoretically conceptualized?*

This conceptual paper aims to explain issue fatigue's relevance, position it in communication research, derive its dimensions from theory and previous research, and outline its causes, consequences, and dynamics. Thereby, it provides theoretical assumptions to be tested by the subsequent empirically oriented papers.

The second paper (**Paper II**) explores the effects of news users' repeated exposure to the issue during a period. Accordingly, it provides answers to the following research question:

RQ2: *What happens to news users when they are exposed frequently to news on the same issue over a prolonged period?*

The qualitative exploratory approach within this paper serves to identify how repeated exposure to the issue affects news media users—what cognitions, emotions, and behavior regarding the issue and its news coverage occur over time. The findings inform about issue fatigue and its correlates and provide the basis for quantitative analyses in the following papers.

The third paper (**Paper III**) focuses on issue fatigue's potential direct behavioral consequences and, accordingly, addresses the following research question:

RQ3: *How does issue fatigue relate to issue-specific avoidance behavior?*

This paper tests the theoretical assumption that issue fatigue leads to avoidance of the issue and examines indications from Paper II—that issue avoidance occurs along with repeated exposure—through a quantitative analysis. The paper focuses on the potential direct consequences of issue fatigue and sheds light on how it relates to issue-specific avoidance

behavior.

The fourth paper (**Paper IV**) investigates reciprocal effects of issue fatigue and news media coverage evaluations and, thereby, both consequences and causes of issue fatigue. It addresses the following research question:

RQ4: *How do issue fatigue and evaluations of news coverage relate to one another?*

This paper focuses on negative news coverage evaluations as a consequence of issue fatigue. It is relevant for news media and journalists to know whether fatigue from ongoing news issues affects the audience's news media evaluations, especially at times when the news media face many challenges in informing the public, such as declining trust and news avoidance (see Section 1.1). In addition, Paper IV considers negative perceptions and evaluations of the issue's news coverage as a cause of issue fatigue.

The fifth paper (**Paper V**) equally addresses the causes of issue fatigue. Based on the theoretical assumption that issue fatigue is mainly rooted in exposure to news on the issue and to test the effects from repeated exposure found by Paper II quantitatively, it aims to test two assumed causes of issue fatigue—the intensity of exposure to news coverage on the issue and exposure to characteristics of the issue's news coverage. The following research question is addressed:

RQ5: *How does exposure to news coverage on the issue lead to issue fatigue?*

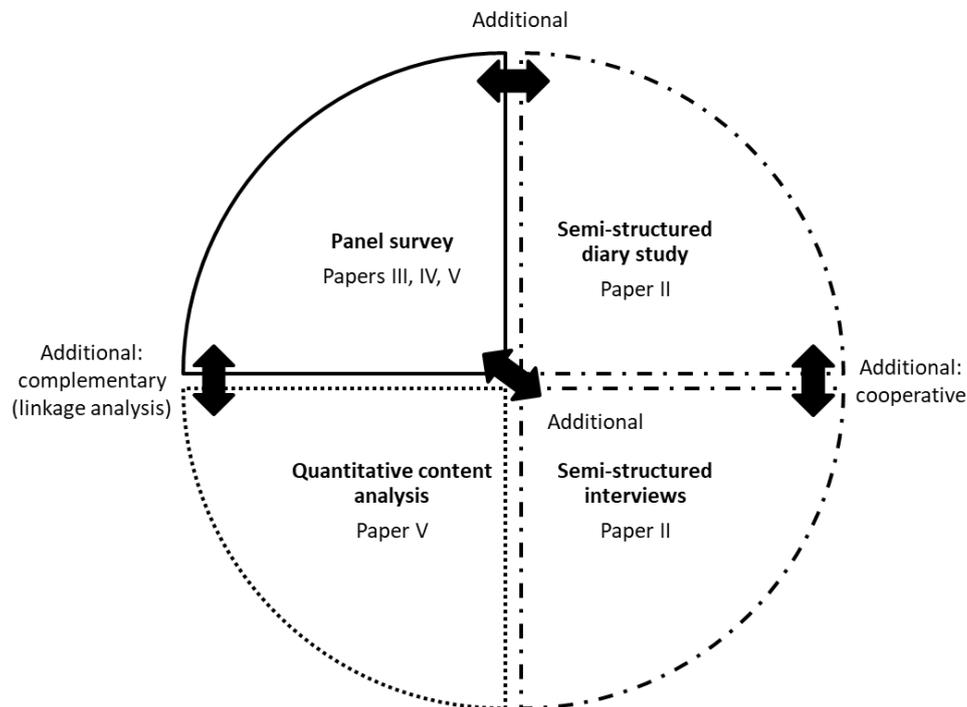
A linkage analysis tests the effects of content characteristics and exposure intensity on issue fatigue. From a journalistic perspective, knowledge on how the intensity of coverage and characteristics of their reporting contribute to issue fatigue can help to prevent issue fatigue among the audience. In contrast to the other papers, this paper does not focus on the individual's perceptions, evaluations, and behavior regarding the issue but takes the issue's media coverage as an independent variable.

Questions about which individual characteristics influence, first, issue fatigue's emergence, and second, how issue fatigue leads to issue avoidance are not addressed empirically within this dissertation. The same applies to the influence of situational determinants on the issue fatigue emergence process and how issue fatigue leads to avoidance. How situational determinants, individual characteristics, attitudes, and news media use for information purposes influence the direct determinants of issue fatigue are secondary questions, which cannot be considered within this dissertation either.

1.6 Research Design

A longitudinal multi-methods design serves to approach the research questions on issue fatigue's dynamics. In the first step, however, issue fatigue is theoretically conceptualized (Paper I). Then, the subsequent studies test some of the derived assumptions empirically. The empirical methods applied within the multi-method approach fulfill different functions and relate to one another structurally in different ways (see Kalch & Bilandzic, 2013; Loosen & Scholl, 2011, 2012), as depicted in Figure 7.⁸

⁸ The research instruments (two panel questionnaires, interview guideline, diary questionnaire, supplemental material of the qualitative studies, and the codebook) are provided in an online appendix, which is available via the following link <https://drive.switch.ch/index.php/s/guqklvdVL34bsTv> (password: Diss_GG).

Figure 7*Multi-Method Approach*

A qualitative research design explores the effects of repeated exposure to the issue over a period. A semi-structured diary study and semi-structured interviews are used to capture profoundly and comprehensively what happens to news users when frequently re-exposed to the same news issue over time, as addressed by Paper II. Since the two studies focus on the same part of issue fatigue's dynamics but measure relevant aspects differently, they are of equal value for the analysis and have additive, cooperative functions (see Kalch & Bilandzic, 2013; Loosen & Scholl, 2011, 2012). The interviews complement the diary study because they ask for further elaborations on the answers given in the diary. The diary study complements the interviews because it accounts in particular for the time dimension. In addition, the diary entries are the basis for the selection of participants for the interviews. After data collection, the data are linked on a case-by-case basis for analysis (see Ortnner, 2018).

In addition, panel surveys test causal relations between issue fatigue and its presumed causes and consequences, as addressed by Papers III, IV, and V. Longitudinal data are better suited for drawing causal inference than cross-sectional data because they provide between and within variation for the analysis, and change can be differentiated from random error (Andreß et al., 2013; Singer & Willett, 2003). Temporal changes on the aggregate and individual level of issue fatigue and its correlates can thus be observed, which is essential because issue fatigue emerges over time.

The semi-structured studies and the panel survey are in an additional relationship. While qualitative studies focus only on some aspects of issue fatigue's dynamics (see Paper II), the panel survey fulfills additional functions (see Kalch & Bilandzic, 2013; Loosen & Scholl, 2011), which the qualitative studies cannot account for due to their semi-structured character—measuring causal relations between issue fatigue and its determinants and effects. The research instruments and data collection processes are independent of one another.⁹ Finally, the findings from the semi-structured studies help to identify hypotheses to be tested quantitatively using the panel data.

In addition, a media content analysis measures potential causes of issue fatigue (see Paper V). Since the panel survey and the content analysis measure different aspects of issue fatigue's dynamics, they complement each other. Within a linkage analysis, the methods are combined at the data analysis level to estimate the effects of media content (de Vreese et al., 2017; Schuck et al., 2016) on issue fatigue. Although the media content analysis and the semi-structured diary study and interviews tap on aspects of issue fatigue's dynamics, their foci are different, and the data collection processes are not linked to one another.

⁹ However, the participants of the qualitative studies are recruited from the panel survey.

The data were collected for the Brexit issue in spring 2019, which was the second most important issue in Switzerland in 2019 (J. Schneider & Eisenegger, 2020). In addition, the panel survey was conducted a second time in autumn 2020 for the Limitation Initiative—a referendum for limited immigration to Switzerland. Out of the five referendum issues from autumn 2020, this issue received the most attention from news media (Udris, 2020).

2 Papers

2.1 Paper I

Negative effects of long-lasting media attention to public issues on recipients:

Conceptualizing issue fatigue

A significant amount of political communication research is grounded in the dynamics of the media's and the public's attention to public issues, assuming that the news media draw the public's attention to issues, thereby fostering an informed and participating citizenry. However, there is evidence from several countries that this mechanism is disrupted for issues that are intensively covered for a considerably long period of time. Against this background, this article scrutinizes the idea that recipients become fatigued by long-lasting news media coverage of specific issues, and finally avoid them. In doing so, it develops a conceptualization of recipients' *issue fatigue*.

Keywords: overexposure; media avoidance; news media exposure; news issues; issue fatigue

Under review in *Studies in Communication Sciences (ScomS)*. Deviations from the otherwise underlying standards of this dissertation are due to the journal's standards and requirements. Page numbers refer to the dissertation document.

1 Introduction

The coronavirus, Brexit, Donald Trump's presidency – are all issues of social and political relevance that are frequently covered by the news media, sometimes to the extent that people may feel bored or fatigued. In the United Kingdom (UK), news avoidance has increased driven by boredom, anger, or sadness over the ongoing Brexit issue (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019). Similarly, coronavirus news fatigue is publicly discussed. While the issue continues to be topical and highly relevant, public attention to news on it has declined (Bedingfield, 2020; Burack, 2020).

A significant amount of research has studied the mechanisms of public attention to issues. As one of the central approaches, the idea of issue attention cycles shows that media attention to issues follows a distinctive five-stage pattern over time: the pre-problem stage, alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm, realizing the costs of significant progress, gradual decline of intense public interest, and the post problem-stage (Downs, 1972). In stage four (gradual decline of intense public interest), recipients are less interested in the issue and they start to avoid it. In addition, the emergence of news waves or hypes related to key events has been studied (Vasterman, 2005; Waldherr, 2014), i.e., an (often sudden) increase in media attention to an issue and continuous coverage over a certain time (Geiss, 2011).

While research on the media issue attention cycles and news waves has assumed that media coverage of an issue also drives public attention, and vice versa (Geiss, 2011, 2015), the effects that intensive and long-lasting coverage of one news issue have on people's mindsets concerning the issue remains unclear.

Research in neighboring disciplines has demonstrated that individuals become fatigued from health messages (So, Kim, & Cohen, 2017) and worn out by advertising (Craig, Sternthal, & Leavitt, 1976) when exposed too often. Similar mechanisms have been found for social problems and human interest stories during media hypes; parts of the population become

chronically fatigued and avoid these issues (Beyer & Figenschou, 2014; Kinnick, Krugman, & Cameron, 1996). Given the regular incidence of ongoing political issues in the news, some researchers have posited that news recipients become fatigued by ongoing news issues as well (Author, 2014; Author, 2016).

However, research has not yet conceptualized thoroughly fatigue from news issues. This is a special case of fatigue which is all the more relevant, since fatigue in the news media environment has detrimental consequences that go beyond those of advertising wearout and health message fatigue. First, issue fatigue occurs with issues that are particularly important for politics and society and that stay on the political agenda for a long time, such as Brexit, Coronavirus and the war in Syria. Second, an increase in citizens' avoidance of these issues caused by fatigue is problematic, as a politically informed and participating citizenry is the foundation of a functioning democracy. If broad segments of the population withdraw from ongoing political issues political decisions may be made without the vigilance and legitimation of citizens (Elvestad, Blekesaune, & Aalberg, 2014). Third, issue fatigue occurs with those who regularly consume news as opposed to news avoiders, who feel generally overloaded by news and tune out from political news completely (Elvestad et al., 2014; Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). Issue fatigue thus contributes to the current discourse about the overall turn away from news media (Strömbäck et al., 2020) by adding a focus on (ongoing) issues and their avoidance by generally news consuming citizens. Given this and the lack of a theoretical investigation of fatigue from news issues, we develop a conceptualization of issue fatigue and sum up our main assumptions in propositions. We also elaborate on the causes and consequences of issue fatigue and derive assumptions about its dynamics. Relying on existing research on fatigue and overexposure phenomena, we assume that if the media have intensely covered a specific issue for weeks or months, there is a chance that some people may become cognitively and emotionally fatigued, thus potentially avoiding the issue, although politics and media continue to focus on it.

2 Theoretical conceptualization of issue fatigue

Extant studies on issue fatigue (Author, 2014; Author, 2016) found that recipients expressed their fatigue by claiming that they no longer wanted to hear or see anything about those issues. This implies that, at some point in time, they were exposed to an issue to a certain extent, but after a period of time they became fatigued and potentially avoided the issue. In the following section, we address why issue fatigue is different from other approaches used to explain media avoidance, and we introduce the idea that overexposure to news issues is the breeding ground for issue fatigue.

2.1 The differences between issue fatigue and existing approaches to information avoidance behavior

In communication research and psychology, several approaches are used to explain intentional avoidance of or non-exposure to information. Consistency theories postulate that individuals avoid or ignore information that is inconsistent with their beliefs or attitudes (Donsbach, 1991; Festinger, 1957). Reactance as a negative cognitive and / or emotional reaction to exposure to different media stimuli has been found to correlate to avoidance behavior (Edwards, Li, & Lee, 2002; Marcinkowski & Došenović, 2020). A general disinterest in specific information (Silvia, 2006), a lack of involvement or negative involvement (Perse, 1998), and certain personality traits (Böcking & Fahr, 2009) can be drivers of avoidance. In health communication, a lack of perceived efficacy, negative emotions, such as threat and anxiety (Goodall & Reed, 2013), or fatigue related to receiving health messages (So et al., 2017), have been identified as causes of avoiding mediated health information. For political media content, predictors of non-exposure or avoidance include disliking political information in general (Bode, Vraga, & Troller-Renfree, 2017; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013), perceiving information or news overload (Lee, Holton, & Chen, 2019, 2016; Song, Jung, & Kim, 2017),

and a negative perception of the news media coverage (Zerba, 2011).

In this research on avoidance of media information, we identify two gaps in the literature. First, previous studies have not yet looked at issues as objects of avoidance. Existing approaches have focused on avoidance of news in general (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020), specific media types (Zerba, 2011), discrete media offers (Jamal & Melkote, 2008), or information on specific angles on issues (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). In contrast to the latter, issue fatigue is not about an individual's attitude toward the issue; it can cause information avoidance, regardless of the view presented in news media. Second, avoidance caused by issue fatigue only emerges after a period of previous and potentially extensive exposure during weeks or months.

Proposition 1: Issue fatigue is a temporal state, which occurs after a period of exposure to news about the issue. It represents a new approach to media avoidance on an issue level.

2.2 Issue fatigue as a consequence of overexposure

Overexposure is the key-factor for understanding the emergence of fatigue from news issues. Overexposure to the same stimulus has not yet been considered in the context of news issues. However, its effects are discussed within theoretical models of repetition effects (Berlyne, 1970; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979, 1989; Koch, 2017; Stang, 1975), the concept of advertising wearout (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980; Calder & Sternthal, 1980; Craig et al., 1976), for health messages (So et al., 2017) and persuasive statements in news articles (Koch & Zerback, 2013). After a threshold point of repetition, the evaluation of a stimulus, such as an ad, can shift from positive to negative. At first, the stimulus is novel and perceived as interesting and stimulating. After a specific number of repetitions, boredom, tedium, satiation, and reactance are perceived, processing and learning are decreased, and the attitude towards the stimulus becomes more negative (Batra & Ray, 1986; Berlyne, 1970; Rethans, Swasy, & Marks, 1986; Stang, 1975).

Based on this line of research, fatigue with persuasive health messages (S. Kim & So, 2018; So et al., 2017) has been conceptualized and investigated. It occurs because of excessive exposure to similar health messages. It includes perceptions of overexposure, tedium, redundancy and exhaustion and can lead to disengagement with the messages (So et al., 2017).

Research has so far ignored the effects of repeated exposure to the same stimulus in the news media context; fatigue has not yet been conceptualized for ongoing political news issues.¹ Thus, it is necessary to consider the specifics of news issues for overexposure effects. First, the stimulus is of informative nature and not a persuasive one that promotes a particular behavior. Second, issue fatigue results from exposure to the issue via various media messages on different channels, whereas advertising wearout results from repeated exposure to the exact same message (Craig et al., 1976), and health message fatigue from overexposure to similar messages (So et al., 2017). Media messages about ongoing issues in different media outlets over an extended period differ considerably from each other in a variety of aspects, such as in their events, viewpoints and actors covered. It is thus the issue as the common core of all the various messages rather than the discrete message itself that causes fatigue.

Proposition 2: After a prior period of positive or neutral responses to an issue covered in the news media, recipients respond negatively to the issue after a threshold point of too frequent re-exposure. Consequently, issue fatigue emerges.

2.3 Dimensions of issue fatigue

Referring back to other overexposure phenomena, we apply the term of fatigue to news issues. In health research, fatigue denotes an unpleasant experience consisting of physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions, which follows a phase of exertion and leads to an often

¹ News overload is the result of cumulative exposure to news (York, 2013); however, it concerns news in general rather than the same stimulus.

temporary decrease of ability (Ream & Richardson, 1996). Research on repetition effects also shows that overexposure to stimuli, such as ads and health messages, have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effects on individuals (Bornstein, 1989; Burke & Edell, 1986; Claypool, Mackie, Garcia-Marques, McIntosh, & Udall, 2004; Rethans et al., 1986; So et al., 2017). The concept of health message fatigue (So et al., 2017) and compassion fatigue (Kinnick et al., 1996) separate cognitions and emotions from behavior such as avoidance. Since issue fatigue must not necessarily lead to changes in behavior, as we explain later on, we follow this assumption:

Proposition 3: Issue fatigue comprises of cognitive and emotional dimensions, which can cause behavioral responses.

Below, we discuss how the three dimensions of decreased processing involvement, perceived information surplus and increasingly perceived negative emotions form the state of fatigue from news issues.

2.3.1 Dimension 1: Decreased issue-specific information processing involvement

Findings on the effects of overexposure to stimuli show that frequent re-exposure to a stimulus affects attention and information processing (Craig et al., 1976; Kinnucan, Chang, & Venkateswaran, 1993; Rethans et al., 1986). When recipients are too frequently exposed to information on the same issue, they possibly lose their initial motivation to engage cognitively with it, especially when it is perceived as monotonous, not novel (Berlyne, 1970). Thus, we assume that recipients' cognitive engagement with the issue decreases due to frequent re-exposure to media content on the same issue.

The motivation to intensively process information about an issue is referred to as issue-specific information processing involvement (Perse, 1998; Schemer, Matthes, & Wirth, 2008). It is closely linked to general cognitive involvement (Donnerstag, 1996; Mitchell, 1981; Silvia,

2006). While cognitive involvement refers to an individual's internal engagement with an object, it is used in a heterogeneous manner (Donnerstag, 1996); for example, as perceived interest, personal meaning, or expected consequences for oneself and, thus, personal importance (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Thus, we elaborate on the roles cognitive involvement plays for issue fatigue in terms of perceived relevance and cognitive elaboration (Jungkee & Rubin, 1997).

Whether an individual generally perceives an issue as being relevant – personally or for society—depends on his / her opinions of and attributions to the characteristics of the issue (Antil, 1984). Individual opinions and attributions can change over time if the issue changes in terms of events and developments, or they can remain unchanged if an individual perceives no change in the issue's personal relevance. Despite stable levels of perceived relevance, the motivation to engage with the issue, or to process information on the issue, is likely to change. This is because the information received about the issue influences information processing. If an individual recognizes the details of a message and their relevance, the need for further information emerges and leads to an increased motivation to engage with the issue (Burnkrant & Sawyer, 1983). However, if the information is perceived as not newsworthy, repetitive, or not relevant for decreasing uncertainty (Atkin, 1973, 1985; Berlyne, 1970) – as is assumed for information on a frequently covered issue – the motivation to process the received information should be low.

Proposition 4: Issue fatigue manifests, first, in decreased information processing involvement.

Issue-specific information processing involvement decreases, while the general perceived relevance of the issue can, but does not have to, remain unchanged.

2.3.2 Dimension 2: *Perceived information surplus*

Regarding the changing news media environment, communication research has started to investigate the effects of significant amounts of information on recipients. The effects of information overload or news overload on recipients have been examined (A. M. Lee et al., 2019; Schmitt, Debbelt, & Schneider, 2018; Song et al., 2017; York, 2013); these have also been discussed for issue fatigue (Author, 2016). In this section, we show that information overload plays a role in issue fatigue in two ways because information overload on a news issue might either exceed or fall short of the recipient's informational needs.

In its narrow sense, information overload occurs if the amount of information exceeds the recipient's cognitive capacities to process it (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012; Lang, 2000); for a similar argument see also Atkin (1973, 1985). If the information load increases over time as a result of re-exposure, at some point, the perception of being overwhelmed by information (Ji, Ha, & Sypher, 2014) can emerge. In addition to the quantity of received information and individual characteristics, such as general information processing capacity or motivation, the characteristics of the received information affect the occurrence of information overload. Information overload is facilitated by uncertainty, diversity, ambiguity, novelty, complexity, intensity, and negative quality (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012; Schneider, 1987).

For issue fatigue, we identify two different paths of how these characteristics contribute to the perception of information overload. On the one hand, if recipients are persistently exposed to information about an issue that they perceive as being highly complex or ambiguous, such as the Cum-Ex-Scandal or the consequences of global warming, the information might exceed their cognitive capacities (Eppler & Mengis, 2004). This type of information surplus is specific to fatigue from news issues as opposed to fatigue from persuasive messages: Ads and campaign messages are less complex than news issues making cognitive overload less likely.

On the other hand, recipients are likely to perceive the novelty and diversity of the repeated media coverage on the same issue as being low (Berlyne, 1970; So et al., 2017). This can also lead to a perception of being overloaded by information, however, not in the sense that the information exceeds the recipient's cognitive capacities. Perceiving information as monotonous and repetitive, rather than diverse and novel, falls short of an individual's cognitive capacities. Thus, a recipient might have the impression that he / she already knows everything about an issue so there is no perception of an information gap or information insufficiency (Dunwoody & Griffin, 2015); instead he / she feels boredom (Klapp, 1986). In other words, the informational value of the overall coverage about an issue is perceived as low (Atkin, 1973). The statement "oh god, not another polar bear", from a study on climate change fatigue by Capstick and Pidgeon (2014, p. 394) is an example of this type of information surplus. For both paths, receiving too much information results in being overwhelmed, at some point (Ji et al., 2014):

Proposition 5: Perceived information surplus – either because news media coverage exceeds or falls short of the recipient's informational needs – is the second dimension of issue fatigue.

2.3.3 Dimension 3: Increase in boredom, annoyance and anger

An increase in particular negative emotions toward a news issue over time is the last of the three dimensions of issue fatigue. As a type of affect, emotions can be evoked by contact with a stimulus (Klauer, 1997; Konijn, 2015) and they can be associated with an object, such as an issue (Matthes, 2013). Hence, recipients can associate specific emotions that are activated by repeated exposure to the issue. As previously mentioned, overexposure to a stimulus can provoke negative affective responses. First, boredom can occur because of too frequent exposure to the issue. Boredom is a consequence of being dissatisfied and inadequately stimulated (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993); tedium and satiation are negative feelings about

being re-exposed to the stimulus and in part used interchangeably with boredom (Redden & Galak, 2013; Rethans et al., 1986; So et al., 2017). Annoyance emerges in situations in which situational factors hinder a person's goal (Roseman, 1984). This can also happen during news media exposure. Excessive repetition of display-ads causes annoyance among internet users because it intervenes with the goal of information navigation (Todri, Ghose, & Singh, 2020). Similarly, interference with information goals can occur when recipients are exposed repeatedly to the same news issue against their will. Likewise, anger can arise if internal goals, such as not wanting to hear or see about an issue, are threatened (S. Kim & So, 2018; Song et al., 2017) and information are judged as unwanted (Sweeny, Melnyk, Miller, & Shepperd, 2010). Previous investigations have found that recipients perceive anger, boredom and annoyance concerning ongoing news issues (Newman et al., 2019; Author, 2014).

Proposition 6: An increase in the negative emotions boredom, annoyance and anger forms the third dimension of issue fatigue.

The interactions of the three dimensions are meaningful for issue fatigue as a concept in its own right. Perceiving information surplus involves negative emotions, and it affects cognitive processing motivation (Lang, 2000; Thorson, Reeves, & Schleuder, 1985; York, 2013). When an object is associated with negative feelings, the motivation to approach information on the issue and process it is low (Alexopoulos & Ric, 2007; Frijda, 2004).

3 Definition of issue fatigue

Having cognitive and emotional components, issue fatigue resembles the concept of attitudes toward an issue (Breckler, 1984). However, we define issue fatigue as a mental state rather than as an attitudinal concept. Attitudes are defined as an evaluation of a psychological object, ranging from positive attributes, such as pleasant or good, to negative attributes, such as unpleasant or bad, or to the overall "degree of favorability", respectively (Ajzen, 2001, p.

29). They are said to explain the avoidance of information, as within dissonance approaches (e.g., Donsbach, 1991). However, issue fatigue does not equal the attitude toward the issue. Issue fatigue is a negative effect of re-exposure, which can emerge whether or not an individual is for or against an issue (Breckler, 1984). An attitude is an “enduring pattern of evaluative responses” (Colman, 2015, para. 1); it is considered to be relatively stable over time (Ajzen, 2001; Sia, Lord, Blessum, Ratcliff, & Lepper, 1997). Issue fatigue is dynamic and dependent on the degree of exposure to the issue during a specific period of time. The exact amount of time for issue fatigue to occur surely depends on an interplay between the intensity of news coverage on the issue, characteristics of the issue, and the recipients. We infer from the exemplary issues that fatigue emerges over weeks or months of media attention to the issue, as opposed to an immediate effect in consequence of exposure situations during one or more days.

Considering the temporal and situational nature of issue fatigue as well as its cognitive and emotional components, we propose to classify it as an individual’s mental state at a certain point in time. Originally referring primarily to emotions (Marks & Lader, 1973), the notion of mental state was later extended to refer to an individual’s fluctuating and situational sensitivities and accounts for his / her needs, motivational states, current thoughts, and consciousness (Cattell, 1963; Fridhandler, 1986). Thus, the comparatively shorter temporal state of issue fatigue encompasses cognitions and affect, and it can be activated by situational triggers, such as news media coverage of the issue.

Hence, we conclude with *proposition 7*: Issue fatigue refers to an individual’s negative state that emerges as a result of overexposure to an issue that is intensively covered by the news media during a period of weeks or months. This state consists of increasingly perceived boredom, annoyance and anger, decreasing issue-specific information processing involvement, and perceived information surplus. These three dimensions manifest as the recipient’s expression of no longer wanting to hear or see anything about the issue.

Subsequently, we elaborate on the potential consequences and causes of the phenomenon.

4 Consequences

Previous research on overexposure effects and the dimensions of issue fatigue suggests that the emotions and cognitions inherent in issue fatigue can have behavioral consequences. Issue fatigue can trigger, most importantly, avoidance of the issue. This is supported by research in different contexts, which has shown that individuals avoid media content that triggers a negative affect while selecting content that elicits a positive affect (Brashers, 2002; Fahr & Böcking, 2009; Schramm & Wirth, 2008; Zillmann, 1988). The degree of motivation to process information about an issue is related to the extent to which information is sought and processed (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984; Donnerstag, 1996). Information overload can also result in avoidance behavior (Schmitt et al., 2018; Song et al., 2017).

Communication research points to various ways of avoiding media content, such as on issues. There are different forms of avoidance that mainly differ in how active recipients are when avoiding an issue. While some conceptualize avoidance as not using specific media content at all or infrequently (Elvestad et al., 2014; Shehata, Wadbring, & Hopmann, 2015), others emphasize the distinction of active avoidance from non-exposure to media content (Fahr & Böcking, 2009; McLeod & Becker, 1974). In psychology and communication theory, active information avoidance refers to the actual decision to refrain from relevant information (Afifi, 2004; Howell & Shepperd, 2017). Avoidance can occur at the point of information selection; it can also emerge as a cognitive strategy during information reception, when less attention is paid to the content or the reception is stopped (Bode et al., 2017; Schramm & Wirth, 2008). In addition to avoidance at the level of media exposure avoidance of interpersonal discussions on the issue are plausible (Author, 2014; Author, 2016).

Proposition 8: Avoidance of news on the issue and interpersonal discussions about it are

behavioral outcomes of issue fatigue. It is assumed that higher levels of issue fatigue lead to stronger avoidance behavior.

Second, we know from research on persuasive messages, that overexposure can lead to resistance-reactions, such as reactance and counterargument (Cacioppo & Petty, 1979; S. Kim & So, 2018; So et al., 2017). Reactance is understood as “an urge to act against or resist the perceived cause of the freedom threat” (S. Kim & So, 2018, p. 110). It emerges because of recognizing the persuasive attempt (Koch, 2017). Although news coverage is not persuasive per se, recipients could perceive the coverage of the same issue as a persuasive attempt with increasing exposure (Koch & Zerback, 2013). Especially recipients with low levels of trust in traditional news media could perceive the extensive media coverage as persuasive attempt or hidden agenda by political or media elites. Those recipients could use alternative and social media for information purposes as a consequence (Jackob, 2010). The same could be true for recipients who are fatigued from the issue but generally interested in news and the issue.

Proposition 9: Using alternative and social media as opposed to traditional news media for information purposes is a potential outcome of issue fatigue.

Finally, issue fatigue also seems to trigger changes in political attitudes and raise levels of dissatisfaction with the way political institutions and processes handle the issue under consideration (Author, 2020). A lack of motivation and cognitive engagement with news information inhibits political learning (David, 2009; Eveland, 2002). Fatigued recipients could thus be less knowledgeable about the issue.

Proposition 10: Issue fatigue can affect recipients’ political attitudes and learning.

5 Causes

Since the news media are a central source for information about current political issues, how recipients are exposed to and evaluate the news coverage influences their perception of the issue. In line with research on repetition effects and first empirical approaches to the idea of issue fatigue (Author, 2014; Author, 2016), the intensity of exposure to the stimulus, and thus of the reception of media information of the issue, is considered the central driver of the emergence of issue fatigue. Recipients can be exposed to news on the issue either directly or indirectly via interpersonal discussions (Bandura, 2001).

Proposition 11: The intensity of exposure to news on the issue influences the emergence of issue fatigue.

The characteristics of the information received are a major determinant for the emergence of information surplus. Because the reception of news media coverage on the issue in question is the root of the emergence of issue fatigue, the received characteristics of the media coverage should be an influencing factor. These characteristics consist of the quality of the media coverage, such as its relevance and clarity (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; McQuail, 1992) and its credibility (Appelman & Sundar, 2016; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). The recipients' evaluation of the news media coverage of the issue is assumed to change over a period of frequent exposure; in turn, this can impact the emergence of issue fatigue. It has been shown that too frequent repetition of the same message can decrease its perceived credibility (Koch & Zerback, 2011, 2013) and lead to perceiving it as redundant (So et al., 2017). In the case of excessive media coverage on the same issue, a lack of quality in terms of the variety or novelty of the media coverage, can be perceived (Author, 2014).

Proposition 12: Increasingly negative evaluations of the news coverage of the issue lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

The perceived quality of information is a possible cause of issue fatigue rather than a

necessary condition for it. Excessive exposure to an issue can cause recipients to have negative emotions about it, feel overloaded by it, and be unmotivated to process information on it, but they might still evaluate the quality of the news media coverage positively. The media coverage is a different object of evaluation than the political issue itself; how recipients evaluate the media coverage depends on various individual characteristics, such as their trust in the news media (e.g., Tsfati & Cappella, 2003).

6 Reflections on the dynamics of issue fatigue

Since issue fatigue emerges over time, it is dynamic. In this section, we elaborate on its process and discuss several unanswered questions. The extent of an individual's exposure to a new issue on the media's agenda is dependent on several individual factors, such as interest and perceived importance (Antil, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). If an individual does not consider an issue to be relevant, initially, his / her issue-specific information seeking behavior and cognitive processing are low (Donnerstag, 1996). Hence, either a minimum level of perceived issue-relevance or incidental exposure to information on the issue despite a lack of relevance (Y. Kim, Chen, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013) is a precondition for the emergence of issue fatigue.

During the initial period of media coverage, issue fatigue has not yet emerged. Boredom, annoyance and anger are mostly absent, a certain level of information processing involvement is present, and recipients do not experience information surplus. However, the cognitive and emotional dimensions of issue fatigue can develop over the course of exposure to intensive and ongoing news coverage. Once associated with the issue, the negative emotions are more accessible and they can be activated easily when the recipient is re-exposed to the issue (Fazio, 1990; Klauer, 1997). These emotions increase over time. Simultaneously, the recipients' information processing involvement decreases and they experience growing levels of

information surplus. Consequently, recipients possibly take countermeasures, in particular avoiding the issue.

However, several questions remain unanswered, most prominently regarding the determinants of the issue fatigue emergence process. It remains unclear what level of exposure intensity is necessary for issue fatigue to emerge and how long it takes until the state of overexposure is reached. We know from advertising research that wear-out effects are dependent on three intensity-related factors: the number of repetitions, the interval of repetition, and the overall duration of the period of exposure (Corkindale & Newall, 1978). We assume that these factors are equally important for the emergence of issue fatigue. Scenarios in which a recipient is moderately exposed to an issue, but over a long time, or one in which a recipient is extremely exposed to an issue over a short time, might both be realistic for the emergence of issue fatigue. While a specific frequency of news exposure is a necessary condition of issue fatigue, quality evaluations of the media coverage on the issue that might also foster issue fatigue are not a necessary condition of it.

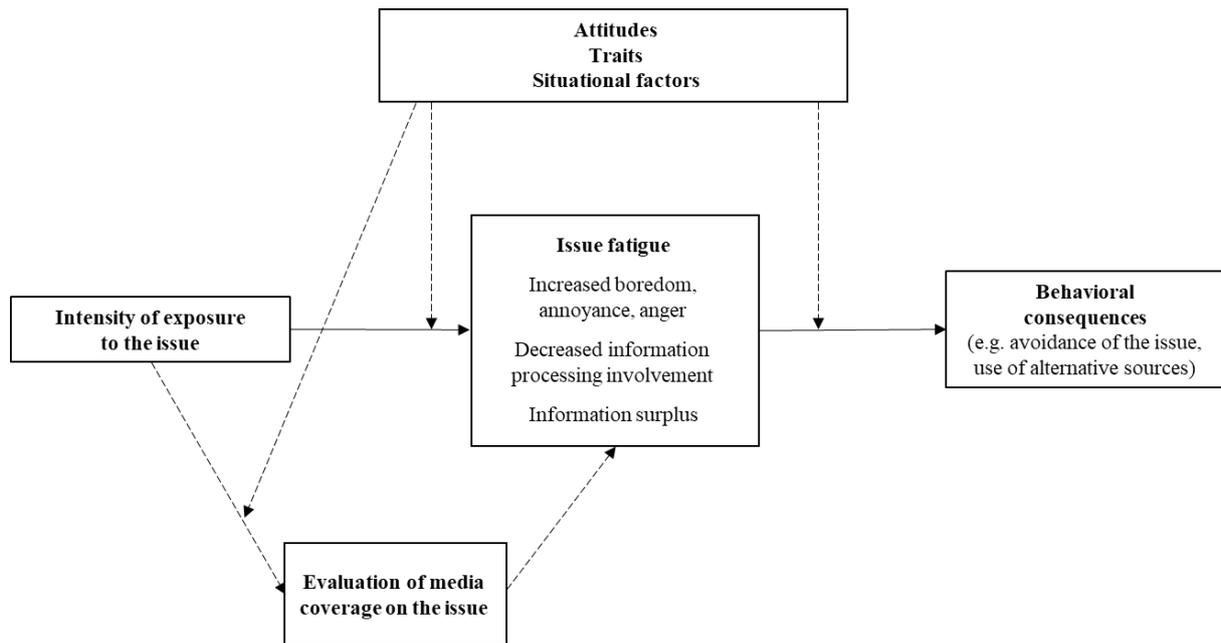
Issue fatigue can develop regardless of the recipient's attitude toward an issue. However, the attitude might moderate the associations between intensity of exposure, evaluations of the news coverage on the issue, and issue fatigue. We assume that a negative attitude toward an issue hastens the emergence of issue fatigue due to the interplay of emotions and cognitions (Forgas, 1995; Mather & Fanselow, 2018; Storbeck & Clore, 2007) as well as emotions of the same valence (Pe & Kuppens, 2012). Initially, negative thoughts and emotions, such as being against the issue, fear, or sadness, could elicit the negative emotions inherent in issue fatigue, thus accelerating the emergence of issue fatigue or increase its level more quickly than initial positive cognitions and emotions. As shown for the development of information overload (York, 2013), we suppose that additional individual characteristics, such as the level of news enjoyment (Nash & Hoffman, 2009), play a role in issue fatigue, with high levels decelerating

the emergence of issue fatigue and low levels accelerating it.

Individual and situational factors might also influence the associations between issue fatigue and behavioral consequences. Situations, such as watching TV news in a group, are assumed to play a role when the presence of others hinders an individual's ability to change the TV channel (Wonneberger, Schoenbach, & van Meurs, 2011). In terms of traits, a strong duty to keep informed (Mothes, Knobloch-Westerwick, & Pearson, 2016; Poindexter & McCombs, 2001) potentially hinders recipients from disengaging with the issue. Since issue fatigue is a gradual phenomenon and its intensity can vary over time, its effects on avoidance and other behavior and might also vary.

Disengagement should lead to reduced exposure to the issue. Since the amount of exposure is a main driver of issue fatigue, issue fatigue should decrease with avoidance behavior. However, incidental and forced news exposure (Y. Kim et al., 2013) could hinder this process. Even short episodes of contact with an issue, such as unintentionally stumbling on a post when scrolling through social media, could provoke negative emotions, feelings of information surplus, and reduced information-processing involvement. Thus, despite information avoidance behavior, issue fatigue could be repeatedly "refreshed" as long as an issue remains on the agenda of the public and the media.

Figure 1: Model of the dynamics of issue fatigue



7 Conclusion

In this article, we outlined issue fatigue as a concept that is rooted in the interplay between media attention to political issues and citizens' attention to these issues. Building on previous research on overexposure and fatigue phenomena, we defined issue fatigue as a negative cognitive and affective state consisting of decreasing issue-specific information processing involvement, perceived information surplus, and increasingly perceived boredom, annoyance and anger toward a public political issue. Issue fatigue develops because of repeated exposure to information about an issue during weeks or months, and it can lead to disengagement with the issue. Issue fatigue differs from other overexposure phenomena because it concerns a non-persuasive stimulus in the news media environment. It serves as a new explanatory approach to avoidance of news on an issue level.

The concept of issue fatigue can be viewed in the context of issue attention cycles (Downs, 1972). For some issues, it is possible that – unlike the common pattern of public and media attention to an issue – the gradual decline of public attention is not followed by a decline in

media attention; rather, it results from ongoing high or even massive news coverage that endures far longer than the public's attention span. In these situations, some citizens are likely to experience issue fatigue.

The role of news media in a democracy is to provide citizens with information on current affairs and to enable opinion formation (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017). Against this backdrop, it is problematic if their news coverage leads recipients to become fatigued from relevant political or social issues and to avoid them or even turn away from news media more generally. Thus, the question arises as to what extent news media and journalists should focus on the public's stance on an issue. We argue that, from a normative perspective, journalists should strive to select the issue they want to address not solely based on the public's interest (Welbers, van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, Ruigrok, & Schaper, 2016), and fulfill their democratic information function by continuing to inform citizens about the current issue. Therefore, we propose that journalists should be sensitive to the possibility that issue fatigue can arise in their audience. Since being issue fatigued means being less motivated to process information and perceiving information surplus and negative emotions, journalists could think about different ways to tailor the information they provide about ongoing issues.

Linked to these considerations is the question about what kind of issues can elicit issue fatigue. We argue that the affective and cognitive dimensions of issue fatigue are not tied to a specific kind of issue; therefore, issue fatigue can potentially occur with any kind of issue the mass media covers during a longer period of time. People's fatigue of political issues is particularly relevant since an increase in avoidance of these issues or further consequences such as turning away from traditional news media caused by issue fatigue could be detrimental to democratic processes that rely on an informed and participating citizenry.

Since our conceptualization of issue fatigue relates to political issues of societal relevance and media coverage is the main driver of issue fatigue, it is possible to identify correlations

between issue fatigue and people's attitudes toward the news media and politics. Priming effects can occur because negative associations with the current issue are activated in the recipients and influence how they evaluate the performance of political actors and the news media's handling of this issue (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1997). Thus, issue fatigue has the potential to increase the number of citizens that tune-out substantive political discourse.

The theoretical arguments presented in this paper call for empirical research to test these assumptions. The dynamic nature of issue fatigue requires longitudinal analyses to determine the exact threshold point during the period of exposure at which people start to become issue fatigued. Qualitative methods would be particularly suitable to explore this emergence process, including its relevant factors and their interplay. Longitudinal quantitative research can address the causal relationship between issue fatigue and the quantity and quality of media coverage as well as the association between issue fatigue and avoidance behavior.

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Supplemental Analysis Paper I: Confirmation of Issue Fatigue's Conceptual Definition

The conceptualization of issue fatigue presented in Paper I forms the basis for the issue fatigue scale used in Papers III, IV, and V. Therefore, confirmatory factor analyses (Carpenter, 2018; Levine, 2005) based on survey data from two panel surveys comprising three panel waves each were used to provide evidence for the validity of the internal factors structure of the issue fatigue conceptualization. The theoretical conceptualization suggests the hypothesis that issue fatigue is a second-order three-factorial construct with the dimensions Information Overload (IO), Information Processing Involvement (IPI), and Negative Emotions (NE).

Method

A three-wave panel survey was conducted in spring 2019 on the Brexit issue, explained in the Method sections of Papers III, IV, and V. The resulting data were used for confirmatory factor analyses. In addition, data from another panel survey were used to re-examine the assumed factorial structure in another, independent sample (Levine, 2005). The second representative three-wave panel survey was conducted for a referendum issue in Switzerland in 2020. Quota sampling was applied with respect to age, gender, and language region. Wave 1 ($n = 1300$, 50% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 48$, $SD = 15.60$, 49% higher education) took place on August 20–31, 2020, Wave 2 ($n = 973$, 48% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 49$, $SD = 15.88$, 49% higher education) on September 3–14, 2020, and Wave 3 ($n = 783$, 46% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 49$, $SD = 15.91$, 50% higher education) on September 17–28, 2020. The referendum for limited immigration (*Begrenzungsinitiative*) was launched by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and put to the vote on September 27, 2020, in Switzerland. As a national political issue, it differs from the Brexit issue used in the first panel survey. Among the five referendums put to the vote on September 27, 2020, it received the most media attention during twelve weeks before polling day (Udris,

2020).

Based on a balanced sample of respondents who participated in all panel waves and did not have more than four missing values on the nine issue fatigue items ($n_{\text{Brexit}} = 707$; $n_{\text{Referendum}} = 612$), confirmatory factor analyses were calculated using *Mplus* version 8.4 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2017) to test the concept's dimensionality. Maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR) was used, controlling for non-normality and missing values (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2017).

Table 1 displays the items used for the three dimensions of issue fatigue and their descriptive statistics per wave. Information on the choice of the items and where they were taken from can be found in the Methods sections of Papers III, IV, and V. Table 2 and Table 3 display inter-item correlations at all panel waves for the Brexit and Referendum data.

Table 1*Dimensions and Items of the Issue Fatigue Scale (Brexit and Referendum)*

Items	Brexit (<i>n</i> = 707)									Referendum (<i>n</i> = 612)								
	Wave 1			Wave 2			Wave 3			Wave 1			Wave 2			Wave 3		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Information Overload (IO)																		
1. I currently feel overloaded by the amount of news available on this issue. (IO1)	2.61	1.77	696	2.45	1.54	697	2.39	1.47	692	1.99	1.03	605	2.13	1.13	600	2.22	1.31	608
2. I receive more information on this issue than I can actually process. (IO2)	2.72	1.73	682	2.70	1.51	688	2.72	1.49	684	2.11	1.15	593	2.30	1.43	599	2.35	1.29	600
3. I am confronted with too much information on this issue. (IO3)	2.52	1.60	694	2.47	1.53	695	2.44	1.52	694	2.06	1.01	601	2.24	1.10	608	2.26	1.16	604
4. I feel overloaded with the amount of news on this issue. (IO4)	2.48	1.58	698	2.44	1.60	694	2.40	1.61	695	1.98	0.97	600	2.10	1.10	606	2.14	1.12	606

Table 1 (continued)

Items	Brexit (<i>n</i> = 707)									Referendum (<i>n</i> = 612)								
	Wave 1			Wave 2			Wave 3			Wave 1			Wave 2			Wave 3		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Information Processing Involvement (IPI)																		
5. I follow this issue with attention. (recoded) (IPI1)	3.10	1.55	702	3.26	1.52	706	3.34	1.53	707	2.66	1.51	609	2.66	1.40	612	2.69	1.43	612
6. The more information I get on this issue, the better. (recoded) (IPI2)	3.27	1.49	691	3.33	1.34	690	3.39	1.39	698	2.61	1.43	603	2.81	1.51	602	2.82	1.41	605
7. It is important to me to know all arguments of this issue in detail. (recoded) (IPI3)	3.30	1.39	699	3.35	1.43	693	3.28	1.43	697	2.35	1.24	608	2.44	1.21	610	2.43	1.21	605
Negative Emotions (NE)																		
8. This issue gets on my nerves. (ANN)	2.51	1.85	697	2.47	1.77	698	2.53	1.84	702	2.46	1.86	599	2.51	1.70	602	2.64	1.83	610
9. This issue makes me angry. (ANG)	2.40	1.71	692	2.33	1.66	696	2.41	1.69	697	2.57	1.84	595	2.61	1.83	603	2.67	1.79	606

Table 2*Item Correlations (Brexit)*

Sample	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Wave 1	1. IO1								
	2. IO2	.62***							
	3. IO3	.65***	.64***						
	4. IO4	.65***	.57***	.73***					
	5. IPI1	.14**	.09*	.12**	.14***				
	6. IPI2	.27***	.22***	.26***	.25***	.61***			
	7. IPI3	.12**	.13**	.13**	.09*	.60***	.54***		
	8. ANN	.48***	.36***	.45***	.48***	.14**	.25***	.07	
	9. ANG	.39***	.30***	.36***	.36***	-.02	.11**	-.02	.66***
Wave 2	1. IO1								
	2. IO2	.60***							
	3. IO3	.68***	.64***						
	4. IO4	.73***	.61***	.75***					
	5. IPI1	.13**	.09*	.14***	.18***				
	6. IPI2	.21***	.20***	.24***	.25***	.61***			
	7. IPI3	.13**	.17***	.15***	.18***	.65***	.63***		
	8. ANN	.46***	.36***	.45***	.49***	.25***	.30***	.20***	
	9. ANG	.42***	.34***	.45***	.46***	.14***	.19***	.12**	.73***
Wave 3	1. IO1								
	2. IO2	.64***							
	3. IO3	.74***	.66***						
	4. IO4	.72***	.64***	.77***					
	5. IPI1	.20***	.18***	.26***	.27***				
	6. IPI2	.25***	.26***	.33***	.32***	.67***			
	7. IPI3	.19***	.19***	.20***	.22***	.68***	.62***		
	8. ANN	.46***	.38***	.51***	.46***	.32***	.36***	.25***	
	9. ANG	.41***	.39***	.47***	.43***	.20***	.27***	.19***	.73***

Note. $n = 707$. See Table 1 for item names. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3*Item Correlations (Referendum)*

Sample	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Wave 1	1. IO1								
	2. IO2	.51***							
	3. IO3	.51***	.50***						
	4. IO4	.54***	.52***	.67***					
	5. IPI1	.11**	.05	.16***	.22***				
	6. IPI2	.21***	.21***	.26***	.27***	.42***			
	7. IPI3	.16***	.15**	.21***	.24***	.53***	.46***		
	8. ANN	.24***	.23***	.36***	.35***	.22***	.31***	.27***	
	9. ANG	.13**	.11*	.23***	.24***	.15***	.19***	.15***	.64***
Wave 2	1. IO1								
	2. IO2	.62***							
	3. IO3	.68***	.58***						
	4. IO4	.67***	.54***	.71***					
	5. IPI1	.14**	.11*	.17***	.13**				
	6. IPI2	.19***	.23***	.29***	.26***	.40***			
	7. IPI3	.21***	.17***	.25***	.24***	.55***	.51***		
	8. ANN	.30***	.24***	.33***	.36***	.28***	.30***	.27***	
	9. ANG	.17***	.15**	.20***	.21***	.17***	.19***	.17***	.67***
Wave 3	1. IO1								
	2. IO2	.64***							
	3. IO3	.62***	.64***						
	4. IO4	.61***	.58***	.70***					
	5. IPI1	.17***	.12**	.21***	.22***				
	6. IPI2	.28***	.23***	.36***	.31***	.52***			
	7. IPI3	.20***	.19***	.29***	.22***	.60***	.56***		
	8. ANN	.29***	.24***	.34***	.30***	.31***	.32***	.27***	
	9. ANG	.24***	.16***	.27***	.27***	.20***	.26***	.20***	.69***

Note. $n = 612$. See Table 1 for item names. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Results

Table 4 shows the items' factor loadings for the Brexit data ranging from .72 to .92. All items loaded significantly ($p < .001$) on the latent constructs. The second-order model (Figure 8) shows that the Information Overload dimension loaded strongest on the second-order factor in the first wave; the factor loadings in Wave 2 and 3 were smaller than in the first wave. The factor loadings of Information Processing Involvement and Negative Emotions were stronger in Wave 3 and Wave 2 than in Wave 1. The correlations between each pair of factors (Table 5) were significant and moderate, ranging from .26 to .61 (all $ps < .001$). The model showed a good fit to the data (see Table 6); the model fit (Levine, 2005; Reinecke & Pöge, 2010) was better in Wave 2 and Wave 3 than in Wave 1. In addition, the suggested second-order model was compared to a first-order model where all items load on one issue fatigue factor (Matthes, 2005; So et al., 2017) to prove the second-order model's feasibility. Table 6 shows that the second-order model's fit was better in all waves.

Table 4 shows the items' factor loadings for the Referendum data, ranging from .64 to .95. The second-order model (Figure 9) shows that the three factors loaded similarly strongly on issue fatigue. The factor loadings of Information Processing Involvement were slightly stronger in Wave 3 than in Wave 2 and Wave 1. The correlations between each pair of factors (see Table 5) were significant and moderate, ranging from .36 to .42 (all $ps < .001$). The model showed a good fit to data (see Table 6); the model fit was better in Wave 2 than in Wave 1 and Wave 3. Compared to a first-order model (see Table 6), the second-order model's fit was better in all waves.

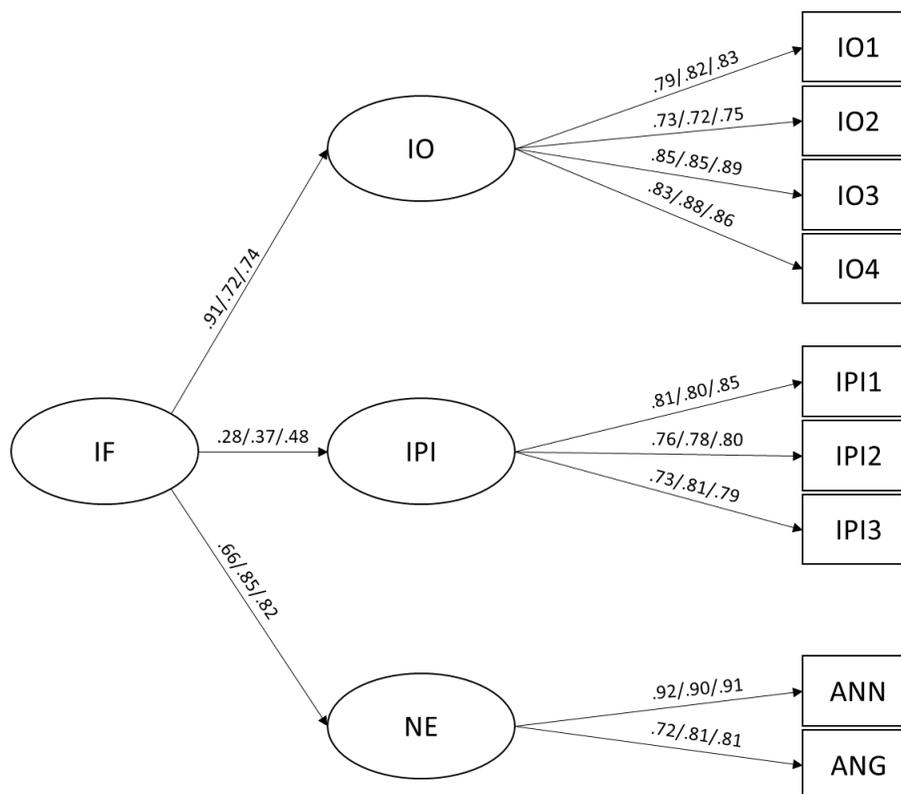
Table 4*Factor Loadings (Brexit and Referendum)*

Items	Brexit (<i>n</i> = 707)						Referendum (<i>n</i> = 612)					
	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3		Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3	
	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>
Information Overload (IO)												
1. I currently feel overloaded by the amount of news available on this issue. (IO1)	.79	.02	.82	.02	.83	.02	.66	.04	.82	.02	.77	.03
2. I receive more information on this issue than I can actually process. (IO2)	.73	.03	.72	.03	.75	.02	.65	.04	.69	.04	.76	.03
3. I am confronted with too much information on this issue. (IO3)	.85	.02	.85	.02	.89	.02	.80	.03	.85	.02	.85	.02
4. I feel overloaded with the amount of news on this issue. (IO4)	.83	.02	.88	.02	.86	.02	.83	.02	.82	.02	.80	.03

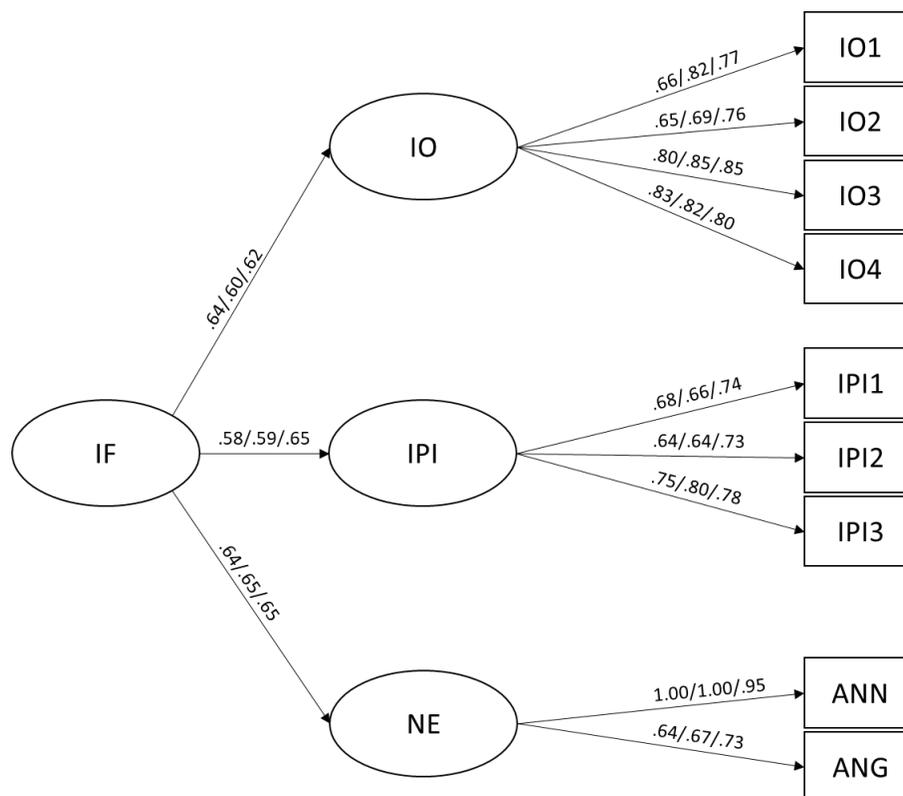
Table 4 (continued)

Items	Brexit (<i>n</i> = 707)						Referendum (<i>n</i> = 612)					
	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3		Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3	
	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>
Information Processing Involvement (IPI; recoded)												
5. I follow this issue with attention. (recoded) (IPI1)	.81	.02	.80	.03	.85	.02	.68	.03	.66	.04	.74	.03
6. The more information I get on this issue, the better. (recoded) (IPI2)	.76	.03	.78	.03	.80	.03	.64	.04	.64	.04	.73	.03
7. It is important to me to know all arguments of this issue in detail. (recoded) (IPI3)	.73	.03	.81	.02	.79	.02	.75	.04	.80	.03	.78	.03
Negative Emotions (NE)												
8. This issue gets on my nerves. (ANN)	.92	.03	.90	.03	.91	.03	1.00	.00	1.00	.00	.95	.04
9. This issue makes me angry. (ANG)	.72	.03	.81	.03	.81	.03	.64	.03	.67	.03	.73	.04

Note. All except ANN in Wave 1 and 2 (Referendum) $p < .001$. Since the residual variance of the ANN item was initially a small negative value in Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the Referendum data, it was fixed to zero.

Figure 8*Second-Order Model of Issue Fatigue (Brexit)*

Note. $n = 707$. The numbers separated by dashes indicate the factor loadings per wave. Parameter estimates from the first wave sample are on the left of the first slash, those from the second wave sample between the slashes, and those from the third wave sample are on the right of the second slash.

Figure 9*Second-Order Model of Issue Fatigue (Referendum)*

Note. $n = 612$. The numbers separated by dashes indicate the factor loadings per wave. Parameter estimates from the first wave sample are on the left of the first slash, those from the second wave sample between the slashes, and those from the third wave sample are on the right of the second slash.

Table 5*Factor Correlations (Brexit and Referendum)*

	Factors	1	2
Brexit (<i>n</i> = 707)	Wave 1		
	1. IO		
	2. IPI	.26 ^{***}	
	3. NE	.60 ^{***}	.19 ^{***}
	Wave 2		
	1. IO		
	2. IPI	.26 ^{***}	
	3. NE	.61 ^{***}	.31 ^{***}
	Wave 3		
	1. IO		
	2. IPI	.36 ^{***}	
	3. NE	.61 ^{***}	.41 ^{***}
Referendum (<i>n</i> = 612)	Wave 1		
	1. IO		
	2. IPI	.38 ^{***}	
	3. NE	.41 ^{***}	.37 ^{***}
	Wave 2		
	1. IO		
	2. IPI	.36 ^{***}	
	3. NE	.39 ^{***}	.38 ^{***}
	Wave 3		
	1. IO		
	2. IPI	.40 ^{***}	
	3. NE	.40 ^{***}	.42 ^{***}

Note. ****p* < .001.

Table 6*Model Fit Indices of the Issue Fatigue Scale (Brexit and Referendum)*

	Sample	Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (CI)	SRMR
Brexit (<i>n</i> = 707)	Wave 1	2 nd Order	84.47(24)	.97	.95	.06(.05, .07)	.05
		Single-Factor	749.39(27)	.64	.52	.20(.18, .21)	.14
	Wave 2	2 nd Order	54.29(24)	.99	.98	.04(.03, .06)	.03
		Single-Factor	907.42(27)	.62	.50	.22(.20, .23)	.15
	Wave 3	2 nd Order	52.12(24)	.99	.98	.04(.03, .06)	.03
		Single-Factor	917.06(27)	.65	.53	.22(.20, .23)	.14
Referen- dum (<i>n</i> = 612)	Wave 1	2 nd Order	45.36(25)	.98	.98	.04(.02, .05)	.04
		Single-Factor	498.93(27)	.63	.51	.17(.16, .18)	.12
	Wave 2	2 nd Order	42.56(25)	.99	.98	.03(.02, .05)	.03
		Single-Factor	566.99(27)	.65	.54	.18(.17, .19)	.13
	Wave 3	2 nd Order	59.79(24)	.98	.97	.05(.03, .07)	.03
		Single-Factor	660.14(27)	.63	.51	.20(.18, .21)	.13

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; CI = confidence interval.

Discussion

Confirmatory factor analyses tested the theoretically derived concept of issue fatigue and its three dimensions using data from two panel surveys with three waves each. The analyses demonstrated support for the issue fatigue concept and its proposed dimensionality and scale. These results confirm that issue fatigue can be considered a second-order factor consisting of three lower-order factors—issue-specific Information Overload, Information Processing Involvement, and Negative Emotions (annoyance and anger). The second-order model fits the data well and is superior to a single-factor model.

It has to be noted that the lower-order factors' loadings on issue fatigue differed, first, within the panel waves, and second, between the Brexit and Referendum data. In the Brexit data, Information Overload loaded strongest on the issue fatigue factor in all waves, particularly in Wave 1, and Information Processing Involvement loaded least on the issue fatigue factor, though

increasing from Wave 1 to Wave 3. The Referendum data showed less variation in the factor loadings, first, within the same factor over the panel waves, and second, between the factors. While Information Overload was found a particularly strong factor in the Brexit data, it loaded less strongly on the issue fatigue factor in the Referendum data. Information Processing Involvement was found stronger in the Referendum than in the Brexit data.

2.2 Paper II

Fatigued by Ongoing News Issues?

How Repeated Exposure to the Same News Issue Affects the Audience

When a news issue is of ongoing topicality and covered by news media extensively for a prolonged period, news users can be exposed to this issue repeatedly for weeks, months, or years. There are indications from several countries that citizens become fatigued from ongoing political issues in the news and, consequently, try to avoid them. News users' fatigue from, and avoidance of, current political issues would be detrimental to a politically informed citizenry. This study examines the potential effects on news users from repeated exposure to a news issue by applying a qualitative, longitudinal, mixed-methods approach. The findings from the qualitative content analysis of data obtained from semi-structured diaries combined with semi-structured interviews with the same participants reveal that, along with repeated exposure, news users hold specific cognitions, such as redundancy, regarding the issue and its media coverage. They show emotions regarding the issue, such as annoyance, and behaviors, such as avoidance during news exposure. It becomes apparent that fatigue with an ongoing political issue can carry further implications for the user's knowledge of the issue, their evaluations of political actors, and their trust in news media.

Introduction

Several studies have indicated that media attention to issues can be modeled in cycles, waves, or hypes (Geiss, 2011; Waldherr, 2014; Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009). Despite differences between issues, a typical pattern of media attention to issues has been identified. Accordingly, media attention increases during latency, breakthrough, and boom phases until a threshold point, after which it decreases (Waldherr, 2014) due to declining input from actors and events, other competing issues, or a decline in public interest (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990; Downs, 1972; Geiss, 2011; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). However, for some issues—such as the Syrian war, Brexit, or the refugee crisis—media coverage remains extensive for a prolonged period despite a potential decline in public interest. Thus, there can be a mismatch between news media's and the public's attribution of attention and relevance to these issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Within this context, the idea of public boredom and saturation effects regarding such issues has been mentioned (Henry & Gordon, 2001; Neuman, 1990).

The investigation of negative effects on individuals from frequent exposure over a prolonged period has so far been focused on persuasive media messages or stimuli, such as advertisements or health campaigns, often in the context of the concept of overexposure (Rethans et al., 1986; So et al., 2017). These studies show that the evaluation of the stimulus in question shifts from positive to negative when individuals are exposed to it too frequently. This finding, as well as the idea of public boredom and saturation effects, suggests that prolonged exposure to an issue in news media is likely to affect users negatively.

A concept that is both connected to research on effects from extensive exposure and tries to grasp such a negative effect is the idea of issue fatigue among news users. When users are exposed to media coverage on an issue excessively over a prolonged period, they react negatively to the

issue and its coverage at some point and tend to avoid the issue during subsequent news exposure and in interpersonal encounters (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). In contrast to negative consequences from news exposure in general, such as news overload (York, 2013) or news avoidance (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020), issue fatigue and the resulting avoidance behavior are tied to frequent exposure to news media coverage of a single issue.

Against this backdrop, a thorough investigation of the potential effects of prolonged news media coverage of single public issues on news users remains lacking. Thus, this study strives to add to this line of research by analyzing what happens to news users when they are exposed frequently to news media coverage of the same issue over a prolonged period. We combine a semi-structured diary study with semi-structured interviews to investigate these mechanisms using reporting of the Brexit issue in Switzerland. Understanding these mechanisms is important because, particularly for issues that are relevant to society, negative reactions, such as avoiding current information, would be problematic since an informed and participatory citizenry is the foundation of a functioning democracy (Delli Carpini, 2000). Furthermore, potential negative effects indicate a disruption in the common attribution of relevance and attention to political issues by news media and the public, reducing news media's influence on the public regarding current issues.

Effects from Repeated Exposure

According to theoretical models of repetition effects, stimuli become more accessible and familiar to the individual through repetition, so the stimulus can be processed more easily in exposure situations (Zajonc, 1968). There is a positive habituation to the stimulus due to the reduction of uncertainty, the perception of the stimulus as novel, interesting, and stimulating, and the rewarding effect of learning. The individual processes messages more deeply and learns more

about the stimulus. However, after a threshold point, the attitude toward the stimulus becomes more negative when the individual is exposed to the stimulus more often. Tedium is evoked by perceptions of monotony, saturation, and reactance; information is processed less deeply and learning decreases. Thus, the evaluation shifts from positive to negative (Berlyne, 1970; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979; Stang, 1975).

Previous research related to communication has investigated repetition effects, predominantly concerning persuasive stimuli focusing on attitudes and credibility (Koch & Zerback, 2013). First, such repetition effects have been studied for repeated exposure to advertisements. Advertising wearout refers to a decline in the effectiveness of a commercial because of repeated exposure (Calder & Sternthal, 1980; Craig et al., 1976). One explanation is that attention to the advert decreases along with repeated exposure because of decreased learning and increased reactance and tedium (Kinnucan et al., 1993; Rethans et al., 1986). Another explanation is that, with increasing exposure, negative own thoughts, which are only indirectly associated with the advert, outnumber positive message-related thoughts, which were dominant at the beginning (Calder & Sternthal, 1980). Studies on advertising wearout point to different outcomes of repeated exposure to an advert, namely negative affect such as tedium and annoyance, negative evaluations of the advert, decreased learning or recall, respectively, and changes in cognitions, more precisely increased negative thoughts and decreased elaboration and information processing (Burke & Edell, 1986; Calder & Sternthal, 1980; Rethans et al., 1986).

Second, overexposure has been investigated for health messages such as campaigns against tobacco use or obesity (Baseman et al., 2013; Kim & So, 2018; So et al., 2017). The concept of message fatigue has been introduced as an “aversive motivational state of being exhausted and bored by overexposure to similar, redundant messages over an extended period of time” (So et al., 2017, p. 10). Relevant dimensions include the perception of overexposure and redundancy as part

of the message environment, exhaustion or burnout, and tedium or boredom as the individual's response to the messages. Health message fatigue results in disengagement with the message through inattention and avoidance, as well as resistance to the persuasive intent (Kim & So, 2018; So & Alam, 2019; So et al., 2017).

With regard to non-persuasive stimuli and the news media environment, Kinnick et al. (1996) elaborated on the idea that citizens become weary of or burned out over prominent social problems, particularly due to intensive exposure to these issues via news coverage. Desensitized or burned-out individuals are less interested in and emotionally aroused by the social problem in question. In addition, affected individuals were found to change their media use behavior in different ways, such as changing channels, being increasingly selective, or reducing overall media use. Furthermore, news overload can be the result of cumulative exposure to news. News users cannot process all news information available and feel psychological discomfort (Lee et al., 2019; York, 2013). However, compassion fatigue and news overload concern exposure to news in general rather than the same stimulus. Repetition and overexposure effects have not yet been investigated for political news issues that users are exposed to repeatedly over a prolonged period.

Overexposure to News Issues: Remaining Questions

Bringing together findings on repetition and overexposure effects from other domains allows for approaching the research gap concerning overexposure effects from political news issues. While this research suggests that repeated exposure affects cognitions, emotions, and behavior regarding the stimulus, what effects occur exactly when users are exposed frequently to news media coverage of the same issue over a prolonged period is still unknown.

A recent concept that tries to consider these preconditions is the concept of issue fatigue. It

suggests that users react negatively to current political issues that news media cover frequently and extensively over a prolonged period. Researchers found that issue fatigue can be conceptualized as a negative cognitive and affective state toward a public political issue. Issue fatigue develops over a period of repeated exposure to information about an issue, and it can lead to information avoidance (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). However, several facets of the phenomenon of becoming issue-fatigued remain unclear. A detailed and deep analysis is necessary to understand how audience fatigue emerges, what kind of cognitions and emotions it entails specifically, and what kind of behavioral consequences occur over time. A profound analysis is also necessary to observe whether and how these aspects develop over a period.

Overexposure affects cognitions, such as thoughts about the stimulus in terms of supportive and counterarguments and positive versus negative evaluations (Calder & Sternthal, 1980; Malaviya, 2007). In the context of issue fatigue, Schumann (2018) discusses the cognition of no longer wanting to hear or see anything about the issue, but beyond that, which cognitions occur along repeated exposure to the same news issue remains unclear.

RQ1. How does frequent exposure to an issue during a prolonged period affect users' cognitions regarding the issue?

Effects from excessive exposure on affect have been found through research on compassion fatigue (Kinnick et al., 1996) and repetition effects in advertising, particularly the perception of boredom, tedium, and reactance (Rethans et al., 1986). Also, previous approaches to issue fatigue have provided indications that repeated exposure to news media coverage on the same issue elicits annoyance, anger, and further negative emotions (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). When repeatedly exposed to an issue or its respective media coverage, it is reasonable to assume that media reports on the issue act as triggers, thereby leading to specific

emotions (Konijn, 2015).

RQ2. How does frequent exposure to an issue during a prolonged period affect users emotionally?

Findings on health message fatigue suggest that overlapping and repetitive information is perceived as redundant (So et al., 2017), and for persuasive media messages, a perceived lack of credibility concerning the message has been found (Koch & Zerback, 2013). As for the concept of issue fatigue, a lack of credibility and diversity in media coverage and an excess of information have been observed empirically (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016). Thus, overexposure can also affect cognitions regarding media coverage of the issue.

RQ3. How does frequent exposure to an issue during a prolonged period affect the perception of the issue-specific news media coverage?

Thus, concerning cognitions, overexposure possibly can affect two different, albeit related, stimuli—the issue itself and media coverage of the issue. While advertising wearout results from repeated exposure to the exact *same* message (Craig et al., 1976) and health message fatigue from overexposure to *similar* messages (So et al., 2017), media messages on a news issue from various media channels over a longer period differ considerably from each other concerning events, viewpoints, and the actors covered. In contrast to advertising and health messages, we can expect a certain degree of novelty in the media messages on the issue, considering that events still require a certain degree of novelty to be reported in news media (Herbert, 2000). Nevertheless, the issue is the common core of all the various messages. This suggests that overexposure effects should occur primarily with the issue. However, the question is to what extent users differentiate between the issue and messages about the issue. On the other hand, previous research has so far pointed to

overexposure effects solely with media messages. Users might perceive the media messages as redundant and lacking novelty despite objective novelty and different aspects covered. The question is, therefore, to what extent do effects from overexposure occur with either the issue or media coverage of the issue?

RQ4. How do users' stances toward the issue and its media coverage interact during frequent exposure to an issue over a prolonged period?

Previous research on health message fatigue (So et al., 2017) and on the reception of news in general has found that when too much information or news is perceived, a state of information overload can arise. So far, information and news overload have been conceptualized as being primarily cognitive, but as also involving negative emotions, such as distress (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Lee et al., 2019; York, 2013). However, the role of the amount of information received on a public issue for overload perceptions has so far not been investigated longitudinally.

RQ5. To what extent and in what way do users perceive information overload during a prolonged period of frequent exposure to an issue?

In addition, overexposure research in health communication and compassion fatigue points to effects on behavior from repeated exposure, such as approaching or avoiding the stimulus (Kinnick et al., 1996; So et al., 2017). It has also been found that avoiding an issue is related to being exposed to it frequently during a prolonged period (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016). However, it is not clear what forms of avoidance appear when users are confronted repeatedly with the issue.

RQ6. How does frequent exposure to an issue during a prolonged period affect selection and avoidance of information on the issue?

Methods

Answering these questions requires repeated observations of users' stances toward the issue over a period of exposure situations. Due to this study's exploratory character, a qualitative research design was applied. While we deduce the broad categories of cognitions, emotions, and behavior from previous research, we investigate inductively *what kinds* of cognitions, emotions, and behavioral consequences can be detected when users are exposed frequently to a political issue over a prolonged period of media coverage. To observe potential changes in users' stance toward the issue over repeated exposure situations, we conducted a longitudinal semi-structured diary study complemented by semi-structured interviews. This mixed-methods approach (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017) enabled us to investigate the daily reception of the issue in question over a longer period, both shortly after exposure and in a profound and comprehensive manner. The research project was pre-examined by the responsible ethics commission, who decided that ethical approval is not required. For this study, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU; Brexit) has been chosen as an ongoing political issue. Brexit is a non-national issue for Switzerland, which can, nevertheless, have an impact on the Swiss economy and its relationship with the UK. Thus, the issue allows for some degree of involvement with the issue but, at the same time, does not concern the Swiss population as strongly as a national issue. It is, therefore, a suitable issue for observing potential overexposure effects.

Brexit has been covered by news media since the referendum in 2016. However, the period of spring 2019 was considered a suitable investigation period because it covered several postponements of Brexit due to a lack of agreement on the exit conditions and the corresponding negotiations between UK and the EU under the pressure of time. Thus, this period is one of extensive exposure and with a particular thematic focus. News media in Switzerland have covered

Brexit extensively prior to and during the investigation period. In total, 1,091 reports were found on front pages and political news sections of the 45 most widely used Swiss daily and weekly print newspapers, online news sites, and TV news series from April 6 to June 16, 2019 (see Figure 1).¹ However, the Brexit issue was not a completely new issue at the beginning of the data collection period, and participants' previous experiences with the issue and potentially resulting predispositions were not captured, which poses a limitation to our analysis. We made the decision to gather data on the Brexit issue on April 5, when the Brexit postponement to June 2019 was highly probable, and started data collection after the participants' recruitment, on April 24. Data collection ended on June 7, when Theresa May resigned as prime minister and less news coverage was expected until the new Brexit date in October 2019.

¹ A media content analysis on the Brexit issue was conducted as part of a larger research project.

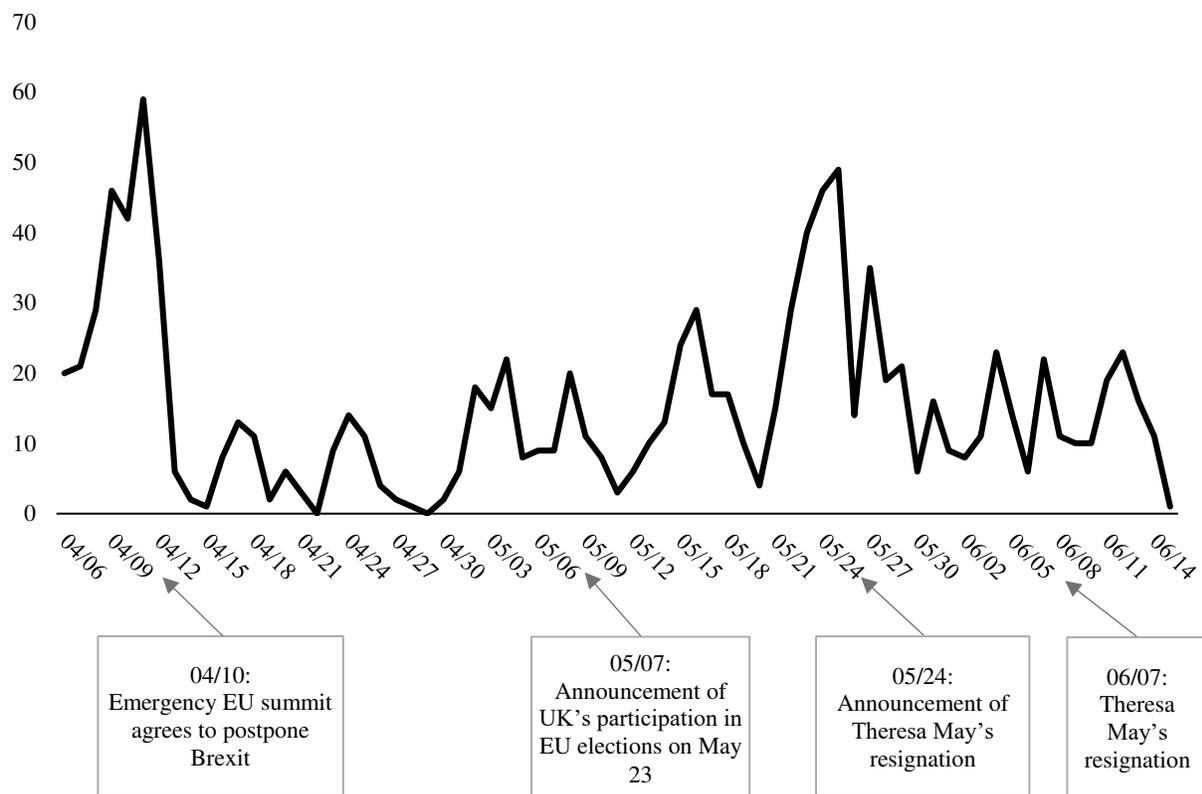


Figure 1. Media reports on Brexit per Day (2019)

Participants

Participants were recruited from the first wave of a representative panel survey ($n = 1,338$) in Switzerland on the Brexit issue conducted by a professional market and social research institute as part of a larger research project. Altogether, 60 of the 102 participants who participated in the survey within the first two days (April 11 and 12, 2019) and agreed to participate in a further study were selected. We excluded individuals who were probably not frequently exposed to the Brexit issue during the study period based on several criteria. Altogether, 35 people finally agreed to participate in the diary study. The average age was 50, and 17 participants were female. 62.9

percent of the participants have a tertiary education.² 18 participants were chosen for the interviews.

Diary Study and Interview Procedure

The participants filled out a short semi-structured online diary on three evenings per week between April 24 and June 7, 2019. The online diary survey comprised both open and standardized measures of through which sources participants were exposed to the issue on that day, changes in the evaluation of the issue and media coverage, cognitive and emotional associations with the issue, perceptions and evaluations of news media coverage, information load, and avoidance behavior.

Studying the data after each day of data entries allowed for the selection of participants to do a 20-minute semi-structured interview.³ The researchers and assistants tracked the quantitative measures and selected participants if the their evaluation of the issue and the media coverage became more negative, information overload was increasingly perceived, avoidance of the issue increased over two to three subsequent days of data entries, or when increasingly negative answers to these variables were observed repeatedly over longer intervals. In addition, we considered selecting a participant if he/she did not care whether they were informed about the issue or did not want to receive any information on the issue repeatedly, as opposed to wanting to be continually informed about it. Second, participants were selected based on their answers to open-ended questions, more precisely, when they reported negative thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior regarding the issue, which indicate fatigue dimensions, at least twice.

Altogether, 18 participants were interviewed by phone or Skype between May 15 and June 16, 2019. The interview questions addressed the questions from the diary in an in-depth manner

² Further information on the sampling procedure and the sample can be found in the supplemental material file.

³ The diary questionnaire and the interview guideline can be found in the supplemental material file.

(Edwards & Holland, 2013). The interviews complement the diary study in that some of the interview questions referred back to answers from the diary of each individual participant. This way, we could ask for further elaborations on the answers given in the diary. Some details of the interview guidelines were, thus, adapted individually for each participant prior to the interview. Participants were asked about their emotional and cognitive stance toward issue, and their perception of the information load. In the second part of the interview, they answered questions about their perception of the media coverage on the issue. Subsequently, participants were asked about the role the issue and media coverage of it play in their perceptions. Finally, participants spoke about their behavior when confronted with the issue.

Data Analysis

Answers to standardized questions from the diary study were translated into text (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Subsequently, one researcher and one assistant analyzed the answers from the diary study and the interviews using MAXQDA software. Following Mayring (2015), the common deductive category system based on the diary survey and interview guidelines was supplemented with further inductive sub-categories, such as particular cognitions and emotions, during the coding procedure.

After coding, data from the diary study and the interview transcripts were linked on a case-by-case basis, resulting in a table for each case, including the coded diary entries over time and the coded interview passages structured by the deductive categories and both deductive and inductive sub-categories. During further analysis, the categories were analyzed for each research question, first, for each case separately, and second, at the aggregate level for all cases (Flick, 2014).

Results

Before the users' reactions to the issue and its media coverage over the period of frequent exposure are described below through each research question, we report how the evaluation of the issue and the media coverage developed over the investigation period. Most participants indicated several times in their diaries that they evaluated the issue more negatively than the last few days (i.e., for some participants, the evaluation became increasingly negative as they were exposed to the issue cumulatively). Other participants provided a more negative evaluation only on certain days. Consequently, their evaluation became more negative at some points and remained at this level until it became even more negative or, in a few cases, more positive. However, we did not observe a linear increase in the negative evaluation at the aggregate level. Another group of participants did not show any changes during the investigation period. Most participants evaluated media coverage on the issue in question either continually positively or negatively during the period of frequent exposure. However, for approximately one quarter of participants, the evaluation shifted from positive to negative over the period of frequent exposure. After several days during the investigation period, their evaluation worsened compared with previous days.

RQ1: Cognitions

When frequently exposed to the Brexit issue, participants perceived the issue as drawn out and its enduring topicality as unnecessary (see Table 1). To them, the issue was “*worn out*” (ID = 7, male, age = 35, education = 3, issue interest = 4, political interest = 4; diary: 05/06),⁴ an “*endless*

⁴ Education levels (1 = *low*; 2 = *medium*; 3 = *high*); interest in the issue (from 1 = *not interested at all* to 5 = *very interested*); political interest (from 1 = *not interested at all* to 5 = *very interested*); the last information refers to the date of the diary entry or interview.

loop” (ID = 13, age = 43, male, education = 3, issue interest = 4, political interest = 4; diary: 05/06), and a “*never ending story*” (ID = 14, age = 48, female, education = 3, issue interest = 4, political interest = 4; interview: 06/16). They were negative about the issue’s **lengthiness** and did not see an end to it. In addition, participants argued that nothing new was happening and that the same political actions were repeated. It seems that the participants do not, or only barely, recognize new developments regarding the issue. Instead, they perceived the happenings as repetitive and **redundant** when frequently exposed to the issue for a prolonged period. Some participants attributed redundancy primarily to the political situation, rather than to the issue itself. Participants criticized a **lack of progress** and changes in the political situation. It was noted that the issue was unnecessarily protracted, with no progress made. Some participants related their negative thoughts concerning the political stalemate more directly to the political actors than to the issue itself. In their view, politicians brought up the same arguments and questions but did not find a solution. They are **discontented** with politicians and criticized directly how they handled the issue.

Table 1

Cognitions

Dimensions	Example
Lengthiness	<i>It takes so long; that’s negative. And simply because it’s being dragged out—unnecessarily in my opinion. (ID=12, age=54, male, education=2, issue interest=5, political interest=4; interview: 06/12)</i>
Redundancy/lack of novelty	<i>Not much news. You almost feel as if a rotating record has been put on. The topic hasn’t lost any of its laboriousness. (ID=15, age=76, male, education=3, issue interest=5, political interest=4; diary: 05/15)</i>
Lack of progress	<i>It disturbed me that it somehow was the same points again. Something happens, but nevertheless, there is no solution. That the same questions are being asked over and over again; it’s some kind of circle. Somehow the whole thing turns around and around. The same arguments are being brought up constantly. (ID=19, age=33, female, education=3, issue interest=3, political interest=3; interview: 05/15)</i>
Political discontent	<i>Well, the issue itself didn’t actually, and also the media coverage didn’t actually annoy me, just somehow how those people dealt with it. (ID=11, age=55, female, education=2, issue interest=2, political interest=3; interview: 06/16)</i>

RQ2: Affect

It was noted that some participants were not involved emotionally with the issue over the period of frequent exposure. Some stated explicitly that the issue left them indifferent due to a lack of personal relevance and efficacy concerning the issue. However, participants who felt emotionally affected after exposure to the issue perceived negative emotions regarding the issue either at some points in time or as overarching impressions over the period of frequent exposure (see Table 2). **Annoyance** co-occurred from perceived lengthiness, a lack of progress, and the politicians' handling of the issue. In addition, participants perceived the constant presence of the issue and frequent exposure to news media coverage of it as annoying. Superficial and scandalous portraying evoked annoyance. Participants felt **angry** and upset when exposed to information on the issue. This feeling related to the political situation, where a lack of progress was perceived. The feeling that political actors who do not find a solution but argue with each other and have done so for a long enough time provoked anger in the participants. Similarly, participants perceived **boredom** in the context of a lack of progress with the political situation. Within the diary study, participants often displayed boredom without elaborating further on this perception. They simply mentioned their boredom by one or a few words, such as "*once again*" (ID = 27, age = 24, female, education = 3, issue interest = 3, political interest = 3; diary: 05/02) or "*boredom*" (ID = 6, age = 40, male, education = 2, issue interest = 3, political interest = 4; diary: 05/06).

Table 2*Affect*

Dimensions	Example
Annoyance	<i>Actually, what has been written, it went on endlessly, and that's annoying.</i> (ID=7, age=35, male, education=3, issue interest=4, political interest=4; interview: 05/30)
Anger	<i>The first news in a long time, and they keep dithering. Anger, disappointment.</i> (ID=7, age=35, male, education=3, issue interest=4, political interest=4; diary: 05/22)
Boredom	<i>Boring, annoying, they ought to move forward.</i> (ID=12, 54, age=male, education=2, issue interest=5, political interest=4; diary: 05/17)

RQ3: Evaluation of Media Coverage

Most prominently, participants perceived a **lack of novelty** in the reporting and that the information provided was repetitive and redundant, similar to redundancy perceived regarding the issue (see Table 3). In their view, they did not read or see anything new but always the same and, thus, did not learn anything new from the information provided. This fostered their disengagement with the issue; they cared less if they miss novelty. In particular, those who consistently evaluated the reporting as negative were dissatisfied with how news media depicted the Brexit issue. Participants perceived the reporting as **sensationalist** and scandalous, with some aspects exaggerated. This particularly concerned the coverage of the political actors. This perception of sensationalism evoked annoyance. Furthermore, participants evaluated the media coverage as **personalized**; they mentioned that the reporting focused too much on the main actors involved. They stated that they would have wished for more detailed information on the political situation and arguments rather than focusing on the dominant political actors and their repeated statements. Similarly, the participants stated that they wanted more in-depth information in the reporting and missed a **lack of depth**. They deemed the information provided as superficial and wished for a more detailed reporting of arguments. Participants wanted to know more details than what reporters provided. However, some participants were negative about the **complexity** of reporting on the

issue. They did not feel that they were able to follow the reporting and did not understand exactly what it was about due to its complexity. This could lead to less engagement with the issue and its media coverage.

Table 3

Evaluation of Media Coverage

Dimensions	Example
Lack of novelty/information redundancy	<i>That Theresa May is resigning today was actually known days ago. So nothing new there. Boris Johnson and Michael Grove being possible successors of T.M.—isn't new either. It seems the media coverage is a little stuck at the moment. Or have I read the wrong newspaper?</i> (ID=16, age=72, female, education=2, issue interest=4, political interest=4; diary: 06/07)
Sensationalism	<i>I realize that on the weekend, there is the discussion of Boris Johnson. Then I realized it starts being annoying again, the scandalous about it.</i> (ID=1, age=51, female, education=3, issue interest=5, political interest=4; interview: 06/16)
Personalization	<i>You felt like this woman [Theresa May] was being used as cannon fodder, but the background—how and what exactly—that would've been more interesting for me.</i> (ID=1, age=51, female, education=3, issue interest=5, political interest=4; interview: 06/16)
Lack of depth	<i>Yes, you've only constantly heard the closing words of Theresa May, but not much more. [...] What I missed exactly was the debate, the pros and cons. [...] Those superficial statements, then I don't like to hear about it anymore.</i> (ID=1, age=51, female, education=3, issue interest=5, political interest=4; interview: 06/16)
Complexity	<i>The information came across as too complex. [...] When you are not really following it, then it's usually just too complex and so, so it just isn't interesting anymore to follow, when you don't get it from the start.</i> (ID=21, age=27, female, education=2, issue interest=2, political interest=4; interview: 06/12)

RQ4: Relationship between Issue and Media Coverage Evaluation

Three types of relationships between the evaluation of media coverage of the issue and the issue itself over a period of frequent exposure have been found inductively (see Table 4). One group of participants described their stance toward the issue and media coverage **independently** from one another and perceived negatively either only the issue or the media coverage. These perceptions have been described under RQ1 and 3. Over the period of frequent exposure, the second group of participants were negative about both the issue and news media coverage and did **not differentiate**

in their evaluation. They evaluated certain aspects negatively regarding the issue, such as lengthiness and lack of novelty and progress, which they expressed in the form of a general statement without reflecting on the source of their discontent. They did not differentiate between whether they perceived so because there was actually nothing new happening regarding the issue or because news media did not report anything new.

The third group of participants were generally negative about **similar** aspects concerning both the issue and media coverage **but differentiated** between politics and news media's roles (a). Some of these deemed the political situation responsible for their negative perceptions and were aware that it is news media's task to report political news, despite a lack of progress. However, other participants, who evaluated the issue and its media coverage similarly negatively, blamed the news media despite their awareness of the news media's role. They argued that it was not necessary to report on the issue constantly when nothing new happened (b).

Table 4

Relationship between Issue and Media Coverage Evaluation

Dimensions	Example
Independent evaluation	See Tables 1 and Tables 3.
Undifferentiated evaluation	<i>It goes around in circles, and it was exactly the same with the media coverage. There was never anything new. It was always the same in the media coverage. (ID=6, age=40, male, education=2, issue interest=3, political interest=4; interview: 05/23)</i>
Similar but differentiated evaluation (a)	<i>So, the problem isn't the media coverage, but what's happening politically. That's somehow mirrored in the media coverage, and that's actually the endless thing, always so endlessly, endlessly, endlessly. (ID=7, age=35, male, education=3, issue interest=4, political interest=4; interview: 05/30)</i>
Similar but differentiated evaluation (b)	<i>They look at the issue from many different perspectives, and at some point, it's just 'through,' but they have to squeeze everything out of it. So, I felt sometimes like they could also let it be, but nevertheless, they kept bringing it up. (ID=17, age=60, male, education=3, issue interest=3, political interest=4; interview: 06/12)</i>

RQ5: Information Load

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that one group of participants was satisfied with the amount of information received during the period of frequent exposure. They explained that they managed the amount of information to which they exposed themselves and were aware of the possibilities of selecting media content on the issue based on their informational needs. In particular, participants who were engaged highly with the issue stated that they did not receive enough information on the issue at certain times. However, other participants perceived having more information than they needed at times (see Table 5). These participants noted that when they used media for information purposes, they were faced with too much information and argued that news media paid too much attention to the issue. In this case, the **quantity** of received information exceeded the participants' needs. Some participants mentioned that it was primarily the **frequency** with which they were exposed to information on the issue that bothered them. Participants saw themselves as being exposed too frequently to information on the issue unwillingly, such as hourly, which was associated with annoyance and the perception that no one cares about the information provided.

Table 5
Information Load

Dimensions	Example
Overload regarding information quantity	<i>It's a very big amount of information. It occurred that I sometimes read almost too much about the issue or that in some places, there was almost too much written. (ID=5, age=20, female, education=2, issue interest=3, political interest=4; interview: 05/23)</i>
Overload regarding frequency	<i>By reporting every day in every newspaper about the topic Brexit—every day, in every medium, from radio to Tagesschau to 10vor10—there was always something about Brexit. And I feel like no one in Switzerland cares anymore. (ID=6, age=40, male, education=2, issue interest=3, political interest=4; interview: 05/23)</i>

RQ6: Selection and Avoidance

Participants indicated that they avoided information on the issue in exposure situations (see Table 6). They tuned out from media content internally and only skimmed through articles, paying less attention to TV or radio news on the issue when they realized the information was redundant to them. These behaviors can be viewed as **cognitive avoidance strategies** (Schramm & Wirth, 2008). In addition, participants applied **behavioral strategies**. Some distracted themselves from media content on the issue by doing something else, stopped reading an article, or turned off the sound on a news program. This seemed to be triggered by certain aspects of the information received, such as a perceived lack of novelty, the presence of certain political actors, or the simple presence of the issue.

Table 6

Behavior

Dimensions	Example
Cognitive avoidance	<i>Sometimes I did do something else when I knew, oh well, they're discussing the things I already know or that have been discussed three times already, then I certainly didn't listen or watch as carefully as usual. (ID=17, age=60, male, education=3, issue interest=3, political interest=4; interview: 06/12)</i>
Behavioral avoidance	<i>I did something else during this time. So, for example, when the Tagesschau is running, and they discuss Brexit, I take out my mobile phone and look up something. I distract myself. (ID=6, age=40, male, education=2, issue interest=3, political interest=4; interview: 05/23)</i>

Discussion

The findings indicate that news users appear to be affected diversely in their cognitions regarding the issue. While some perceive the issue's drawn-out existence and lack of progress, others who are rather highly involved with the issue focus primarily on the political handling of the issue and display discontent with the political actors. Almost all participants—though to a

varying degree—perceived repetitiveness, monotony, and redundancy in coverage of the issue. The perception of redundancy and a lack of novelty is in line with overexposure to health messages (So et al., 2017) and the theoretical models of repetition effects (Berlyne, 1970; Stang, 1975). These negative cognitions are often paired with negative emotions (Storbeck & Clore, 2007). Those who show themselves to be emotionally involved with the issue after repeated exposure mostly perceive annoyance, anger, and boredom related to cognitions regarding the issue and the media coverage. These emotional responses are in line with previous research on the phenomenon of issue fatigue (Kuhlmann et al., 2014).

In particular, users perceive a lack of novelty in media coverage. The prevalent perception of redundancy in news coverage resembles a finding by Kuhlmann et al. (2014) that users miss diversity in the reporting of ongoing issues. It supports the finding that novelty influences the evaluation of the stimulus (Berlyne, 1970; So et al., 2017). Unlike findings on persuasive messages (Ernst et al., 2017; Koch & Zerback, 2013), a lack of credibility seems less relevant in the context of repeated exposure to news issues. While some users hold a negative overarching position on both the issue and its media coverage, particularly due to a lack of novelty, other users hold two different stances or a similarly negative stance toward both, but still reflect news media's role. Negative effects can occur concerning either both the issue and its media coverage or one of these exclusively. Therefore, further research should consider these two stimuli, similar to the conceptualization of health-message fatigue having dimensions related to the message environment and the audience response (So et al., 2017).

In addition, participants felt they were faced too frequently with the issue or with too much information on it. Avoidance occurs more often on the level of cognitive and behavioral strategies during exposure than on the initial level of selection or avoidance, respectively (Schramm & Wirth, 2008; Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020).

The findings suggest that some cognitions, such as redundancy and a lack of novelty regarding both the issue and its media coverage, and emotions such as boredom, are similar to overexposure effects from persuasive messages (Rethans et al., 1986; So et al., 2017). However, lengthiness, a perceived lack of progress, political discontent, and anger concerning the issue are effects that occur particularly in relation to ongoing news issues. The difference from effects of persuasive messages can be either due to the non-persuasive nature of news issues or the higher degree of objective novelty and variety of received news on an issue compared to the same campaign message or advert. However, users do not necessarily recognize novelty and variety in the issue and its news coverage.

The findings carry implications on several levels. They indicate that some users are particularly negative about the lack of progress and long, drawn-out coverage of the issue, which is in part traceable to the political actors involved. Priming effects can occur because negative associations with the current issue are activated in users and influence how they evaluate the performance of political actors handling the issue (Domke et al., 1998). Thus, users' experience with the current issue can affect their attitude toward politics in terms of trust or support (Norris, 2017). Furthermore, attitudes toward news media, including trust, are based on users' experiences with single journalistic pieces (Grosser, 2016), such as exposure to media reports on a current political issue. Thus, their negative evaluation of media coverage on the issue can shape their general attitude toward news media in the long term. This is problematic against the backdrop of citizens increasingly tuning out news media (Blekesaune et al., 2012). Therefore, journalists should consider the effects of frequent exposure to their coverage of a political issue in their reporting styles.

Concerning generalizability, a heterogeneous sample has been chosen with regards to predispositions toward the Brexit issue and information behavior regarding this issue to reveal a

broad range of effects, some of which have been observed for only a few participants and, thus, lack internal generalizability. In addition, the sample consists of participants who are on average highly interested in politics, which is a further constraint to generalizability to the population. Moreover, this study's findings are linked to the Brexit issue and its reception in Switzerland. It is possible that findings would vary with other issues that are international/national and specific to the country of investigation, as well as differ in complexity and obtrusiveness from the Brexit issue (Berlyne, 1970; Bornstein, 1989). However, the key effects from frequent exposure identified within this study, such as a perceived lack of novelty and annoyance, can occur equally with other political issues.

The Brexit issue had been on the news media's agenda for a long time before this study began, before the Brexit referendum in the UK in June 2016. In addition, the news media covered the issue extensively during the weeks before the start of the study. Thus, it is possible that users' orientations changed before this study, and that we missed these effects for methodological reasons. However, news media coverage around the investigation period was particularly extensive and focused on a particular sub-issue, specifically negotiations between the UK and the EU concerning exit conditions. In addition, we ensured that none of the participants had already tuned out from the issue completely at the beginning of the study, which, at the same time, caused a bias in the sample regarding issue predispositions.

In addition, our results on changes in the users' orientations and behavior regarding the issue are limited. While we could draw some conclusions on the development of issue and media coverage evaluations over time based on our quantitative measures, we could not identify temporal changes in the qualitative measures. First, participants often shifted their focus to different aspects when answering an open-ended question several times. When they focused on the same dimension, for example, the emotion of boredom, several times, it was often still not clear enough to declare a

clear increase or decrease in this perception, especially if they gave answers to the question at irregular intervals. Questions that are narrower or ask directly about perceived changes could be a solution.

Furthermore, the diary study could not validly capture participants' responses and their changes at every single measurement point due to a lack of media coverage of the issue on certain days. Some of the participants' responses suggest that social desirability played a role in these studies (i.e., some preferred to present themselves positively toward the issue due to its political relevance and topicality). Furthermore, we can assume that participation in this study over several weeks affected the participants' behavior concerning the issue and, thus, response behavior. Such panel and conditioning effects are difficult to avoid entirely and need to be considered when applying longitudinal research designs (Trivellato, 1999).

Finally, our results are based on a small sample, which enables us to identify what effects of repeated exposure to an ongoing news issue occur within a heterogeneous group of individuals with different levels of interest in the issue and attention paid to news coverage on the issue. However, we cannot draw conclusions either on frequencies and variations of the effects or on their generalizability. Related to this, we conducted this exploratory study on only one ongoing issue.

Future research should investigate, first, in an exploratory way, overexposure effects for other political issues, such as more obtrusive ones or national issues with a higher degree of expected involvement. In addition, issues that have been constantly on the public agenda for years, such as climate change (Capstick & Pidgeon, 2014), should be considered. These issues remain on the agenda due to their global and enduring relevance, which makes overexposure effects even more problematic.

Building on exploratory qualitative studies, quantitative research based on a larger sample will inform better about frequencies and variations of the identified dimensions and help to generalize

the findings. The focus should be longitudinal to account for the dynamics inherent in the processes and to test reciprocal causal relations between the relevant dimensions. In addition, a longer time period covering the whole presence of an issue on the public agenda would enhance the validity of observing overexposure effects and allow for a comprehensive analysis of temporal developments in orientations and behavior regarding the issue. Beyond repeated exposure to ongoing news issues and their effects on issue orientations and behavior, further studies should take into account users' political and issue predispositions as well as traits and other characteristics, such as general news exposure, explicitly as potential moderators.

When the interest is the effects of objective media coverage intensity and characteristics as opposed to their perceptions by users—as with this study—it would be promising to content-analyze media coverage on the issue in question and to link these data to survey data from participants at the individual level. This could inform about potential interactions of frequency of exposure and media content characteristics, such as novelty, in affecting cognitions, emotions, and behavior regarding the issue and its news coverage.

Conclusions

This study transfers the idea of overexposure to the news media environment and addresses the issue of how news media report on some issues frequently and extensively over a longer period, even though the public might no longer agree with the relevance level given to the issue and instead perceive issue fatigue (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). The findings from this exploratory, mixed-methods study suggest that repeated exposure to the same political issue over a prolonged period particularly impacts users' affective and cognitive stance toward the issue and their evaluation of media coverage, leading some news users to turn away from the issue.

Thus, the theoretical idea of public boredom and saturation effects regarding public issues, occurring when media attention to these issues is enduringly high (Henry & Gordon, 2001; Neuman, 1990), is supported. Users' issue fatigue can carry further detrimental implications for the individual users, political processes, and news media, or journalists, respectively, thereby qualifying as a relevant subject for further research.

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*Paper II Appendix***Table A1.** *Participants' Characteristics*

ID	Study Participation	Age in Years	Sex	Interest in Brexit at the beginning of the study (April 2019)	Attention to Brexit at the beginning of the study (April 2019)
1	Diary & Interview	51	Female	Very interested	Very attentive
2	Diary & Interview	58	Male	Somewhat interested	Somewhat attentive
3	Diary	57	Female	Neutral	Not very attentive
4	Diary	78	Male	Very interested	Very attentive
5	Diary & Interview	20	Female	Neutral	Not very attentive
6	Diary & Interview	40	Male	Neutral	Neutral
7	Diary & Interview	35	Male	Somewhat interested	Somewhat attentive
8	Diary & Interview	60	Female	Neutral	Neutral
9	Diary & Interview	44	Male	Very interested	Very attentive
10	Diary & Interview	53	Male	Neutral	Somewhat attentive
11	Diary & Interview	55	Female	Not very interested	Neutral
12	Diary & Interview	54	Male	Very interested	Somewhat attentive
13	Diary & Interview	43	Male	Somewhat interested	Neutral
14	Diary & Interview	48	Female	Somewhat interested	Very attentive
15	Diary	76	Male	Very interested	Very attentive
16	Diary & Interview	72	Female	Somewhat interested	Very attentive
17	Diary & Interview	60	Male	Neutral	Somewhat attentive
18	Diary & Interview	55	Female	Somewhat interested	Neutral
19	Diary & Interview	33	Female	Neutral	Not very attentive
20	Diary & Interview	45	Male	Not very interested	Not very attentive
21	Diary & Interview	27	Female	Not very interested	Not very attentive
22	Diary	64	Male	Somewhat interested	Very attentive
23	Diary	72	Female	Neutral	Somewhat attentive
24	Diary	41	Female	Somewhat interested	Neutral
25	Diary	53	Female	Not very interested	Not very attentive
26	Diary	50	Male	Somewhat interested	Very attentive
27	Diary	24	Female	Neutral	Not very attentive
28	Diary	23	Female	Neutral	Not very attentive
29	Diary	33	Male	Somewhat interested	Somewhat attentive
30	Diary	60	Male	Very interested	Very attentive
31	Diary	51	Male	Very interested	Somewhat attentive
32	Diary	44	Female	Neutral	Very attentive
33	Diary	54	Female	Somewhat interested	Neutral
34	Diary	75	Male	Neutral	Somewhat attentive
35	Diary	24	Male	Somewhat interested	Not very attentive

Notes. Information retrieved from participation in a panel survey on the same issue. Participants with ID 20, 28 and 35 were excluded from further analysis due to missing or invalid information provided.

Further Information on the Sampling Procedures and the Sample

Altogether, 60 of the 102 participants who participated in the panel survey within the first two days and agreed to participate in a further study were selected. The choice of the participants was based on several criteria: 1) giving a correct e-mail address for contact; 2) having at least “rather no interest” in the issue as opposed to “no interest at all” or “never having heard of the issue,” following news coverage on the issue with at least “rather less attention” as opposed to with “no attention at all,” not agreeing totally to be “annoyed by the issue” and to “no longer want to hear or see anything about the issue”; and 3) having used news media for information purposes (TV news, print daily and weekly newspapers, and online news sites) in at least four days of the previous week.

For an even distribution of women and men in the sample, we kept all 27 female participants of the 60 participants who were willing to participate and fulfilled the criteria. We chose 33 of the 46 male participants at random. The participants were contacted via e-mail on April 18 and sent information and instructions on participation in the study. Participants received a voucher worth 100 CHF at the end of the investigation period.

The participants’ interest in the issue was between medium and rather interested ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.94$), similar to attention paid previously to the issue ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.17$). Participants used TV news on average 3.30 days a week ($SD = 2.17$), printed daily newspapers 4.03 days ($SD = 2.70$), weekly magazines 1.09 days ($SD = 2.05$), online news sites 2.93 times ($SD = 2.33$), radio 3.77 times ($SD = 2.61$), and social media 1.74 times ($SD = 2.78$) for information purposes. In addition, the participants were rather interested in politics ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.69$).

Example of a selected participant for the interview: Participant no. 7 was selected when they 1) developed an increasingly negative evaluation of the issue (quantitative measure) and 2) answered

the open-ended question concerning associations with the issue: “The first news in a long time, and they keep dithering. Anger, disappointment” on May 22 and “political endless loop” and “disappointment” on May 25.

Participants were not selected for the interviews when their answers to the standardized questions did not change and when they did not indicate any negative emotions or cognitions regarding the issue or the media coverage, information overload, or avoidance behavior repeatedly.

2.3 Paper III

Examining Avoidance of Ongoing Political Issues in the News:

A Longitudinal Study of the Impact of Audience Issue Fatigue¹

This study examines relations between news users' fatigue from ongoing political news issues and different forms of avoiding these issues. When it comes to political issues, avoidance would be detrimental to an informed citizenry and problematic against the backdrop of citizens increasingly tuning out news media in general, as observed in recent years. The results from fixed effects regressions based on a three-wave panel survey show that increasing issue fatigue leads to increasing avoidance of the issue when selecting news media content and during exposure to news media content on the issue, although it does not affect avoidance of interpersonal discussions on the issue. Issue fatigue is a stronger predictor of avoidance during media use than other issue predispositions, such as issue importance and attitude. Thus, it emerges as a new explanatory approach to avoidance of media content on an issue level.

Keywords: media avoidance; issue fatigue; news issues; political issues; news media use

Published in 2021 in *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 1798–1809. Deviations from the otherwise underlying standards of this dissertation are due to the journal's standards and requirements. Page numbers refer to the dissertation document.

¹ This research was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF), Grant 176356.

Introduction

Coronavirus, Brexit, and climate change: News media have been covering these issues frequently and extensively over a long period of time. The emergence of news users' fatigue from these ongoing issues has been observed and discussed publicly, including in regard to an increasing number of news avoiders in general (Bedingfield, 2020; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019). The idea that overexposure to extensive media coverage of a political news issue during a particular period eventually causes a perception of fatigue from the issue has been introduced as a phenomenon known as *issue* or *topic fatigue* (Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). When news users no longer want to hear or see anything about an issue, they might strive to avoid the issue. Previous research already has found indications that issue fatigue is related to avoiding the issue in regard to news exposure and interpersonal conversations (Kuhlmann, Schumann, & Wolling, 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016). However, causal relationships between issue fatigue and different avoidance forms have yet to be investigated longitudinally.

As opposed to positive effects from extensive media coverage of public issues on media users, such as devoting more attention to such issues (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) and processing the information provided more deeply (Ciuk & Yost, 2016), fatigue from news issues and subsequent avoidance behavior are problematic. Mass media are viewed as the most important source of information for citizens, whose use of it for information purposes is associated positively with political knowledge and participation (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Scheufele, 2002). If individuals stay away from information on a current political issue, they may become less knowledgeable about current developments and decisions regarding the issue. This is problematic for the functioning of modern democracies, which are founded on an informed and participatory citizenry (van Aelst et al., 2017), particularly against the backdrop of an increasing number of general news avoiders tuning out current affairs completely

(Blekesaune, Elvestad, & Aalberg, 2012).

Thus, it is relevant to investigate the dynamics of ongoing news coverage of a political issue and news users' avoidance behavior. We do so by using the concept of issue fatigue to grasp news users' state of being overexposed to ongoing news coverage of an issue. Avoidance behavior so far has been researched in a variety of communication contexts, such as politically motivated selective exposure (Stroud, 2008), advertising (Cho & Hongsik, 2004), and news in general (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2019). Issue fatigue differs from these approaches because it occurs on the level of a single issue and is the result of overexposure to information on that issue. Furthermore, avoidance does not occur initially, but only if issue fatigue has emerged after a period of exposure to information on the issue. Against this backdrop, this study investigates how issue fatigue is related to issue-specific avoidance behavior. To account for the fact that issue fatigue and potential avoidance behavior develop over time and for underlying causal mechanisms, we used data from a panel survey.

The Concept of Issue Fatigue

Some researchers have introduced the idea that fatigue from public issues that news media cover extensively over a long period leads to avoidance of media content and interpersonal discussions on the issue (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). We define issue fatigue as an individual's negative state that emerges because of overexposure to an issue that news media cover extensively over a long period. Extant research on the effects from repeated exposure to stimuli, such as advertising or health messages, suggests that after a certain number of repetitions, the evaluation of a stimulus can shift from positive to negative. In the beginning, the stimulus is novel and perceived as interesting and stimulating; however, after a certain number of repetitions, negative cognitive and emotional reactions occur (Berlyne, 1970; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979, 1989; Calder & Sternthal, 1980; So, Kim, & Cohen, 2017).

Overexposure first affects the evaluation of the stimulus, information-processing strategies, and learning (Burke & Edell, 1986; Claypool, Mackie, Garcia-Marques, McIntosh, & Udall, 2004). Moreover, perceptions of boredom, tedium, reactance, and anger occur (Craig, Sternthal, & Leavitt, 1976; S. Kim & So, 2018; Rethans, Swasy, & Marks, 1986; So et al., 2017). It is assumed that repeated exposure to information on the same political news issue at some point causes negative cognitive and affective responses to the issue also. Thus, we transfer findings on other overexposure phenomena to ongoing news issues and suggest three conceptual dimensions of issue fatigue, considering that an ongoing news issue is an informative stimulus and nonpersuasive: decreased processing involvement, negative emotions of anger and annoyance, and information overload regarding the issue.

When recipients are too frequently exposed to information on the same issue, their motivation to engage with the issue or to process information on the issue extensively (Perse, 1998; Schemer, Matthes, & Wirth, 2008) is assumed to decrease. Processing involvement is determined particularly by the information received on the issue rather than by the issue itself (Antil, 1984). If—after repeated exposure—the information on the issue is perceived as less newsworthy and rather repetitive (Berlyne, 1970), the motivation to process the received information should decrease. Second, repeated exposure to information on the same issue over weeks or months leads to increasingly negative emotions associated with the issue, particularly annoyance and anger (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). Annoyance and anger are negative, obstructive emotions and emerge in situations in which situational factors hinder a person's goal (Roseman, 1984; Scherer, 2005), such as being exposed against one's will to a health message (S. Kim & So, 2018) or an ongoing news issue. Finally, repeated exposure to media content on the issue, at some point, can turn into receiving too much information, thereby creating feelings of being overloaded or overwhelmed by the information. It is assumed that news overload (Ji, Ha, & Sypher, 2014; Lee, Holton, & Chen,

2019) can apply also to information on a single news issue, thus making information overload a dimension of issue fatigue. Issue fatigue is about ability and motivation to engage with the issue. It thus goes beyond mental fatigue as exhaustion and weariness following exertion (Ream & Richardson, 1996). It is not only about being overwhelmed by information, but also about no longer wanting to hear or see about the issue (Kuhlmann et al., 2014).

Approaches to Avoidance of Media Information

Communication research has dealt with selection and avoidance of media objects in several contexts. One theoretical approach is based on consistency theories. Cognitive dissonance is a situation of being exposed to conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behavior, which causes mental discomfort that individuals strive to avoid (Festinger, 1957). Transferred to media information, the selective exposure approach (e.g., Donsbach, 1991; Stroud, 2008) postulates that individuals select information that matches their beliefs and predispositions to reduce dissonance. Selective avoidance refers to avoiding information with challenging views (Jang, 2014; Johnson & Kaye, 2013).

Another approach to selectivity are motives or their absence. The uses and gratifications approach assumes that individuals select media content based on their needs, orientations, and motivations (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974), such as political interest (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013; Wonneberger, Schoenbach, & van Meurs, 2011) and perceived duty to keep informed (Poindexter & McCombs, 2001) for news. In that respect, the instrumental utility theory explains selection of information by the degree of utility attributed to the information. When individuals are uncertain about topics or events because they do not have sufficient knowledge, they select information on these (Atkin, 1973; Knobloch-Westerwick, Carpentier, Blumhoff, & Nickel, 2005). In addition, noninstrumental motives of information selection have been identified, such as personal issue importance (Y. M. Kim, 2008) and

interest in the issue (Silvia, 2006). Consequently, individuals are less likely to select information on issues if they do not perceive a lack of knowledge and do not perceive the issue as relevant or interesting.

Issue fatigue differs from previous approaches to avoidance. It is not about the attitude toward an issue, which is central in selective exposure research (Stroud, 2008). It is also different from the expected utility of information on the issue for gaining knowledge (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2005) and general attributed importance to the issue (Y. M. Kim, 2008). Issue fatigue is a negative effect from overly frequent exposure that does not exist initially, but emerges only over time and can emerge whether an individual is for or against an issue. It concerns those who are generally interested in politics and the issue and thus expose themselves to political news (Strömbäck et al., 2013) and information on the issue during their news exposure. This enables them to become fatigued as opposed to those who do not expose themselves to news on the issue.

Avoidance Forms

Communication research applies different understandings of avoidance. Selective avoidance is often conceptualized and measured as not selecting particular media content such as information on issues (Jang, 2014) and news (Strömbäck, 2017; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013). Some communication scholars, however, emphasize the distinction between nonselection and active avoidance, and they conceptualize avoidance as a conscious and deliberate choice to stay away from the media object in question (Böcking & Fahr, 2009; McLeod & Becker, 1974). In line with this, information science describes active or intentional information avoidance as an individual's purposeful decision to stay away from available information (Howell & Shepperd, 2016).

Not selecting a media item can be traced to its characteristics, such as a lack of importance

or dissonant information. However, it can also be due to a prioritization of other content, given the impossibility to select all media content available. Thus, nonselection does not sufficiently inform about its causes. Avoidance, on the contrary, relates more explicitly to the media object as its potential cause. Because we are interested in whether issue fatigue leads individuals to turn away from the issue, we focus on avoidance strategies of the issue rather than on nonselection. Similarly, selective exposure research differentiates between “defensive avoidance” (selectively avoiding dissonant information; Garret, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013, p. 115) and “confirmation bias” (seeking consistent information; Garret et al., 2013, p. 115).

First, avoidance can occur during the media selection process. Previous research has found that selective scanning and selective attention are strategies to avoid content users do not like, are not interested in, do not consider as important, or feel overloaded by (Bode, Vraga, & Troller-Renfree, 2017; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Lee et al., 2019; Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013). In addition, research on emotion regulation argues that avoidance during selection occurs to prevent the perception of undesirable affect expected from particular content (Schramm & Wirth, 2008). Findings on advertising avoidance point to avoidance strategies such as ignoring the ads, turning the page, and discarding content (J. K. Kim & Sang, 2017; Speck & Elliott, 1997). If issue fatigue triggers avoidance of information on the issue initially during media selection, affected individuals neglect to learn about the issue because news exposure, together with interpersonal discussions, increases political learning (Eveland, 2004).

Second, avoidance occurs during exposure to a selected program or report. There is the possibility that users see a media report and start reading or watching it intentionally or incidentally (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018), but then take countermeasures (Bode et al., 2017). To regulate emotions, media users can apply behavioral and cognitive strategies during exposure (Schramm & Wirth, 2007, 2008). Behavioral strategies are interrupting or terminating reception, selecting other content, or doing something else (Böcking & Fahr, 2009; Perse,

1998). Cognitive strategies concern the attention during exposure (Schramm & Wirth, 2008); similarly, inattention to the information is a strategy of information avoidance (Golman, Hagmann, & Loewenstein, 2017). During media exposure, cognitive avoidance can occur as shifting the attention elsewhere or rationalizing the received content (Schramm & Wirth, 2008). If issue fatigue triggers avoidance during exposure to information on the issue, it is possible that affected individuals learn about the issue during the initial phase of exposure prior to taking countermeasures, which then inhibit the further learning process.

Interpersonal discussions are social situations that involve other individuals and social norms (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Avoiding interpersonal discussions demands greater effort and potentially entails more unpleasant social consequences than avoidance during media use. Nonetheless, research has identified social aspects, such as dodging dissonance or conflict (Eveland, Morey, & Hutchens, 2011), or anxiety and uncertainty (Duronto, Nishida, & Nakayama, 2005), as drivers of avoiding interpersonal discussions. When it comes to political news, individuals avoid talking about public issues because of a lack of interest (Wyant, Hurst, & Reedy, 2020). Similar to the finding that those individuals who are fatigued from health messages avoid discussions on the message topic (So et al., 2017), associations between fatigue from ongoing news issues and avoidance of interpersonal discussions have been found by cross-sectional research (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016).

Hypotheses on Issue Fatigue and Avoidance

The cognitive and affective dimensions of issue fatigue have the potential to cause subsequent behaviors regarding the issue. First, negative emotions are generally associated with avoidance rather than approach behavior (Alexopoulos & Ric, 2007) and an individual's perception of certain emotions motivates them to act (Scherer, 2005). In media entertainment research, it has been shown that avoidance can take place if a positive affective state is to be

maintained and a negative affective state is to be avoided (Zillmann, 2000). Actively avoiding media content because of negative affect also has been found in the context of nonentertaining media, such as election campaign information (Marcinkowski & Došenović, 2020), health information (Barbour, Rintamaki, Ramsey, & Brashers, 2012; So & Alam, 2019; So et al., 2017), and TV viewing (Böcking & Fahr, 2009; Perse, 1998). Although issue fatigue is different from mood and not about persuasive messages, these findings lead us to assume that the obstructive emotions of annoyance and anger (Scherer, 2005) cause avoidance of the issue.

Second, the dimension of decreased processing involvement could foster avoidance. The degree of motivation to process information on an issue is related to the extent to which information is sought and actually processed (Donnerstag, 1996). When issue-specific cognitive engagement is low—that is, when the individual does not want to know more information or more arguments, and does not want to spend time thinking about the issue (Matthes, 2013)—a plausible consequence is avoiding exposure to more information on the issue.

Third, information overload regarding the issue as a negative cognitive and affective state can result in avoidance behavior. For news in general, it has been shown that media users aim to avert the unpleasant experience of being overwhelmed by information (Schmitt, Debbelt, & Schneider, 2018; Song, Jung, & Kim, 2017) and thus apply countermeasures (Lee et al., 2019). Thus, information overload regarding a single issue could also lead to avoiding the issue. Therefore, it is plausible that issue fatigue—entailing the interplay of increasingly perceived annoyance and anger, decreased information-processing involvement, and information overload regarding the issue—leads to avoidance of the issue on different levels.

With regards to avoidance during the media selection process, we assume that when news users are fatigued from an ongoing news issue, they expect negative emotions and cognitions

when discovering a report is about the issue and thus do not select it in the first place, but avoid it.

H1: The more news users perceive issue fatigue, the more they avoid selecting media content on that issue.

With regards to avoidance during media exposure, users can decide to select a media report on the issue, which during exposure gives rise to their anger and annoyance, decreases the motivation to process the information because of a lack of novelty, and fosters feelings over information surplus on the issue. This can lead users to avoid these perceptions by behavioral and cognitive countermeasures during exposure.

H2: The more news users perceive issue fatigue, the more they apply avoidance strategies during exposure to media information on that issue.

In addition to media selection and exposure, avoidance can also concern conversations with others. Similar to avoidance during the media selection process, when individuals lack the motivation and capacity to engage with the ongoing news issue, they are likely to avoid talking with others about it.

H3: The more news users perceive issue fatigue, the more they avoid interpersonal conversations about that issue.

Method

Data

To analyze the causal order of issue fatigue and different forms of avoidance behavior, we conducted a representative three-wave online panel survey in Switzerland. Respondents were recruited from the online access panel of LINK, a social and market research company. Quota

sampling was applied with respect to age, gender, and language region. The first wave ($n = 1,338$; 50% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 48.27$ years, $SD = 16.02$; education: 44% higher education²) took place April 11–24, 2019; the second wave ($n = 985$; 49% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 49.31$ years, $SD = 16.04$; education: 44% higher education) took place May 9–20, 2019; and the third wave ($n = 800$; 48% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 49.42$ years, $SD = 16.03$; education: 43% higher education) took place May 29–June 11, 2019. The retention rate was 74% for Wave 2 and 81% for Wave 3. For this study, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Brexit) was chosen as an ongoing political news issue during the period of investigation, as the media covered it extensively over the investigation period with a thematic focus on several postponements of the Brexit and negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union. The Brexit has an impact on the Swiss economy and its relation to the United Kingdom. Thus, the issue allows for some degree of involvement with the issue but does not concern the Swiss population as a strong national issue. It is therefore a suitable issue for studying fatigue and its potential behavioral consequences.

Measures

Dependent Variables

To measure avoidance strategies, we asked respondents to indicate how often they did the following things during the past week. Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Avoidance during selection was measured by two items (Wave 1: $M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.15$, $r = .68$; Wave 2: $M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.21$, $r = .66$; Wave 3: $M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.24$, $r = .74$): “Concerning an article or report, I . . .” “did not even read it or look at it, when I noticed it was the Brexit issue” and “(I) ignored it and instead I read or looked at something else.” Avoidance

² Tertiary education.

during exposure was measured by three items (Wave 1: $M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.00$, $\alpha = .73$; Wave 2: $M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.02$, $\alpha = .73$; Wave 3: $M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.00$, $\alpha = .72$): “Concerning an article or report, I . . .” “stopped reading it or looking at it before it was finished,” “(I) kept following it, but I was inwardly disconnected,” and “(I) kept following it while doing something else.” Interpersonal avoidance was measured by one item (Wave 1: $M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.19$; Wave 2: $M = 1.98$, $SD = 1.21$; Wave 3: $M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.28$): “I avoided discussing the issue with others.” Comparative measures have been used in previous research (Geiss, 2015; Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2019; Speck & Elliott, 1997).

Time-Varying Independent Variables

Nine items used in previous research for the processing involvement, information overload, and negative emotion dimensions were averaged to form a composite measure of issue fatigue (Wave 1: $M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.79$, $\alpha = .81$; Wave 2: $M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.77$, $\alpha = .82$; Wave 3: $M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.82$, $\alpha = .85$). Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 5 (*I totally agree*). Processing involvement was measured by three items (all recoded): “I follow this issue with attention,” “It is important to me to know all arguments of this issue in detail,” and “The more information I get on this issue, the better” (Matthes, 2013; Schemer et al., 2008). Information overload was measured by four items: “I currently feel overloaded by the amount of news available on this issue,” “I receive more information on this issue than I can actually process,” “I am confronted from too much information on this issue,” and “I feel overloaded from the amount of news on this issue” (Lee et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2018; Song et al., 2017). The negative emotions were measured by one item each: “This issue gets on my nerves” and “This issue makes me angry” (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016).

As discussed previously, issue predispositions are influential for selective approach and avoidance to information. To compare the potential effects of issue fatigue on avoidance with

established predictors, we included issue-specific control variables into the analysis. Issue importance was measured by two items (Wave 1: $M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.97$, $r = .47$; Wave 2: $M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.94$, $r = .51$; Wave 3: $M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.94$, $r = .52$): “I personally think that this issue is important” and “This issue is important to Switzerland” (Matthes, 2013). Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 5 (*I totally agree*). Interest in the issue was measured by one item (Wave 1: $M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.10$; Wave 2: $M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.10$; Wave 3: $M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.10$): “How interested are you in the Brexit issue?” Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) to 8 (*I have never heard of that issue*). Self-perceived knowledge was measured by two items (Wave 1: $M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.01$, $r = .67$; Wave 2: $M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.97$, $r = .71$; Wave 3: $M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.99$, $r = .76$): “I know the main arguments of the various parties involved in this issue” and “I know the main facts about this issue” (Geiss, 2015). Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 5 (*I totally agree*). Negative attitude toward the issue was measured by four items (Wave 1: $M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.98$, $\alpha = .73$; Wave 2: $M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.93$, $\alpha = .74$; Wave 3: $M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.89$, $\alpha = .73$): “Brexit is the correct political decision for Great Britain” (recoded), “Brexit carries negative consequences for the Swiss economy,” “Brexit endangers stability in Europe,” and “Brexit would improve relations between Great Britain and Switzerland” (recoded). Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 5 (*I totally agree*).

Time-Invariant Variables

Furthermore, political interest and the perceived duty to keep informed are motives for general news exposure and could thus lead to exposure to information on the issue (Trilling & Schoenbach, 2013). We included these control variables into the analysis: Political interest was measured by one item at Wave 1 ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.97$): “How interested are you in politics in general?” Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Duty to keep

informed was measured by three items at Wave 2 ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.78$, $\alpha = .69$): “It is important to be informed about news and current events,” “We all have a duty to keep ourselves informed about news and current events,” and “So many other people follow the news and keep informed about it that it doesn’t matter much whether I do or not” (recoded; Poindexter & McCombs, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2018). Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 5 (*I totally agree*). In addition, age, gender, and education were included.

Data Analysis

First, a dropout analysis revealed that those respondents who dropped out after the first wave and were not included in the analysis ($n = 349$) were significantly younger than those who participated in all waves. Furthermore, t tests for all issue-specific time-varying variables revealed that they avoided the issue more during media selection, were more issue fatigued, had lower self-perceived knowledge and less interest in the issue at Wave 1, and were generally less interested in politics.

To test the effect of issue fatigue and other issue predispositions on different avoidance forms, we ran fixed effects (FE) regressions. When the research interest is in the effects from time-varying explanatory variables, such as issue fatigue, and there is within variation in the dependent and independent variables over time, FE models using only within variation are most suitable as they come closest to causal tests in experimental studies (Allison, 2009). FE models study the causes of changes within individuals and produce estimates of the independent variables’ average effects within units over time. The effects from individuals’ stable characteristics, whether measured or not, are controlled for; thus, FE regression’s advantage is that, by using within variation only and eliminating all time-invariant differences between individuals from the estimation, it reduces bias resulting from omitted and confounding variables more effectively than random effects (RE) or pooled ordinary least squares

regressions. FE estimates produce smaller coefficients and larger standard errors, causing higher p values than estimates based on both within and between variance (Allison, 2009; Wooldridge, 2010). Clustered standard errors in FE models account for the assumption of heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation of the residuals, leading to larger standard errors. Thus, in the first step, the time-varying independent variables' effects were analyzed only in an FE model.

To compare issue fatigue's effects with those from time-invariant individual characteristics influential in the use of media for information on current issues, in the second step, we also needed to include time-invariant predictors. Considering that all individual characteristics are controlled for in the FE model, their effect cannot be estimated (Allison, 2009). Thus, we ran RE models based on within- and between-units differences. According to the Hausman test, the estimates are biased systematically in our RE models. Therefore, we did not interpret the RE estimates' size, but compared only the order of their strength to see whether time-invariant individual characteristics exerted a stronger or weaker effect on avoidance of the issue than issue fatigue.

Interitem correlations at each wave ranged from nonexistent to moderate and confirmed that the predictors were different phenomena. The sample comprised 796 individuals giving answers to the relevant variables in at least Waves 1 and 2, resulting in 2,186 observations. Forty-three observations were deleted for reasons of data cleansing. The sample ($n = 796$; $M_{age} = 50.69$ years, $SD = 16.07$; 45% female; education: 50% higher education) differed from the original sample only slightly. To avoid a further decrease in the number of observations, we conducted a within-mean imputation at the wave level, averaging the available variables of a scale and replacing every missing value with the individual mean of the available variables from the same scale in the same wave, which is acceptable if the scales are homogenous (Graham, 2012).

Results

Table 1 shows the results from the FE and RE regressions for predicting avoidance of the issue during media selection. The FE results indicate that issue fatigue was associated the strongest with avoidance of the issue during selection, followed by interest and self-perceived knowledge. The positive coefficient of issue fatigue implies that a within-subject increase in issue fatigue led to a within-subject increase in avoiding the issue during media selection. The more audience members perceived issue fatigue, the more they avoided the issue during the selection of news media content. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Higher levels of interest and self-perceived knowledge predicted lower levels of avoiding the issue during selection. The model explained 4.6% of the variation avoidance of the issue during a person's selection over time. The remainder was produced by other factors that changed over time, but not by time-invariant individual characteristics, as these were controlled for in the FE model. The results from the RE model indicate that issue fatigue was a stronger predictor of avoidance during selection than the time-invariant individual characteristics of political interest and the perceived duty to remain informed.³ Differences in the time-varying coefficients of the FE and RE model indicate the systematic bias in the RE model.

³ We tested all models including avoidance of news in general as a control variable. Despite a weak significant effect on avoidance during selection and exposure, issue fatigue remained the strongest predictor; other coefficients changed slightly. Because avoidance of news in general was measured in Wave 3 only, we did not include it in the analyses so as to not reduce further the sample.

Table 1. Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of the Issue During Selection.

Independent variable	Fixed effects		Random effects	
	<i>b</i>	Clustered <i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Issue fatigue	.280***	.060	.541***	.034
Interest	-.114**	.041	-.162***	.028
Issue importance	-.068	.046	-.052	.029
Negative attitude	-.006	.047	-.055*	.026
Self-perceived	-.085*	.042	-.060*	.029
Political interest			-.100**	.035
Duty to keep informed			-.077*	.039
Age			.003	.002
Gender (female = 1)			.006	.057
Education (higher = 1)			-.080	.056
Constant	2.478***	0.353	2.506***	0.217
Within R^2	.046		.043	
Between R^2	.455		.478	
Overall R^2	.334		.350	
σ_u	.834		.585	
σ_e	.765		.765	
Rho	.543		.369	
<i>N</i> (observations)	2,186		2,186	
<i>n</i> (individuals)	796		796	

Note. σ_u = the time-invariant individual residual; σ_e = the time-varying residual; Rho = the proportion of variance due to time-invariant differences across individuals; Within R^2 = the proportion of variance in the dependent variable within an individual captured by the model; Between R^2 = the proportion of variance in the dependent variable between individuals captured by the model; Overall R^2 = the weighted average of the within R^2 and between R^2 .

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

A similar picture emerged for avoidance during exposure to media content on the issue. Table 2 shows that issue fatigue had a significant effect on avoiding the issue during news media exposure, thereby supporting Hypothesis 2. None of the other issue predispositions

significantly affected avoidance during exposure to information on the issue. The results from the RE model show that greater political interest and higher education led to less avoidance of the issue during exposure. However, issue fatigue was a stronger predictor than the time-invariant characteristics (the same holds true with standardized coefficients).

Table 2. Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of the Issue During Exposure.

Independent variable	Fixed effects		Random effects	
	<i>b</i>	Clustered <i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Issue fatigue	.213***	.056	.393***	.033
Interest	-.016	.036	-.046	.026
Issue importance	-.021	.042	-.003	.027
Negative attitude	-.037	.042	-.056*	.025
Self-perceived	-.030	.040	.016	.028
Political interest			-.070*	.033
Duty to keep informed			-.022	.036
Age			.004**	.002
Gender (female = 1)			.096	.053
Education (higher = 1)			-.162**	.052
Constant	2.275***	0.315	1.886***	0.205
Within R^2	.017		.016	
Between R^2	.237		.269	
Overall R^2	.162		.182	
σ_u	.755		.552	
σ_e	.729		.729	
Rho	.517		.364	
<i>N</i> (observations)	2,186		2,186	
<i>n</i> (individuals)	796		796	

Note. σ_u = the time-invariant individual residual; σ_e = the time-varying residual; Rho = the proportion of variance due to time-invariant differences across individuals; Within R^2 = the proportion of variance in the dependent variable within an individual captured by the model; Between R^2 = the proportion of variance in the dependent variable between individuals captured by the model; Overall R^2 = the weighted average of the within R^2 and between R^2 .

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The third hypothesis presumed that issue fatigue leads to avoiding interpersonal conversations about the issue. The FE regression results (see Table 3) show that issue fatigue did not significantly predict avoidance of interpersonal discussions on the issue. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was rejected. None of the other issue predispositions exerted a significant effect either. Although not significant, avoidance of interpersonal discussions was associated more strongly with issue fatigue than with the other issue predispositions. In the RE model, issue fatigue was related the strongest to avoidance of interpersonal discussions. However, the differences in the time-varying coefficients of the FE and RE model indicate the systematic bias in the RE model. In addition, the perceived duty to remain informed, age, and education exerted a significant effect.

Table 3. Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of Interpersonal Discussions.

Independent variable	Fixed effects		Random effects	
	<i>b</i>	Clustered <i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Issue fatigue	.105	.071	.412***	.041
Interest	.033	.044	-.001	.034
Issue importance	-.062	.055	-.029	.034
Negative attitude	-.041	.060	-.041	.031
Self-perceived	-.024	.055	-.002	.035
Political interest			-.069	.040
Duty to keep informed			-.099*	.044
Age			.006**	.002
Gender (female = 1)			.090	.065
Education (higher = 1)			-.149*	.064
Constant	2.069***	0.386	1.560***	0.252
Within R^2	.005		.003	
Between R^2	.170		.234	
Overall R^2	.098		.141	
σ_u	.949		.644	
σ_e	.945		.945	
Rho	.502		.317	
<i>N</i> (observations)	2,186		2,186	
<i>n</i> (individuals)	796		796	

Note. σ_u = the time-invariant individual residual; σ_e = the time-varying residual; Rho = the proportion of variance due to time-invariant differences across individuals; Within R^2 = the proportion of variance in the dependent variable within an individual captured by the model; Between R^2 = the proportion of variance in the dependent variable between individuals captured by the model; Overall R^2 = the weighted average of the within R^2 and between R^2 .

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The results from the panel analysis show that when an ongoing political news issue fatigues news users, they avoid selecting media content on that issue. When already exposed to media

content on the issue, they apply strategies to stay away from it. Issue fatigue affects avoidance during selection slightly more extensively than during exposure. Thus, the dimensions of issue fatigue, that is, higher levels of information overload and negative emotions—annoyance and anger—as well as lower levels of motivation to process information on the issue, lead to behavioral consequences concerning the issue during media use. However, issue fatigue does not affect interpersonal discussions on the issue significantly according to the FE regression producing unbiased estimates. In contrast to research on avoidance based on cross-sectional data, this study investigated relations between issue fatigue and avoidance using panel data.

The findings confirm that cognitive and behavioral strategies during exposure and behavioral strategies during selection (Schramm & Wirth, 2007) apply to the use of media content on a particular issue. Similar to avoidance of advertising (Speck & Elliott, 1997) and selective avoidance and scanning (Lee et al., 2019), ignoring the issue, stopping exposure, and distracting oneself are cognitive and behavioral strategies of avoidance during exposure that are related to issue fatigue. Thus, this study points to more active avoidance behavior concerning the issue beyond nonselection of information.

That issue fatigue affects avoidance during media use but not interpersonal avoidance can have several reasons. When turning to news media for current information, it is possible that users are exposed to the issue unintentionally (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018); perceive it as intrusive, such as with forced exposure to ads (Edwards, Li, & Lee, 2002); and avoid it consequently. Given that users can choose among a variety of news reports and other media content, it is relatively easy to sort out unwanted content (Bode et al., 2017), such as information on an issue. Furthermore, it is possible that issue fatigue is particularly associated with media coverage on the issue; characteristics of the media coverage, such as recurring images or keywords in headlines, cause a particularly strong perception of issue fatigue (i.e., of anger and annoyance) that motivate action and lead to avoidance (Newhagen, 1998; Scherer, 2005). In interpersonal

discussions, visual stimuli are absent, which is why the perception of issue fatigue and the need to take countermeasures could be weaker. Furthermore, fatigued individuals could see interpersonal discussions as an opportunity to learn about the issue from others who are informed by the news media (Bandura, 2001) if they consider being informed as socially desirable and do not learn about the issue themselves from the news media because of avoidance. Finally, fatigued individuals could vent on their negative state concerning the issue when talking with others, which could be a compensation strategy when fatigued by it and thus a reason not to avoid conversations about the issue. For further research, it would be promising to analyze relationships among different avoidance forms among news users. So far, it remains unclear whether news users avoid the issue entirely or not (i.e., during media selection, exposure, and interpersonal discussions) or show only one avoidance form.

Issue fatigue differs from other approaches to avoidance in the news media environment. In contrast to general news overload (Song et al., 2017) and news avoidance (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2019), it focuses on single issues and concerns those who are not generally overloaded and avoiding news. It differs from the attitude toward the issue, which is central in selective exposure research (Stroud, 2008), because it is, first, a negative effect from overly frequent exposure, as opposed to a rather stable attitude (Ajzen, 2001), and can emerge whether an individual fears challenging views or not. Issue fatigue also emerges only after a prior period of exposure to information on the issue. Issue fatigue is a stronger predictor of avoidance of the issue during media use than other issue predispositions. Despite issue importance, interest, a negative attitude, a lack of self-perceived knowledge, political interest, and the perceived duty to remain informed about current affairs, users avoid information on the issue when they perceive fatigue. Thus, the emergence of fatigue from ongoing news issues needs to be viewed as an independent concept affecting selection of and exposure to media information on ongoing political news issues. It represents a further theoretical approach to avoidance of media content

on an issue level and adds to extant research on avoidance of news media content.

If individuals avoid exposure to information on the issue, learning about current developments and different positions concerning the issue can be impeded. This undermines the news media's information function and can be detrimental to political discourses that are key in the functioning of modern democracies (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Scheufele, 2002), especially if occurring repeatedly. Turning away from media content on ongoing political issues is also problematic against the backdrop of the general public increasingly tuning out news media, a phenomenon observed in several countries over the past few years (Blekesaune et al., 2012). Thus, issue fatigue that leads to avoidance behavior stands to elicit further potential consequences on political communication and news media's role in democratic societies.

Limitations

The findings come with some limitations. Relations between issue fatigue and avoidance behavior were investigated only for the Brexit issue in Switzerland and should be validated for other issues and country contexts. Furthermore, avoidance of interpersonal discussions was measured using only one item, which should be extended in future studies. In addition, this study investigated avoidance forms in general. It would be promising to investigate different avoidance strategies that involve different media types (e.g., print, social media, or TV)—as done in advertising research—in further studies. To better account for active avoidance, it would be promising to measure avoidance intentions (Howell & Shepperd, 2016) in addition to avoidance strategies.

Furthermore, the results may be biased because of dropout from the panel survey. Dropout after Wave 1, and thus exclusion from the analysis, goes in hand with a more negative stance toward the issue initially. The results were based on a sample overrepresenting those who were on average more positive toward the issue. Effects of issue fatigue on avoidance could thus be

underestimated in our models. In addition, the effects could be stronger if intervals between the waves were longer.

On the data analysis level, FE regressions' disadvantage in not being able to estimate effects from time-constant predictors limits the preciseness of results for time-invariant predictors. In the RE models, we identified time-invariant predictors, but could not interpret their values thoroughly compared with issue fatigue and other time-varying predictors, as the estimates are biased in our RE models. FE models produce unbiased estimates of the time-varying predictors, which we prioritized in this study. The possible disadvantage of FE models relying on only within variation—and, thus, causing potential inferential problems (Bell, Fairbrother, & Jones, 2019)—can be compensated for through the sample's representativeness.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of fatigue from ongoing news issues and different forms of issue avoidance. The findings from a three-wave panel survey on the Brexit issue in Switzerland show that issue fatigue does not lead to avoiding interpersonal discussions on the issue, but does lead to avoidance of the issue during media selection and exposure. Issue fatigue is more influential than other issue predispositions, as well as general political interest and the perceived duty to remain informed about current affairs. Thus, the study adds to research on avoiding news media content by offering an approach to avoidance on the issue level while simultaneously distinguishing between different avoidance forms. The findings indicate that enduring media coverage of political issues can exert negative effects on the public. Thus, a need exists to study the causes of issue fatigue among the news audience to avoid users tuning out ongoing political issues covered in news media.

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Supplemental Analysis Paper III: Validation of the Findings

The hypotheses postulated in Paper III were re-examined for the referendum issue (Limitation Initiative) to test the robustness of the findings. Thus, it was tested whether fatigue from the Limitation Initiative leads to avoidance of the issue during media selection, exposure to media content on the issue, and of interpersonal discussions about the issue. The analyses were based on the panel data on the Limitation Initiative described in Section 2.1 (*Supplemental Analysis Paper I: Confirmation of Issue Fatigue's Conceptual Definition*). A cleansed balanced data set ($n = 781$, 46.20% f., $M_{\text{age}} = 50.62$, $SD = 15.78$, 51.60% higher education) was used for the panel regression analyses.

The descriptive results in Table 7 show that issue fatigue was weaker for the referendum issue ($M_{w1} = 2.31$, $SD = 0.70$, $M_{w2} = 2.43$, $SD = 0.73$, $M_{w3} = 2.47$, $SD = 0.75$, than for Brexit ($M_{w1} = 2.71$, $SD = 0.79$, $M_{w2} = 2.70$, $SD = 0.77$, $M_{w3} = 2.71$, $SD = 0.82$). However, issue fatigue increased slightly more for the referendum issue over time at the aggregate level than for the Brexit issue. The avoidance forms applied similarly to the referendum and Brexit issue.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability per Wave

Variable	Wave 1			Wave 2			Wave 3		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Avoidance selection	2.23	1.05	0.76	2.30	1.11	0.79	2.42	1.21	0.84
Avoidance exposure	2.40	0.93	0.73	2.47	0.99	0.76	2.46	1.00	0.77
Interpersonal avoidance ^a	2.02	1.17		2.02	1.18		2.04	1.18	
Issue fatigue	2.31	0.70	0.78	2.43	0.73	0.80	2.47	0.75	0.82
Interest ^a	3.76	1.12		3.70	1.13		3.71	1.10	
Issue Importance	4.22	0.89	0.75	4.20	0.84	0.70	4.20	0.86	0.76
Negative attitude	3.59	1.19	0.87	3.24	0.75	0.87	3.29	0.73	0.88
Self-perceived knowledge	3.59	1.02	0.83	3.75	0.95	0.82	3.92	0.85	0.82
Political interest ^{ab}	3.66	0.93							
Duty to keep informed ^b				4.29	0.71	0.67			

Note. $n_{\text{Wave 1}} = 709$; $n_{\text{Wave 2}} = 774$; $n_{\text{Wave 3}} = 637$. ^a single-item measure. ^b measured only at one wave.

The results (Table 8) indicate that issue fatigue was associated the strongest of all predictors with avoidance of the issue during selection, according to the FE model. The positive coefficient of issue fatigue implies that a within-subject increase in issue fatigue led to a within-subject increase in avoiding the issue during media selection. The more audience members perceived issue fatigue, the more they avoided the issue during the selection of news media content. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported for the referendum issue. The association between issue fatigue and avoidance during selection was stronger for the referendum issue ($b = .382^{***}$) than for the Brexit ($b = .280^{***}$).

Table 8*Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of the Issue**During Selection*

Independent variable	FE		RE	
	<i>b</i>	<i>Clustered SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Issue fatigue	.382***	.057	.575***	.037
Interest	-.134**	.039	-.118***	.026
Issue importance	-.032	.042	-.039	.030
Negative attitude	-.044	.037	-.016	.025
Self-perceived knowledge	-.046	.044	.029	.028
Political interest			-.025	.033
Duty to keep informed			-.208***	.043
Age			.005**	.002
Gender (female = 1)			-.001	.055
Education (higher = 1)			.023	.055
Constant	2.352***	.321	2.212***	.258
Within R^2	.068		.063	
Between R^2	.345		.400	
Overall R^2	.266		.302	
σ_u	.784		.560	
σ_e	.753		.753	
Rho	.520		.356	
<i>N</i> (observations)	2,120		2,120	
<i>n</i> (individuals)	781		781	

Note. σ_u represents the time-invariant individual residual, σ_e is the time-varying residual, and Rho represents the proportion of variance due to time-invariant differences across individuals. Within R^2 represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable within an individual captured by the model. Between R^2 represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable between individuals captured by the model. The overall R^2 is the weighted average of the within R^2 and between R^2 . * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 9 shows that issue fatigue had a significant effect on avoiding the issue during news media exposure, according to the FE model, thereby supporting Hypothesis 2 for the referendum issue. Like for Brexit, none of the other issue predispositions significantly affected avoidance during exposure to information on the issue. Again the association between issue fatigue and avoidance during exposure was stronger for the referendum issue ($b = .272^{***}$) than for the Brexit ($b = .213^{***}$).

Table 9

Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of the Issue

During Exposure.

Independent variable	FE		RE	
	<i>b</i>	<i>Clustered SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Issue fatigue	.272***	.049	.435***	.034
Interest	-.041	.032	-.029	.024
Issue importance	-.013	.035	.006	.028
Negative attitude	-.008	.032	-.019	.023
Self-perceived knowledge	.042	.036	.051*	.025
Political interest			.015	.032
Duty to keep informed			-.112**	.041
Age			.006***	.002
Gender (female = 1)			-.016	.054
Education (higher = 1)			-.029	.053
Constant	1.865***	.271	1.500***	.245
Within R^2	.034		.034	
Between R^2	.215		.243	
Overall R^2	.154		.172	
σ_u	.742		.575	
σ_e	.669		.669	
Rho	.552		.424	
N (observations)	2,120		2,120	
n (individuals)	781		781	

Note. σ_u represents the time-invariant individual residual, σ_e is the time-varying residual, and Rho represents the proportion of variance due to time-invariant differences across individuals. Within R^2 represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable within an individual captured by the model. Between R^2 represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable between individuals captured by the model. The overall R^2 is the weighted average of the within R^2 and between R^2 . * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

The FE regression results (Table 10) show that issue fatigue did not significantly predict avoidance of interpersonal discussions on the issue. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was also rejected for the referendum issue. While for Brexit, none of the other issue-predispositions exerted a significant within-effect, a negative attitude toward the referendum issue had a significant negative effect on avoiding interpersonal discussions about it with others.

Table 10*Fixed Effects and Random Effects Regression Model Predicting Avoidance of Interpersonal**Discussions*

Independent variable	FE		RE	
	<i>b</i>	<i>Clustered SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Issue fatigue	.127	.067	.324***	.044
Interest	-.011	.048	.003	.031
Issue importance	-.037	.048	-.046	.037
Negative attitude	-.101*	.051	-.076*	.030
Self-perceived knowledge	.035	.049	.038	.033
Political interest			-.051	.038
Duty to keep informed			-.160**	.050
Age			.004	.002
Gender (female = 1)			-.041	.064
Education (higher = 1)			.014	.064
Constant	2.126***	.392	2.242***	.307
Within R^2	.009		.007	
Between R^2	.106		.150	
Overall R^2	.060		.088	
σ_u	.888		.618	
σ_e	.947		.947	
Rho	.468		.299	
<i>N</i> (observations)	2,120		2,120	
<i>n</i> (individuals)	781		781	

Note. σ_u represents the time-invariant individual residual, σ_e is the time-varying residual, and Rho represents the proportion of variance due to time-invariant differences across individuals. Within R^2 represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable within an individual captured by the model. Between R^2 represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable between individuals captured by the model. The overall R^2 is the weighted average of the within R^2 and between R^2 . * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

The results for the Limitation Initiative confirm the results found for the Brexit issue. Considering that learning about current developments and different positions concerning the issue can be impeded when information on the issue is avoided, that issue fatigue leads to avoidance also for current national issues emphasizes the importance of studying issue fatigue, its antecedents, and how it can be reduced.

2.4 Paper IV

Does Fatigue from Ongoing News Issues Harm News Media?

Assessing Reciprocal Relationships between Audience Issue Fatigue and News Media

Evaluations

News media covers certain political issues extensively for weeks or months at a time, leading users to become fatigued, avoiding them altogether. Against the background of increasing distrust in and tune out of news media observed in several countries, this study investigates the role of fatigue from ongoing news issues for how audiences evaluate news media. It examines reciprocal causal relations between news users' fatigue from ongoing news issues and their evaluations of news media with focus on the Brexit issue. A three-wave panel survey was conducted in Switzerland from April 11 to June 11, 2019. Random intercept cross-lagged panel models show positive intra-individual correlations between issue fatigue and negative news coverage evaluations regarding the issue and hostile media perceptions. In addition, issue fatigue leads to negative evaluations of an issue's media coverage and vice versa. However, issue fatigue does not predict negative news coverage evaluations in general and hostile media perceptions. Implications of ongoing news issues on news media evaluations are discussed, considering citizens' attachment to news media faltering in today's news environment.

Keywords: issue fatigue; hostile media perceptions; media quality; media evaluations; cross-lagged analysis

Revised and resubmitted / under review at *Journalism Studies*. Deviations from the otherwise underlying standards of this dissertation are due to the journal's standards and requirements. Page numbers refer to the dissertation document.

Introduction

In today's high-choice media environment, such as, *inter alia*, alternative and social media, citizen journalism, and fake news, challenge the role of news media in providing news and equipping citizens with political knowledge (Park, Fisher, Flew, & Dulleck, 2020; van Aelst et al., 2017). Therefore, trust is increasingly important for news media in retaining their users (Strömbäck et al., 2020). At the same time, current research points to perceptions of biased reporting, news avoidance, and a decrease in citizens' trust in news media (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017; Jones, 2018; Ladd, 2011; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019; Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). The news media's role in informing citizens and enabling rational political participation in a democratic society can only be fulfilled if citizens trust the news (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003).

Previous research examined negative attitudes toward news media institutions, as postulated by the idea of media skepticism (Tsfati, 2002), and their reporting as with hostile media perceptions (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). Recently, researchers introduced the idea that citizens negatively view ongoing political issues the news media cover frequently over a prolonged period (Newman et al., 2019; Schumann, 2018). Accordingly, users become fatigued by issues omnipresent in the news for weeks or months, such as Brexit or the COVID-19 pandemic (Bedingfield, 2020; Groot Kormelink & Klein Gunnewiek, 2021; Newman et al., 2019). When news coverage of an issue increases strongly over a period, a news wave is created (Geiss, 2011), which takes the form of a hype (Vasterman, 2005) or storm (Boydston, Hardy, & Walgrave, 2014) and can repeat itself several times (Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009). When fatigued from such issues, users develop negative feelings regarding the issue, such as annoyance and lack of motivation to engage with the issue cognitively. Consequently, they might avoid the issue (Schumann, 2018). Thus, affected citizens could be less informed on current developments and politics regarding the issue.

Furthermore, the first empirical approaches to fatigue from ongoing news issues show that this fatigue goes along with disliking how the issue is portrayed in the news media (Kuhlmann, Schumann, & Wolling, 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). Citizens generally react negatively to major issues, such as Brexit or the Yellow Vests in Europe, increasing perceptions of impartiality and distrust in the news. Citizens were dissatisfied with the news media's role in covering these issues (Newman et al., 2019). Issue fatigue represents a direct negative experience with the media output, potentially influencing news media evaluations. However, the interrelations between fatigue from ongoing news issues and evaluations of news media have not yet been theorized and systematically analyzed. Thus, questions arise as to how, if at all, fatigue from ongoing news issues affects evaluations of news media. Given that citizens' trust in news media is crucial for democratic societies and that news media regularly covers issues for extended periods (such as, currently, COVID-19 and Trump's former presidency), this study investigates relations between perceptions of ongoing issues and citizens' evaluations of news media. After literature reviews of attitudes toward news media and the concept of issue fatigue, theoretically derived interrelations will be analyzed using panel data.

News Media Evaluations

When it comes to attitudes toward news media, communication research applies various concepts comprising different attitudinal dimensions directed toward different news media objects. Following the concept of political support by David Easton (1975), Fawzi and Obermaier (2019) argue that attitudes toward news media can be divided into satisfaction with how the news media fulfill their functions (specific support), trust (middle-level between specific and diffuse support), and legitimacy (diffuse support). Specific support emerges from recent experiences and is variable, whereas diffuse support is more consistent and considered a stable trait (Easton, 1975; Tsfati, 2002).

On the more diffuse level is trust in news media (Fawzi & Obermaier, 2019). Like media mistrust (McDonald Ladd, 2010), media skepticism refers to the opposite of media trust (Tsfati, 2002). While some scholars conceptualize news media trust as trust in news media as institutions and as rather diffuse (Hanitzsch, van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005), others focus on selection and depiction of information by news media (Kohring & Matthes, 2007) and thus on news media performance or, respectively, specific support by the audience. This notion of trust is similar to news media credibility—the perception of news media information as believable or, more precisely, fair, accurate, and unbiased (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013).¹ Media trust is often referred to as the relationship between two sides, i.e. “a trustor, the side that places trust, and a trustee, the side being trusted” (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, p. 505). The trustor has a certain degree of uncertainty regarding the media’s work and content, which demands trust (Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Strömbäck et al., 2020). Strömbäck et al. (2020) propose to focus on trust “in the information coming from news media” (p. 10). Accordingly, trust in media information can be analyzed at different levels, ranging from information from news media in general at the most general level to news media information on a particular issue at the most specific level (Strömbäck et al., 2020).

On the level of specific support, citizens hold support for the news media’s performance (Fawzi & Obermaier, 2019). Media performance broadly refers to “the assessment of mass media according to a range of evaluative criteria” (McQuail, 2015, p. 364), whereby the media products or its content, respectively, are evaluated. Previous research derives quality criteria from news media functions in democratic societies. Accordingly, news media content should be evaluated concerning factuality, as indicated by topicality, accuracy, and completeness. In addition, users assess impartiality, more precisely, the degree of balance and neutrality (Jandura

¹ Media trust is often considered as related to, as part of, or as superior to media credibility (Jackob, 2010; Prochazka & Schweiger, 2019; Strömbäck et al., 2020).

& Friedrich, 2014; Jungnickel, 2011; Urban & Schweiger, 2014). Quality evaluations serve as indicators of trust in news media (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2019). Likewise, when news media meet quality requirements, such as correct and balanced reporting, they are perceived as credible (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986).

The phenomenon of hostile media perceptions relates to the quality criterion of impartiality. Vallone et al. (1985) called the tendency of partisans to perceive media coverage as biased or even hostile against their viewpoint as hostile media phenomenon. Accordingly, individuals highly involved with an issue perceive neutral media coverage as biased (Choi, Yang, & Chang, 2009). Hostile media perceptions have been empirically evidenced in several studies (Hansen & Kim, 2011). Previous research views hostile media perceptions as antecedents of distrust in the media (Engelke, Hase, & Wintterlin, 2019; Ladd, 2011).

Issue Fatigue

Extant research on the effects from repeated exposure to stimuli, such as advertising (Calder & Sternthal, 1980) or health messages (So, Kim, & Cohen, 2017), suggests that after a certain number of repetitions, the evaluation of a stimulus can shift from positive to negative. In the beginning, the stimulus is novel and perceived as interesting; however, after a certain number of repetitions, negative cognitive and emotional reactions occur (Berlyne, 1970; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979, 1989; Calder & Sternthal, 1980; So et al., 2017). Overexposure affects the evaluation of the stimulus, information-processing strategies, and learning (Burke & Edell, 1986; Claypool, Mackie, Garcia-Marques, McIntosh, & Udall, 2004). Moreover, perceptions of tedium, reactance, and anger occur (Craig, Sternthal, & Leavitt, 1976; Rethans, Swasy, & Marks, 1986; So et al., 2017). It is assumed that repeated exposure to the same news issue at some point causes negative cognitive and affective responses to the issue also. Scholars have found that individuals develop fatigue from ongoing news issues they encounter repeatedly

(Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018). Issue fatigue refers to “an individual’s negative state that emerges because of over-exposure to an issue that news media cover extensively over a long period” (Author, year, p. X). Findings on other overexposure phenomena are transferred to ongoing news issues. This suggests three conceptual dimensions of issue fatigue (Author, year).

As with health message fatigue (Kim & So, 2018; So et al., 2017), repeated exposure to the ongoing issue, first, leads to increasingly negative emotions associated with the issue, particularly annoyance and anger (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018; Author, accepted). Once associated with the issue, these negative emotions are more accessible and can be activated easily when the individual is exposed to the issue again (Fazio, 1990; Klauer, 1997). While repeated exposure to persuasive messages affects information processing strategies (Claypool et al., 2004), we argue that for the mental state of issue fatigue, the *motivation* to engage with the issue or process information on the issue extensively (Matthes, 2013; Perse, 1998) decreases throughout frequent exposure, which describes the second dimension. Information processing involvement at the state level describes the motivation to process information and arguments on an issue (Matthes, 2013). After repeated exposure, news users perceive the issue and related information as less novel and somewhat repetitive (Berlyne, 1970). Thus, the motivation to process the information should decrease. Third, repeated exposure to media content on the issue, at some point, can cause information overload (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012), as has been shown for exposure to news in general (Ji, Ha, & Sypher, 2014; Lee, Holton, & Chen, 2019).

News users potentially develop a negative stance toward both the issue and its media coverage throughout frequent exposure, such as coronavirus news fatigue (Bedingfield, 2020). However, fatigue from the issue and fatigue from its news coverage do not necessarily occur jointly. When news users are fatigued from the issue, they can evaluate the issue’s news

coverage still positively. Some news users are aware of the news media's role in covering ongoing political issues and distinguish between the issue and its news coverage (Author, accepted). Hence, issue fatigue in its narrow sense concerns the issue only rather than both the issue and its news coverage.

It is plausible that, in addition to exposure intensity, news coverage characteristics and issue predispositions, such as issue importance and interest, contribute to issue fatigue. For example, some individuals become less fatigued due to repeated exposure because they consider the issue particularly relevant. Issue avoidance resulting from issue fatigue occurs during media use, more precisely during selection and exposure (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Author, year).

Interrelations between Issue Fatigue and News Media Evaluations

Cross-sectional research has shown that fatigue from ongoing issues relates positively to a negative evaluation of the coverage on the issue, such as perceiving a lack of quality and credibility and hostile media perceptions. Those who are issue fatigued negatively evaluate media coverage on the issue and perceive it as hostile, and vice versa (Arlt, Schumann, & Wolling, 2020; Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016). However, we lack knowledge of causal relationships. This study considers the effects of issue fatigue on three news media performance evaluations. Quality evaluations are indicators of satisfactory media performance (Hasebrink & Hölig, 2020) and news media trust (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2019). They shape trust over time (Fawzi & Obermaier, 2019). When studying effects of issue fatigue on news media evaluations, it is obvious to focus on specific support in the first instance rather than on more stable, trait-like attitudes toward news media, which are least influenced by single experiences (Fawzi & Obermaier, 2019), such as repeated exposure to issue-specific news coverage. In addition, trust is oriented toward news media's performance in the future

(Hanitzsch et al., 2018). Since the ongoing issue is covered by news media only temporarily, current news media performance evaluations are more suitable for investigation than trust. At the most general level, this study focuses on quality evaluations of news media coverage in general. On a more specific level are quality evaluations of news coverage on a particular issue. In addition, hostile media perceptions are considered at the level of news coverage of a particular issue.

This study considers issue fatigue as a negative experience with news media output. Thus, it can influence news users' evaluation of news media's performance (Easton, 1975; Fawzi & Obermaier, 2019). Priming theory (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010) is used as an account to explain issue fatigue's effects on news coverage evaluations. When making judgments, individuals rely on information that is most accessible in memory rather than on all information available. Mental constructs that have been previously stored in memory and are subsequently easily accessible. They can be activated and influence individuals' subsequent evaluations of objects or concepts (Domke et al., 1998; 1986; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Previous research provides evidence that media users are primed by media content. When it comes to political news coverage, priming effects occur when individuals apply dominant issues on the news media agenda to evaluate the performance of political actors or policies (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The assumption is that "extensive media coverage of an issue primes the likelihood that people will use the heavily covered stimulus as a criterion to judge the president's performance" (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Klinger, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007, p. 60). The issue's salience facilitates the activation of thoughts about the issue and their processing. This makes the issue more likely to be relied on for evaluations of the president's performance regarding the issue, their general performance, and character (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1997). However, Roskos-Ewoldsen et al. (2007) argue that

political priming is not a priming effect described by cognitive psychology as a short-term effect, but rather an effect of chronically well accessible information in memory applied to judge politicians.

This study transfers priming to issue fatigue and news media evaluations. Issue fatigue occurs when news media cover an issue extensively over a prolonged period (Schumann, 2018; Author, year). During this period, issue fatigue—feeling annoyance, anger, and information overload regarding the issue and lacking the motivation to process information on the issue—becomes reinforced with repeated exposure and is thus chronically well accessible. Hence, news users likely recall and apply their negative fatigue perceptions regarding the extensively covered issue to evaluate the news media's performance. This prompts the following hypotheses:

H1: Higher levels of issue fatigue are positively associated with a more negative evaluation of the issue's news coverage.

The first hypothesis focuses on the correlation at the within-level at the same time point but does not inform about causal effects. Thus, a second hypothesis addresses the causal relationship:

H2: Issue fatigue leads to a negative evaluation of the issue's news coverage.

H3: Higher levels of issue fatigue are positively associated with a more negative evaluation of news coverage in general.

Again, another hypothesis explicitly addresses the causal effect:

H4: Issue fatigue leads to a negative evaluation of news coverage in general.

The explanations for issue fatigue's effect on hostile media perceptions rely on affective priming theory, which previous research has applied to explain hostile media perceptions

(Matthes, 2013; Matthes & Beyer, 2017). Once an individual experiences negative or positive affect as a response to a stimulus, such as an issue, this affect is temporarily well accessible in memory. Affect-congruent information is likely to be activated in subsequent situations. This way, emotions and mood can bias evaluations and judgments (Forgas & Bower, 1987; Klauer, 1997; Kühne, Schemer, Matthes, & Wirth, 2011; Wirth, Schemer, & Matthes, 2010). Previous studies have shown that discrete emotions, such as annoyance and anger, cause hostile perceptions (Arlt, Dalmus, & Metag, 2019; Matthes, 2013; Matthes & Beyer, 2017). Issue fatigue, including the emotions of annoyance and anger and feeling overloaded, could thus give rise to perceiving media coverage on the issue as biased against one's perspective. This suggests the following hypotheses:

H5: Higher levels of issue fatigue are positively associated with higher levels of hostile media perceptions.

In addition, the following hypothesis centers on the causal effect:

H6: Issue fatigue leads to hostile media perceptions.

Since issue fatigue emerges over time (Schumann, 2018, Author, year), users likely form perceptions and evaluations about the news coverage, such as regarding quality criteria and bias (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann, 2018), before they potentially become fatigued from the issue. In addition, research on other media-related overexposure phenomena assumes that perceptions of media information, such as sensationalism, redundancy, and a lack of quality and diversity, cause fatigue from the news (Andersen, 2020), social problems (Kinnick, Krugman, & Cameron, 1996; Moeller, 1999), and from health messages (So et al., 2017). Thus, there is the possibility that negative perceptions and evaluations of the issue's news coverage cause fatigue from the issue. Thus, we consider reverse causality for issue-specific news coverage evaluations and hostile media perceptions.

H7: Negative evaluations of the issue's news coverage lead to issue fatigue.

H8: Hostile media perceptions lead to issue fatigue.

Method

Data

The analyses are based on a representative three-wave online panel survey in Switzerland. Respondents were recruited from a representative online access panel of a social and market research institute [company]. The sample is quoted with respect to age, gender, and language region. In 2019, the first wave ($n = 1338$, 50% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 48.27$, $SD = 16.02$, education—44% higher education) took place on April 11-24, the second wave ($n = 985$, 49% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 49.31$, $SD = 16.04$, education—44% higher education) on May 09-20, and the third wave ($n = 800$, 48% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 49.42$, $SD = 16.03$, education—43% higher education) on May 29-June 11. The retention rate was 74% for wave 2 and 81% for wave 3. The exit of Great Britain from the European Union (Brexit) has been chosen as an ongoing political news issue, which was covered by Swiss news media extensively from March to June 2019. Brexit has an impact on the Swiss economy and its relation to the United Kingdom. Thus, the issue allows for some degree of involvement with the issue but does not concern the Swiss population as a strong national issue. It is, therefore, a suitable issue for studying fatigue and its reciprocal effects with news media evaluations. News media have covered Brexit since the referendum in 2016. However, news media coverage during the investigation period in spring 2019 was pervasive and focused on a particular sub-issue, specifically negotiations between the UK and the EU concerning exit conditions, including discussions on the UK's participation in the EU elections and the resignation of the prime minister Theresa May. In total, 1,225 reports were found on front pages and political news sections of the most widely used 45 Swiss daily and weekly print

newspapers, online news sites, and TV news series from March 28 to June 11, 2019.² News media coverage declined after the prime minister's resignation and the European elections in May 2019.

Measures

All variables were measured three times and on five-point scales. For the sake of consistency, they were recoded into a negative direction, i. e., negative general news coverage evaluation, if necessary.

Issue fatigue (IF)

For issue fatigue, nine items were used for the dimensions of processing involvement, information overload, and negative emotions (Wave 1: $M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.80$, $\alpha = .81$, $n = 646$; Wave 2: $M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.82$, $\alpha = .84$, $n = 660$; Wave 3: $M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.85$, $\alpha = .86$, $n = 670$).³ The measure of processing involvement was taken from Matthes (2013) and Schemer, Matthes, and Wirth (2008): “I follow this issue with attention”; “It is important to me to know all arguments of this issue in detail”; “The more information I get on this issue, the better” (all recoded). The measure of information overload was taken from research on news overload (Lee et al., 2019; Schmitt, Debbelt, & Schneider, 2018) and adapted to the issue: “I currently feel overloaded by the amount of news available on this issue”; “I receive more information on this issue than I can actually process”; “I am confronted with too much information on this issue”; “I feel overloaded with the amount of news on this issue.” The negative emotions were measured by one item each, which were used in previous studies on issue fatigue (Kuhlmann

² The data are based on a media content analysis of the Brexit issue on front pages and political news sections of the most widely used 45 Swiss print, online, and TV news series, which is part of the same research project.

³ Descriptive statistics of all measures are based on the balanced cleansed dataset ($n = 757$; 48% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 49.79$, $SD = 16.08$, education—44% higher education).

et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016): “This issue gets on my nerves”; “This issue makes me angry.” Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 5 (*I completely agree*).

Evaluation of News Coverage on the Issue (NEMCI)

Three items were used to measure evaluations of the issue’s news coverage (Wave 1: $M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.84$, $\alpha = .87$, $n = 735$; Wave 2: $M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.85$, $\alpha = .88$, $n = 735$; Wave 3: $M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.86$, $\alpha = .90$, $n = 742$). The selection of items aligns with normative criteria for political media coverage. Accordingly, news media should provide factual and impartial information to the public (McQuail, 2015; Strömbäck, 2005). The chosen items are applied by research on news media trust, which uses quality evaluations and indicators of trust (Strömbäck et al., 2020; Tsfati, 2002), and audience news quality perceptions (Sundar, 1999; Urban & Schweiger, 2014). Respondents were asked to evaluate the media coverage on the issue based on pairs of opposites, selecting for each line the extent to which the left or right option is most applicable: “unbalanced – balanced”, “incomplete – complete”, “inaccurate – accurate” (all recoded).⁴

Evaluation of News Coverage (NEMC)

The same scale as above was used (all recoded). The question’s wording was different in order to point to evaluations of the news media coverage in general, regardless of the specific issue (Wave 1: $M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.78$, $\alpha = .83$, $n = 753$; Wave 2: $M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.80$, $\alpha = .86$, $n = 755$; Wave 3: $M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.84$, $\alpha = .88$, $n = 753$).

⁴ The item «irrelevant – relevant» was excluded from the scale in the course of exploratory factor analyses, due to insufficient loading.

Hostile Media Perception (HMP)

Three items were used to measure hostile media perceptions (Wave 1: $M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.83$, $\alpha = .67$, $n = 546$; Wave 2: $M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.86$, $\alpha = .76$, $n = 546$; Wave 3: $M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.83$, $\alpha = .74$, $n = 565$). The items were taken from Matthes (2013) and Schulz, Wirth, and Müller (2020), and adapted to the Brexit issue: Considering the media coverage on Brexit, “I perceive it as biased”; “It rarely reflects what I think about the issue”; “It is often concerned with other opinions rather than mine.” Response alternatives ranged from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 5 (*I completely agree*).

Statistical Analyses

Before hypothesis testing, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to confirm issue fatigue’s factor structure and to demonstrate the distinctiveness of all concepts used. All models were calculated using Mplus 8 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2017). For each model, only those cases were included that participated in all waves and have values on more than half of the variables included in each factor. The models were estimated using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation with robust standard errors (MLR) to account for missing data due to item non-response and nonnormality. The confirmatory factor analyses for the second-order model of issue fatigue, negative issue-specific news coverage evaluations, news coverage evaluations in general, and hostile media perceptions showed good fit to the data (Wave 1: CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .04, $n = 606$; Wave 2: CFI = .98, TLI = .98, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .03, $n = 600$; Wave 3: CFI = .97, TLI = .97, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .04, $n = 619$).⁵

⁵ Table A1 in the supplemental material displays the items’ factor loadings. Table A2 displays the second-order factor loadings. Table A3 displays the correlations between the factors. Table A4-A6 display all inter-item correlations.

Previously conducted exploratory factor analyses showed that the NEMC items have weak double loadings on the NEMCI factor in wave 3.

Random intercept cross-lagged panel models (RI-CLPM) (Hamaker, Kuiper, & Grasman, 2015) were applied to test reciprocal causal effects. The RI-CLPM distinguishes variance at the within-level and the between-level. It controls for time-invariant individual differences so that causes and effects at the intra-individual level can be studied over time. The correlation between the random intercepts (R.I.) of a variable x and a variable y represented by the curved arrow at the right shows the between-person differences. The random intercept factors are created by using the observed scores of all factor loadings constrained to a value of 1. The observed scores of x and y are regressed on their latent factors with loadings constrained to a value of 1. The latent factors inform about relationships at the intra-individual level: First, they indicate the autoregressive effects from x_1 on x_2 and x_2 on x_3 and from y_1 on y_2 and y_2 on y_3 , represented by horizontal arrows. Second, they show the correlation between x and y at wave 1 and the residual correlations at waves 2 and 3, represented by vertical arrows. Third, they reflect the reciprocal relationship between x and y over time—whether deviations in the individual's score from its mean in x at t predict deviations in the individual's score from its mean in y at $t+1$, represented by crossed arrows (Hamaker et al., 2015).

Results

Issue Fatigue and Negative Evaluations of Media Coverage on the Issue

The cross-lagged analysis of issue fatigue and negative evaluations of the media coverage on the issue ($n = 745$) showed good model-fit (CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, SRMR = .00, RMSEA = .00). First of all, the positive correlation of IF and NEMCI at the between-level (see Figure 1) indicates a positive relationship. Those with higher levels of issue fatigue on average evaluate news coverage on the issue more negatively than the average. H1 assumes a positive association between IF and NEMCI at the within-level. Figure 1 shows weak positive correlations at the within level at wave 2 and wave 3, but not at wave 1. This indicates that a

within-person change in IF relates positively to a within-person change in NEMCI over time, partially supporting H1. H2 posited that issue fatigue leads to a negative evaluation of news media coverage on the issue. The CL terms show that the effect from IF at t2 on NEMCI at t3 is positive and significant. This indicates that the individual's deviation at t2 from its own score in IF predicts their deviation at t3 from its own score in NECMI, which partially supports H2. Vice versa, the effect from NEMCI at t2 on IF at t3 is significant, which partially supports H7. However, reciprocal effects do not occur between wave 1 and 2.

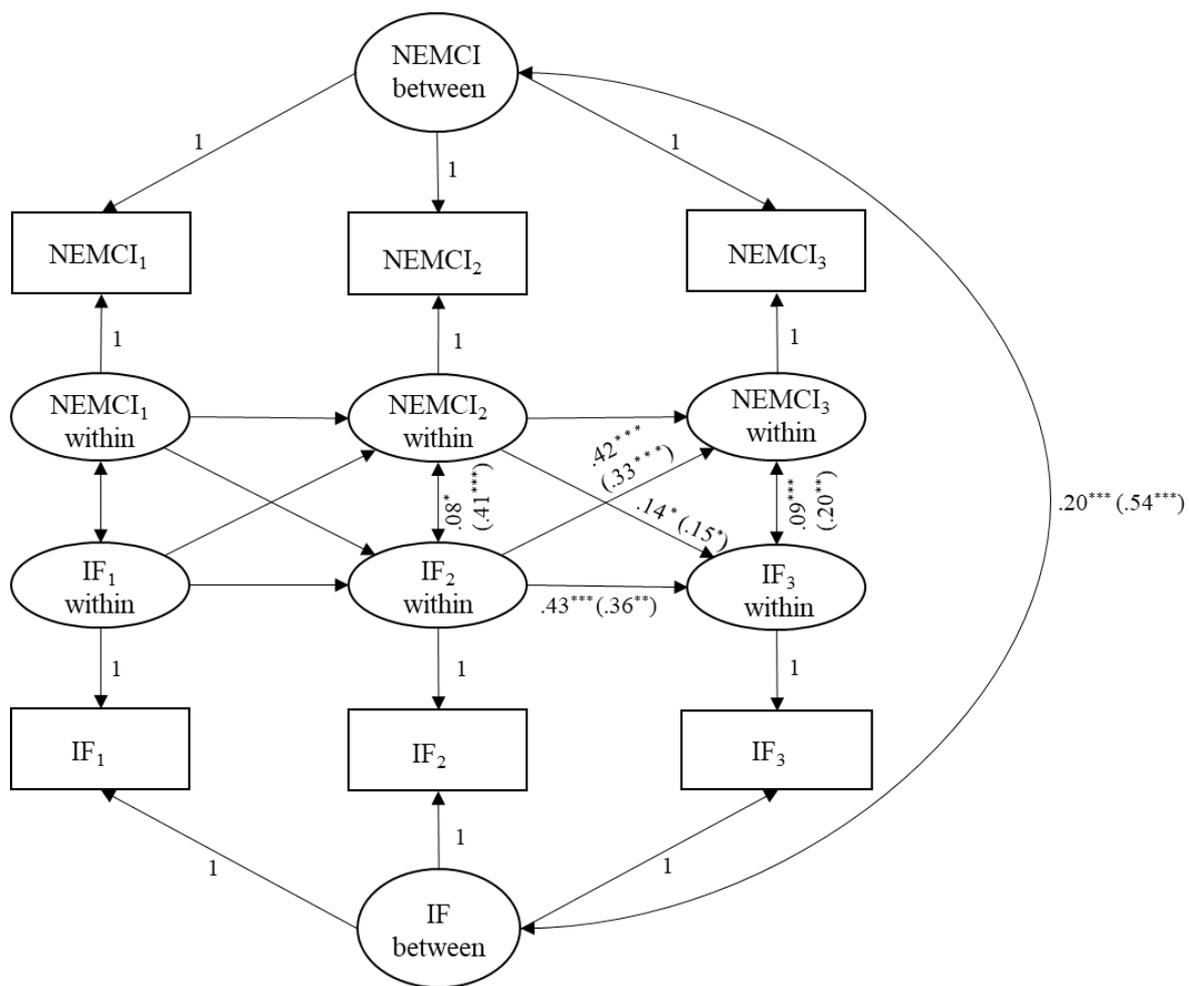


Figure 1. Random intercept cross-lagged panel model of reciprocal effects of issue fatigue (IF) and negative evaluations of news media coverage on the issue (NEMCI).
Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. n = 694. Unstandardized path coefficients. Standardized coefficients are in the brackets.

Issue Fatigue and General Negative Evaluations of News Media Coverage

The RI-CLPM of issue fatigue and general negative media coverage evaluations ($n = 747$) fit the data well (CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, SRMR = .00, RMSEA = .00). There is a weak positive correlation between IF and NEMC at the between-level (see Figure 2). Those with higher levels of issue fatigue on average evaluate news coverage, regardless of the issue, more negatively than the average. H3 assumed positive relations at the within-level. Since there is a weak negative correlation at wave 1 and no significant correlations at wave 2 and 3, H3 is rejected. H4 assumed a causal effect of issue fatigue on negative news coverage evaluations. The CL terms indicate that there are no effects from IF on NEMC, at the individual level. Thus, H4 is rejected.

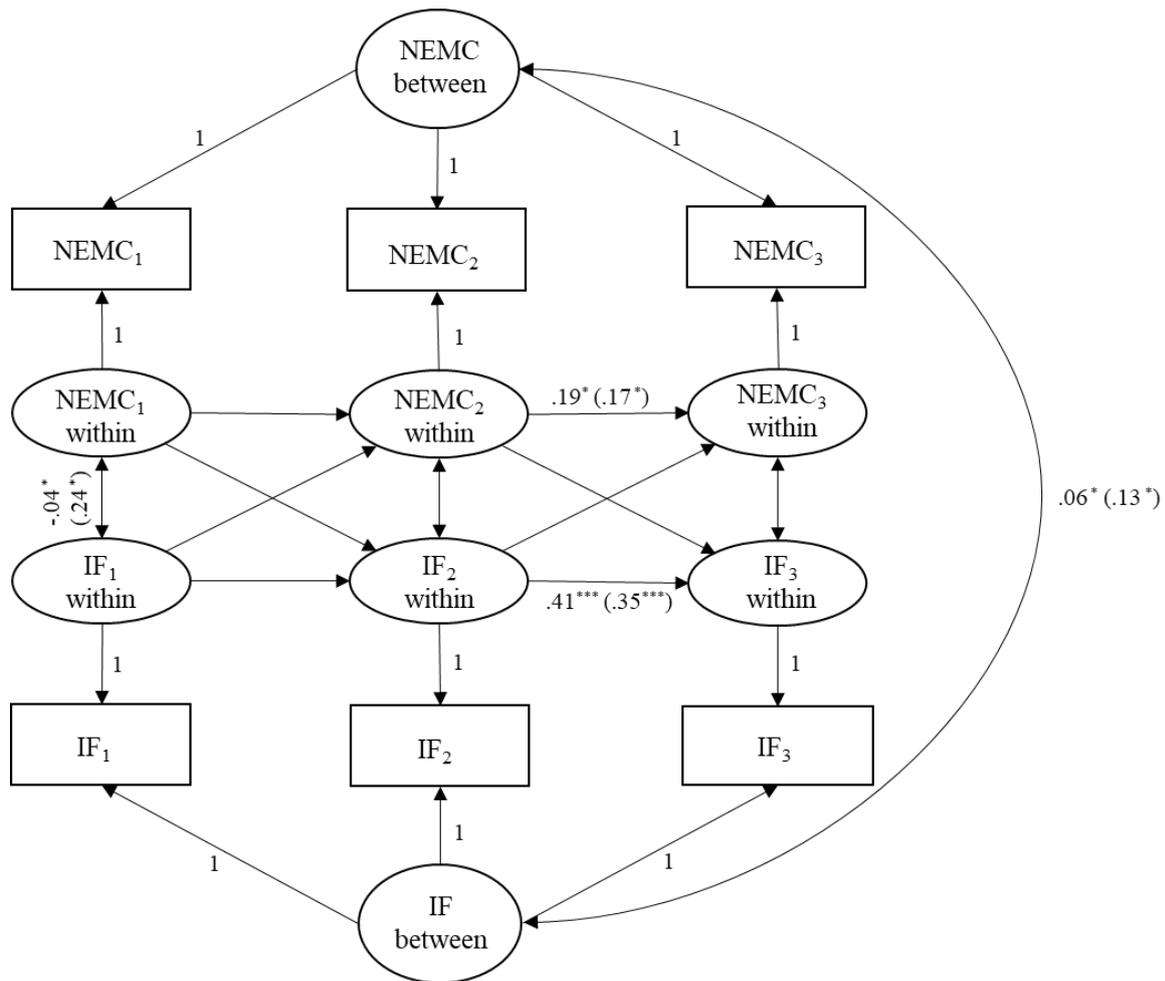


Figure 2. Random intercept cross-lagged panel model of reciprocal effects of issue fatigue (IF) and negative evaluations of news media coverage in general (NEMC).

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. $n = 705$. Unstandardized path coefficients. Standardized coefficients are in the brackets.

Issue Fatigue and Hostile Media Perceptions

For the RI-CLPM of issue fatigue and hostile media perceptions ($n = 677$), model-fit is good (CFI = 1.00 TLI = 1.00, SRMR = .02, RMSEA = .03). Figure 3 shows a weak positive correlation between IF and NEMC at the between-level. Those with higher levels of issue fatigue have stronger hostile media perceptions. H5 assumes a positive association between issue fatigue and hostile media perceptions at the within-level. There are weak positive correlations at the within level at wave 2 and wave 3. These indicate that a within-person change in IF relates positively to a within-person change in HMP, which partially supports H5. H6 posits that issue fatigue will lead to hostile media perceptions. The CL terms indicate that

there are no significant effects. An individual's deviation from its issue fatigue score does not predict a deviation from its hostile media score at the next time point. H8 assumed effects of hostile media perceptions on issue fatigue. The CL terms indicate that there are no such effects. Thus, H8 is rejected.

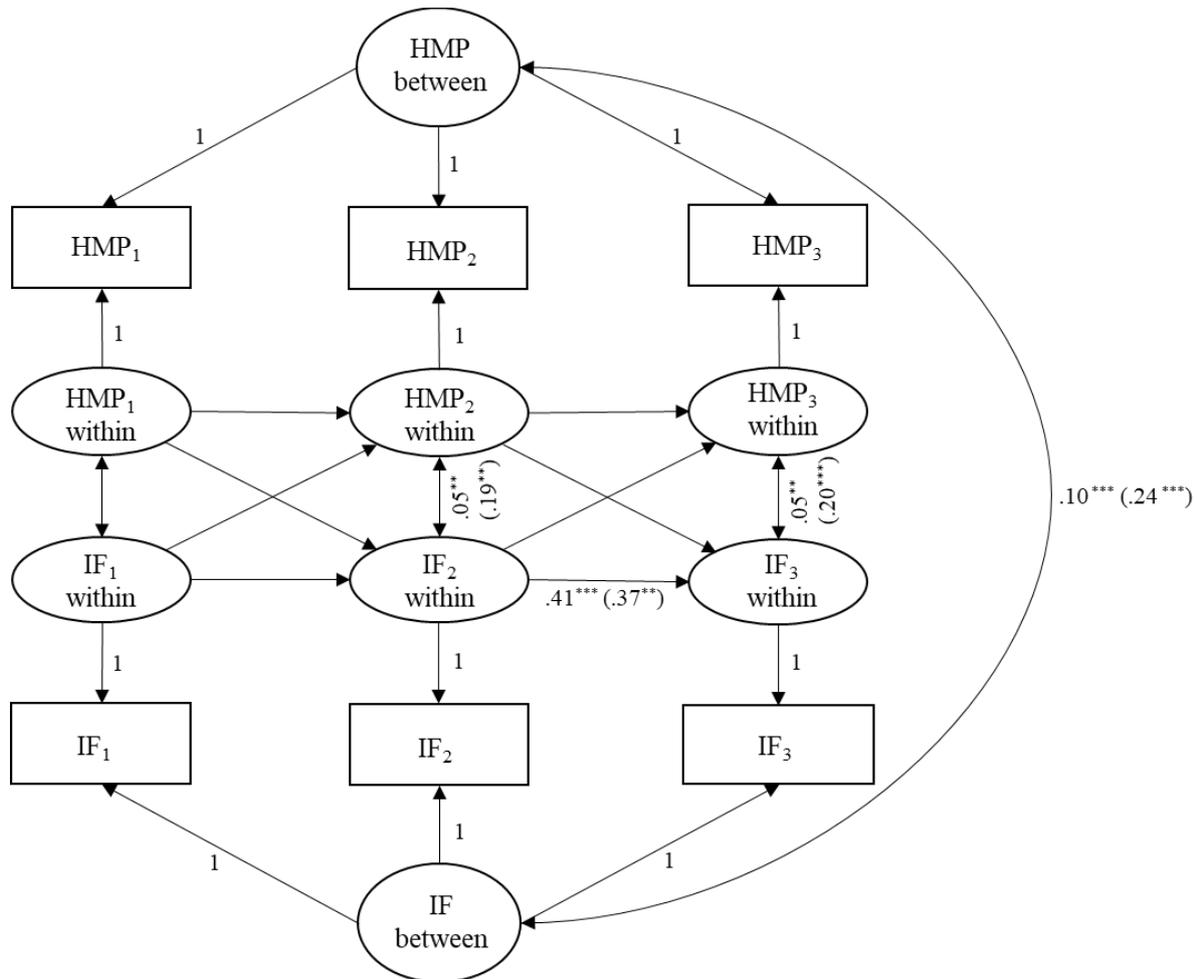


Figure 3. Random intercept cross-lagged panel model of reciprocal effects of issue fatigue (IF) and hostile media perceptions (HMP).
Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. n = 530. Unstandardized path coefficients. Standardized coefficients are in the brackets.

Discussion

Currently, the news media faces many challenges in informing the public about current affairs (van Aelst et al., 2017). Audience support for news media is crucial for them to fulfill their role in informing citizens and enabling them to form opinions and make informed

decisions (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). Against the background of decreasing trust in news media and the prevalence of ongoing news issues, such as Trump's presidency or Brexit, this study addressed the question as to how audience fatigue from ongoing news issues relates to news media evaluations.

The results from random intercept cross-lagged panel models based on a three-wave panel survey show that fatigue from the Brexit issue relates positively to negative news media evaluations. News users who are more issue fatigued perceive more hostile media perceptions and evaluate the quality of news coverage on the issue and, news coverage in general, more negatively. The results at the within-level showed that within-increases in issue fatigue go along with within-increases in hostile media perceptions and negative evaluations of issue-specific coverage. Reciprocal effects occur only between issue fatigue and negative quality evaluations of the issue's news coverage. Issue fatigue relates stronger to issue-specific news media perceptions and evaluations than to news media evaluations in general. This finding is reasonable considering that the issue plays a more significant role in evaluating news media coverage on the issue rather than general news coverage.

Issue fatigue and negative issue-specific media coverage evaluations influence each other over time. This finding supports the idea of priming effects (Domke et al., 1998; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). News users rely on their issue fatigue to evaluate news media's performance in covering the issue and current affairs in general during a period of extensive news coverage on the issue. When issue fatigue is chronically well accessible, news users use it as a benchmark to judge news media coverage (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007). Vice versa, users perceive issue fatigue because they negatively evaluate media coverage on the issue—this supports the importance of news coverage evaluations for news users' issue fatigue. If individuals perceive media coverage as negative or too complex, or low in quality, they feel overloaded and demotivated to engage with the information (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Jackson & Farzaneh,

2012). The cross-lagged effects between issue fatigue and negative issue-specific news coverage evaluations occur only between wave 2 and wave 3, indicating that they influence each other only after a period of extensive coverage.

Those who are more fatigued from an issue tend to evaluate news media coverage negatively. However, issue fatigue does not lead to a more negative evaluation of news media coverage in general. This finding shows that despite the predominance of the issue in the media, users rely on other experiences with media content, such as news on other issues and past experiences when assessing media coverage. The finding from political priming that individuals rely on dominant issues to judge political persons in general, regardless of their handling of the issue in question (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1997), has not been found for issue fatigue and general news coverage evaluations.

Issue fatigue and hostile media perceptions are positively related at the between- and within-level. This finding supports what previous research has discussed for Brexit and the Yellow Vests (Newman et al., 2019): those negatively affected by the ongoing issue tend to question the media's impartiality. However, no causal effects are found at the within-level. Issue fatigue comprising negative emotions does not give rise to perceiving the media coverage on the issue as biased against one's viewpoint later in time. This speaks against affective priming effects (Forgas & Bower, 1987) over time. As Slater (2007) notes, emotional media effects are often immediate and apparent in cross-sectional associations rather than in lagged effects. At the same time, hostile media perceptions could cause issue fatigue and vice versa over a more extended period than applied in this study.

In sum, ongoing issues and the users' reactions do not only relate to but, in part, also negatively influence news media evaluations. Against the backdrop of decreasing trust in news media (Newman, Fletcher, Schulz, Andi, & Nielsen, 2020) and increasing tune-out from the news (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020), the finding that issue fatigue harms news media

evaluations is relevant. Issue fatigue alone is associated with avoidance of media content on the issue itself (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Author, year). Its broader impact on news media evaluations emphasizes the relevance of ongoing news issues for citizens' attachment to news media. Research on news media evaluations and trust should consider how unintended adverse effects of news exposure, such as issue fatigue, affect news media evaluations.

Limitations and Outlook

The discussed findings come with limitations. The lack of causal effects between issue fatigue and hostile media perceptions and negative general news coverage relations could have methodological reasons. A longitudinal study over several years of Brexit coverage with more extended time lags allows for more change in the variables and increases the chance of causal effects. Practical reasons guided the selection of the study's exact time slot. For observing issue fatigue and news media evaluations, we prioritized high amounts of media coverage on the issue and thus chose a short period of intensive coverage over a more extended period with potentially less coverage at the measurements.

The analysis of reciprocal relations using random intercept cross-lagged panel models shows how issue fatigue and news media evaluations relate to each other at the within-level. It accounts for stable between-unit differences and variance within the same person (Hamaker et al., 2015). When media cover an issue extensively across time, related concepts will be primed during a period to different degrees, depending on how frequently, how long, and how long ago users were exposed to the primed issue (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007). The measurement times potentially did not match with the presumed priming effects, especially with the affective priming effects on hostile media perceptions. The cross-lagged effects indicate no increase in issue fatigue at wave 3 due to increased hostile media perceptions at wave 1 approximately

three weeks earlier. There is a chance that such effects occurred, but the scheduled measurements did not capture them. More measurements could address this shortcoming.

In addition, the dynamics of the issue's media coverage in terms of size, duration, explosiveness, and volatility (Boydston et al., 2014; Geiss, 2018) are potentially influential for the strength of fatigue from the issue, perceptions, and evaluations of the issue's news coverage and their interrelations. The amount of news media coverage and, thus, users' exposure to the issue was likely different before each wave, which could have influenced both the degree of issue fatigue and perceptions and evaluations of the issue's news coverage. In Switzerland, Brexit was most extensively covered three weeks before wave 1 (851 reports). Three weeks before wave 2, there was less media coverage (178 reports) and again more media coverage three weeks before wave 3 (431 reports). Although priming effects potentially decrease with decreasing media coverage (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007), we find reciprocal effects between issue fatigue and negative news coverage evaluations between wave 2 and 3.

Finally, this study focuses on one issue only. Issue fatigue could be different for countries other than Switzerland, such as EU countries, which relate politically differently to the UK, or non-European countries, where the issue is less important. Issues can be of national or international relevance for a population; they differ in obtrusiveness and complexity (Neuman, 1990; Palmgreen & Clarke, 1977). Such issue characteristics potentially influence audience issue fatigue. Most Swiss people come across the issue via news coverage rather than direct experience. In this case, there is a chance that news users' issue stance bases to a great extent on their experience with news coverage. Thus, they evaluate the issue and its news coverage similarly. For domestic issues or health care issues such as the coronavirus, which people more likely experience in their everyday life, they potentially evaluate the issue and its news coverage more separately.

Future research should test the robustness of the relations and effects found in this study for

other issues, study contexts, with more measurement times and longer time lags. In addition, individual characteristics, such as personal issue relevance, personality traits, and news media use could be included in the analysis to provide further insight into the interrelations of issue fatigue with news media evaluations. Finally, for research on news media evaluations and trust, it would generally be promising to consider further how dynamics of the news coverage (Boydston et al., 2014), such as covering ongoing issues for weeks or months with different intensities, influence news media evaluations.

Conclusion

Given the importance of audience support for news media in democratic societies, this study is the first to address the role of ongoing news issues for news media evaluations. Interrelations were analyzed between existing concepts, tapping on audience evaluations of news media, such as hostile media perceptions and quality evaluations, and the idea of fatigue from issues the news media extensively cover. The results from random intercept cross-lagged panel models based on a three-wave panel survey indicate that issue fatigue and negative news media evaluations are positively related. First, issue fatigue negatively affects evaluations of the news media coverage of an issue and vice versa. Second, issue fatigue is positively related to but does not lead to general negative news coverage evaluations and hostile media perception. Ongoing news issues and adverse audience reactions to them can be detrimental to audience news media evaluations. Focusing on ongoing news issues, this study contributes to researching faltering attachment to news media today.

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Paper IV Appendix

Table A1*First-Order Factor Loadings*

	Wave 1 <i>n</i> = 756		Wave 2 <i>n</i> = 757		Wave 3 <i>n</i> = 757	
	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>
Information overload (IO)						
IO1	.79***	.02	.81***	.02	.82***	.02
IO2	.74***	.03	.69***	.03	.72***	.03
IO3	.84***	.02	.83***	.02	.88***	.02
IO4	.82***	.02	.88***	.02	.85***	.02
Information processing Involvement (IPI)						
IPI1	.78***	.03	.79***	.03	.84***	.03
IPI2	.74***	.04	.76***	.03	.78***	.03
IPI3	.69***	.04	.78***	.03	.75***	.03
Negative emotions (NE)						
ANN	.92***	.04	.90***	.03	.90***	.03
ANG	.71***	.04	.80***	.03	.78***	.04
HMP						
HMP1	.75***	.05	.76***	.03	.70***	.04
HMP2	.54***	.06	.65***	.04	.71***	.05
HMP3	.60***	.05	.74***	.04	.71***	.04
NECMI						
NEMCI_compl	.80***	.02	.78***	.03	.85***	.02
NEMCI_bal	.81***	.03	.87***	.02	.85***	.02
NEMCI_acc	.85***	.02	.82***	.02	.86***	.02
NEMC						
NEMC_compl	.83***	.02	.80***	.02	.85***	.02
NEMC_bal	.73***	.03	.79***	.03	.77***	.03
NEMC_acc	.80***	.03	.85***	.02	.91***	.01

Note. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

Table A2*Second-Order Factor Loadings*

	Wave 1 <i>n</i> = 756		Wave 2 <i>n</i> = 757		Wave 3 <i>n</i> = 757	
	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Factor Load.</i>	<i>SE</i>
Issue fatigue						
Information overload	.90***	.10	.75***	.06	.78***	.05
Information processing involvement	.34***	.06	.41***	.06	.53***	.05
Negative emotions	.66***	.08	.82***	.06	.77***	.05

Note. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

Table A3*Factor Correlations*

	1	2	3
Wave 1 <i>n</i> = 756			
1 IF			
2 HMP	.22***		
3 NEMCI	.09	.52***	
4 NEMC	-.01	.40***	.65***
Wave 2 <i>n</i> = 757			
1 IF			
2 HMP	.28***		
3 NEMCI	.21***	.60***	
4 NEMC	.15*	.58***	.72***
Wave 3 <i>n</i> = 757			
1 IF			
2 HMP	.35***		
3 NEMCI	.24***	.56***	
4 NEMC	.16**	.52***	.79***

Note. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

Table A4*Item Correlations Wave 1*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1 IO1																	
2 IO2	.63***																
3 IO3	.63***	.63***															
4 IO4	.65***	.57***	.70***														
5 IPI1	.16***	.10*	.15***	.16***													
6 IPI2	.28***	.23***	.29***	.26***	.57***												
7 IPI3	.16***	.15***	.16***	.12**	.56***	.49***											
8 ANN	.45***	.36***	.44***	.47***	.15***	.26***	.09*										
9 ANG	.35***	.28***	.36***	.37***	-.01	.12**	-.01	.65***									
10 HMP1	.07	.03	.11**	.08*	.05	-.03	-.02	.09*	.09*								
11 HMP2	.09*	.08	.12**	.08*	-.03	.02	-.06	.10*	.13**	.36***							
12 HMP3	.19***	.14**	.18***	.16***	-.03	.02	-.04	.12**	.12**	.46***	.39***						
13 NEMCI_compl	-.01	-.05	-.01	.01	.11**	.10*	.03	.06	.03	.30***	.20***	.12**					
14 NEMCI_bal	.06	.00	.06	.04	.12**	.13**	.04	.09*	.05	.45***	.27***	.18***	.64***				
15 NEMCI_acc	.04	.00	.10*	.06	.14**	.12**	.07	.10*	.10*	.35***	.28***	.15***	.69***	.68***			
16 NEMC_compl	-.03	-.07	.03	-.03	.06	.07	.03	.00	-.03	.28***	.17***	.10*	.45***	.43***	.45***		
17 NEMC_bal	-.04	-.02	.02	.01	.02	.05	.02	-.01	.00	.29***	.23***	.09*	.36***	.43***	.37***	.61***	
18 NEMC_acc	-.03	-.04	.01	.02	.06	.09*	.02	.03	-.01	.26***	.20***	.10*	.42***	.40***	.48***	.66***	.59***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $n = 606$.

Table A5*Item Correlations Wave 2*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1 IO1																	
2 IO2	.57***																
3 IO3	.65***	.59***															
4 IO4	.72***	.59***	.73***														
5 IPI1	.15***	.14**	.17***	.18***													
6 IPI2	.25***	.25***	.27***	.27***	.59***												
7 IPI3	.15***	.21***	.18***	.18***	.63***	.59***											
8 ANN	.46***	.35***	.45***	.48***	.26***	.30***	.20***										
9 ANG	.41***	.33***	.45***	.45***	.15***	.19***	.11**	.72***									
10 HMP1	.09*	.06	.13**	.11**	.16***	.12**	.08	.16***	.13**								
11 HMP2	.14**	.07	.14**	.11**	.09*	.03	.04	.16***	.13**	.45***							
12 HMP3	.14**	.10*	.17***	.16***	.06	.06	.04	.15***	.11**	.55***	.54***						
13 NEMCI_compl	.08	.00	.08*	.05	.20***	.13**	.14**	.11**	.09*	.40***	.30***	.28***					
14 NECMI_bal	.08*	.08	.11**	.07	.22***	.17***	.17***	.18***	.12**	.50***	.33***	.35***	.67***				
15 NEMCI_acc	.08	.05	.06	.06	.23***	.18***	.16***	.10*	.06	.39***	.30***	.28***	.64***	.71***			
16 NEMC_compl	.04	-.01	.01	.03	.16***	.10*	.13**	.08*	.06	.37***	.27***	.28***	.50***	.49***	.48***		
17 NEMC_bal	.10*	.04	.08	.07	.18***	.13**	.11**	.13**	.07	.46***	.30***	.34***	.39***	.51***	.45***	.62***	
18 NEMC_acc	.07	.00	.07	.05	.12**	.13**	.11**	.08*	.05	.39***	.30***	.33***	.45***	.52***	.53***	.69***	.67***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $n = 600$.

Table A6*Item Correlations Wave 3*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1 IO1																	
2 IO2	.61***																
3 IO3	.71***	.63***															
4 IO4	.70***	.60***	.75***														
5 IPI1	.22***	.18***	.29***	.30***													
6 IPI2	.27***	.26***	.37***	.34***	.64***												
7 IPI3	.20***	.18***	.23***	.23***	.64***	.58***											
8 ANN	.44***	.35***	.49***	.44***	.33***	.36***	.23***										
9 ANG	.40***	.36***	.46***	.41***	.18***	.25***	.15***	.71***									
10 HMP1	.17***	.09*	.19***	.22***	.18***	.18***	.11**	.17***	.16***								
11 HMP2	.13**	.10*	.13**	.20***	.10*	.07	.02	.16***	.11**	.48***							
12 HMP3	.20***	.13**	.20***	.23***	.10*	.11*	.00	.13**	.13**	.45***	.56***						
13 NEMCI_compl	.07	.03	.08*	.09*	.26***	.16***	.14**	.13**	.09*	.38***	.29***	.29***					
14 NEMCI_bal	.05	.05	.11**	.09*	.24***	.19***	.16***	.16***	.11**	.43***	.29***	.35***	.74***				
15 NEMCI_acc	.10*	.10*	.15***	.13**	.21***	.17***	.16***	.12**	.10*	.38***	.31***	.33***	.73***	.73***			
16 NEMC_compl	.05	.07	.07	.07	.18***	.09*	.10*	.06	.06	.37***	.25***	.24***	.56***	.52***	.57***		
17 NEMC_bal	.06	.06	.11**	.08*	.13**	.10*	.09*	.05	.06	.44***	.27***	.31***	.54***	.59***	.55***	.64***	
18 NEMC_acc	.08	.07	.09*	.09*	.20***	.15***	.12**	.08*	.08*	.40***	.28***	.31***	.60***	.59***	.64***	.78***	.68***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $n = 619$.

2.5 Paper V

What Leads to Audience Issue Fatigue?

A Linkage Analysis Study on the Effects of News Coverage on Fatigue from Ongoing News Issues

News media covers certain political issues extensively during weeks, months, or years, leading the audience to become fatigued. Audience fatigue from and avoidance of ongoing political news issues are detrimental to an informed citizenry and problematic against the backdrop of citizens who are increasingly avoiding political news. While previous research has investigated relations between news coverage perceptions and issue fatigue, it has not explicitly tested the effects of objective news coverage characteristics and the intensity of exposure. This study examines how news coverage of an ongoing political issue affects news users' issue fatigue. Data from a three-wave panel survey on the Brexit issue are used and linked to an extensive content analysis of print, online, and television news coverage on the issue. The results of the panel analysis show that repeated information, complexity, and strategy framing lead to issue fatigue, while the intensity of exposure to news coverage and other political news characteristics, such as negative tonality and sensationalism, have no effect. The findings inform journalism and political communication researchers about the effects of communication regarding ongoing political issues.

Keywords: issue fatigue; news issues; news exposure; media effects; linkage analysis

Introduction

Brexit, Donald Trump's presidency—and more currently, the coronavirus—are issues that have been covered extensively by news media for weeks, months, or years. Consequently, people have felt fatigue from them. When users are excessively exposed to media coverage on a news issue for a prolonged period, they react negatively to the issue at some point; this phenomenon has been called topic or issue fatigue (Arlt et al., 2020; Schumann, 2018). Affected audience members tend to avoid the issue upon subsequent news exposure as a result of issue fatigue (Author, year). Similarly, issue fatigue positively relates to dissatisfaction with the way that politicians handle the issue in question (Arlt et al., 2020). Issue fatigue thus triggers consequences—beyond the single issue—for political communication.

Expectations differ among scholars and democracy theories regarding the extent to which citizens need to be informed and knowledgeable about politics and political issues (Delli Carpini, 2000; Strömbäck, 2005). Nevertheless, most scholars agree that well-informed citizens are better able to form their opinions, make informed choices, and participate in politics (Aalberg & Curran, 2012). Citizens' issue fatigue would thus be detrimental to democracy.

The role of news media in covering ongoing issues, such as Brexit and the coronavirus, and thereby maintaining or losing public attention to these issues is discussed in public and in communication science (Bedingfield, 2020; Burack, 2020; Newman et al., 2019). Since audience issue fatigue is rooted in exposure to news coverage on the issue during a prolonged period, news media likely have an impact on the extent to which the audience becomes fatigued. While citizens can learn about current political issues from their online and offline social networks, offline and online news media represent an important source of information for most citizens (European Commission, 2020; Geiger, 2019). They are exposed to news coverage either directly via news media or indirectly via other individuals (Bandura, 2001) or due to the news media's inter-media agenda-setting role for social media (Harder et al., 2017; Lee, 2007). News coverage

on the issue is thus considered the key source of issue fatigue.

Similar to fatigue from health messages (So et al., 2017), advertising wearout (Corkindale & Newall, 1978), and news overload (Lee et al., 2019), the intensity at which the audience is exposed to a stimulus (in this case, the issue) will likely influence the emergence of audience fatigue. How the media cover the issue can also affect how the audience becomes fatigued. While research on fatigue from media stimuli has so far exclusively investigated how subjective perceptions of media messages are related to fatigue, previous political communication research has shown that objective characteristics of news coverage, such as frames (Valkenburg et al., 1999) and negativity (Lengauer et al., 2012), influence political attitudes and behavior, such as political cynicism and voting decisions. This finding suggests that objective characteristics of news coverage of ongoing issues influence fatigue perceptions among the audience in addition to the coverage's intensity. However, we lack knowledge on how news coverage contributes to the emergence of audience issue fatigue. In this study, we address this gap and focus on the role of news coverage in issue fatigue with regard to two aspects. We investigate how the intensity of media coverage on the issue and the characteristics of the news coverage lead to issue fatigue. By linking a three-wave panel survey and a media content analysis of Swiss print, television, and online media coverage on the Brexit issue in 2019, we analyze the causal effects of news coverage on audience fatigue from this issue.

For journalists whose job is, *inter alia*, to inform the public about the latest developments on (ongoing) issues and enable opinion formation (Hanitzsch et al., 2018), it is important to maintain their audience's attention to such issues. Therefore, it is also essential to know which characteristics of their reporting cause fatigue and to develop strategies to avoid audience issue fatigue and avoidance. This is especially relevant against the backdrop of citizens turning away from news media—as manifested in perceptions of biased reporting, news avoidance, and a decrease in citizens' trust in news media in several countries (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017; Newman et al., 2019; Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020).

Issue Fatigue

Issue fatigue refers to “an individual’s negative state that emerges because of over-exposure to an issue that news media cover extensively over a long period” (Author, year, p. X). Extant research on the effects of repeated exposure to stimuli, such as advertising or health messages (e.g., Corkindale & Newall, 1978; So et al., 2017), suggests that after a certain number of repetitions, the evaluation of a stimulus can shift from positive to negative. When repeatedly exposed to the same news issue, users experience negative emotions and information overload, and are decreasingly motivated to process information on the issue, which are the conceptual dimensions of issue fatigue (Author, year). When recipients are overly frequently exposed to information on the same issue, their motivation to engage in the issue or process information about it extensively decreases (Matthes, 2013). Processing involvement is determined particularly by the information received on the issue, rather than by the issue itself (Antil, 1984). After repeated exposure, if the information is perceived as less newsworthy, repetitive, and irrelevant to reducing uncertainty (Atkin, 1973; Berlyne, 1970), the motivation to process the received information will likely decrease. Repeated exposure to information on the same issue over weeks or months leads to increasing annoyance and anger associated with the issue (Author, year; Schumann, 2018). Finally, repeated exposure to media content on the issue can at some point turn into receiving too much information; news users feel overloaded or overwhelmed by it. Previous research has shown that issue fatigue leads to avoiding the issue during news media use (Author, year) and is related to dissatisfaction with politics (Arlt et al., 2020). If media users avoid exposure to information on the issue, learning about current developments and different positions concerning the issue can be impeded. It is therefore relevant to investigate how its emergence can be explained.

Effects of Exposure Intensity

The negative state of issue fatigue emerges as a result of overexposure to an issue that is intensively covered by the news media over a period of weeks or months. Overexposure effects, such as advertising wearout and message fatigue, are based on theories of repetition effects (Berlyne, 1970; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979, 1989; Stang, 1975). According to theoretical models of repetition effects, stimuli become more accessible and familiar to the individual through repetition, so the stimuli can be processed more easily in exposure situations (Zajonc, 1968). There is a positive habituation to the stimulus due to the reduction of uncertainty, the perception of the stimulus as novel, interesting, and stimulating, and the rewarding effect of learning. However, after the exposure reaches its saturation point, the attitude toward the stimulus becomes more negative (Berlyne, 1970; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979; Stang, 1975).

Correspondingly, advertising wearout is due to repeated exposure to the same television ad (Calder & Sternthal, 1980), contingent on three intensity-related factors: the number of repetitions, the repetition interval, and the overall duration of the exposure (Corkindale & Newall, 1978). Fatigue from health messages is due to prolonged and repeated exposure to the same message by the media (So et al., 2017). Though concerned with non-persuasive stimuli, research on compassion and human-interest fatigue similarly argues that excessive exposure to media messages or media coverage is the cause of fatigue perceptions (Beyer & Figenschou, 2014; Kinnick et al., 1996; So et al., 2017). News overload is also caused by the intensity (frequency) of exposure to them (Lee et al., 2019; York, 2013). We thus assume that intensity of exposure is equally important for the emergence of issue fatigue, and we propose our first hypothesis:

H1. Higher levels of intensity of exposure to a news issue will lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

Additionally, the characteristics of the information will likely have an impact on issue fatigue. Previous cross-sectional studies on issue fatigue show its positive relation to a negative subjective evaluation of news media coverage on the issue in terms of quality, balance, and credibility (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Author, year). Research is lacking on whether and which objective news coverage characteristics, as opposed to subjective perceptions, influence the emergence of issue fatigue.

Transferring Effects of Media Content on Overexposure to Issue Fatigue

We need to consider more specifically which characteristics of media coverage lead to decreased ability and motivation to engage in the issue. We therefore take into account research on other overexposure phenomena. Overexposure effects are rooted in the exposure to information and contingent on the characteristics of the information. According to Berlyne's (1970) and Stang's (1975) experiments, novelty and thus the stimulating potential of the stimulus determine how pleasing it is perceived along with repeated exposure, which has also been argued for persuasive stimuli, such as television ads for a product (Corkindale & Newall, 1978). Health message fatigue emerges because of redundant and overlapping messages received as opposed to new information provided. However, message fatigue is about the individuals' subjective perceptions of redundancy and overlaps of the messages rather than about an objective measure (So et al., 2017). We assume that the degree of novelty in the media reports on the issue is influential for developing fatigue. The motivation to process information on the issue (Matthes, 2013), the first dimension of issue fatigue, will likely decrease if the information is repetitive rather than novel, and anger can occur in response to unwanted repetitive content (Sweeny et al., 2010). Therefore, we assume:

H2. Higher levels of repetition in the media coverage of an issue will lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

Information overload occurs, not only because of too much information received, but also due to the characteristics of that information, which determine the energy needed to process information (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012; Schneider, 1987). However, the effect of content characteristics on news overload has rarely been measured. Issue fatigue's third dimension of information overload can be viewed as a special case of news overload, since it concerns a single issue. Therefore, it will likely be influenced by the characteristics of the news coverage. Research on information and news overload suggests that the complexity of information elicits feelings of overload, since it requires more knowledge (Lee et al., 2019; Schneider, 1987). Although complexity might also make stimuli more interesting (Berlyne, 1970), it might cause feelings of being overwhelmed by information, negative emotions, and a decreased motivation to process information on the issue when the issue is portrayed in a complex way for a prolonged period. Therefore, we propose:

H3. Higher levels of complexity in the media coverage of an issue will lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

Negative effects of human-interest framing have been found when it occurs in high volumes. Beyer and Figenschou (2014, 2018) find that it leads to negative perceptions of media hypes or human-interest fatigue. According to Valkenburg et al. (1999), to frame human interest means to "personalize, emotionalize and dramatize the news" (p. 551). Personalization focuses on political leaders and their qualities and behavior rather than on substantive news content (Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007; van Aelst et al., 2012). Furthermore, news that focus on politicians can lead to political cynicism (Jebril et al., 2013). Sensationalism refers to attention-attracting and emotion-arousing features of media content (Vettehen et al., 2008). Kuhlmann et al. (2014) find that individuals who no longer want to see and hear about extensively covered issues perceive news coverage on the issues as sensationalist and focused on prominent politicians. We assume that

prolonged sensational and personalized news coverage of an ongoing issue leads to fatigue from this issue.

H4a. Higher levels of sensationalism in an issue's media coverage will lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

H4b. Higher levels of personalization in an issue's media coverage will lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

Kinnick et al. (1996) introduce the concept of compassion fatigue, which states that audiences become burned out by social problems covered pervasively by the media. Based on their findings, Kinnick et al. (1996) conclude that in addition to redundant and negative coverage, presenting problems without offering solutions causes fatigue. More generally, focusing on conflict and a lack of solutions can negatively affect users' attitudes and thoughts (Lengauer et al., 2012; McIntyre, 2019; Valkenburg et al., 1999). We assume that political conflict is present when issues are on the political and public agenda for weeks or months. Consequently, conflict is expected occur in the issue's news coverage. Repeated exposure to ongoing conflict could in turn lead to fatigue, especially negative emotions, with the issue.

H5. Higher levels of conflict in the media coverage of an issue will lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

Transferring Effects of Political News Coverage on Political Attitudes to Issue Fatigue

In addition to research on overexposure and fatigue phenomena, we consider news coverage effects on political attitudes, since issue fatigue is about an ongoing political issue. Research on the effects of political news coverage has predominantly, but not exclusively, focused on the effects of news framing on negative political attitudes, such as political cynicism and distrust (Aalberg et al., 2012). It follows the idea that the audience responds to characteristics of news

coverage, particularly to frames. News framing has an impact on the audience's interpretations, evaluations, and judgments (Price et al., 1997) and leads to the adoption of issue-specific frames (Valkenburg et al., 1999; Wettstein, 2012).

The effects of game or strategy frames¹ as opposed to substantive or issue-based frames have been analyzed in experimental and quasi-experimental studies. Game and strategy frames emphasize tactics and strategies of campaigning, election outcomes, and politicians' performance and battles for voters (Aalberg et al., 2012). In contrast, politics are framed as issues when the focus is on political content, specifically problems, solutions, implications, events, and politicians' opinions and actions (Aalberg et al., 2012; Shehata, 2014). The findings show that strategic framing leads to higher levels of political cynicism regarding the issue, more negative thoughts about the issue, and a decreased interest (de Vreese, 2004; de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008; Jackson, 2011; Schuck et al., 2013; Shehata, 2014). Based on this, we assume that strategic framing can also cause fatigue from the ongoing issue in question, particularly with regard to negative emotions, annoyance and anger, and a decreased motivation to process the information as dimensions of issue fatigue.

H6. Higher levels of strategy versus substantive framing in the media coverage of an issue will lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

Negative news frames (Balzarotti & Ciceri, 2014), negative as opposed to positive aspects of certain topics, such as immigration (Igartua et al., 2011), negative versus positive valence of news stories (McIntyre & Gibson, 2016), and adverse aspects, such as violence (Unz et al., 2008), can cause negative affective responses among the audience. When more negative news are consumed, users report increasingly negative emotions and decreasingly positive emotions (Hoog & Verboon, 2020). Negative news coverage can lead negative emotions (e.g., McIntyre

¹ For a discussion on the distinction between game and strategy frames, see Aalberg et al. (2012).

& Gibson, 2016) and fatigue from social problems (Kinnick et al., 1996). Negativity in the news can be generally understood as negative tonality and a pessimistic outlook in news reports (Lengauer et al., 2012). Thus, negative news coverage will likely cause negative emotions, particularly annoyance and anger, among the recipients when they are extensively exposed to the issue.

H7. Higher levels of negativity in the media coverage of an issue will lead to higher levels of issue fatigue.

In sum, it is plausible that characteristics of the issue's news coverage, along with repeated exposure, lead to issue fatigue. Causal effects of objective characteristics of information about the issue on fatigue have not yet been tested experimentally or quasi-experimentally, as is done for news effects on political attitudes and behavior (e.g., Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016). Our study closes this gap.

Methods

News coverage of ongoing issues potentially changes over time, leading to audience exposure to certain characteristics to different extents over weeks and months. To trace how the intensity and characteristics of news coverage of an ongoing issue affect audience fatigue over a period of time, we combine a three-wave panel survey with media content analysis. This enables better insights into the dynamics of media coverage effects compared with short-term experimental data and cross-sectional designs (de Vreese et al., 2017).

For this study, Great Britain's exit (Brexit) from the European Union (EU) was chosen as an ongoing political news issue during the period of investigation. Brexit is a non-national issue for Switzerland, which can nevertheless have an impact on the Swiss economy and its relation to Great Britain. Thus, the issue allows some degree of involvement in it but does not concern the Swiss population as strongly as a national issue. It is therefore a suitable issue for observing

potential overexposure effects. The spring of 2019 was considered a suitable investigation period because it covered several postponements of Brexit due to a lack of agreement on the exit conditions and the corresponding negotiations between Great Britain and the EU under time pressure. Thus, this period is one of extensive exposure and with a particular thematic focus.

Content Analysis

In total, 1,275 reports mentioning Brexit in headlines or leads were found on front pages and political news sections of the most widely used 36 Swiss daily printed newspapers, online news sites, and television news series, which were accessed by at least 1% of the Swiss population in 2018 (see Table 2 in the Appendix). We used data from March 25 to May 28, 2019, which corresponds to the period of 2.5 weeks before Wave 1 until the end of Wave 3 of the panel survey.² The content analysis was conducted by five coders (students at [university]) in German, French and Italian language, who were trained before they performed the analysis and were supervised during the coding period. The codebook was adapted and supplemented by rules and coding examples after several training sessions.

The following variables were included as independent variables for the linkage analysis: *Intensity* was measured by summing up the number of news items per media outlet per time period, which was later multiplied by the individual frequency of exposure. Second, we measured whether the news item presented new information as opposed to previously *established information* ($M = -0.80$, $SD = 0.46$, $n = 1,272$). Third, we measured how simple or *complex* ($M = -0.62$, $SD = 0.61$, $n = 1,272$) the depiction in the news item was. Fourth, we assessed whether the news item made use of *sensationalism* ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.42$, $n = 1,272$) and whether the news item was *personalized* ($M = -0.47$, $SD = 0.81$, $n = 1,268$) as opposed to substantive. Fifth,

² The following numbers of media outlets have been analyzed: daily printed newspapers (22), weekly newspapers (9), online news sites (11), and TV news (3).

we measured whether the news item primarily presented *conflict* ($M = 0.58$, $SD = 0.71$, $n = 420$) as opposed to consensus-centered or balanced impressions of politics, conditions, and views. Sixth, we measured whether the news item mainly focused on substance or *political strategy* ($M = -0.70$, $SD = 0.62$, $n = 1,266$). Lastly, a scale from positive to negative tonality measured *negativity* ($M = 0.33$, $SD = 0.64$, $n = 1,272$).³ Except for negativity, which was measured on a five-point scale (ranging from -2 to 2), all variables were measured on a three-point scale (ranging from -1 to 1). The intercoder reliability test showed an average Lotus (S-Lotus) value (Fretwurst, 2015), ranging from .69 to 1.00, with an average of .83, for the variables used in this analysis. The Lotus coefficient shows the percentage agreement of coders and considers the number of categories per variable and the variables' distributions (Fretwurst, 2015). It has been applied in previous content analyses (e.g., Kristiansen et al., 2021).

Panel Survey

The respondents were recruited from the representative online access panel of LINK. Quota sampling was applied with respect to age, gender and language region. Wave 1 ($n = 1,338^4$, 50% female, $Mage = 48.27$ [$SD = 16.02$], education = 44% tertiary education) took place on April 11–24, 2019, Wave 2 ($n = 985$, 49% female, $Mage = 49.31$ [$SD = 16.04$], education = 44% tertiary education) on May 9–20, 2019, and Wave 3 ($n = 800$, 48% female, $Mage = 49.42$ [$SD = 16.03$], education = 43% tertiary education) on May 29–June 11, 2019. The retention rates were 74% for Wave 2 and 81% for Wave 3. We used a balanced sample of 638 respondents for the analyses due to the exclusion of those who dropped out after Wave 1 or Wave 2, did not access any media coverage on the issue via the suggested media outlets, or had missing values on the dependent variable. The sample ($Mage = 51.42$ [$SD = 15.97$], 46% female, education = 46% tertiary

³ Table 1 in the Appendix displays coding instructions, indications, and reliability values for all variables.

⁴ 26.5% of the participants who were invited to participate in the first wave completed the first questionnaire.

education) differed only slightly from the original sample.

We measured the dependent variable issue fatigue in three waves. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with statements on Brexit. Nine items used in previous research for the processing involvement, information overload, and negative emotion dimensions were averaged to form a composite measure (w1: $M = 2.78$ [$SD = 0.81$], $\alpha = .82$; w2: $M = 2.76$ [$SD = 0.82$], $\alpha = .84$; w3: $M = 2.77$ [$SD = 0.87$], $\alpha = .87$; $n = 636$). The response options ranged from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 5 (*I totally agree*). Processing involvement included the following items: I follow this issue with attention. It is important to me to know all arguments on this issue in detail. The more information I get on this issue, the better (all recoded) (Matthes, 2013). Information overload comprised the following items: I currently feel overloaded by the amount of news available on this issue. I receive more information on this issue than I can actually process. I am confronted with too much information on this issue. I feel overloaded by the amount of news on this issue (Lee et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2018). Negative emotions include the following items: This issue gets on my nerves. This issue makes me angry (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Author, year).

News media use was measured by means of the list-frequency technique (Andersen et al., 2016) in order to measure both the specific source and the frequency of exposure in days per week, which is suitable for linking the survey data with media content analysis data on an individual level (de Vreese et al., 2017). The media outlets in the panel survey correspond to those that were subjected to content analysis.⁵

Data Analysis and Matching of Media Content Analysis and Panel Data

The media content analysis dataset was aggregated by wave and media outlet, which enables calculating scores for every independent variable per outlet per wave (de Vreese et al., 2017).

⁵ Table 2 in the Appendix displays the average frequency of exposure per news outlet.

For each news characteristic measure, we built mean indices per outlet per time period. We opted for mean indices rather than summed scores because of a highly uneven distribution of news items in the three time periods ($n_{t1} = 687$; $n_{t2} = 246$; $n_{t3} = 342$; see Table 3 in the Appendix). However, for the intensity measure, we computed an additive index of the number of news items per outlet per time period. Table 1 displays the mean scores of the received media content variables per outlet per wave.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of media content exposure variables.

	t1		t2		t3	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intensity	45.51	40.73	16.31	15.66	21.66	20.43
Repetition	-2.09	1.52	-2.20	1.65	-2.12	1.67
Complexity	-1.93	1.65	-1.63	1.73	-1.78	1.57
Sensationalism	0.53	0.51	0.54	0.52	0.41	0.44
Personalization	-1.15	0.85	-1.40	1.11	-0.26	0.62
Conflict	1.42	1.15	1.10	1.07	1.61	1.26
Strategy framing	-1.81	1.37	-1.69	1.27	-1.69	1.21
Negativity	0.85	0.69	0.56	0.72	0.50	0.49

Note. $n = 636$. t1 = time period until start of Wave 1 (March 25–April 10, 2019); t2 = time period until start of Wave 2 (April 11–May 8, 2019); t3 = time period until start of Wave 3 (May 9–28, 2019).

In the panel dataset, we manually included the media content variables from the content analysis dataset. We multiplied these by standardized media exposure variables, ranging from 0 (exposed to no edition) to 1 (exposed to all editions), for each time period for each respondent (following de Vreese et al., 2017). Due to high multi-collinearity between the independent variables on each wave (see Table 4 in the Appendix), we could not include the independent variables together in one regression model. We therefore ran a regression model for each independent variable separately. The within-variation in the dependent variable was rather small (17% of the overall variance), and the intra-class correlation ($ICC = 0.75$) was rather high. Therefore, and since we measured news exposure frequency in one panel wave only, we did not

rely on the within-variation only and thus did not run fixed-effect panel regressions.⁶ Instead, we opted for a lagged-dependent variable model, which controls for the effect of the dependent variable in the previous wave. Since we had three panel waves, we could cluster the observations that belonged to the same individual. In addition to the lagged dependent variable, we included wave dummies to control for time effects (de Vreese et al., 2017) and age, gender, and education as control variables. All variables were z-standardized.

Results

As shown in Table 2, Model 1, including only the lagged dependent variable, the wave dummy, and sociodemographic variables, indicates that 59% of the variance of issue fatigue is explained by issue fatigue in the previous wave and the control variables. The lagged dependent variable has a strong impact on the dependent variable. Time has no effect and gender has a positive effect on issue fatigue, while age and education have a negative effect in all models (except for age in Models 3 and 7). The inclusion of any of the media content variables (Models 2–9) does not improve the model fit considerably. However, some of the variables have significant effects, and their inclusion in the model improves the preciseness of the results. To check the robustness of the findings, we consider alternative specifications and run three alternative models for each independent variable (b) without controlling for sociodemographic variables, (c) the independent variable weighted by the prominence of the media reports in terms of (audio-)visual material, and (d) the latter plus sociodemographic variables; see Tables 5–13 in the Appendix. We report discrepancies when applicable.

First, we include the intensity variable (Model 2) to the lagged dependent variable model, which indicates the number of news items to which a respondent has been exposed. Intensity of

⁶ According to the Hausman test, random-effect models would be inappropriate, due to the systematic bias of the estimates.

exposure to news items on the issue has no significant effect on issue fatigue. We thus reject H1. However, the more news users are exposed to repeated as opposed to new information on the issue, the more they are issue fatigued, which supports H2 (Model 3). H3 posits that increasing complexity in the news coverage leads to increasing issue fatigue (Model 4). The results support this hypothesis. Adding sensationalism to the empty lagged dependent variable model (Model 5) does not yield an effect on issue fatigue. We thus reject H4a. Adding personalization (Model 6) to the empty lagged dependent variable model does not yield an effect either, which leads us to reject H4b. However, personalization has a positive effect on issue fatigue ($b = 0.04^*$) when the variable is weighed by (audio-)visual material (Model 6c in the Appendix). Exposure to more conflict does not lead to increased issue fatigue, which is why H5 is rejected (Model 7). There is a negative effect ($b = -0.05^{**}$) when we use the weighted conflict variable (Model 7c in the Appendix). According to Model 8, the more news users are exposed to strategy framing of the issue, the more they become fatigued from the issue. This supports H6. Exposure to negative tonality in the news coverage (Model 9) has no significant effect on issue fatigue, which leads us to reject H7.

Table 2. Regression models predicting issue fatigue.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		Model 9	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>																
Time	.03	.03	.04	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.01	.04	.04	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
Issue fatigue t-1	.78***	.02	.78***	.02	.78***	.02	.78***	.02	.78***	.02	.78***	.02	.78***	.02	.78***	.02	.78***	.02
Sex	.04*	.02	.03*	.02	.03*	.02	.03*	.02	.04*	.02	.03*	.02	.03*	.02	.03*	.02	.04*	.02
Age	-.04*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.04*	.02	-.04*	.02	-.02	.02	-.03*	.02	-.04*	.02
Education	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.03*	.02
Intensity			-.05	.03														
Repetition					.04*	.02												
Complexity							.04*	.02										
Sensationalism									-.01	.02								
Personalization											.03	.02						
Conflict													-.04	.02				
Strategy framing															.04*	.02		
Negativity																		-.01
Constant	-.02	.03	-.04	.03	-.02	.03	-.02	.03	-.02	.03	-.01	.03	-.02	.03	-.02	.03	-.02	.03
<i>R</i> ²	.59		.59		.59		.59		.59		.59		.59		.59		.59	
<i>n</i>	1,262		1,262		1,262		1,262		1,262		1,262		1,262		1,262		1,262	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .00$; sex (0 = male; 1 = female); education (1 = tertiary education). Cells contain unstandardized (*b*) coefficients with robust clustered standard errors (*SE*)

Discussion

Some politically relevant issues, such as Trump's presidency or COVID-19, have been on the public agenda for weeks, months, or years. Researchers and journalists claim that news media coverage of the issues leads to audience fatigue from these issues (Bedingfield, 2020; Burack, 2020; Newman et al., 2019). However, so far, there is no evidence for the effects of news coverage of ongoing issues on audience fatigue. Hence, we investigate how news media contribute to fatigue from ongoing issues. Studying the causes of fatigue from ongoing issues is relevant because this fatigue leads affected users to avoid the issue during media use (Author, year), which can have detrimental effects on their knowledge and opinion formation regarding such issues. Furthermore, turning away from media content on ongoing political issues is problematic against the backdrop of the general public's increasing tuning out of news media, a phenomenon observed in several countries over the past few years (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020).

First, the results show that how frequently users are exposed to the issue via news coverage or how much information on the issue they receive from news media has no effect on how fatigued they are from the issue. This contradicts research findings on information overload (Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012) and repetition effects, such as advertising wearout (Calder & Sternthal, 1980), where the frequency of exposure to the stimulus is an important predictor. However, the interval and the overall duration of exposure are also relevant (Corkindale & Newall, 1978), which we have not considered for issue fatigue. Additionally, we have considered exposure intensity only via news media. However, users can also be exposed to the issue via social media and interpersonal encounters, which has not been measured in this study. Lastly, we can assume reciprocal effects of issue fatigue on exposure intensity. Since Brexit has been on the media agenda before the investigation period and fatigue can cause avoidance of the issue

(Author, year), it is possible that fatigue has already led to some users' decreased exposure to the issue, balancing out positive and negative effects of intensity on issue fatigue.

The findings show that repetition and complexity are relevant for issue fatigue. The positive effect on repetitive information as opposed to new information is in line with the assumption on repetition effects that after overly frequent exposure, the stimulus is perceived as less novel and stimulating after a phase of positive associations due to familiarity (Berlyne, 1970). Although the majority of news reports should cover new events (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), repeated information is included to catch up on previous developments regarding the issue. When users are increasingly exposed to repeated information, their fatigue increases as well. This supports the results of qualitative research on issue fatigue, that is, news users negatively perceive a lack of novelty (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Author, accepted). As assumed from research on information overload (Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012; Schneider, 1987), a complex depiction of events regarding the issue leads to negative cognitions and emotions. We assume that exposure to information on the issue that is complex and difficult to understand causes the feeling of being overwhelmed and decreases the motivation to process information on the issue.

Out of the predictors derived from research on the effects of political news coverage on political attitudes, only strategic framing predicts issue fatigue. As hypothesized, higher levels of strategic as opposed to substantive framing of the issue lead to higher levels of issue fatigue. Similar to political cynicism toward the issue (de Vreese, 2004), focusing on political strategy and tactics leads to users' negative cognitions and emotions regarding the issue. Although qualitative research has found that the perceptions of sensationalism and personalization are associated with issue fatigue (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Author, accepted), the actual degree of sensationalism and personalization in the news has no impact on issue fatigue. Focusing on famous persons, such as political leaders, and human-interest aspects are news factors that usually capture the audience's attention (Eilders, 2006; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). Thus, we can assume that these characteristics positively affect users' cognitions and emotions regarding the

issue, which potentially balance out negative effects, such as being annoyed about the issue, as assumed in issue fatigue. Similar explanations are plausible for the non-significant effects of negative tonality and conflict on issue fatigue. Based on the findings that conflict and negativity in the news generally lead to negative audience responses (Lengauer et al., 2012), such as negative emotions (e.g., McIntyre & Gibson, 2016), and fatigue from social problems (Kinnick et al., 1996), we assume that negativity contributes to issue fatigue. However, such “bad news” (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017, p. 1471) are equally newsworthy and thus might have a positive effect on the audience’s motivation to engage in the issue. Overall, our analyses suggest that in particular, political strategy framing, repetition, and complexity contribute to audience fatigue from ongoing news issues, while characteristics that are claimed to make news stories newsworthy do not lead to fatigue. In this study, we performed a content analysis of reports on Brexit on the headlines and leads of newspapers, online sites, and television news. It is thus highly probable that attention-catching elements occur in the news coverage on this prominent issue, which can increase users’ motivation to engage in the issue and thus counteract the state of issue fatigue.

The effects are generally weak, and only three out of seven media coverage characteristics have significant effects. This leads us to assume that the actual content characteristics are not the most influential in explaining that users become fatigued from ongoing news issues. A subjective perception of the media coverage could also lead to fatigue, similar to hostile media perceptions, where perceiving news coverage on the issue as biased against one’s own viewpoint (Vallone et al., 1985) is central, rather than actual bias in the news coverage. Once users are fatigued from the ongoing issue in the news, they will likely no longer evaluate the news coverage objectively but make biased judgments. According to Matthes (2013) and Matthes and Beyer (2017), negative emotions can lead to biased judgments and hostile media perceptions. Transferred to issue fatigue, what influences users’ stance toward the issue is at some point no longer the actual characteristics of news coverage but their subjective perceptions of these. Compared to message

fatigue (So et al., 2017), a user's perception of the news on the issue as repetitive could be more influential on issue fatigue than how redundant the coverage actually is. Future research should thus take into account individual perceptions of news coverage and analyze their causal relation to issue fatigue over time. Additionally, scholars are encouraged to consider individual characteristics, such as personality traits, news enjoyment (Nash & Hoffman, 2009), or attitudes (e.g., toward the issue), for issue fatigue.

Limitations

We ran three alternative models for each independent variable, which in most cases yielded the similar results, pointing to the robustness of our findings. However, our analyses have several limitations that we need to take into account when interpreting the results. Despite the potential of linking media content and panel survey data for testing media effects (de Vreese et al., 2017), measurement error is problematic because it stems from two sources (media content analysis and survey) and biases the estimates (Scharkow & Bachl, 2017). Although we applied the list-frequency technique to measure the media exposure variables in the survey, measurement error is probable (Andersen et al., 2016; de Vreese et al., 2017). Additionally, we measured the frequency of exposure to each media outlet only in one panel wave, thereby decreasing the potential within-variation in exposure to news coverage intensity and characteristics. For the independent media content variables, we coded news reports from different media types (print, online, and television) in three different languages, which led to acceptable but imperfect inter-coder reliability. Measurement error in the survey and media content analyses thus likely leads to down-biased estimates and to an underestimation of the media effects of our study (Scharkow & Bachl, 2017). The estimates in our models are very small. We can thus assume that the positive effects of strategy framing, repetition, and complexity on issue fatigue are stronger than suggested by our models and that the non-significant effects of intensity, sensationalism,

personalization, negative tonality, and conflict are to some extent due to measurement error. However, this kind of analysis is still better suited for measuring media effects than cross-sectional studies.

Our findings are also limited by the rather short period of twelve weeks. News media coverage during the investigation period was particularly extensive and focused on a particular sub-issue, specifically the negotiations between Great Britain and the EU concerning the exit conditions. However, the Brexit issue had been on the news media's agenda for a long time before this study began, before the Brexit referendum in Great Britain in June 2016. Thus, it is possible that some users had become fatigued (possibly due to media coverage) prior to this study and that we thus did not cover the effects of news coverage on issue fatigue in our investigation period. Related to this, our findings are limited because we analyzed media effects only for the Brexit issue. Further research for other ongoing issues in other countries is necessary to validate our findings. A longer time period with more points of survey measurement, particularly of exposure to news outlets, would allow considering not only the between-variation in exposure to news coverage characteristics but also the within-variation.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, our study is the first to investigate causal effects of news coverage characteristics on audience issue fatigue, against the background of news users' fatigue from ongoing issues, as recently observed for several issues. The findings from a linkage analysis of a three-wave panel survey and a media content analysis on the Brexit issue in Switzerland show that repetition, strategy framing, and complexity in the news coverage lead to increasing issue fatigue, while intensity of received coverage, sensationalism, personalization, conflict, and negative tonality have no effect. Knowledge on which characteristics of their reporting cause fatigue from ongoing news issues is relevant for journalists who can thus be sensitive to the

effects of this kind of reporting on the audience and can consider these effects in how they cover the issue. Political communication practitioners can accordingly adjust their communication activities that are interrelated with news coverage about a political issue. While our findings indicate that some news coverage characteristics are influential, they also point to directions for future research. There is an existing need to study subjective perceptions and individual characteristics as drivers of issue fatigue in order to identify strategies to avoid this phenomenon. Our study adds to the research on explaining fatigue from ongoing news issues, which has detrimental consequences for news users' information behavior regarding the issues and their issue-related evaluations and politics. Therefore, investigating the causes of issue fatigue is important, particularly against the backdrop of citizens increasingly tuning out news media and political information (Blekesaune et al., 2012; Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020).

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Paper V Appendix

Table 1. Media content variables, coding instructions, and reliability.

Variable	Coding instructions	Reliability (standardized Lotus coefficient)
<i>Media Outlet</i>	Coders should type the code of the media outlet, which the news item to be coded was published in. This variable has 36 codes for 36 media outlets.	1.00
<i>Date of Publication</i>	Coders should type the date of publication of the news item to be coded in the following format: YYMMDD.	1.00
<i>Multimedia Elements</i> Is the news item supplemented by (audio-)visual elements, such as pictures, graphics, videos or audios?	This variable has two codes: 1 = no multimedia element included, 2 = multimedia element included. For an audio-visual element to be considered as belonging to the news item, it has to be adjacent to the news item and to fit thematically with the news item.	.99
<i>Sensationalism</i> Does the news item make use of sensationalism?	This variable has two codes: 0 = no sensationalism; 1 = sensationalism. Coders should type 1 if the presentation is given the appearance of something sensational, spectacular or unexpected in order to create particularly a lot of attention in the news items' head and lead. Signs for this sensationalism are exaggerations, dramatic elements, shocking pictures, evaluative terms, emotional and colloquial language. Coders should type 0 if the presentation contains no signs of sensationalism but simply summarizes the occurred events. The operationalization of sensationalism is based on Donsbach & Büttner (2005) and Vettehen et al. (2005).	.82
<i>Personalization</i> Is the news item rather people-oriented or substantive?	This variable has four codes: -1 = predominantly issue-focused, 0 = balanced, 1 = predominantly people-oriented, 999 = no political focus and therefore neither focus on political content nor on political persons. To choose the correct specification coders should compare the issue-focused proportion of the news item with the people (politicians)-	.69

	<p>oriented proportion of the news item. Coders should type –1 if the news item focuses predominantly on factual politics and abstract processes. Coders should type 0 if the news item focuses almost equally on issues or factual politics and on individuals (politicians). Coders should type 1 if individuals (politicians) are focused in news item. Coders should type 999 if the news item has a non–political focus and therefore deals neither with political content nor with political persons.</p> <p>The operationalization was based on Rahat & Sheafer (2007) and van Aelst et al. (2012).</p>	
<p><i>Strategy framing</i></p> <p>Does the article mainly focus on substance or political strategy?</p>	<p>This variable has four codes: –1 = focus on political content, 0 = equally political content and political strategy, 1 = focus on political strategy, 999 = no political focus and therefore neither issue-focused nor strategy-focused. Coders should base their decision on the following indicators. Indicators for the focus on political content are differences and conditions of positions, statements and solutions regarding an issue, demonstrations, political processes, and effects of political decisions. Indicators for the focus on political strategy are strategies used by actors to pursue their goals, motives of actors, style of the campaign of a political actor, disputes between political actors and the struggle for the favor of voters. Coders should type –1 if the predominating focus in the article is on political content. Coders should type 0 if the article focuses equally on political content and strategy. Coders should type 1 if the predominating focus in the article is on political strategy. Coders should type 999 if the news item has a non–political focus and therefore is neither issue- not strategy-focused.</p> <p>The operationalization was based on Aalberg et al. (2012); Shehata (2014); Elenbaas & Vreese (2008).</p>	.84
<p><i>Novelty</i></p> <p>To what extent does the news item present new information?</p>	<p>This variable has three codes: –1 = mainly new information; 0 = partly established/repeated information, partly new information; 1 = mainly established / repeated information. To choose the correct specification, coders should compare the amount of new/topical/ up–to–date information presented by the news item with the amount of previously established/older information throughout the entire news item. Indications for repeated information are expected development, repetitions, consistency, and lack of surprise. Indications for new information are aggravation or disarming of the situation, surprising content, uniqueness, and the breaking of a pattern. Coders should type 1 if at least</p>	.86

	two thirds of the news item contain previous information. Coders should type 0 if the news item contains almost the same amount of previous and new information. Coders should type -1 if at least two thirds of the news item contain new information. The operationalization was based on Geiss (2015).	
<i>Conflict</i> Does the news item primarily present conflict, consensus-centred or balanced impressions of politics, conditions and views?	This variable has four codes: -1 = predominantly consensus, 0 = balanced (partly consensus/partly conflict), 1 = predominantly conflict, 999 = no conflict or consent. A conflict refers to at least two different representations of conflict, dispute, disagreement, confrontation, clashing positions and views or controversy. A conflict must be directly recognizable in the news item. To choose the correct specification, coders should compare the amount of the news item with conflict and the amount of the news item with consensus. Coders should type -1 if the news item focuses mainly on agreement between protagonists. Coders should type 0 if disagreements and agreements are addressed approximately equally in the news item. Coders should type 1 if the presentation of disagreements or disputes between the protagonists predominates in the news item. Coders should type 999 if there is not matter of discussion and thus no conflict or consensus. The operationalization was based on Lengauer et al. (2012) and Schuck et al. (2016).	.73
<i>Negativity</i> Is the article predominantly positive or negative in tone?	This variable has five codes: -2 = clearly optimistic, -1 = predominantly optimistic, 0 = neutral/ambivalent, 1 = predominantly pessimistic, 2 = clearly pessimistic. Coders should base their decision on the following indicators. Indicators for an optimistic tone in the news item are the mention of possible positive developments, optimism, positive scenarios, success and the presentation of problems as solvable. Indicators for a pessimistic tone are the mention of possible negative developments, pessimism, negative scenarios, hopeless statements and the presentation of problems as unsolvable. Coders should type -2 if a particularly positive impression is given. Coders should type -1 if the positive impression dominates (at least two indicators for optimistic evaluation). Coders should type 0 if neither an optimistic nor a pessimistic impression prevails or if there are no evaluations at all. Coders should type 1 if the negative impression dominates (at least two indicators for pessimistic evaluation). Coders should type 2 if a particularly negative impression is given.	.69

	The operationalization was based on Lengauer et al. (2012).	
<i>Complexity</i> How simple or complex is the depiction in the news item?	This variable has three codes: –1 = rather simple presentation, 0 = partly simple/partly complicated presentation, 1 = rather complicated presentation. This variable focuses on the presentation of events rather than whether the events themselves are simple or complicated. Coders should base their decision on the following indicators of simplicity and complexity. Indicators for simplicity are simple and common words, short sentences, the explanation of difficult words and a simple text structure. Indicators for complexity are the telling of many storylines and involved characters, an unclear link between actions and events (causes, motives), long and convoluted sentences, complicated grammar and technical language without explanation of difficult words. Coders should type –1 if the presentation of the news item is mainly simple. Coders should type 0 if the indicators for simplicity and complexity are equally represented in the news item. Coders should type 1 if the indicators for complexity in the presentation of the news item are dominant. Coders should type 888 if they cannot determine whether the presentation of the news item is simple or complicated. The operationalization was based on Geiss (2015).	.74
Average S-Lotus		.83

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Table 2. Frequency of exposure per media outlet.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Printed daily newspapers		
20 Minuten (G) ¹	.16	.30
Blick (G)	.09	.25
TagesAnzeiger (G)	.10	.27
Neue Zürcher Zeitung (G)	.06	.19
Die Südostschweiz (G)	.03	.14
Basler Zeitung (G)	.02	.13
St.Galler Tagblatt (G)	.07	.23
Luzerner Zeitung (G)	.05	.20
Der Bund (G)	.03	.14
Berner Zeitung (G)	.06	.23
Regionale Zeitung aus Zürich (G)	.03	.13
Zeitung aus der Nordwestschweiz (G)	.04	.17
20 minutes (F)	.08	.24
ArcInfo (F)	.01	.09
24 heures (F)	.05	.19
Le Nouvelliste (F)	.02	.11
Tribune de Genève (F)	.02	.11
Le Temps (F)	.02	.14
La Liberté (F)	.02	.13
Corriere del Ticino (I)	.07	.23
LaRegione (I)	.04	.18
20 minuti (I)	.04	.18
Online news outlets		
20 Minuten (G)	.20	.34
Blick Online (G)	.12	.28
TagesAnzeiger (G)	.08	.22
Neue Zürcher Zeitung (G)	.06	.20
Watson (G)	.05	.18
Luzerner Zeitung (G)	.03	.13
Berner Zeitung (G)	.03	.15
AZ Nordwestschweiz (G)	.03	.14
20 Minutes (F)	.08	.25
Le Matin (F)	.03	.15
Tio (I)	.07	.23
Television news		
SRF : Tagesschau (G)	.30	.39
RTS : Le 19h30 (F)	.11	.27
RSI LA 1 : Telegiornale (I)	.07	.22

Note. *n* = 636. Scale from 0 (exposed to no editions of the week) – 1 (exposed to all editions of the week).

¹ G stands for German-speaking, F for French-speaking and I for Italian-speaking media outlets.

Table 3. Number of news reports per media outlet and time period.

Media outlet	t1	t2	t3	total
Printed daily newspapers				
20 Minuten (G) ²	9	7	6	22
Blick (G)	6	3	7	16
TagesAnzeiger (G)	20	14	15	49
Neue Zürcher Zeitung (G)	15	11	11	37
Die Südostschweiz (G)	13	9	3	25
Basler Zeitung (G)	19	10	11	40
St.Galler Tagblatt (G)	9	11	8	28
Luzerner Zeitung	13	9	7	29
Der Bund (G)	26	13	14	53
Berner Zeitung (G)	15	7	12	34
Regionale Zeitung aus Zürich (G)	20	10	11	41
Zeitung aus der Nordwestschweiz (G)	8	4	6	18
20 minutes (F)	7	2	4	13
ArcInfo (F)	11	4	7	22
24 heures (F)	12	2	0	14
Le Nouvelliste (F)	9	2	4	15
Tribune de Genève (F)	1	2	7	10
Le Temps (F)	3	3	8	14
La Liberté (F)	16	4	10	30
Corriere del Ticino (I)	16	12	18	46
LaRegione (I)	13	5	9	27
20 minuti (I)	8	1	3	12
Online news outlets				
20 Minuten (G)	18	3	5	26
Blick Online (G)	41	14	22	77
TagesAnzeiger (G)	31	9	11	51
Neue Zürcher Zeitung (G)	55	18	35	108
Watson (G)	30	7	14	51
Luzerner Zeitung (G)	41	9	13	63
Berner Zeitung (G)	32	6	7	45
AZ Nordwestschweiz (G)	43	12	14	69
20 Minutes (F)	31	6	10	47
Le Matin (F)	35	4	11	50
Tio (I)	28	5	9	42
TV news				
SRF : Tagesschau (G)	10	5	4	19
RTS : Le 19h30 (F)	12	2	2	16
RSI LA 1 : Telegiornale (I)	11	1	4	16
Total	687	246	342	1,275

Note. t1 = time period until start of Wave 1 (March 25–April 10, 2019); t2 = time period until start of Wave 2 (April 11–May 8, 2019); t3 = time period until start of Wave 3 (May 9–28, 2019).

² G stands for German-speaking, F for French-speaking and I for Italian-speaking media outlets.

Table 4. Correlations of independent variables (media content variables weighted by frequency of exposure).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Wave 1								
1 Sensationalism	1							
2 Repetition	.90***	1						
3 Complexity	-.87***	.95***	1					
4 Conflict	.89***	-.93***	-.90***	1				
5 Strategy fram.	-.81***	-.98***	.94***	-.93***	1			
6 Personalization	-.62***	-.75***	.56***	-.71***	.74***	1		
7 Negativity	.87***	-.91***	-.83***	.85***	-.93***	-.73***	1	
8 Intensity	.82***	-.90***	-.87***	.86***	-.91***	-.67***	.84***	1
Wave 2								
1 Sensationalism	1							
2 Repetition	-.41***	1						
3 Complexity	-.01	.85***	1					
4 Conflict	.40***	-.68***	-.38***	1				
5 Strategy fram.	-.56***	.94***	.73***	-.59***	1			
6 Personalization	-.49***	.86***	.57***	-.73***	.90***	1		
7 Negativity	.53***	-.56***	-.16***	.65***	-.61***	-.73***	1	
8 Intensity	.29***	-.91***	-.85***	.56***	-.89***	-.79***	.51***	1
Wave 3								
1 Sensationalism	1							
2 Repetition	-.34***	1						
3 Complexity	-.19***	.97***	1					
4 Conflict	.39***	-.88***	-.81***	1				
5 Strategy fram.	-.55***	.92***	.85***	-.86***	1			
6 Personalization	-.61***	-.05	-.04	-.19***	.33***	1		
7 Negativity	.76***	-.50***	-.38***	.59***	-.62***	-.52***	1	
8 Intensity	.37***	-.91***	-.88***	.82***	-.84***	-.27***	.61***	1

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5. Alternative models issue fatigue t-1.

Independent Variables	Model 1b		Model 1c		Model 1d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	.03	.03	—	—	—	—
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	—	—	—	—
Sex	—	—	—	—	—	—
Age	—	—	—	—	—	—
Education	—	—	—	—	—	—
Constant	-.02	.03	—	—	—	—
N	1,272	—	—	—	—	—
R ²	.59	—	—	—	—	—

Note. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001

Table 6. Alternative models intensity.

Independent Variables	Model 2b		Model 2c		Model 2d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	.04	.03	.04	.03	.04	.03
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	.79***	.02	.78***	.02
Intensity	-.07*	.03	-.08*	.03	-.06	.03
Sex	—	—	—	—	.03*	.02
Age	—	—	—	—	-.03*	.02
Education	—	—	—	—	-.03*	.02
Constant	-.05	.03	-.05	.03	-.04	.03
N	1,272	—	1,272	—	1,262	—
R ²	.59	—	.59	—	.59	—

Note. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001

Table 7. Alternative models repetition.

Independent Variables	Model 3b		Model 3c		Model 3d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	.79***	.02	.78***	.02
Repetition	.05**	.02	.05**	.02	.04*	.02
Sex	—	—	—	—	.03*	.02
Age	—	—	—	—	-.03	.02
Education	—	—	—	—	-.03*	.02
Constant	-.02	.03	-.02	.03	-.02	.03
N	1,272	—	1,272	—	1,262	—
R ²	.59	—	.59	—	.59	—

Note. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001

Table 8. Alternative models complexity.

Independent Variables	Model 4b		Model 4c		Model 4d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	.03	.03	.03	.03	.04	.03
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	.79***	.02	.78***	.02
Complexity	.04**	.02	.04**	.02	.04*	.02
Sex	–	–	–	–	.03*	.02
Age	–	–	–	–	-.03*	.02
Education	–	–	–	–	-.03*	.02
Constant	-.03	.03	-.03	.03	-.03	.03
N	1,272		1,272		1,262	
R ²	.59		.59		.59	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 9. Alternative models sensationalism.

Independent Variables	Model 5b		Model 5c		Model 5d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	.02	.03	.02	.03	.03	.03
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	.79***	.02	.78***	.02
Sensationalism	-.02	.02	-.02	.02	-.01	.02
Sex	–	–	–	–	.04*	.02
Age	–	–	–	–	-.04*	.02
Education	–	–	–	–	-.03*	.02
Constant	-.02	.03	-.02	.03	-.02	.03
N	1,272		1,272		1,262	
R ²	.59		.59		.59	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 10. Alternative models personalization.

Independent Variables	Model 6b		Model 6c		Model 6d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	-.01	.04	-.02	.04	-.00	.04
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	.79***	.02	.78***	.02
Personalization	.04	.02	.04*	.02	.03	.02
Sex	–	–	–	–	.03*	.02
Age	–	–	–	–	-.04*	.02
Education	–	–	–	–	-.03*	.02
Constant	-.01	.03	.00	.03	-.00	.03
N	1,272		1,272		1,262	
R ²	.59		.59		.59	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 11. Alternative models conflict.

Independent Variables	Model 7b		Model 7c		Model 7d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	.05	.03	.04	.03	.04	.03
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	.79***	.02	.78***	.02
Conflict	-.05**	.02	-.05**	.02	-.04	.02
Sex	–	–	–	–	.03*	.02
Age	–	–	–	–	-.03	.02
Education	–	–	–	–	-.03*	.02
Constant	-.03	.03	-.03	.03	-.03	.03
N	1,272		1,272		1,262	
R ²	.59		.59		.59	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 12. Alternative models strategy framing.

Independent Variables	Model 8b		Model 8c		Model 8d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	.79***	.02	.78***	.02
Strategy Framing	.05**	.02	.05**	.02	.04*	.02
Sex	–	–	–	–	.03*	.02
Age	–	–	–	–	-.03*	.02
Education	–	–	–	–	-.03*	.02
Constant	-.02	.03	-.03	.03	-.02	.03
N	1,272		1,272		1,262	
R ²	.59		.59		.59	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 13. Alternative models negativity.

Independent Variables	Model 9b		Model 9c		Model 9d	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
Issue Fatigue t-1	.79***	.02	.79***	.02	.78***	.02
Negativity	-.03	.02	-.03	.02	-.02	.02
Sex	–	–	–	–	.04*	.02
Age	–	–	–	–	-.04*	.02
Education	–	–	–	–	-.03*	.02
Constant	-.03	.03	-.03	.03	-.02	.03
N	1,272		1,272		1,262	
R ²	.59		.59		.59	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

3 Discussion

This chapter includes, first, a summary of the papers' main findings. It also explains how the papers contribute to each other and to the investigation of issue fatigue's dynamics. Second, the findings and their contributions are discussed. Third, the chapter presents the dissertation's limitations and outlooks for future research.

3.1 Summary of the Findings

The five papers addressed several facets of fatigue from ongoing political issues in the news. The overarching assumption was that prolonged, extensive media coverage of an issue causes fatigue in the audience, potentially resulting in issue avoidance.

The first paper addressed **RQ1**: *How can the phenomenon of issue fatigue be theoretically conceptualized?* Building on previous research on overexposure and fatigue phenomena and transferring them to ongoing issues in the news, issue fatigue was defined as a negative cognitive and affective state comprising decreasing issue-specific information processing involvement, information overload, and increasingly perceived annoyance, anger, and boredom toward a public political issue. It develops because of repeated exposure to information about an issue for weeks, months, or longer, mainly via news content. Paper I elaborated on issue fatigue's causes, e.g., the intensity of exposure to the issue (*Paper V*), and consequences, such as issue avoidance (*Paper III*). Furthermore, it identified potential moderators of issue fatigue's emergence, such as perceived issue importance, and of issue fatigue's effect on issue avoidance, such as the perceived duty to remain informed. Issue fatigue was classified as an explanatory approach to avoidance of news on an issue level.

In addition, issue fatigue's theoretically derived dimensions underwent empirical testing. The second-order factor analyses based on two panel datasets comprising three waves confirmed that issue fatigue is reflected by issue-specific Information Overload, issue-specific

Information Processing Involvement, and Negative Emotions—annoyance and anger. In sum, the first paper and the additional empirical validation inform about the characteristics of issue fatigue; they demonstrate what constitutes fatigue from ongoing issues in the news. Thereby, they provided a basis for the following empirically oriented papers.

The second paper answered **RQ2**: *What happens to news users when they are frequently exposed to news on the same issue over a prolonged period?* More precisely, it investigated how news users perceive, evaluate, and behave regarding the ongoing issue and its news coverage over time. A combination of a semi-structured diary study with semi-structured interviews was applied to answer these questions. The results showed that along with repeated exposure, news users held specific cognitions, such as redundancy and lengthiness, regarding the issue and its media coverage. In addition, they showed emotions regarding the issue, such as annoyance, and behaviors, such as avoidance during news exposure. Furthermore, the findings revealed that news users were not necessarily fatigued from both the issue and its news coverage. While some developed a negative stance towards both, others perceived only the issue negatively. A third group perceived both the issue and its news coverage negatively but differentiated between the two and was aware of the news media's role in covering ongoing political issues. Thus, the two combined studies shed light on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral indicators of fatigue from ongoing news issues and related perceptions and behavior over a period. In addition to issue fatigue's conceptualization resulting from *Paper I*, the findings from *Paper II* inform about indications, antecedents, and consequences of fatigue from ongoing news issues that should be tested quantitatively in the subsequent and other future studies, such as the role of the intensity of exposure (*Paper V*) and news coverage evaluations (*Paper IV*) for issue fatigue.

Paper I theoretically derived issue avoidance as a direct consequence of issue fatigue. In addition, *Paper II* found that news users avoid the Brexit issue during news selection and

exposure. Avoidance could lead to news users being less knowledgeable about current developments and decisions regarding the political issue, which could be problematic for democratic considerations (see Section 1.3). Therefore, the third paper investigated the effects of issue fatigue on different forms of issue avoidance, thereby addressing **RQ3**: *How does issue fatigue relate to issue-specific avoidance behavior?* The findings from panel regressions based on a three-wave panel survey on the Brexit issue showed that issue fatigue did not lead to avoidance of interpersonal discussions on the issue. However, it led to avoidance of the issue during media selection and exposure to media content on the issue. Issue fatigue was more influential than other issue predispositions, such as issue importance, and general political interest, and the perceived duty to remain informed about current affairs.

The findings were validated for a referendum issue (Limitation Initiative) put to the vote in Switzerland in September 2020. This issue differs from the Brexit issue, mainly because it is a national issue, which affects the Swiss population stronger than Brexit. The results confirmed the findings on the Brexit issue. Hence, the effect of issue fatigue on issue avoidance during media selection and exposure applies to both an international and a national issue in Switzerland. The finding that issue fatigue leads to issue avoidance underpins the importance of studying issue fatigue and its causes. Studying issue fatigue's causes (*Papers IV and V*) is of particular importance to avoid users tuning out ongoing political issues covered in the news media.

The fourth paper equally focused on the consequences of issue fatigue. More precisely, it investigated how issue fatigue influences users' news media coverage perceptions and evaluations. Simultaneously, it looked into how news coverage perceptions and evaluations contribute to issue fatigue and thus one of issue fatigue's potential causes. Thereby, it provided answers to **RQ4**: *How do issue fatigue and evaluations of news coverage relate to one another?* Previous research on issue fatigue (Kuhlmann et al., 2014; Metag & Arlt, 2016; Schumann,

2018) and the qualitative studies described in *Paper II* indicated that issue fatigue relates to negative evaluations of the issue's news coverage, such as concerning quality and bias. However, the nature of the relationship and causal effects had not yet been analyzed. Against the background of increasing audience distrust in and tune out of news media observed in several countries, this study investigated the role of fatigue from ongoing news issues for audience evaluations of the news media. Since issue fatigue is rooted in prior exposure to news coverage on the issue, the paper also considered the effects of news coverage evaluations on issue fatigue. Reciprocal causal relations between news users' fatigue from ongoing news issues and their evaluations of news media were analyzed utilizing three-wave panel data on the Brexit issue. The results showed that issue fatigue and negative news media evaluations in general, regarding the issue, and hostile media perceptions, related positively to issue fatigue. Reciprocal causal effects occurred for issue fatigue and negative quality evaluations of the issue's news coverage. Thus, negative quality evaluations of the issue's news coverage are both a cause and consequence of issue fatigue. However, no reciprocal causal effects were found for issue fatigue and negative news coverage evaluations in general and for issue fatigue and hostile media perceptions. In sum, this paper contributes to researching both causes and consequences of issue fatigue, focusing on news coverage evaluations.

The fifth paper equally focused on issue fatigue's causes, thereby answering **RQ5**: *How does exposure to news coverage on the issue lead to issue fatigue?* It differs from the previous analyses because it went beyond individual perceptions, evaluations, and behavior. It tested the effects of objective characteristics of news coverage and intensity of exposure on issue fatigue. Previous political communication research has shown that political news coverage characteristics, such as strategy frames, affect political attitudes, such as political cynicism (e.g., Elenbaas & de Vreese, 2008). Research on overexposure phenomena from other domains revealed that exposure intensity predicts wearout from advertising (e.g., Craig et al., 1976),

fatigue from health messages (e.g., So et al., 2017), and news overload (e.g., York, 2013). Data from a three-wave panel survey on the Brexit issue were used and linked to an extensive content analysis of print, online, and television news coverage to investigate the effects of exposure intensity and news coverage characteristics on issue fatigue. The results showed that repeated information, complexity, and strategy framing predicted issue fatigue. The intensity of exposure, negativity, personalization, sensationalism, and conflict did not significantly affect issue fatigue. These findings are significant for journalists; they inform them about the effects of their communication of ongoing political issues. The fifth paper contributes to researching the dynamics of issue fatigue by focusing on news coverage as an essential source of issue fatigue. Thus, it complements the finding from *Paper IV* that negative news coverage quality *evaluations* contribute to issue fatigue.

In sum, all papers of this cumulative dissertation addressed issue fatigue's dynamics and complemented each other by focusing on different aspects. The studies shed light on the core of issue fatigue, its causes, and its consequences at the individual level. At the same time, they raised new questions to be addressed by future research and left several parts of issue fatigue's dynamics unnoticed. This will be discussed in the Limitations and Outlook Section.

3.2 Discussion and Contribution

First and foremost, the findings from this dissertation advance research on the recently observed phenomenon that news users react negatively to issues the news media cover extensively for weeks, months, or longer. While previous cross-sectional research has addressed some of the phenomenon's dynamics, this dissertation offers a theoretical conceptualization and a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of fatigue from ongoing issues based on longitudinal data. This section discusses the findings and their contributions further from different perspectives.

First, by conceptualizing fatigue from ongoing issues in the news and studying the effects of

ongoing media coverage of political issues on the audience, this dissertation adds to research on media and public attention to issues. Not only for issues on the media agenda in general (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990; McCombs & Shaw, 1972) but also for extensive issue coverage, for instance, in the form of hypes (Chung, 2018) and storms (Boydston et al., 2014), most studies assume that news media and public attention to issues generally coincide. Little scholarly attention has so far been directed toward adverse audience reactions to the ongoing issue coverage.

The concept of issue fatigue addresses this gap. The theoretical conceptualization of issue fatigue in Paper I goes beyond saturation and boredom effects reflected in decreased issue importance (e.g., Henry & Gordon, 2001; Neuman, 1990). It suggests that fatigue from ongoing news issues is an individual's negative state that comprises cognitive and affective dimensions and emerges from overexposure to an issue intensively covered by the news media for weeks or months. Previous approaches to the audience perspective have focused on how important the audience perceives the issue (Henry & Gordon, 2001; Neuman, 1990). In contrast, the diary study and semi-structured interviews underlying Paper II did not find that news users attribute less importance to the issue over time. Instead, the audience develops specific cognitions, emotions, and behavior regarding the issue. Issue fatigue's conceptualization considers that audience members can be aware of the issue's relevance while simultaneously thinking and feeling negative about it due to overexposure. Of course, the perceived issue importance may decrease over a more extended period than applied in the diary study.

Issue fatigue is an adverse effect of extensive media attention to an ongoing *issue* on the audience. The findings from Paper II identify users' specific cognitions regarding the ongoing *news coverage*, and Paper IV considers users' quality evaluations of the issue's *news coverage*. However, the concept of issue fatigue in its narrow sense does not directly address the audience's perspective on extensive *news coverage* on the issue. Instead, it is about news users'

stance toward *the issue itself*. Nevertheless, issue fatigue's dimensions relate to the issue's news coverage indirectly: Information overload regarding the issue is the feeling of being overwhelmed by the amount of information received on the issue—to a large extent from the news coverage. Information processing involvement denotes the motivation to engage with information and arguments on the issue—which come to users mainly via news coverage.

On a related note, the studies underlying this dissertation did not consider the issues' news coverage dynamics in terms of waves, cycles, or storms. For example, the question remains as to whether a media hype of three weeks with a sharp increase of media attention (Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009) is enough or too short-lived for provoking fatigue among the audience. Theoretically speaking, issue fatigue does not require a mismatch between the issue's news coverage and its real-world importance, as (partly) assumed for hypes, storms, and waves (Stanyer, 2014). It does not require explosiveness in coverage either, as assumed for storms (Boydstun et al., 2014); instead, its duration and size (Boydstun et al., 2014) are considered essential, which should be explored by further study. However, indicators like size and duration are ultimately always relative (Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009).

Issue fatigue is more likely to occur for wave storms, driven by several events related to the same issue and lasting longer, than for short spike storms driven by a single event (Boydstun et al., 2011). Also, recurring news waves of the same issue (Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009) can lead to a prolonged period and a high amount of news coverage and, consequently, likely cause issue fatigue. In the case of one news wave, the phase before the solution or decision (Kolb, 2005) must be long enough for fatigue to develop. Brexit news coverage was driven by several political events during the investigation period, such as political negotiations and resignations, and had several peaks (see Figure 1 in Paper II).¹⁰ One news wave with an

¹⁰ Brexit's news coverage over several years starting from the referendum in 2016 was probably shaped by several news waves, which this dissertation did not consider.

extended phase before the solution is likely for the Limitation Initiative. This issue has been covered at least twelve weeks before polling day—the solution—, with a slight peak five weeks before polling day (Udris, 2020). Future research should investigate how dynamics of issue coverage, notably intensity and duration, relate to the emergence of fatigue from the issue.

In addition, the findings on issue fatigue's emergence and consequences add to research on news exposure and its effects in high-choice media environments in different ways. Current news use data show that news users are likely to encounter ongoing news issues in various sources, increasingly online, indirectly, and via social media (see Section 1.1). Although no statistical evidence was found for the effect of exposure intensity by Paper V, the findings from this dissertation indicate that fatigue can be the result of encountering an issue repeatedly in several news exposure situations. The results from Paper II reveal that repeated exposure to the issue via news for several weeks made users feel they came across the issue too frequently in the news and that the amount of information on the issue was too high. A participant's quotation from Paper II exemplifies this: "By reporting every day in every newspaper about the topic Brexit—every day, in every medium, from radio to Tagesschau to 10vor10—there was always something about Brexit. And I feel like no one in Switzerland cares anymore" (Participant no. 6). This dissertation does not provide statistical evidence for the effect of exposure intensity, yet this idea remains plausible. Reasons for the non-significant effect of exposure intensity are discussed in the Limitations section.

With its focus on single issues, the concept of issue fatigue offers a new perspective on news overload and news avoidance. Research on news overload and fatigue indicates that the amount of news available makes news users feel overwhelmed (V. Y. Chen & Masullo Chen, 2020; Ji et al., 2014; York, 2013). The intensive amount of news disseminated via traditional and social media, in part via push notifications and pop-ups, fosters overload feelings. Recently, surveys showed that people felt overloaded by the news in several countries (Gottfried, 2020; Newman

et al., 2019). Related to overload (Song et al., 2017), news avoidance is discussed and researched—people passively or intentionally avoiding news (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). The findings on issue fatigue show that news overload and news avoidance occur at an issue-level also. Paper I and its empirical validation defined and tested issue-specific information overload as a dimension of issue fatigue. Stronger concerning Brexit than concerning the Limitation Initiative, overload was a decisive empirical factor of issue fatigue. Paper III and its validation showed that fatigued news users apply avoidance strategies during news media selection and exposure, pointing to intentional news avoidance at an issue level.

Furthermore, the findings on issue fatigue advance the research on selectivity in high-choice media environments by identifying an issue-specific driver. High-choice media environments comprising numerous journalistic, nonjournalistic, and specialized news outlets facilitate selectivity (Prior, 2007; van Aelst et al., 2017). When many options are available, media users cannot choose all of them and need to be selective based on their personal preferences. The findings from Paper III and its validation indicated that fatigue from ongoing issues leads to avoidance of the issue during news selection and thus to selective exposure. Thereby, the findings point to issue fatigue as a new driver of selectivity in news media use, in addition to political motivations (Barnidge et al., 2020) and informational utility (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2005).

Selectivity is often discussed together with fragmentation in news media content and use. A broad supply of information and high levels of selectivity in their use allow for audience fragmentation (van Aelst et al., 2017; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Audience fragmentation is present when the audience is divided into sub-audiences (Webster & Phalen, 1997). Scholars fear that fragmentation is a danger to mass media (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008) and the common core of the public sphere (Porten-Cheé & Eilders, 2019). Accordingly, selective exposure could decrease the number of common issues for public discourse (Sunstein, 2007; Webster & Phalen,

1997). Politically motivated selective exposure is viewed as one potential reason for a fragmented and polarized citizenry (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Sunstein, 2007). In addition, issue predispositions such as interest and perceived importance are reasons for selective exposure and discussed against the background of fragmentation (Bolsen & Leeper, 2013; Y. M. Kim, 2008; Porten-Cheé & Eilders, 2019). The concept of issue publics posits that the citizenry consists of groups concerned and informed about particular issues while paying less attention to issues outside their public (Converse, 1964; Krosnick, 1990).

At first sight, issue fatigue and resulting issue avoidance resemble the idea of issue publics. The share of the audience exposed to the same set of issues will be reduced if some citizens avoid issues. However, issue fatigue is different from the concept of issue publics. Issue fatigue concerns individuals who have at least a minimum interest in the issue and thus expose themselves to news about it before becoming fatigued (see Section 1.4.2 and Paper I); it does not primarily concern those who are not interested in and do not pay attention to the issue initially. In addition, research on issue publics has mainly focused on relatively long-term issues, for instance, employment and abortion (Converse, 1964; Krosnick, 1990), whereas issue fatigue, according to this dissertation, concerns issues covered during weeks or months. When an issue is covered extensively during weeks or months, such as Brexit and the Limitation Initiative, fatigued news users are likely to still come across the prominent issue, even if only incidentally (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). When intentionally disregarding information on the issue and reducing attention during exposure (Paper III), news users' knowledge on the issue potentially decreases. However, issue fatigue unlikely contributes to long-term audience fragmentation in the sense that a population does not encounter the same issues. When it comes to fatigue from issues on the media agenda for years, such as climate change, which resembles the long-term issues decisive for issue publics (Converse, 1964; Krosnick, 1990), it relates more closely to the ideas of fragmentation and issue publics.

So far, this section has addressed rather detrimental aspects of issue fatigue and resulting avoidance. However, also positive effects are possible. At the individual level, issue fatigue leads to avoidance reactions to avert the negative emotions and cognitions regarding the issue (see Paper III). Thereby, issue avoidance can improve the news user's mental well-being during news media exposure. Several studies have found that exposure to political news, in general, renders users in a negative mood due to negativity and conflict in the news, which can lead to disengagement with the news (Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2017; Kinnick et al., 1996; McIntyre, 2019). If news users perceive fatigue from an ongoing news issue and avoid it during news exposure, they potentially focus their attention on other issues and stories, making them feel and think more positively. Avoiding issues could thus be a strategy to make news exposure a more positive—or less harmful—experience. Continued exposure to issues users are fatigued from, on the contrary, could strengthen their negative mood during news exposure, thereby making disengagement more likely.

Moreover, high amounts of alternative information sources, including alternative and social media, and fake news are examples of the current challenges to the role of news media in providing citizens with news and to be trusted (S. Park et al., 2020; Strömbäck et al., 2020; van Aelst et al., 2017). The findings from this dissertation point to issue fatigue as a further challenge for news media in informing citizens and have implications for research on news media support. Not only does it lead to avoiding news coverage of ongoing political issues (Paper III), it also positively relates to negative news coverage evaluations in general, regarding the issue, and hostile media perceptions (Paper IV). What is more, the results from Paper IV showed that issue fatigue at one point leads news users to disapprove of the news media's performance in covering the issue at a later time.

Following the logic of political support (Easton, 1965, 1975; Norris, 2017), specific news media support—performance evaluations—is influenced by direct experiences with media

output, such as fatigue from an ongoing issue. In the long term, specific support shapes more diffuse support, such as trust (Easton, 1975). In line with this assumption, Prochazka (2020) showed that positive evaluations of news media performance explain trust in news media. Livio and Cohen (2018) found that experience-based news coverage evaluations are a better predictor of trust in news media than news exposure and political orientations. It can be concluded that issue fatigue—an experience with news coverage—exerts influence on the dynamics of news media support due to its impact on media performance evaluations. Issue fatigue is different from more stable or long-term predictors of news media support, such as populist attitudes (Fawzi, 2019), political trust (Strömbäck et al., 2015), and ideology (T.-T. Lee, 2010). The findings from Paper IV point to the potential of experience-based determinants of news media support.

However, the question arises as to whether the positive relationship between issue fatigue and negative news coverage evaluations applies to all issues. The news media shape public perceptions stronger concerning foreign policy issues than concerning domestic ones (Norris, 2010). This is because domestic issues can be directly experienced, which can outweigh perceptions from the news media. Due to direct experience, news users thus possibly differentiate stronger between news coverage and the issue itself. On the contrary, news users possibly mix up their evaluations of an unobtrusive issue like Brexit and its news coverage, as evidenced by Paper II. Since they encounter the unobtrusive issue almost exclusively in the news, the association between fatigue from the issue and negative evaluations of the issue's news media's coverage might be stronger than for obtrusive issues. Fatigue from more obtrusive issues, for example, referendum issues, could thus relate less strongly to news users' media performance evaluations.

Furthermore, the results on issue fatigue can be discussed against the background of trends in news coverage and its effects. Political communication research discusses how trends in the

news such as tabloidization, sensationalism, and negativity (Lengauer et al., 2012; Norris, 2010; Reinemann et al., 2012; van Aelst et al., 2017) lead to outcomes such as political cynicism (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015), lower levels of political efficacy (Pedersen, 2012), negative referendum campaign evaluations (de Vreese & Semetko, 2002), and media distrust (Hopmann et al., 2015). Paper V found that framing politics as a strategic game in the news increased issue fatigue. However, other political news characteristics did not have an effect. Thus, current trends in political news coverage do not have a major impact on fatigue from ongoing news issues, according to this dissertation's findings. For example, users do not become fatigued from an issue because the news about it is too negative. However, these findings rest on news coverage of the Brexit issue, a conflict-loaden issue that involved adverse events, such as failed negotiations, in Spring 2019. Issues on the political and media agenda for long periods often involve conflict and negativity, such as the Syrian war and the Covid-19 pandemic. The issue's overall negativity and conflict-centeredness in itself possibly decrease the effect of different degrees of negativity in news coverage on users. Further studies on other issues are needed to confirm the findings, also because the non-significant effects of Brexit news coverage characteristics might be due to methodological shortcomings of the applied linkage analysis (see Paper V and Section 3.3.2). However, novel vs. redundant information and complexity, which derive from research on repetition effects (Berlyne, 1970), fatigue from persuasive messages (So et al., 2017), and information overload (Eppler & Mengis, 2004) increase issue fatigue.

The findings on issue fatigue in general, particularly on the role of news coverage, are helpful for journalists, whose task is to provide news, amongst others, about ongoing issues. They could be careful about influential characteristics of news coverage, such as repetition, in reports about ongoing issues. Concerning Covid-19 news coverage, the German journalist Christina Burack (2020) reflects on the news media's role for audience fatigue from the issue: "With headline

after headline, 24/7 news tickers, every possible aspect of the coronavirus examined or speculated upon, it's no wonder people feel emotionally fatigued – (...)” (para. 4). “Given the gravity of the current situation, media (...) should take a critical look at what coronavirus topics it chooses to cover and why. What crucial information does a readership or viewing public need now?” (para. 5). She fears that people tune out necessary information because they receive too much redundant information. This argument emphasizes that news organizations and journalists should consider the effects of covering ongoing issues on their audience. Future studies should identify cross-issue characteristics of news coverage and investigate the role of the amount of information and the intervals in which the information is published to provide practical advice. When the news media are struggling to remain a trusted source of information for the majority (van Aelst et al., 2017), preventing audience fatigue from and avoidance of ongoing news issues is relevant.

In sum, issue fatigue can be viewed as an outcome of news exposure in the current high-choice media environment. Simultaneously, it retrospectively affects dynamics such as selectivity and decreasing news media support. Issue fatigue can theoretically occur in low-choice media environments when frequent news users encounter the issue and specific news coverage characteristics repeatedly. However, the current news supply and use structures make issue fatigue's dynamics more likely.

In addition, the results have normative implications; they concern the ideal of the informed citizenry. Citizens learn about politics if they have the opportunity, ability, and motivation (Norris, 2010). With issue fatigue, the opportunity is given to become informed about the issue, but the ability and motivation fade over time; issue fatigue's dimensions of information overload, low levels of information processing involvement, and negative emotions represent both ability and motivation to engage with the issue. The panel studies indicated that the Swiss population was moderately fatigued from Brexit and the Limitation Initiative. In addition,

Paper III and its validation evidenced that issue fatigue leads to avoidance of these issues during media selection and avoidance strategies during exposure to information on the issues. Numerous studies have shown the positive link between news media use and political knowledge (e.g., Eveland et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2013). Consequently, it is likely that avoiding media information on the ongoing political issue negatively affects knowledge about the issue. Issue fatigue and resulting issue avoidance thus counteract an informed citizenry concerning ongoing issues.

However, the severity of issue fatigue and avoidance depends on the democracy understanding and scholarly perspective. First and foremost, deliberative (Elster, 1998) and participatory (Barber, 1984) perspectives on democracy would view issue fatigue and resulting avoidance as detrimental to the functioning of democracy. According to deliberative democracy, citizens should seek information to understand and discuss political issues, for instance, in their daily lives with other citizens, thereby meeting the deliberative criteria, for instance, rationality (Strömbäck, 2005). The news media's task is to foster these deliberative discussions among citizens through their news coverage (Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; Strömbäck, 2005). Citizens' fatigue from international and national political issues and avoidance of media content about these issues run counter to widespread deliberative discussions among the citizenry based on current information from news media and the news media's role in fostering these discussions.

Participatory democracy equally emphasizes that citizens need to keep themselves informed about current societal problems and different political views and to participate actively (Strömbäck, 2005). The news media have a mobilizing function; they should provide news coverage that actively fosters citizens' participation (Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; Strömbäck, 2005). Avoidance of media information on political issues due to fatigue, exemplified by Brexit and the Limitation Initiative, indicates that citizens are unwilling to keep themselves informed

about ongoing issues. The news media's function to mobilize their engagement seems undermined.

According to competitive democracy understandings, citizens should be predominantly informed about the most important current problems and developments in society for participating in elections (Strömbäck, 2005). They do not need to discuss a wide range of political issues. Therefore, one could argue that fatigue and avoidance are mainly problematic for election-related issues, which demand the populations' participation. Accordingly, fatigue would be more problematic for the Limitation Initiative—a referendum issue—than for Brexit, in Switzerland. Paper III and its validation show that issue fatigue leads to avoidance of media information about both a national and international issue; however, slightly stronger for Brexit than for the Limitation Initiative. According to competitive democracy theory, media should provide information for citizens to form their opinions, develop preferences, judge representatives, and make informed choices (Scammell, 2000; Strömbäck, 2005). This function is undermined when fatigued citizens avoid ongoing international and domestic issues in the news, such as Brexit and the referendum issue.

Similar to the competitive model of democracy, some political and communication scholars argue that the expectations deliberative and participatory models of democracy set on citizens' political information behavior and knowledge are too high and that most citizens cannot fulfill them (e.g., Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). They suggest lower demands on citizens' information behavior and knowledge. Schudson's (2002) concept of the *Monitorial Citizen* and Zaller's (2003) *Burglar Alarm News Standard* suggest that citizens should only monitor the information environment and become alerted by news media for relevant issues while ignoring unimportant issues. However, issue fatigue also poses a problem against this background. As shown by the studies presented in this dissertation, issue fatigue occurs with issues that the news media cover extensively over weeks or months, amongst others, due to their ongoing political relevance.

Thus, such ongoing political issues represent issues that citizens should be alerted to and focus on when monitoring the information environment.

Zaller (2003) argues:

An intense, dramatic story that keeps up a "critical mass" over one or several news cycles in all information media— TV news, mainstream and tabloid newspapers, entertainment, late night comedy, talk TV and radio—breaks through the fog of disjointed news and engages the attention of the Monitorial Citizen. People talk, think, learn, see the big picture, and form opinions. (p. 121)

Furthermore, Zaller (2003) suggests:

As with a real burglar alarm, the idea is to call attention to matters requiring urgent attention, and to do so in excited and noisy tones. News would penetrate every corner of public space so few could miss it. (...) This standard would motivate news that would catch the attention of the Monitorial Citizen, providing subsidized information that would facilitate opinion formation and making politics engaging rather than boring. (p. 121)

The findings on issue fatigue speak against this idea because the audience develops fatigue from precisely such penetrating, ongoing issues and tries to avoid them. Furthermore, fatigue from and avoidance of current political issues interfere with the news media's role in directing citizens' attention to the most critical issues according to the *Burglar Alarm News Standard* (Zaller, 2003) and the *Monitorial Citizen* (Schudson, 2002). Consequently, issue fatigue poses a problem also from less demanding perspectives on the informed citizenry.

In addition, interpersonal discussions represent sources of information about politics (Eveland, 2004; Scheufele, 2000) and thus about ongoing political issues. While this dissertation did not investigate how interpersonal conversations contribute to issue fatigue, Paper III and its validation found that fatigue from the Brexit and the Limitation Initiative did

not cause avoidance of interpersonal discussions about the issue. Thus, interpersonal discussions as a source of political information are not affected by issue fatigue. However, as discussed in Paper III, interpersonal avoidance was not measured comprehensively. Different facets of interpersonal avoidance, such as switching to another topic or terminating the conversations (Dailey & Palomares, 2004; Kuhlmann et al., 2014), should be further studied.

Finally, fatigue from ongoing news issues and resulting avoidance can be viewed as part of the overall discussion of citizens tuning out politics (Dalton, 2004; Eliasoph, 2009; Norris, 2010). Different positions exist concerning the role of the news media for citizens' attachment to politics (see Avery, 2009; Newton, 1999). One position often referred to as *videomalaise* argues that exposure to political media coverage has adverse effects on political trust and fosters political cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Robinson, 1976). News coverage characteristics such as conflict, violence, negative aspects of politics, sensationalism, personalization, and scandals make users apathetic (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Shehata, 2014). This argument is similar to the idea that exposure to news coverage of ongoing political issues causes fatigue in the audience. On the other hand, news media use is often positively associated with political trust (Aarts & Semetko, 2003; Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Strömbäck et al., 2015), pointing to positive effects of news exposure on citizens' support for politics. The virtuous circle theory (Norris, 2000, 2010) accounts for both positive and negative associations between news media use and political trust. The circle posits that those with the most positive attitudes towards politics in terms of interest and trust pay more attention to political news and, consequently, develop higher levels of trust. Those with low levels of trust or more cynicism, respectively, tune out the news and pay less attention to the news they still encounter. Consequently, their trust remains low.

The following mechanisms are possible for issue fatigue: Those who have tuned out politics tend to not expose themselves regularly to news and, as a consequence, will probably not

develop fatigue. Instead, they might have a negative stance toward the political issue initially. However, those with high and intermediate levels of trust, who expose themselves regularly to news, will more likely experience issue fatigue. Thus, issue fatigue concerns primarily those who have not tuned out politics. Norris (2010) argues that singular news exposure does not affect political engagement. Instead, news media exert a long-term diffuse effect. Thus, fatigue from one ongoing news issue—an effect from news exposure during a period—is unlikely to affect citizens' long-term attachment to politics. However, if citizens repeatedly experience fatigue from ongoing political news issues, a long-term effect on their political attachment is more likely.

3.3 Limitations and Outlook

The five papers discussed both their individual and common limitations, such as the single-issue focus and the investigation period. This section points to the dissertation's overall limitations regarding content and methodology—and provides suggestions for future research. The last part of the section provides a further outlook.

3.3.1 Content Limitations and Outlook

While the studies yielded findings on the core of issue fatigue and some of its central determinants and consequences, they left some parts of the theoretically assumed dynamics empirically unnoticed. Regarding the core of issue fatigue, the panel survey on Brexit did not measure boredom as an emotional component of issue fatigue. Since Papers I and II suggest that boredom is associated with issue fatigue, future quantitative analyses should consider this emotion empirically.

Regarding issue fatigue's causes and emergence, an obvious question remains: How much time is necessary for issue fatigue to emerge? Although time seems like a prominent determinant, it needs to be differentiated. Issue fatigue is contingent on the intensity of exposure

to the issue, news coverage characteristics, news coverage evaluations, and indirect determinants (i.e., individual characteristics, attitudes, and predispositions; see Section 1.4.2). Thus, it is not time per se but several determinants that exert influence. Related to the question of time, issue fatigue's duration and the possibility of its re-occurrence at a later point in time remain unclear. It is plausible that issue fatigue's direct causes, e.g., news coverage characteristics, and indirect causes, e.g., issue predispositions and individual characteristics (see Section 1.4), are decisive here as well.

How political attitudes and issue predispositions mediate or moderate how the direct determinants cause issue fatigue remains unclear. The qualitative studies described in Paper II indicate that news users with higher involvement in the issue react differently to the ongoing issue than those who generally care less about it. In addition, the studies identified fatigue-related cognitions concerning the political situation, e.g., political discontent. This suggests that issue and political predispositions could be influential for how exposure to the issue leads to fatigue, which should be explored more closely through further study.

Furthermore, the studies did not empirically consider the effects of socio-demographic and personality traits. For instance, research has found that news users with lower levels of self-efficacy are more likely to experience news overload (Ji et al., 2014; C. S. Park, 2019; Schmitt et al., 2018). Park (2019) defines news efficacy as the degree of confidence about the amount of news a user receives compared to the amount of news they want and how well they understand it. Since issue fatigue concerns the motivation and capacity to engage with the ongoing issue, news self-efficacy likely plays a role for issue fatigue, together with the intensity of exposure and news content characteristics. However, this dissertation did not consider the influence of individual characteristics, attitudes, and predispositions empirically. Furthermore,

non-mediated exposure to the issue as a cause of issue fatigue was not considered.¹¹

Moreover, the presented studies did not fully capture the consequences of issue fatigue. For example, issue predispositions likely moderate the relationship between issue fatigue and avoidance. Some fatigued news users might continue to expose themselves to information on the issue because of issue importance and personal concern (Y. M. Kim, 2008) or the perceived duty to remain informed (Poindexter & McCombs, 2001). Thus, issue fatigue does not lead to issue avoidance in every case.

A further limitation lies in issue fatigue's emergence over time. Paper II investigated cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions to the issue for several weeks. However, the studies did not identify distinct temporal evolutions of these indications. Papers III, IV, and V rely on panel data; the corresponding statistical models include variation at the within-level, thereby accounting for issue fatigue's evolution over time, at the individual level. However, it would have been promising to investigate more directly how issue fatigue develops over time, at the within-level, and to identify trajectories. Clustering time series could be a way for future studies to address this issue. This method accounts for heterogeneity in the time series and assigns each case to a group with similar time series (Frühwirth-Schnatter, 2011). Thus, different types of issue fatigue developments would become visible. A way to predict trajectories by time-invariant and variant variables is latent growth curve models (Duncan & Duncan, 2009). In addition, knowledge on the evolution of issue fatigue could inform journalists about intensities and periods of issue coverage after which fatigue emerges.

Moreover, future research should include further theoretically relevant variables in the study of issue fatigue's dynamics. Issue fatigue's societal relevance lies greatly in its influence on news users' information behavior concerning ongoing political issues (see Sections 1.3 and

¹¹ How situational determinants, individual characteristics, attitudes, and news media use for information purposes influence the direct determinants of issue fatigue has not been considered within this dissertation either.

3.2). Ideally, citizens become politically informed and engaged from political information provided by the news media (Norris, 2010; Strömbäck, 2005). Hence, avoidance of information on the ongoing issue from the news media could decrease citizens' knowledge of the issue. However, fatigued citizens might still be knowledgeable and participating because they engage with the issue elsewhere, such as in interpersonal discussions or professional political engagement. This dissertation did not measure these potential outcomes of issue fatigue empirically. Consequently, future research should include democratically relevant outcomes of issue fatigue.

3.3.2 Methodological Limitations and Outlook

One of the central assumptions on issue fatigue was that the intensity of exposure is a decisive determinant. However, Paper V did not provide evidence for the effect of exposure intensity. This might be due to the measure of exposure intensity, which bears major limitations. Although the content analysis considered 45 media outlets—all Swiss media outlets used by at least 1% of the Swiss population in 2018, exposure to the issue was not comprehensively measured. While the panel survey underlying Paper V probably covered exposure to the issue via printed newspapers, TV news, and established online news sites accurately, it did not measure how frequently news users encountered the issue elsewhere, primarily online, via intermediaries, for instance, social media and news aggregators. Since two-thirds of people encounter news online indirectly, such as via social media and mobile alerts (Newman et al., 2020), they probably come across the ongoing issue frequently in this way. In addition, the linkage analysis did not consider exposure to the issue via non-Swiss media outlets, especially Italian, French, and German media outlets. German and French TV news are among the most frequently used TV news sources in Switzerland (Udris & Eisenegger, 2021). Hence, exposure to internationally relevant issues (i.e., Brexit) via news from neighboring countries is probable. Future studies on issue fatigue should measure exposure to the issue more comprehensively and

account for these exposure forms. Finally, the interval of exposure situations, the overall duration of exposure, and frequency might be influential, as with advertising wearout (Corkindale & Newall, 1978), and thus should be included in the investigation of issue fatigue's determinants.

In addition, the overall methodological approach to issue fatigue's dynamics has some shortcomings. First, the studies analyzed issue fatigue's dynamics with one issue (Brexit). Data on another issue (Limitation Initiative) were used to validate issue fatigue's conceptualization according to Paper I and the findings on issue fatigue and avoidance from Paper III. Single-issue studies do not account for the heterogeneity of stimuli (Reeves et al., 2016; Slater et al., 2015), in this case, the issue. Thus, there is a threat to the findings' generalizability. Questions arise as to whether the same results would occur for other issues.

Issues can be of national or international relevance for a population; they differ, for example, in how the population's everyday life is affected by the issue (Neuman, 1990) and who puts the issue on the agenda (Pfetsch & Mathes, 1991; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2008). Furthermore, issues can be forecasted events, such as elections, result from an event with high novelty, such as a pandemic, or a recurring event, such as violence in a particular region (Boydston et al., 2011). Such issue characteristics are likely to influence issue fatigue's direct and indirect determinants, for instance, the perceived issue importance. News users can come across obtrusive issues via personal and professional situations, in addition to news media, and are thus likely more involved with an obtrusive issue than with an unobtrusive issue. In line with this assumption, the data underlying this dissertation revealed that the Swiss population was more involved with the national Limitation Initiative than with Brexit (see Paper III and its validation). Fatigue from national issues could thus be weaker or develop over a more extended period than fatigue from international issues. Paper III and its validation provide support for this assumption by showing that the Swiss population was more fatigued from the Brexit issue

than from the referendum issue. However, fatigue from the Limitation Initiative increases stronger over time than fatigue from the Brexit issue. On a related note, the exploratory semi-structured diary study and the semi-structured interviews focused on the Brexit issue only. It would have been helpful to conduct these exploratory studies for several issues to be better informed about how issue differences affect issue fatigue's dynamics. This dissertation is the first approach to address issue fatigue from a longitudinal perspective. As the first step to generalizability, the analysis of issue fatigue's dimensions and its effects on issue avoidance was extended to a second issue, the Limitation Initiative. However, to speak of overarching patterns and to generalize the findings, future research on issue fatigue needs to take further issues into account.

Likewise, issue fatigue's dynamics should be studied in other countries, which differ in political variables, such as the political system and levels of political support, from Switzerland. Switzerland is a country of direct democracy where political participation and trust are high compared to other countries (fög, 2017; Vatter, 2020). Due to the presumed relationships between issue fatigue and political behavior and attitudes, e.g., trust (Section 1.4), such country-specific variables potentially influence issue fatigue.

Another methodological limitation is the potential influence of social desirability—fatigue from ongoing political issues can be considered socially undesirable. The qualitative studies revealed that the participants were aware of Brexit's importance and topicality and hesitated to express negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Instead, they were careful in expressing themselves about the issue. The panel survey on the Limitation Initiative included a measure of social desirability on a scale from 1 to 5, pointing to relatively high levels ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.77$, $n = 718$). Since the data are based on a population-representative sample, a similar degree of social desirability can be expected for the Brexit issue. The level of social desirability suggests that the obtained values for issue fatigue and other variables, such as issue avoidance, might be

down biased and higher than indicated by the data.

The panel survey questionnaire included several strategies to reduce social desirability, such as randomizing and formulating items in positive and negative directions and pointing to the study's interest in individual opinions. The introductions of the diary questionnaire and the qualitative interviews equally informed the participants about the studies' interest in their personal opinions. Future studies should strive to minimize socially desirable answers further through the questionnaire design, such as by item wording (Näher & Krumpal, 2012). In addition, social desirability could be controlled in the statistical analyses (Larson, 2019).

Panel conditioning effects are another methodological shortcoming. Participation in the panel survey can affect the responses, such as reported attitudes and behavior (Trivellato, 1999; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2012). Participants become more aware of the survey's topic and, as a result, change their behavior (Segers & Franses, 2014). In the panel surveys of this dissertation, the participants might have paid more attention to news on the issue and engaged more with it after participating in the first survey wave. In addition, panel conditioning effects are likely for the diary study, which required participation three times a week. Both the panel survey and the diary study bear the risk of giving socially desirable answers due to the awareness of being monitored, in addition to the general social desirability predisposition. Interviewing at random at previously unknown dates is one strategy to reduce panel conditioning effects (Segers & Franses, 2014). Although the participants were asked repeatedly to act as usual and not change their behavior concerning the issue, panel conditioning likely biased the results. Another potential source of bias in the data is the participants' dropout from the panel survey and refraining from answering open-ended diary questions, *inter alia*, because of their fatigue from the issue.

Furthermore, the intervals between panel waves have profound implications for the results. Ideally, the intervals and frequency of measurement correspond to the true change of the

variables of interest (Vaisey & Miles, 2017). However, a survey comprised of three panel waves risks missing such changes. Future research could align better the investigation period to the issue's real-world development and choose longer time lags to allow for more change development. At the same time, shorter between-wave intervals are more likely to capture short-term changes. However, they bear the risk of increasing nonresponse, have cost implications, and are not expedient if no changes occur (Lynn, 2009). Despite these limitations, a three-wave panel survey is a better approach to issue fatigue than cross-sectional or two-wave panel surveys, allowing neither for tracking change nor for calculating causal effects (Johnson, 2005). A research design with more measurement times, but shorter surveys, could capture change better and, simultaneously, reduce nonresponse.

The choice of panel surveys to measure issue fatigue and its correlates was due to their presumed temporal variation. Resulting within-variance in issue fatigue and related variables allows calculating causal effects if the necessary conditions are met (Finkel, 1995). However, retrospective self-report measures likely fail to capture such effects. For example, emotions, such as annoyance and anger, have immediate effects (Otto et al., 2020), such as, in the case of issue fatigue, avoidance strategies during news exposure. The situational effect of issue fatigue on avoidance behavior is thus not fully measurable by panel surveys.

First, experimental studies could account for these shortcomings because they measure short-term reactions to stimuli (Klimmt & Weber, 2013). However, they lack external validity and cannot account comprehensively for situational and temporal dynamics (Masur, 2019). Considering that issue fatigue develops over time, an experimental design with repeated measurements would be most appropriate, allowing the analysis of within-variation. Alternatively, only individuals who have already reached the state of fatigue, as evidenced by a previous longitudinal analysis, should participate in an experimental study.

Another way to avoid retrospective recalls is to measure issue fatigue and its direct correlates

repeatedly and close to real-time—when exposure and effects occur in the participants’ natural environment. The method of *Ecological Momentary Assessment* (EMA; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987) has been introduced to communication research as *Experience Sampling Method* (ESM; Masur, 2019; Naab et al., 2019). This method aims to survey individuals about their perceptions and behavior throughout the day. Thus, thoughts, emotions, and behavior related to media use can be measured immediately after their occurrence. Using ESM can reduce biased answers due to recall, collect data in real-world situations, and produce longitudinal data (Masur, 2019; Naab et al., 2019). Future research on issue fatigue should consider this methodological approach, for it could help measure more immediately the cognitive and emotional components of issue fatigue in relation to exposure and potential behavioral consequences.

To better capture the effects of media content characteristics, in addition to exposure, the application of the *Mobile Intensive Longitudinal Linkage Analysis* (MILLA) proposed by Otto et al. (2021) is promising. Like EMA, it measures media effects immediately and in the participants’ real-world environment; participants make screenshots or photos of received media content, which they upload for further content analysis. They fill in a short questionnaire measuring the immediate effects of news exposure (Otto et al., 2021). This method reduces measurement error in linkage analyses (Scharkow & Bachl, 2017) by accounting for the individually received media content and reducing bias in the media exposure measure (Otto et al., 2021).

3.3.3 Further Outlook

This section makes further propositions for future research on issue fatigue and its overarching research context. First, issue fatigue’s multidimensionality deserves further attention. The proposed second-order model of the dimensions of information overload, negative emotions, and the lack of motivation to process information on the issue, fitted the

Brexit and Referendum data well. Further analyses should test the construct's validity and measurement invariance over time (Hartmann & Reinecke, 2013; Kleinke et al., 2015) for different issues. In particular, a detailed study of the interactions between the three dimensions is promising. According to the theoretical conceptualization from Paper I, the dimensions interrelate and jointly form the state of issue fatigue: For example, news users are likely not motivated to process information on the issue when feeling overloaded. When they are little motivated to process information but get confronted with them in the news, they likely feel annoyed and angry because of being exposed to unwanted information. However, how the dimensions influence each other over time is unclear. Some news users possibly experience negative emotions, which *leads to* a decreased motivation to process information on the issue. Others might feel overloaded and *consequently* have little motivation to process information. Exposure to the issue despite overload and a lack of motivation to process information could *trigger* annoyance and anger. Studying reciprocal effects, using more measurements with shorter intervals or experimental designs, could provide deeper insights into the interplay between the cognitions and emotions inherent in issue fatigue.

Research on information overload assumes that a threshold point exists, after which an individual enters the state of information overload (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012). Following this idea, it is plausible that news users exceed one or multiple thresholds, after which they enter the state of issue fatigue. Future research could pay more attention to such tipping points and identify their predictors. As explained in the previous section, more measurements and shorter intervals increase the chance to observe and thus explain thresholds.

Moreover, scholars are encouraged to consider the role of social media in the emergence of issue fatigue. Social media have gained increasing importance as a news source in the last years (Geiger, 2019; Newman et al., 2020). Therefore, and since incidental exposure is particularly

likely on social media (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018; Weeks et al., 2017), the influence of contact with the issue on social media is worth investigating. In addition, the question arises as to whether fatigue affects mediated interpersonal conversations, such as via social media. Paper III evidenced that issue avoidance occurs in the context of media coverage but not with interpersonal conversations. Hence, fatigue-related avoidance in social media, where both elements from the news media and interpersonal interactions are relevant, would be an interesting case to investigate.

Relying on current developments in communication research, future research on issue fatigue should take a dynamic perspective and study reciprocal effects between news media exposure and issue fatigue. Slater (2007, 2015) acknowledges reciprocal effects between selectivity in media use and media effects. Media exposure can be both a predictor of some outcome variable and, in turn, be affected by this outcome variable. Accordingly, media exposure's cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes influence exposure to media content—selection and attention. Media selectivity and its outcomes mutually influence each other at the intraindividual level in a dynamic and ongoing process and are in a reciprocal relationship, which can reinforce itself (Schemer et al., 2019; Slater, 2007, 2015). This idea applies to issue fatigue: Issue fatigue is an outcome of exposure to the issue and, in turn, affects exposure to the issue via issue avoidance, as shown in Paper III. The reciprocal effects between exposure to the issue and issue fatigue can reinforce themselves over time, indicating a downward spiral with issue fatigue potentially decreasing. It would be promising for future research to investigate longitudinally reciprocal effects between issue fatigue and media exposure, in particular selectivity, to comprehensively model and understand the underlying causes and consequences of issue fatigue.

Moreover, future studies should link news coverage and issue fatigue dynamics more effectively. News coverage dynamics in terms of intensity, duration, and volatility (e.g.,

Boydston et al., 2014; Geiss, 2018) are potentially influential for issue fatigue's timely development and strength. Frequent news users should experience and probably be affected by the shape of the issue's news coverage. Possibly, ongoing coverage with the same level of intensity as opposed to ongoing coverage with several peaks cause fatigue from the issue differently. Thus, the effects of particular media coverage dynamics on issue fatigue are worth investigating. At the same time, this would inform research on media and public attention to issues more comprehensively about the audience's perspective of media attention to issues.

Paper IV addressed the effects of issue fatigue on news media evaluations. Similar effects are plausible for the effects of issue fatigue on political attitudes for several reasons. Likely, being fatigued by an ongoing political issue goes along with disliking how politicians handle the issue in question (Arlt et al., 2020; Metag & Arlt, 2016). Easton (1972) and Farah et al. (1979) argue that citizens evaluate political performances according to current political issues and problems. If an issue is on the political and media agenda for a long time, politics may have difficulties solving the issue. Paper II showed that news users perceive the issue's lengthiness and political stalemate negatively and are dissatisfied with how politicians handle the issue. This perception provokes anger and annoyance. Therefore, it is plausible that issue fatigue accompanies political dissatisfaction and vice versa. The concept of policy malaise refers to "strong dissatisfaction among citizens with political institutions (polity) and political processes (policy) dealing with one specific political topic (...)" (Arlt et al., 2020, p. 625). Arlt et al. (2020) found positive associations between issue fatigue and policy malaise.

In addition, the priming effects (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990) described in Paper IV are likely to apply to issue fatigue and political attitudes. The negative cognitions and emotions inherent in issue fatigue are chronically well available in a news user's memory during a period of extensive news coverage of the issue. Thus, news users likely use them as a benchmark to judge the political actors handling the issue or related policies. This

assumption resembles the original idea of political priming (Iyengar et al., 1982). Accordingly, the issue's salience facilitates the activation of thoughts about the issue. This increases the likelihood that individuals rely on the issue when evaluating the president's performance.

Lastly, according to Erber and Lau (1990), people process political information in two ways, which explain different levels of political cynicism. One way is to interpret politics in terms of persons and to apply a person schema, i.e., to be dissatisfied with politicians such as with their personality traits. The other way is to focus on current issues and apply an issue schema, i.e., be dissatisfied with policy alternatives related to the issue. People evaluating politics in terms of issues and policies are particularly cynical towards the government.

The explanations outlined above suggest that fatigue from ongoing political issues likely affects political attitudes, such as evaluations of political actors and cynicism or trust. Political trust is essential for the functioning of modern democracies (Cole, 1973; Dalton, 2004). Against this background, future studies should focus on how fatigue from ongoing political issues affects political attitudes, such as trust.

In addition, research should take a comparative perspective and study issue fatigue in a media systems context. The advantage of comparative cross-national research is that it accounts for the effects of different media structures on news coverage and audience reactions (Aarts et al., 2012; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011). For example, studies found that news avoidance depends on country-specific factors, such as levels of press freedom and political stability (Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020; Villi et al., 2021). Thus, also issue fatigue's dynamics likely differ between information environments, for example, with different levels of press freedom (Schumann, 2018).

More generally, the findings from this dissertation indicate the relevance of single issues for overarching research objects, such as news exposure and audience support for news media. It would be promising for research on news overload and news avoidance to focus on how these

phenomena occur with single issues and whether these issue-specific phenomena shape the overarching phenomena in the long term. Repeated issue avoidance due to fatigue could lead to general news avoidance in the long term. As an example, Brexit and Covid-19 are discussed as causes of increasing news avoidance in the UK (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2019). The cross-country study by Villi et al. (2021) found that exposure to extensively covered issues and resulting fatigue and overload perceptions drive general news avoidance.

Against the background of concerns of decreasing engagement with the news (Aalberg et al., 2013; Blekesaune et al., 2012) and politics (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2010), research should take into consideration the role of issue-specific phenomena, such as issue fatigue. According to the concepts of political support (Easton, 1965, 1975; Norris, 2017) and news media support (Fawzi & Obermaier, 2019), specific support based on direct experiences shapes diffuse support, such as trust and legitimacy, in the long term. As indicated by Paper IV, issue fatigue as a negative experience during news exposure is influential for news media evaluations. Research predominantly focuses on relatively stable predictors of trust in news media and politics, such as traditional news media use, education, and political predispositions (T.-T. Lee, 2010; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Issue fatigue is an example of a short-term or fluctuating phenomenon resulting from news exposure that potentially influences the overall attachment to news media. At a time when the news media are struggling to be trusted and used, the consideration of issue-specific determinants is worth critical exploration. Taking into account such experience-based short-term phenomena would enrich this line of research.

4 Concluding Remarks

This dissertation addressed the observation that if the media have extensively covered a specific issue for weeks or months, people become fatigued and avoid the issue. The overarching question was how the dynamics of fatigue from ongoing political issues in the news can be described and explained. Five papers investigated issue fatigue in the audience by

deploying a longitudinal multi-method approach and yielded findings on its characteristics, causes, and consequences. Thereby, this dissertation advances research on the recently observed phenomenon of issue fatigue. What is more, the results contribute to several research areas: The conceptualization of issue fatigue represents an audience perspective on extensive media attention to public issues, which has so far attracted little scholarly attention. In addition, the findings add to research on news exposure in high-choice media environments. In particular, issue fatigue emerges as an explanatory approach to selective news media exposure or avoidance respectively. Furthermore, the findings reveal that issue fatigue correlates with negative news media evaluations by the audience. This finding is relevant against the backdrop of audiences' fading support for and use of news media. From different normative perspectives on the democratic value of informed citizens, fatigue from and avoidance of ongoing political issues are problematic. Finally, the findings inform journalists about the adverse effects of covering ongoing political issues. The dissertations' scope and methodology have shortcomings that limit the findings' generalizability and demand further investigations of issue fatigue's dynamics. The presented dissertation was the first to comprehensively and longitudinally investigate fatigue from ongoing issues in the news, which has been observed and discussed for several issues in the last years.

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