

**Political Information Seeking During Election Campaigns:  
Evidence From Local and National Elections in Germany**

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**Political Communication** (Holli A. Semetko)  
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**Abstract:** The paper explores how citizens gather information on political parties during an election campaign, and further attempts to identify the main determinants for political information seeking. As potential sources of political information campaign coverage in the mass media and the political parties' activities are being discussed, i.e. the campaign on TV and in the newspapers, as well as the parties' TV advertisements, brochures and political meetings. In order to identify main incentives for seeking information on political parties and candidates we use a modified Rational Choice-approach as the theoretical frame of reference. The theoretical model conceives political information seeking as a two-step process. First, campaign attentiveness is activated during the campaign. In a second step campaign attentiveness becomes a major determinant for seeking information on the campaign. Within the Rational Choice framework expectations stemming from the primary social environment are identified as the main incentives to stimulate campaign attentiveness and information seeking. Further incentives which should motivate information seeking in the campaign are the duty to keep politically informed, the entertainment aspect of politics, i.e. the "horse race" aspect of an election campaign, and a motivation to express one's political orientations through voting. Political competence and the strength of party affiliation are seen as background variables. Causal models are being tested for campaign attentiveness first, secondly for an overall measure of the intensity to seek political information, and thirdly for the decision to seek particular means of political information on the campaign. The empirical analyses are based on two data sets, a local study of the German town Cologne, and a national post election study of the German national election of 1994.

The empirical findings are able to demonstrate that political information seeking during the campaign can adequately be construed as a matter of conscious, rational decisions by the citizens. In accordance with Downs' (1957) theory it can be shown that the outcome of the forthcoming election is not a sufficient motive to seek information on the campaign. Rather, variables which are independent from the election outcome form the basis for the information behavior of citizens.

## Introduction

The “minimal effects model” of campaign and media effects can no longer be taken as an adequate formula to describe the impact of election campaigns. This does not only have to do with the upcoming of television which, of course, has improved the odds of the political parties to get their messages through to the citizens. Rather, the focus on the persuasion function of political communication increasingly seems to be too narrow, concentrating on peripheral aspects of the election campaign. Citizens are by no means passive and helpless against skilfully agitating and manipulating political parties and candidates. They learn instead about political issues during an election campaign, and they develop images of political candidates (Popkin 1991). It can be even asked in addition whether the minimal effects interpretation of the Columbia studies ever was correct. The dominant interpretation in the literature has focussed on the effects of conversion. In fact, the conversion effects found in People's Choice were not huge, but they were not negligible either. Much more important, however, were the effects of activation and reinforcement (Lazarsfeld et. al 1948). A recent study of Steven Finkel (1993) impressively replicates the findings of the People's Choice study. Thus, it appears that election campaigns do have massive effects on the attitudes of voters, at present as well as fifty years ago. A small group of the electorate changes its party preference, two much larger groups activate or reinforce their predispositions during the campaign period. Conversion, activation and reinforcement are the results of a multitude of interactions between the media and the political parties on the one hand and the individual citizens on the other hand. They can also be understood as processes during which the media and the political parties try to come across to the electorate. During these processes the citizens decide whether or not to gather and receive this information. A complete model trying to explain conversion, activation and reinforcement has to incorporate all these interactions between voters, media and parties during the election campaign. Such a model makes it necessary to include data on media and party communication. It also implies a longitudinal design in order to determine which voters converted, were activated and reinforced.

In this paper we will follow a much more modest approach and try to formulate a partial model of political information seeking during election campaigns. We assume that the three processes are, at least in part, due to decisions of the citizens on whether or not to seek political information during the campaign, on how, how intense, where, and from whom to gather political information. So, in order to understand the causal mechanisms of activation, reinforcement and conversion, in a first step we should be able to account for the political information behavior of the individual citizen. Then we should in a further step of our research be able to relate our partial model to the conversion, activation, and reinforcement phenomena.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the decision whether or not to seek political information on the election campaign from a particular source, e.g. from TV reports on the campaign, and the extent to which information sources are used during the campaign. It goes without saying that a model trying to explain information seeking has to include a wide variety of determinants and contingent conditions because individuals make use of many criteria. Such criteria are commonly formulated within the framework of the uses and gratifications approach (Blumler/Katz 1974; Blumler 1980; Palmgreen et al. 1985). We prefer a slightly different approach because we think the uses and gratifications framework to be deficient in several respects. First, it lacks a clear theoretical foundation. Secondly, it sometimes produces findings that sound almost tautological: The result, for instance, that

respondents volunteering a strong information motive more often watch news on TV than respondents with a strong diversion motive is not particularly revealing. Thirdly, it is not unlikely that respondents try to rationalize their information behavior if they are expected to express their motives more or less directly (McLeod/Becker 1981: 82). In our view, these weaknesses can be overcome if the motives for political information seeking are deduced from a more general theory of individual political behavior.<sup>1</sup> Downs' (1957) Rational Choice theory of political information seeking serves as a starting point to us.

## Incentives for Seeking Political Information

We learned from Downs' (1957) theory of political information that the marginal utility of seeking additional information is practically zero if the model citizen is construed as being interested solely in reaching a better voting decision. As in this theoretical tradition seeking, receiving and evaluating information are interpreted as investment decisions, there is nothing to gain for the politically rational voter.<sup>2</sup> Neither is anything to lose as well if he or she stays politically ignorant. Political rationality is, for all practical purposes, low information rationality (Popkin 1991; Aldrich 1993). Thus, purely instrumental political reasoning cannot be a real and effective incentive for seeking political information.

But it is well known that a large part of the electorate does take an interest in election campaigns and also makes use of the information sources offered during a campaign. Which factors, then, can stimulate political information seeking? Speaking in the vocabulary of economics, which are the restrictions and preferences motivating an individual to turn to political matters? To be sure, these incentives for political information seeking must be, largely, independent of the outcome of the election.

Each citizen is embedded in a social context and has to cope with many diverse expectations on his own behavior. It is thus only natural to look first at those expectations of an individual's social environment which relate to political information and political knowledge (cf. Blumler 1985). Knowing, for instance, how much the social environment is politicized will tell us a great deal about the likelihood to become involved in political discussions (Petty 1988: 267). "All of us want to be knowledgeable, or appear so" (Petty 1988: 266). So, an individual can expect to increase - or at least keep - his social recognition if his behavior is in line with the relevant norms of his social environment. With respect to political matters such norms may demand that ego is able to formulate an opinion in political discussions. The status ascribed within the family, by friends or colleagues should be higher, the better an individual can answer political questions.

Apart from the normative expectations of the family or the friends an individual perceives, norms may be internalized in addition. An individual may thus feel for himself or herself the duty to be and keep politically informed (McCombs/Poindexter 1983). From this perspective

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<sup>1</sup> In terms of measuring the relevant motives for seeking information we think that the so-called "inferential strategy" (McLeod/Becker 1981: 82) should be preferred over self-reports of motives.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, starting with an instrumental model we arrive at a noninstrumental explanation of information seeking (cf. Aldrich 1993: 258). Perhaps the most obvious reason for this result is the well-known fact that the weight of the single vote is infinitesimally small. If the single vote is, for all practical purposes, unrelated to the aggregate outcome of an election, the contribution of additional political information to the aggregate outcome will be negligible as well. A politically rational citizen will therefore stay ignorant in political matters (see Downs 1957: 238-45 for further arguments).

a citizen will seek campaign information not as a result of perceived norms of the environment. Rather, a civic obligation to be politically informed is accepted as belonging to one's own normative belief and value system.

Up to now we have discussed incentives for seeking political information which exclude political considerations more or less completely. A Rational Choice model can incorporate 'political incentives' for seeking information, however. An expressive component of the vote can be one of those incentives (Brennan/Lomasky 1993), where voting per se, and also gathering information about the election per se, might represent a value to the individual, regardless of these activities' relationships to the election outcome (Aldrich 1993: 251). Thus, an issue and/or competence differential can plausibly be related to information seeking. The expectation would be that the expressive value of the vote and, correspondingly, of additional political information rises with the individual party differential. Hence, the larger the party differential the more an expressive component of the vote will contribute to the information seeking behavior.

Finally, the campaign itself may have an appeal to citizens as an entertaining event. Such an entertainment motive plays an important role in the uses and gratifications approach (Blumler 1980: 209). From this viewpoint, an election campaign may appear interesting or even fascinating because it can be interpreted as a close competition between candidates or political parties. Seen in this way, " ... the horse-race appeal of following an election campaign" (Blumler 1980: 209) may be one important reason for citizens to seek political information.

The incentives mentioned will increase, at first, the attentiveness of a citizen to the election campaign. In other words, their influence on information seeking is mediated by campaign attentiveness. In our view campaign attentiveness is a variable which immediately precedes information seeking behavior. It indicates the extent to which citizens are psychologically involved in the election campaign (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948: 40). Campaign attentiveness is, to be sure, neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for information seeking. It should not be excluded, for instance, that the main incentives may also have direct impacts on information seeking. The expectations of the social environment a citizen perceives may cause that information sources are sought although the psychological involvement is low or even absent. In short, a citizen may seek information about the campaign without a genuine interest in the campaign.<sup>3</sup> A similar argument applies to the two background variables in our model, political competence and party affiliation (cf. Dalton 1984).<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, the probability to seek political information will be higher, the lower the costs involved. These costs of gathering and processing information are especially low if it is encountered as a by-product of other activities (Downs 1957; Ohr 1997). Citizens who are either higher educated and/or are affiliated with a political party receive a lot of "free political information" (Downs 1957: 229) in their daily routine activities. For them seeking political information is related only with minor costs.<sup>5</sup>

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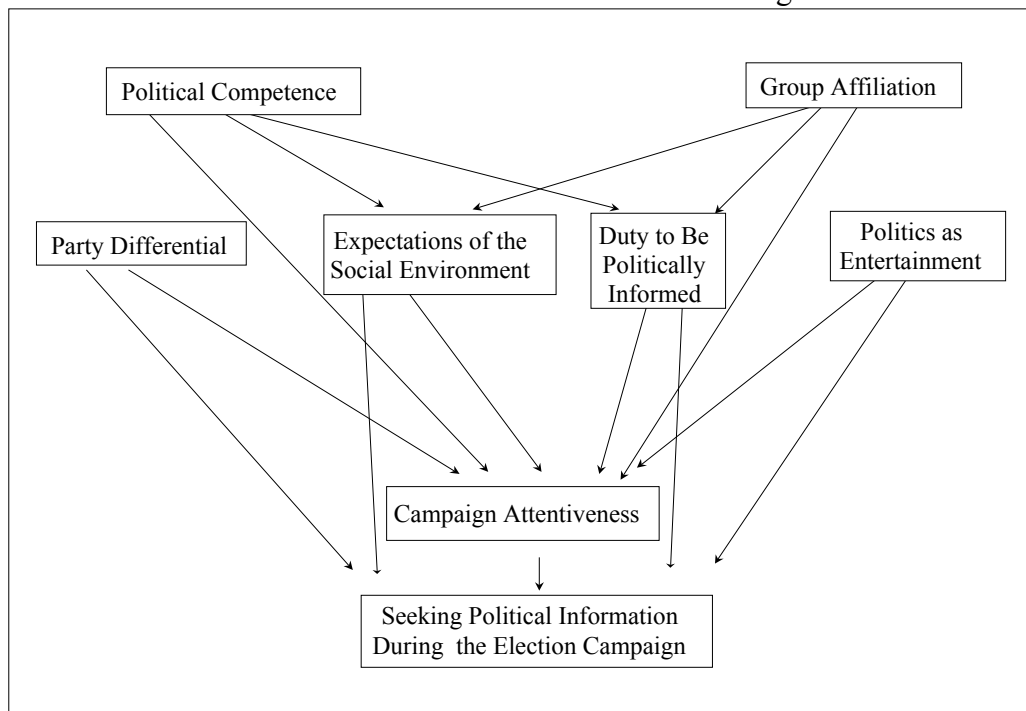
<sup>3</sup> Another reason for direct effects of the incentives discussed on information seeking may be the respondents' standards in the interview situation: A respondent may set a high standard for political interest and thus may volunteer a low value for his or her own political interest.

<sup>4</sup> Dalton identified four mobilization types, apertisans, cognitive partisans, apoliticals and ritual partisans (see for an analysis with German data Schmidt-Beck and Schrott (1994).

<sup>5</sup> Reducing costs can also mean that citizens use information short-cuts and that they prefer decision criteria which are easy to gather and evaluate (Popkin 1991).

Figure 1 depicts our model of information seeking which contains the incentives discussed in this section. It should be added that the model in figure 1 includes all the direct and indirect relationships between the variables. In this paper, however, we cannot theoretically discuss and empirically investigate all these relationships but will concentrate on how to explain information seeking on the one hand and campaign attentiveness on the other hand.

*Figure 1*  
A Model of Political Information Seeking



## Data, Measures, and Methods

### Data

Our empirical analyses are based on two data sets. First, we use a local election study of the German town Cologne, located in the Western part of Germany at the Rhine river. The Cologne Election Study (CES) was conducted immediately before the North-Rhine-Westfalian state election in May 1995. The data were collected by means of face-to-face interviews (N=339). As this study was explicitly designed to test Rational Choice models for several forms of political participation, it contains a wide variety of indicators for political information seeking and its determinants.<sup>6</sup> Analyzing information behavior relating to a state

<sup>6</sup> The Cologne Election Study was devised and conducted by the first author of this paper and Steffen Kuehnel (University of Giessen, Germany). The collection of the data was supported by a grant from the German Research Foundation.

Although random sampling procedures were employed, higher educated respondents are overrepresented in our sample, by approximately 15 percentage points compared to the population of Cologne City; low educated respondents are correspondingly underrepresented by the same margin. Although our local sample is not representative with respect to the population there is nonetheless enough variation in our main variables. Additionally, our primary concern is less to replicate population percentages but to test general hypotheses which should apply not only to Cologne.

election seems to be promising in two respects. First, state elections do not receive as much attention in the media as national elections. Thus, it can be expected that there is more variation between respondents in their information seeking behavior, where one part of the respondents seeks information with a high intensity and another part might ignore the campaign completely. Secondly, in state election campaigns the activities of the political parties should be more important in comparison to national elections. Since research covering party activities in Germany is much more sparse than research on media effects (Scherer 1993: 209), this field of political communication is therefore in need of a systematic causal analysis.

Secondly, we use a national post election study of the German national election of 1994. The random sample is representative for the whole of the Federal Republic (N=2046), data were collected by face-to-face interviews.<sup>7</sup> The combination of both data sets allows us on the one hand to estimate sophisticated models (using the local data), and on the other hand to corroborate some of the results on the national level.

### *Measures*

Information seeking behavior, as we understand it, implies that citizens are consciously aware of the election campaign. We assume that the citizens' decisions relating to information seeking are motivated mainly by conscious considerations (cf. Owen 1991: 6). Therefore we have attempted to incorporate this conscious element of information seeking into the question wordings as far as possible (see appendix). For eight information sources in the campaign a separate indicator was used, i.e. for newspaper reports, TV reports, TV advertisements, radio reports, bulletin boards, party brochures, street stands and political meetings (Cologne Election study). In the German National Election Study three indicators were available, TV ads, party brochures, and political meetings (see appendix for the question wording). Each indicator is dichotomous, with 0 indicating that the respective source was not used, and 1 denoting that the source was used.

We also use a measure for the intensity of political information seeking in the empirical analysis of our local Cologne data. The intensity index is coded from 0 to 1, indicating for each respondent the percentage of political information sources used during the campaign. It is an additive index combining the eight dichotomous indicators of political information seeking.

Campaign attentiveness in our model should have the strongest direct effect on information seeking. To measure attentiveness to the campaign, we devised a straightforward indicator, similar to the item used in People's Choice (cf. Lazarsfeld et al. 1948: 40). In addition to campaign attentiveness we will also employ a measure for attentiveness to politics in general, because information seeking may not only have campaign specific aspects but general, perhaps more stable reasons as well. Both indicators are coded from 0 (absence of attentiveness) to 4 (high attentiveness). In the German national election study only general

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<sup>7</sup> The data for the German National Post Election Study 1994 have been made available to us by the Central Archive for Empirical Research, University Cologne. The primary researchers of the National Election Study come from the Center of Science, Berlin, and the Center for Survey Research and Methodology, Mannheim. Data documentation and preparation was done by the Central Archive. None of the persons and institutes mentioned nor the Central Archive have any responsibility for the analysis and interpretation of the data in this paper. We would like to thank the primary researchers of the post election study for giving their generous consent to use the data set.

attentiveness could be used since campaign attentiveness was not available (same coding as in CES).

To measure the impact of the social environment's expectations on the information seeking of an individual, we used two different operationalizations. First, the politicization of the social environment is covered with two separate indicators, with the frequency of political discussions within the family, and the frequency of political discussions with friends. The more an individual perceives his social environment as politically involved, the more he will anticipate to encounter political arguments and the more he will feel the need to participate competently in such discussions (Petty 1988: 267). For both discussions within the family and with friends, responses were scored from 0 (no discussions at all) to 3 (discussions occurring often). In addition to this perception variable another item points more directly to the social recognition motive of seeking political information. In the Cologne study we asked to what extent respondents pay attention to the election campaign to be able to participate in political discussions. The measure for social recognition can take on values from 0 (motive absent) to 2 (motive highly important).

An internalized norm to be politically informed is operationalized with three indicators in the local Cologne study (for question wording see appendix). The three indicators were combined in an additive index where the minimum score is 0 (norm is absent), and the maximum score is 2 (norm highly internalized). The alpha coefficient for the scale is .521. In addition to this more general information norm we employed as well an election specific participation norm in the analysis which is based on the subjectively perceived relevance of the vote. This specific norm indicator was coded from 0 (norm absent) to 4 (norm highly relevant).

Similar to the concept of obtained gratifications in the uses and gratifications approach, in our local study we use a measure for the information value of the campaign. To operationalize this concept, we built an additive index with four items (for question wording see appendix). 0 indicates that the perceived information value is zero, 2 is the maximum information value. The alpha coefficient for the scale is .564.

As a measure of expressive voting we computed a party differential which stands for the perceived differences between the political parties. In the local study two items measuring such perceived differences were combined in an additive index. The first of these two items asked whether respondents can discern any differences between parties with respect to their problem solving capabilities. The second item asked whether there is one particular party which represents the respondent's own political views better than other parties. The value 0 of the index indicates that a respondent does not see any differences between parties, 1 denotes that a respondent sees differences on both criteria.<sup>8</sup>

To operationalize the entertainment aspect of an election campaign, the respondents in the local sample had to consider whether they view voting similar to horse race betting. The responses were scored from 0 (no entertainment value at all) to 2 (high entertainment value).

Political competence is measured with two separate indicators. First, we use education, which is a variable ranging from 1 (lowest degree of education) to 3 (highest degree of education). Education indicates the ability of an individual to comprehend difficult questions and cope

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<sup>8</sup> In the national election study only problem solving capabilities could be included. Since solving the problems of unemployment and crime are important valence issues in the Federal Republic, we chose these two issues and built an additive index. Responses were scored from 0 to 1 as in the local study.



with them. Thus, it measures, though rather indirectly, the costs to acquire and process political information. Secondly, for the local study we draw on an indicator which taps the relevance politics had during the time a respondent lived with his parents (importance of politics in socialization). The importance politics had in the formative years of a respondent focusses more directly on how experienced an individual is in political matters. The indicator is coded from 0 (no importance) to 3 (high importance).

Together with political competence party affiliation is our second background variable. For the local Cologne data respondents having a party affiliation were scored 1, respondents without affiliation were scored 0. For the national data strength of party affiliation was available with scores from 0 (no affiliation) to 5 (very strong affiliation).

In the last step of our empirical analysis we will examine why a particular source of political information is used. In explaining whether an individual uses, say, newspaper or TV reports, the preference for a particular medium comes into play. For the newspapers and for TV we therefore built two variables measuring media preference (for the respective medium) with the local data set. The indicators were coded 0 for respondents which do not use the respective source for political information, 1 for respondents using the source but not as the most important one, and, finally, 2 for respondents which see the respective source as the most important.

We routinely included socio-demographic variables such as age and gender in all of our regression models. Age is the reported age in years. Gender is a dummy variable, coded 0 for female and 1 for male.

### *Methods*

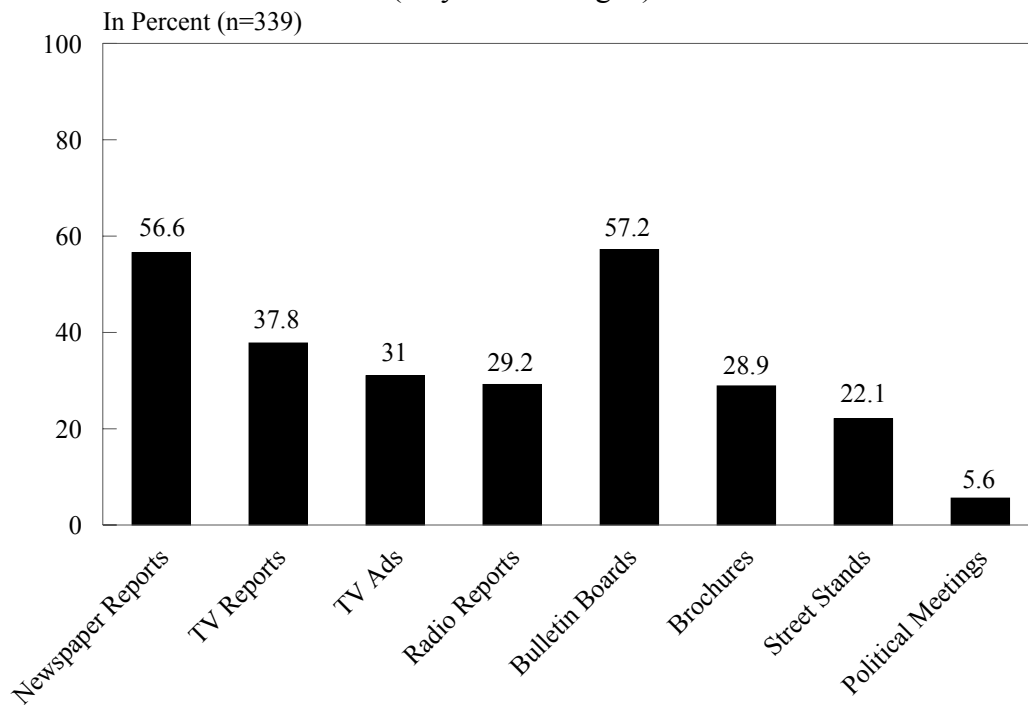
In choosing the methods for causal analysis we use the measurement level of the dependent variable as the main criterion. With political attentiveness and intensity of information seeking as dependent variables, usual linear OLS regression methods were employed to estimate the coefficients. As these criterion variables can be interpreted as (at least) interval scaled variables, OLS estimation is the natural choice. In a third step of our empirical analysis the decision to seek information from a particular source will be examined. Here our dependent variables are dichotomous. Hence, OLS estimation would no longer be optimal in a statistical sense. Logistic regression using maximum likelihood estimation methods is more appropriate for this type of dependent variables. While causal analysis is in the center of our interest, we will also conduct an exploratory dimensional analysis. As all of our indicators for political information seeking are dichotomous, procedures such as factor analysis which assume metric data are not optimally suited. In order to extract dimensions of information seeking we used a latent class analysis (McCutcheon 1987).

## **Findings**

### *Sources of Campaign Information*

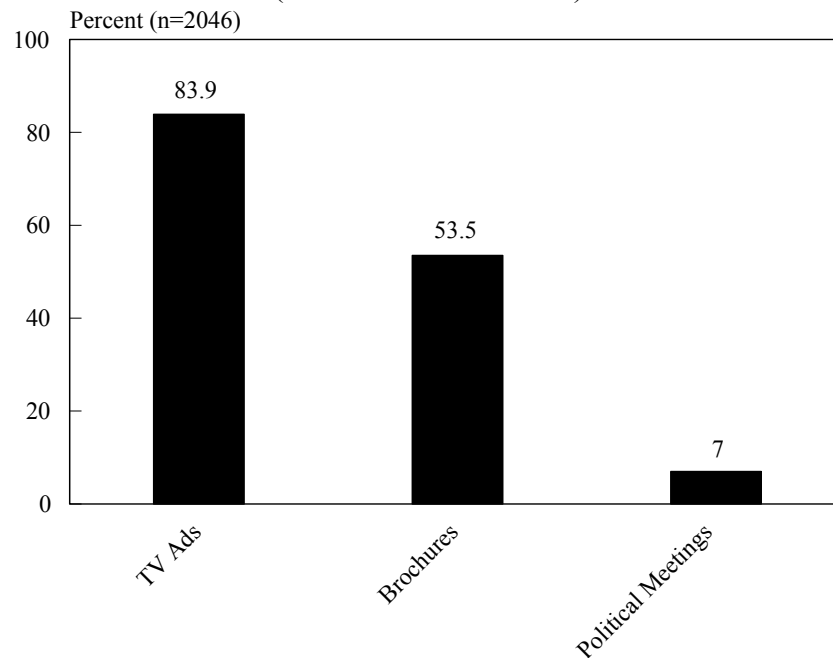
To what extent do the German citizens make use of the information sources during an election campaign? Figure 2 shows the percentages to which the main information sources on the campaign are being used. The upper part of the figure represents the frequencies for the local sample, the lower part for the national sample (see next page).

*Figure 2*  
Means for Seeking Political Information During the Election Campaign  
(City Data Cologne)



Source: Cologne Election Study 1995.

(German National Data)



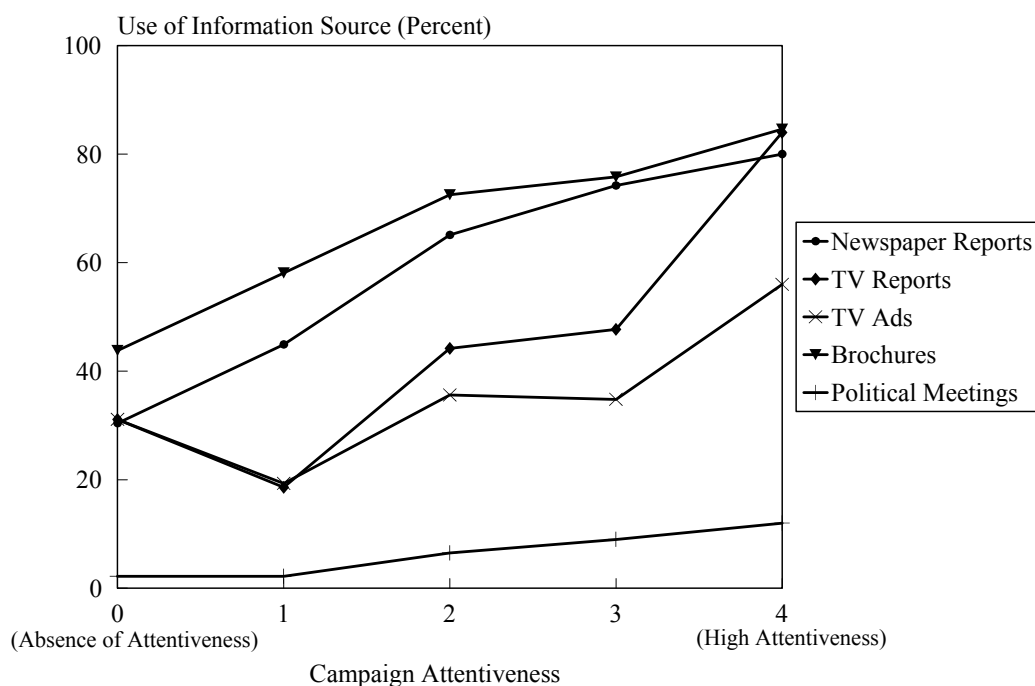
Source: German National Post Election Study 1994.

One main aspect of figure 2 is that the percentages are higher for the information means which are distributed by the media, especially newspaper reports and TV reports. This is likely to be due to the fact that media use is embedded in daily routines and does not imply additional efforts. It also underlines how important the mere availability of an information source is. Perfectly compatible with this line of argumentation is the high

percentage for the attention towards bulletin boards of the political parties. Bulletin boards are set up in all main streets during an election campaign, so the availability is extremely high. Taking a look at them does not demand major costs but can be seen as a by-product of shopping or similar daily activities. In comparing the figures for the local and the national sample, we see an interesting difference with respect to TV ads and party brochures. The percentages for both sources are markedly higher for the national election, reflecting the fact that national elections are more important than state elections in the eyes of the electorate as well as the parties.<sup>9</sup>

Having got a first impression on how frequently the various sources of seeking information are used in Germany, we will now take a first look at the relationship between information seeking and campaign attentiveness which is a central element in our model. We will concentrate here on those five sources which are also analyzed in the next section with multivariate methods, i.e. newspaper and TV reports, TV ads, party brochures, and political meetings (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3*  
Information Seeking Sources and Campaign Attentiveness (City Data Cologne)



Source: Cologne Election Study 1995.

Overall, the relationship between information seeking and campaign attentiveness is strong and positive as was expected.<sup>10</sup> For all five sources included the relative frequency rises if we move from the group in which campaign attentiveness is absent to the groups in which attentiveness is higher. This pattern holds independently from the usage level. Even for

<sup>9</sup> In Germany all political parties have guaranteed contingents for broadcasting their advertisements on national or statewide TV.

<sup>10</sup> The level for the use of party brochures is higher than in figure 2 because there all 339 respondents of our sample were the percentage base. In figure 3 the percentage for party brochures is computed only for those who reported that they received brochures from one or more parties.

political meetings where the percentage of those who attend meetings is very small the slope is clearly positive. There are, however, also some aspects in the graph which point to differences between the information sources. Although the percentages for TV reports and TV ads show a tendency to rise when campaign attentiveness increases, there are exceptions for both curves, especially for the TV ads. Seeking information from TV reports and particularly from the TV ads seems to be positively related to attentiveness, but not as unambiguously as in the other cases. Our first look on the motives for information seeking thus suggests that the models explaining information behavior during the campaign may differ between sources. Before we will examine these differences more closely with multivariate causal models in the next section we will attempt to explore such or similar differences with yet another approach. For this purpose we conducted an exploratory dimensional analysis with the various means of seeking information. Due to the fact that our sample is rather small, only six of the eight sources could be incorporated in a latent class analysis. Brochures and meetings had to be excluded because of the lack of cases, as otherwise too many cells of the multidimensional crosstabulation would have been empty. Because of the small sample the results of the latent class analysis should be interpreted with some caution (see table 1).

*Table 1*  
Latent Class Analysis of Information Seeking Sources (City Data Cologne)

	I	II	III
Campaign Information Sources	Conditional Probabilities		
Newspaper Reports	0.492	0.454	1.000
TV Reports	0.169	0.587	0.660
TV Ads	0.000	0.979	0.196
Radio Reports	0.272	0.163	0.602
Bulletin Boards	0.485	0.536	0.800
Street Stands	0.105	0.275	0.507
Unconditional Probabilities	0.500	0.286	0.214

Source: Cologne Election Study 1995.

299 cases; 43 degrees of freedom; Pearson Chi Square: 32.849 ( $p=0.869$ ); Likelihood Chi Square: 36.118 ( $p=0.762$ ).

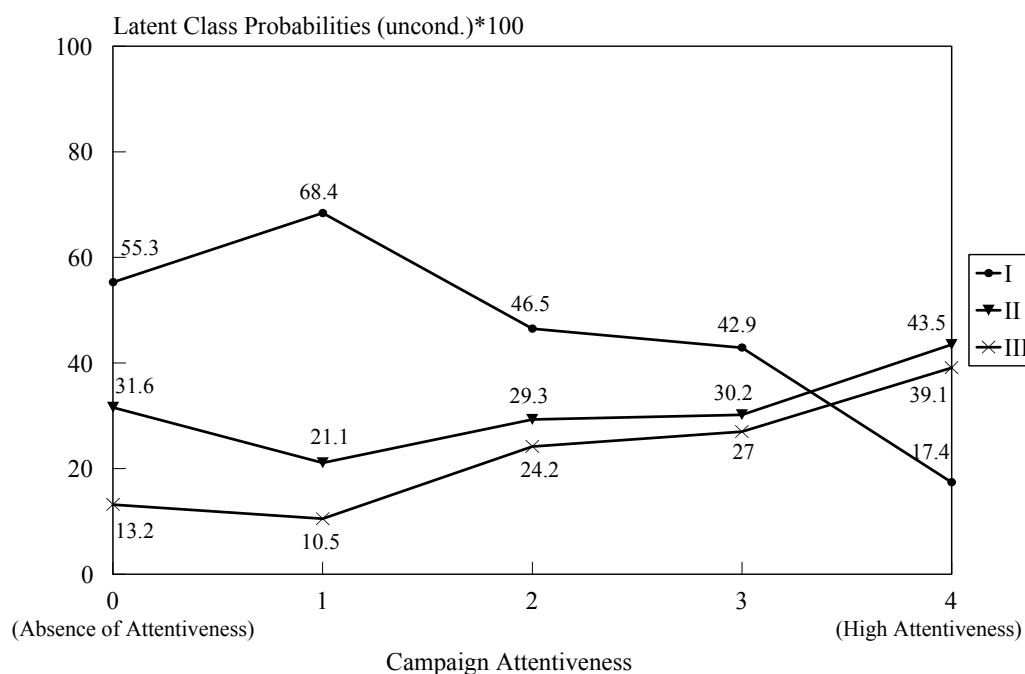
According to the latent class solution<sup>11</sup> we can distinguish three groups in our sample with specific information profiles. The first group (I) encompasses one half of the whole sample (0.5). In this group the conditional probability that a particular information source, say TV reports on the campaign, will be used is very small. TV reports, for example, are only followed with a probability of 0.169. Only sources which are either part of habitual behavior or which are available without greater costs are being used. The second group (II) comprises almost one third (0.286) of the sample. In this group political information seeking is markedly more important but remains concentrated on a few sources, especially on television. So, in this group television advertisements of the political parties are watched by almost all respondents (conditional probability 0.979). A little more than one fifth (0.214) of the sample belongs to the third group (III). This group is characterized by an information behavior which makes use of almost all sources. With one notable exception, the TV ads of the parties, the conditional probabilities are clearly higher than in the other two groups. Whereas the second group focusses on television and there especially on the more entertaining aspects, i.e. the TV

<sup>11</sup> For the latent class analysis we used the LEM program which was written by Jeroen K. Vermunt (Tilburg University, The Netherlands).

ads, the third group is almost overall intense in its information seeking and, in addition, prefers the more informative sources. Figure 4 shows how the sizes of the three information seeking groups vary with campaign attentiveness.

The pattern emerging from the graph shows a very clearcut difference between group I on the one hand and groups II and III on the other hand. For the first group which is also the largest, the relationship with campaign attentiveness is negative. Completely different are the corresponding relationships with campaign attentiveness for the groups II and III. With a rising attentiveness to the campaign the sizes of the two groups which more intensely seek political information increase steadily. To summarize, it can be pointed out that clear differences exist not only between the various sources to gather information but also with respect to dimensions of information behavior.

*Figure 4*  
Information Seeking Groups and Campaign Attentiveness (City Data Cologne)



Source: Cologne Election Study 1995.

The two graphical analyses strongly suggest that attentiveness to the election campaign is a central variable to account for information seeking, as was hypothesized. It is therefore imperative to examine the causal antecedents for attentiveness more closely with multivariate methods.

#### *Determinants of Campaign Attentiveness and Campaign Information Seeking*

Which attributes determine how attentive a citizen will be to the election campaign? And, in addition, are these attributes different from those which can explain general political attentiveness? Table 2.1 shows the OLS estimates for campaign attentiveness and general political attentiveness (see next page). Let us begin with the similarities between the estimates for both models. The positive coefficient for age in both models reflects the well-known fact

that attentiveness to political matters, also political participation in general, increases as an individual progresses through the life cycle.<sup>12</sup>

*Table 2.1*  
Determinants of Political Attentiveness (City Data Cologne)

Independent Variable	Campaign Attentiveness		General Political Attentiveness	
	$\hat{\beta}$	$\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}$	$\hat{\beta}$	$\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}$
<b>Politicization of Social Environment</b>				
-Political Discussions with Family	n.s.		+0.092 (1.72)	+0.088
-Political Discussions with Friends	+0.228 (3.34)	+0.173	+0.374 (6.67)	+0.334
<b>Gaining Social Recognition</b>				
-Following Campaign to Be Able to Participate in Political Discussions	+0.221 (3.46)	+0.177	n.s.	
<b>Internalized Information Norm</b>				
	n.s.		+0.482 (3.26)	+0.153
<b>Election Specific Participation Norm</b>				
-Subjective Relevance of Vote	+0.167 (3.08)	+0.162	n.s.	
<b>Information Value of Campaign</b>				
	+0.428 (3.73)	+0.193	n.s.	
<b>Party Differential</b>				
	n.s.		+0.446 (3.81)	+0.180
<b>Importance of Politics in Socialization</b>				
	n.s.		+0.080 (1.81)	+0.089
<b>Socio-Demographic Variables</b>				
-Education	n.s.		+0.216 (3.78)	+0.200
-Age (in years)	+0.012 (3.67)	+0.189	+0.007 (2.45)	+0.127
-Gender	+0.223 (1.97)	+0.101	+0.257 (2.94)	+0.137
<b>Intercept</b>				
	-0.497 (-1.88)		-0.783 (-2.44)	
$R^2 * 100$	22.73		39.71	
Adj. $R^2 * 100$	21.22		38.07	
Cases	314		303	

Source: Cologne Election Study 1995.

T-Values in Parentheses; n.s.: not significant (one-tailed test;  $\alpha=0.05$ ); listwise deletion of missing values.

For both aspects of attentiveness gender has also a significant influence. This indicates that differences between men and women regarding political attentiveness and political behavior have not yet completely disappeared (cf. Lazarsfeld et al. 1948: 45). It should not be

<sup>12</sup> The positive age effect can, of course, also be due to generational differences. Which of the two interpretations is the more appropriate cannot be decided with a cross-sectional design, however.

dismissed, though, that an effect of social desirability could also apply. If men perceive greater social expectations to be competent in political matters they might tend to give socially desirable answers in an interview and could overstate their attentiveness to politics.

Turning to the main theoretical incentives for political attentiveness, we observe an effect of the politicization of the social environment for both dependent variables. The effect of the discussions with friends seems to be more relevant for general attentiveness, however. Additionally, political discussions within the family only have a significant, though rather small, effect with respect to general attentiveness. The (different) effects of politicization point to a first difference between the two models in table 2.1. With an explained variance of almost 40 percent general political attentiveness can be accounted for much better than campaign attentiveness. And the stronger effect of politicization on general attentiveness is one main cause for the much better explanatory power, compared with the model for campaign attentiveness. Thus, the more important the role politics plays within the social environment, the more attentive towards politics in general an individual will be. If politics is important in the social environment, then an individual's status is crucially dependent on how good he or she is politically informed.

There are further noteworthy differences between campaign attentiveness and general attentiveness, suggesting that the two concepts as well as their causal antecedents should be measured and analyzed separately, although both concepts are moderately correlated with +.44 (Pearson correlation). In interpreting these differences, one conclusion could be that general attentiveness might indicate a more profound and maybe also more intense involvement in politics. In line with this interpretation is the result that an internalized information norm has a significant effect only on general attentiveness. Personal norms can be relevant nonetheless for campaign attentiveness as the positive effect of an election specific participation norm demonstrates. The item on the subjective relevance of the vote taps, at least partly, how important specific information norms are for a respondent. It can be doubted, however, whether this effect is sufficient evidence for assuming a mainly intrinsic motivation for interest in the election. Since the social recognition motive is a relevant predictor only for campaign attentiveness, it seems to be more likely that campaign attentiveness is less intrinsically motivated than general attentiveness to politics.

A fairly strong effect on general political attentiveness, but not on campaign attentiveness, has our education measure for political competence. Hence, with an increasing ability to cope with complex political questions, the general attentiveness to political questions also rises. The same applies to the importance of politics in the formative years of a citizen.

Overall, high education, political experience, demanding expectations of the primary social environment with respect to political knowledge, and an intrinsic value of being politically informed constitute major determinants for being attentive to politics in general. The motivation for being attentive to the election campaign can be traced back similarly to the influence of social expectations, though in a somewhat weaker way. An intrinsic role of politics and a relationship with political competence are missing, however.

The fact that our measure for the party differential does not have a significant effect on campaign attentiveness corresponds nicely with Downs' conclusion: there cannot be a systematic relationship between the party differential and information seeking if politically instrumental reasoning is assumed. We have argued, however, that expressive considerations can form a 'political' motive for being attentive and seeking information. Empirically it turns

out that an effect of the party differential is relevant only for general attentiveness. Since the effect is positive as was hypothesized, it is compatible with our expressive vote hypothesis.

The model for general attentiveness for the national election study 1994 is very similar to the corresponding model for the local data (see table 2.2).

*Table 2.2*  
Determinants of Political Attentiveness (German National Data)

Independent Variable	<b>General Political Attentiveness</b>	
	$\hat{\beta}$	$\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}$
<b>Politicization of Social Environment</b>	+0.401 (18.78)	+0.402
<b>Strength of Party Identification</b>	+0.054 (4.34)	+0.093
<b>Party Differential</b>	+0.137 (2.70)	+0.056
<b>Socio-Demographic Variables</b>		
-Education	+0.241 (8.19)	+0.182
-Age (in years)	+0.006 (4.43)	+0.097
-Gender	+0.291 (7.17)	+0.144
<b>Intercept</b>	+0.265 (2.55)	
<hr/>		
$R^2 * 100$	29.67	
<hr/>		
Adj. $R^2 * 100$	29.43	
<hr/>		
Cases	1786	

Source: German National Post Election Study 1994.

T-Values in Parentheses; (one-tailed test;  $\alpha=0.05$ ); listwise deletion of missing values.

By far the strongest effect comes from politicization of the social environment.<sup>13</sup> The effects of the other explanatory variables are also in line with the results for the local data.

Let us summarize our findings on the antecedents of political attentiveness. According to our theoretical argumentation political attentiveness - and, consequently, political information seeking - cannot convincingly be explained with instrumental political reasoning alone. Therefore, the results in tables 2.1 and 2.2 strongly support our model: Why citizens are attentive to politics in general, and to the electoral campaign in particular, can be accounted for fairly well by means of the incentives of our model. Although both aspects of attentiveness follow different causal explanations, the main interpretation is quite clear. The most important explanatory variables must be located in the expectations of the primary environment, in normative considerations of the citizens and in the political competence. 'Political' motives, e.g. improving the voting decision, are much less important in comparison.

<sup>13</sup> Politicization here is an additive index variable with the frequency of political discussions in the family and with friends as component variables.



If, as we have argued, attentiveness, particularly to the election campaign, should be the main determinant for information seeking, the predictors for attentiveness will indirectly also affect information seeking behavior. Social expectations, for instance, thus have an important (indirect) influence on the decision to seek political information, and this influence is mediated through attentiveness. Direct effects of these variables on the decision to seek information might also exist, however. Now we will try to determine such direct effects on information seeking, together with the influence of campaign attentiveness.

First, we will analyze the intensity of information seeking. Our dependent variable here is the individual percentage of information sources used. It includes the reading of reports on the campaign in the newspapers, watching campaign reports on TV, listening to campaign reports on the radio, watching TV ads of the political parties, looking at bulletin boards, reading party brochures, attending street stands of the parties and, finally, attending political meetings. As a potential explanatory variable we also included an indicator which is supposed to measure the general information behavior of an individual. This measure counts the number of information sources for general political information, i.e. political information which is not explicitly connected with the election campaign (see table 3).

*Table 3*  
Determinants of the Intensity for Seeking Political Information  
(City Data Cologne)

Independent Variable	$\hat{\beta}$	$\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}$
<b>Campaign Attentiveness</b>	+0.057 (5.53)	+0.299
<b>Politicization of Social Environment</b>	+0.042 (2.64)	+0.143
<b>Gaining Social Recognition</b>		
-Following Campaign to Be Able to Participate in Political Discussions	+0.029 (2.27)	+0.120
<b>Election Specific Participation Norm</b>		
-Subjective Relevance of Vote	+0.025 (2.44)	+0.126
<b>Intensity of General Information Seeking</b>	+0.025 (2.35)	+0.126
<b>Socio-Demographic Variables</b>		
-Education	+0.028 (2.22)	+0.115
<b>Intercept</b>	-0.071 (-1.34)	
$R^2 * 100$	27.33	
Adj. $R^2 * 100$	25.84	
Cases	301	

Source: Cologne Election Study 1995.

T-Values in Parentheses; (one-tailed test;  $\alpha=0.05$ ); listwise deletion of missing values.

With an explained variance of almost 30 percent our summary measure of political information can be accounted for fairly well. As could be expected, attentiveness to the

campaign has the strongest impact on the intensity measure ( $\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}=0.299$ ). Therefore, the empirical analysis underlines that campaign attentiveness is indeed a crucial precondition for seeking information during the campaign. Politicization of the social environment, the social recognition motive and the election specific participation norm not only have indirect effects on campaign information behavior but also direct influences. Especially the first two effects might be interpreted as an instrumental use of information sources with respect to the social environment, without developing a genuine interest for politics in general and the election contest in particular. The number of political information sources used in general has a positive influence on the intensity measure for campaign information. An individual who draws on many sources in general, in his everyday life, thus behaves quite similar during the election campaign. Of course, the number of general sources used cannot be equated completely with a high degree of political knowledge. It will indicate, however, a certain kind of familiarity with political matters. Who in general draws on several sources for political information, can gather information in the campaign with lower costs and will not restrict his information gathering to only one or two sources.<sup>14</sup>

Viewing the percentage of all information activities during the campaign as the dependent variable constitutes a first strategy to examine information seeking. It is, in our view, a sensible, though not optimal, measure for the intensity to seek information on the campaign. From the graphical analyses in figures 2 and 3 we know, however, that there are some noteworthy differences between the means to acquire political information. In the last step of our analysis we will therefore concentrate on the decision to use particular information sources. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show the estimates for the logistic regression analyses of our local data (see the next two pages). As effect measures we use the logistic effect coefficients which reflect the estimated mean change in the odds to use a particular information source if the respective predictor variable varies by one unit. An effect coefficient greater than one implies a positive effect of an explanatory variable, whereas a coefficient smaller than one reflects a negative effect. A coefficient of exactly one would indicate that the predictor variable is completely unrelated to the dependent variable (cf. Andress et al. 1997). Since the effect coefficients depend on the measuring units, standardized effect coefficients were also computed (see below table 4.1). In comparing the explanatory power of the logistic models to linear regression models, it should be noted that in most empirical analyses the likelihood ratio index ( $P^2$ ) reaches values which are somewhat lower than in linear regression.

Taking a first look at the results for the Cologne data, the pattern looks fairly similar to the empirical model for the intensity measure. With one exception, the TV ads, the use of particular information sources is significantly furthered by political attentiveness, especially by campaign attentiveness. Only the TV advertisements of the political parties are completely unrelated to attentiveness. For all other sources we see a strong and significant impact. There are also relevant direct effects of our indicators for social expectations, i.e. politicization of the primary social environment and the motive to gain social recognition, on the seeking of most information means.

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<sup>14</sup> We did not estimate the corresponding model for the national data as only three indicators for information seeking were available.

*Table 4.1*  
Determinants for Seeking Newspaper and TV Reports on the Campaign  
(City Data Cologne)

Independent Variable	Newspaper Reports		TV Reports	
	$e^{\hat{\beta}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}}$
<b>Campaign Attentiveness</b>	1.814 (22.32) <sup>a</sup>	1.975	1.537 <sup>b</sup> (11.89)	1.618
<b>Politicization of Social Environment</b>				
-Political Discussions with Family	1.829 (14.17)	1.732	n.s.	
-Political Discussions with Friends	n.s.		1.564 (7.61)	1.456
<b>Gaining Social Recognition</b>				
-Following Campaign to Be Able to Participate in Political Discussions	n.s.		1.347 (4.21)	1.302
<b>Newspaper Preference over Other Information Sources</b>	3.633 (30.99)	2.367		
<b>Socio-Demographic Variables</b>				
-Education	1.462 (6.06)	1.394	n.s.	
-Age (in years)	n.s.		1.019 (5.84)	1.369
$P^2 * 100$	23.26 <sup>c</sup>		10.92	
Cases	317		307	

Source: Cologne Election Study 1995.

n.s.: not significant (one-tailed test;  $\alpha=0.05$ )

a Wald statistic in parentheses. The value of the Wald statistic can be determined by dividing the unstandardized logistic regression coefficient,  $\hat{\beta}$ , by its standard error, then taking the square of the resulting value.

b The standardized logistic effect coefficient,  $e^{\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}}$ , is computed with the following formula:

$e^{\hat{\beta}_{\text{stand.}}} = e^{\hat{\beta} \cdot s_x}$ , where  $s_x$  denotes the standard deviation of the respective explanatory variable in the sample.

c  $P^2$  stands for the Likelihood-Ratio-Index and is determined by the following formula:

$$P^2 = \frac{-2 \log L_0 - (-2 \log L_1)}{-2 \log L_0}$$
, where  $\log L_0$  and  $\log L_1$  denote the values of the likelihood function of the

'empty' model (without any explanatory variable) and the completely specified model, respectively. The measure is roughly comparable to the explained variance in the linear regression model and indicates how precisely the dependent variable can be predicted with the model.

We know from figure 2 that newspaper reports and TV reports are very important information sources during the campaign. They are used by more than 55 and almost 40 percent of the Cologne population, respectively. Seeking both information sources is closely related to campaign attentiveness and politicization of the social environment. Apart from these two common aspects, the differences between both sources seem to dominate, however. Newspaper reports on the campaign are mainly read because reading the newspapers for many citizens is the most important information source in everyday life. If political information is usually acquired by reading newspaper reports, this habitual behavior also

extends to the campaign period. Such an effect of media preference could not be observed for the TV reports. Moreover, the higher educated citizens prefer reading newspaper reports, whereas TV reports are not related to education.

*Table 4.2*  
Determinants for Seeking TV Ads, Brochures and Political Meetings  
(City Data Cologne)

Independent Variable	TV Ads		Brochures		Political Meetings	
	$e^{\hat{\beta}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}_{\text{stand.}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}_{\text{stand.}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}_{\text{stand.}}$
<b>Campaign Attentiveness</b>	n.s.		1.643 (7.16)	1.749	n.s.	
<b>General Political Attentiveness</b>	n.s.		n.s.		2.778 (13.22)	2.612
<b>Politicization of Social Environment</b>						
-Political Discussions with Family	n.s.		2.505 (13.25)	2.149	n.s.	
-Political Discussions with Friends	n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
<b>Gaining Social Recognition</b>						
-Following Campaign to Be Able to Participate in Political Discussions	1.558 (7.39)	1.483	n.s.		n.s.	
<b>Internalized Information Norm</b>	0.132 (16.02)	0.571	0.131 (4.98)	0.583	n.s.	
<b>Election Specific Participation Norm</b>						
-Subjective Relevance of Vote	1.538 (8.42)	1.581	n.s.		n.s.	
<b>Information Value of Campaign</b>	1.677 (3.19)	1.294	n.s.		n.s.	
<b>Party Differential</b>	0.426 (4.82)	0.720	n.s.		n.s.	
<b>Entertaining Aspect of the Campaign</b>						
-Campaign as a Horse Race	1.869 (4.96)	1.334	n.s.		n.s.	
<b>TV Preference over Other Information Sources</b>	1.767 (5.40)	1.374				
<b>Socio-Demographic Variables</b>						
-Education	n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
-Age (in years)	1.014 (2.84)	1.276	n.s.		n.s.	
$P^2 * 100$	11.70		13.74		10.30	
Cases	306		139		337	

Source: Cologne Election Study 1995.

Wald statistic in parentheses; n.s.: not significant (one-tailed test;  $\alpha=0.05$ )

Turning to the TV ads of the political parties, we already mentioned that only TV ads concerning the state election are not related to political attentiveness in any way. Using TV ads as a means to acquire political information is also independent from the degree of politicization of the environment, a further particular characteristic of this information source.

There are still further differences between TV ads and most other sources. Only for the TV advertisements we can observe a significant and positive effect of an entertainment factor which was measured with an item tapping the horse race dimension of the election campaign. The strong negative effect of an internalized information norm points in a very similar direction. Hence, TV ads are watched particularly by those citizens for whom political knowledge and information does not have an intrinsic value. Overall, watching the parties' advertisements on TV seems to follow a quite different logic compared to the use of the other sources.

Whereas TV ads are watched especially by those citizens whose political involvement is rather low, the opposite holds for attending political meetings. For this information source only general political attentiveness has a direct and positive effect. Recalling the findings on general attentiveness, it follows that political meetings before the state election in 1995 were attended particularly by the politically involved and also higher educated citizens.

In comparing the results from our local data with the national results for TV ads, party brochures, and political meetings (see table 4.3), it should be kept in mind that state elections in Germany are much less important to the citizens than national elections. This is reflected, for instance, in markedly lower turnout rates for state elections.

*Table 4.3*  
Determinants for Seeking TV Ads, Brochures and Political Meetings  
(German National Data)

Independent Variable	TV Ads		Brochures		Political Meetings	
	$e^{\hat{\beta}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}_{\text{stand.}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}_{\text{stand.}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}$	$e^{\hat{\beta}}_{\text{stand.}}$
<b>General Political Attentiveness</b>	1.372 (16.09)	1.377	1.220 (12.10)	1.223	1.470 (11.38)	1.475
<b>Politicization of Social Environment</b>						
-Political Discussions with Family	1.427 (25.43)	1.501	n.s.		1.358 (6.66)	1.419
-Political Discussions with Friends	n.s.		1.256 (22.59)	1.300	1.388 (8.32)	1.460
<b>Strength of Party Identification</b>	1.118 (7.13)	1.216	1.176 (28.77)	1.327	1.146 (4.34)	1.267
<b>Party Differential</b>	1.996 (17.64)	1.329	1.366 (6.15)	1.137	n.s.	
<b>Socio-Demographic Variables</b>						
-Education	0.825 (3.32)	0.863	1.230 (9.02)	1.171	1.439 (8.35)	1.320
-Age (in years)	0.991 (4.72)	0.852	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
-Gender	n.s.		1.190 (2.90)	1.091	n.s.	
$P^2 * 100$	8.90		7.00		12.84	
Cases	1777		1773		1765	

Source: German National Post Election Study 1994.

Wald statistic in parentheses; n.s.: not significant (one-tailed test;  $\alpha=0.05$ )

Differential importance of state versus national elections may be one explanation for the fact that the party differential is positively related to reception of TV ads during the national election campaign whereas the corresponding relationship was negative for the state election. The higher importance of the national elections may imply that expressing, and consequently, reinforcing one's political orientation becomes a relevant motive for watching TV ads as well as reading party brochures.<sup>15</sup> A similar argument is behind the consistently positive effect of the strength of party affiliation. With respect to reception of the TV ads the negative effect of education can be interpreted in a similar way as the negative effect of an internalized information norm in table 4.2. Higher educated citizens are able to deal with complex political questions by means of rational arguments. For them, presumably, the TV advertisements of the parties are much too emotional and/or superficial. Over all three information sources in table 4.3 political attentiveness as well as politicization have significant and positive effects. For the TV ads this indicates another important difference to the corresponding Cologne model since there both variables did not affect reception of TV ads to the state election. Here again the differential importance of state versus national elections may be the explanation.

## Conclusion

Why do citizens seek political information during the election campaign? In this paper we tried to answer this question by assuming that information seeking can adequately be modeled by means of a Rational Choice approach. Drawing on Downs' (1957) theory of political information seeking, we hypothesized that the main incentives to seek political information are independent from the election outcome. Thus, improving the individual voting decision cannot be a major motive for being attentive to the election campaign and, consequently, for seeking political information. Instead, explanatory variables such as the expectations of the social environment concerning political information should be main determinants according to the general causal model developed in this paper. A citizen perceiving expectations of the primary social environment to be politically informed will be likely to gather political information during the campaign period. Otherwise he or she would run the risk to lose some recognition. The empirical findings presented strongly support our model. The main incentives for political attentiveness and for the seeking of political information are in fact independent of the election outcome.

It could also be shown that explaining the use of particular information sources demands different specializations of our general model. The decision, for instance, to watch TV advertisements of the political parties is motivated quite differently than, say, the decision to attend a political meeting.

The model presented and tested in this paper is only a partial model of information seeking during an election campaign. Further research should include variables such as the political parties' activities. Since at least for some of these activities there is regional variation, e.g. setting up bulletin boards, street stands or holding political meetings, individual motives as well as the political parties' input into the campaign could be incorporated in a much more comprehensive multi-level model of information seeking during an election campaign.

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<sup>15</sup> Due to the fact that the models for the local and the national data had to be specified differently, it is, of course, not possible to directly compare the effects of variables between the models.

**APPENDIX****Question Wordings for Major Variables***I. Cologne Election Study 1995 (State Election in the German State North-Rhine-Westfalia, May 14th 1995)*

## a. Information sources

**Newspaper reading on state election:**

"Have you read reports or opinions on the forthcoming state election the newspapers or in a magazine? (yes, no; don't read newspapers, can't remember/don't know, no answer)"

**Exposure to TV reports on state election:**

"Apart from the TV ads of the parties, have you watched reports on the state election on TV? (yes, no; don't watch TV/don't have a TV, can't remember/don't know, no answer)"

**Exposure to TV ads on state election:**

"Have you watched political party ads on TV? (yes, no; can't remember/don't know, no answer)"

**Exposure to radio reports on state election:**

"Have you listened to radio reports on the forthcoming state election? (yes, no; don't listen to the radio/don't have a radio, can't remember/don't know, no answer)"

**Attention to bulletin boards:**

"Before elections the parties set up bulletin boards in many locations. Have you taken a closer look at such bulletin boards during this election campaign? (yes, no; can't remember/don't know, no answer)"

**Attention to street stands:**

"The parties also use street stands to advertise their policy and their candidates. Did you stop at such a stand during this election campaign? (yes, no; can't remember/don't know, no answer)"

**Attending political meetings:**

"Before elections political meetings are held in which political candidates appear and advertise their party. Did you attend such a political meeting during this election campaign? (yes, no; can't remember/don't know, no answer)"

## b. Political Attentiveness

**Campaign Attentiveness**

"Now we would like to know what you think about the electoral campaign for the forthcoming state election in North-Rhine-Westfalia? How much are you interested in the electoral campaign? (very strong, strong, average, a little, not at all; don't know, no answer)"

**General Political Attentiveness**

"How strong are you interested in politics? (very strong, strong, average, a little, not at all; don't know, no answer)"

## c. Determinants of Political Attentiveness and Information Seeking

**Politicization of Social Environment****-Talking about Politics in the Family:**

"How often do you talk about politics with your family? (often, occasionally, rarely, never; don't know, no answer)"

**-Talking about Politics with Friends:**

"And how often do you talk about politics with your friends? (often, occasionally, rarely, never; don't know, no answer)"

**Gaining Social Recognition:**

"I only pay attention to the election campaign to be able to talk about it. (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)"

**Internalized Political Information Norm (Duty to be Politically Informed):**

"As a democratic citizen one should be informed about the important questions in one's country (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)".

"Democracy only can work if the citizens are politically informed (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)".

"Because politics determines our life it is important to be politically informed (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)".

**Election Specific Participation Norm:**

"How would you assess the importance of your vote for the outcome of the state election on May 14th: Is your vote of great importance, middle importance, small importance or no importance at all?"

**Entertainment Aspect of Elections:**

"Voting to me is like horse race betting (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)".

**Information Value of the Campaign:**

"You cannot trust promises of the parties before an election (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)".

Campaigning is nothing but doing dirty laundry in public (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)".

"Although election campaigns are expensive they are necessary nonetheless (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)".

"Controversies between political parties during the election campaign are important so that one can distinguish between the various positions (agree completely, agree partly, don't agree)".

**Party Identification:**

"Many people in the Federal Republic lean towards a particular political party for a longer time although they might also vote for another party. How is it in your case: Do you lean, generally speaking, towards a particular party? If yes, towards which party?"

*II. National German Post Election Study 1994 (Central Data Archive, ZA-Nr. 2601; German National Election, October 16th, 1994)*

a. Information Sources

**Reading information material of parties:**

"Of which parties did you read information material of some kind during the last national election campaign, for example leaflets, or brochures? (parties had to be mentioned spontaneously, multiple responses were possible)"

**Exposure to TV ads:**

"From which parties did you see TV ads? (parties had to be mentioned spontaneously, multiple responses were possible)"

**Attending political meetings:**

"Did you attend one or more election meetings or similar events before the national election? yes, no; no answer)" If yes: Of which party, which parties? (parties had to be mentioned spontaneously, multiple responses were possible)"

b. Political Attentiveness

**General Political Attentiveness:**



"How strong are you interested in politics? (very strong, strong, average, a little, not at all)"

### c. Determinants of Political Attentiveness and Information Seeking

#### **Politicization of Social Environment**

##### **-Talking about politics in the family:**

"Did you talk about the parties, the politicians and the election in your family before the national election? (yes, no; don't know)" If yes: "Did this occur often, sometimes or rarely? (don't know, no answer)"

##### **-Talking about politics with friends:**

"And how was this with your friends? Did you talk with them about the parties, the politicians and the election? (yes, no; don't know, no answer)" If yes: "Did this occur often, sometimes or rarely? (don't know, no answer)"

#### **Party Identification, Strength of Party Identification:**

"Many people in the Federal Republic lean towards a particular political party for a longer time although they might also vote for another party. How is it in your case: Do you lean, generally speaking, towards a particular party? If yes, towards which party? (parties had to be mentioned spontaneously, no, do not lean to a party; don't know, no answer, refusal)"

If respondent leans towards a party: How strong or weak do you lean, all in all, towards this party? (very strong, fairly strong, moderate, fairly weak, very weak)"

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