"I Don't Care About Politics, I Just Like That Guy!" Affective Disposition and Political Attributes in Information Processing of Political Talk Shows

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Drawing on the affect infusion model and on affective disposition theory, this study aims to explain the influence of viewers' affective disposition toward the guests of political TV talk shows on their information processing and judgments. The affective disposition was manipulated in an experiment. Results suggest that this affective disposition remained stable during exposure to the program, leading to predetermined information processing of the discussed political issue and a judgment that is consistent with the one made by the guest. Without prior manipulation of affective disposition, affective involvement with the issue influenced the viewers' judgments instead, indicating open information processing.

Keywords: political talk shows, affective disposition, affect infusion model, political judgments, affective issue involvement

Political talk shows on television in the form of roundtable discussions have become highly influential in public opinion-making processes in many democracies, most notably in Germany, where they have been broadcast for decades (e.g., Dörner & Vogt, 2004; Roth, Weinmann, Schneider, Hopp, & Vorderer, 2014; Schultz, 2006). Given their popularity, two questions seem particularly salient: Are these shows capable of influencing the political judgments of citizens, and if so, how? Second, what are the most important factors that viewers rely on when making political judgments during exposure? Political TV talk shows have been referred to as "talking head" formats (e.g., Hanselmann, 2012; Linkins, 2013), a label that emphasizes the core elements of these shows: guests' discussions of and arguments for their political views. Further, all the shows tend to rotate the same politicians, intellectuals, and experts (Gäbler, 2011). Thus, many of the guests are likely well-known to the audience, who may have already formed opinions about them. Therefore, we propose viewers' disposition toward the guests to have a major impact on their information processing and their judgment concerning the political issue under discussion.

We combine two theoretical different approaches in this research: The affect infusion model (AIM; Forgas, 1995), a social psychological approach that deals with the interplay of affects, information processing, and judgments; and affective disposition theory (ADT; Zillmann, 2006; Zillmann & Cantor, 1972), one of the most prominent approaches in entertainment research. ADT explains viewers' responses to entertainment media formats by referencing the viewers' judgments about portrayed characters (e.g., Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004). Just recently, Boukes, Boomgaarden, Moorman, and de Vreese (2015) relied on disposition theory to examine the formation of judgments in viewers of political satire programs.

As the discipline has evolved, researchers on political media have come to consider affective influences on political judgments as rather a distraction, and the cognitive aspects of information processing have come to the fore (cf. Marcus, 2000). However, a range of studies have shown that in the context of mass-mediated settings, moods and emotions exert

considerable influence on political judgments (e.g., Brader, 2011; Civettini & Redlawsk, 2009; Isbell, Ottati, & Burns, 2006). Therefore, affective influences research provides an important piece of information. Although there are currently only two studies that used the AIM to investigate political media effects (Kühne, Wirth, & Müller, 2012; Roth, 2016), the model seems to be one of the most useful approaches to theoretically systematize the role that moods and emotions play for individuals' opinion-making processes. In addition, despite the fact that political talk shows have long been considered "serious" political information, there is now an increasing number of studies that suggest that these shows have at least as much potential to entertain their viewers as to inform them (e.g., Fahr, 2008; Mattheiß et al., 2013; Roth, 2016; Roth et al., 2014). This is why ADT can play a promising role in explaining why viewers might be attracted to them and process the information given in a particular way.

In our study, we will focus on the topic of social justice, which the OxfordDictionaries define as "[j]ustice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society" (social justice [definition], n.d.). According to recent surveys, more than half of German citizens attach great importance to this topic (IfD Allensbach, 2016) and more than 75% think that social justice needs to be increased in Germany (YouGov, 2017). Further, the topic might be one in which the emotions of citizens play a substantial role. In the following, we begin by explicating how the AIM describes the role that affect plays in an individual's processing of information. Subsequently, we conceptualize how the different information processing strategies proposed by the AIM can be related to ADT. The resulting hypotheses are empirically tested in an experimental design. After reporting the results, the conclusions as well as the study's limitations will be discussed.

Conceptualizing the Processing of Political Talk Shows

Information Processing and Affects: The Affect Infusion Model

A vast number of theories and models conceptualize how users process information presented by the media. The affect infusion model, conceived by Forgas (1995, 2002a, 2002b) is one promising attempt to describe the role of affect in individuals' processing of information and social judgments. Four different judgmental strategies are characterized; each one has different affect infusion potentials. The four strategies can be divided along two central dimensions (see Figure 1). The first dimension is similar to a distinction that is also made by dual-process models of information processing, such as the elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) or the heuristic systematic model (HSM; Chaiken, 1980): a differentiation between information processing strategies that require a low versus high cognitive effort. This dimension will be of minor importance in this study, however. Rather, we will focus on the second dimension of the AIM—the one that differentiates between open and predetermined information processing strategies.
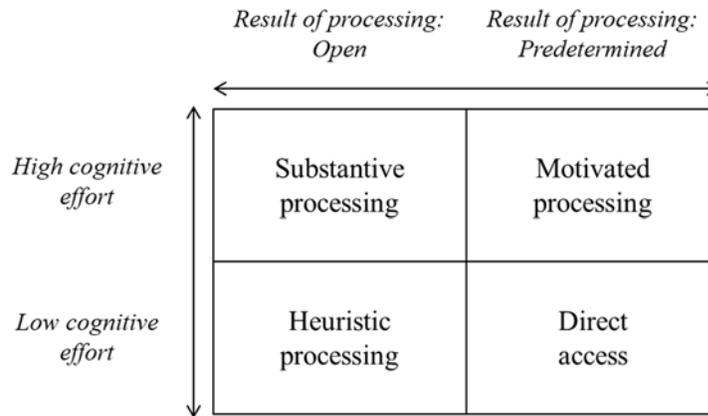
	Result of processing: Open	Result of processing: Predetermined
High cognitive effort	Substantive processing	Motivated processing
Low cognitive effort	Heuristic processing	Direct access

Figure 1. Information processing strategies in the affect infusion
model as illustrated by Kühne, Wirth, and Müller (2012).

In the case of the two predetermined processing strategies—direct access and motivated processing—the result of the information processing, meaning a person's judgment of a specific target, is already predetermined. The judgment is either formed by the retrieval of a prior, stored judgment (direct access) or by a very selective and targeted information processing (motivated processing). In contrast, with the two open processing strategies—heuristic processing and substantive processing—the outcome is not predetermined. Rather, information available during an individual's processing influences the development of a judgment: either information about the target, which the judging person integrates in her or his own knowledge (substantive processing) or the person's current emotions, feelings, and affective state (heuristic processing).

Affect (i.e., emotions and feelings) plays a specific role for each of the four strategies. Applied to political talk shows, for example, if a viewer adopts a heuristic processing strategy (i.e., one of the open strategies), then the information provided by the show will only be processed in a superficial way, and the person's mood will have a direct influence on the judgment outcome. In contrast, with motivated processing, the outcome of the processing is already determined. Therefore, if a viewer adopts this strategy, the content of a political talk show will not have an influence on a viewer's judgment. If this viewer is in a really bad mood, she or he might use the content of the show to try to elevate her or his mood; for example, by selectively looking for positive features in the show (e.g., jokes or positive messages). In addition to these examples, which are derived from an application of the AIM, other influences on the processing of a talk show are possible, such as the viewers' prior affective judgments about the guests.

The Influence of Viewers' Disposition Toward the Guests
of Political Talk Shows on Information Processing

ADT was initially proposed by Zillmann and Cantor (1972) as well as Zillmann and Bryant (1975) and focused on individuals' appreciation of comedy and drama as a consequence of their sympathy or antipathy toward the portrayed characters. In the following years, the theory was also used to explain people's responses to different media stimuli, such as movies and sports, mainly dealing with their enjoyment during exposure (e.g., Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Peterson & Raney, 2008; Weber, Tamborini, Lee, & Stipp, 2008; Zillmann, 1996). As its central assumption, the theory states that media users automatically inhabit an affective disposition toward the characters depicted in a media product. This process starts at the very beginning of exposure[2] and is grounded in moral judgments about the observed characters' actions. Based on these affective dispositions, media users will then hope for a positive outcome and fear a negative outcome for their preferred characters, as well as the opposite outcomes for despised characters (Raney, 2004; Zillmann, 2006).

In most cases, ADT has been applied to exposure to such media content that primarily provides pleasure for its users (e.g., movies and sports; see above). Later on, however, Zillmann and colleagues (Zillmann, Bryant, & Cantor, 1974; Zillmann, Taylor, & Lewis, 1998) as well as, for example, Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger (2007), Boukes and colleagues (2015), and Becker (2014) have also used it in the context of exposure to political messages or news. However, all previous studies have primarily been concerned with people's emotional responses to media messages, from simpler forms, like mere approval, to more complex experiences, like suspense (e.g., Vorderer, Wulff, & Friedrichsen, 1996). Through connecting ADT with the AIM (Forgas, 1995, 2002a, 2002b), we aim to explain how individuals form or reinforce political judgments in the context of their exposure to political media content.

As mentioned, we focus on the AIM's distinction between predetermined and open processing strategies. Briefly summarized, individuals fall back on preexisting judgments, values, and goals or choose arguments according to their mood to form (or reinforce) a judgment in the case of a predetermined processing. In contrast, when applying an open processing strategy, individuals rely on information that is available during the information processing process. According to the AIM (Forgas, 1995), different factors determine whether individuals adopt an open or a predetermined information processing strategy, for example, the level of personal relevance or the degree to which the target is familiar or not.

As with every other situation, we assume that, in principle, all types of information processing strategies can occur during exposure to a political talk show. For this specific

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[2] This can be traced back to a widely known insight gained by different research areas: Individuals depend on the ability to evaluate situations and other individuals, regardless of whether they had been given the possibility to fully understand all aspects and dimensions involved (e.g., Kahneman, 2011).

situation, however, we suggest that an individual's affective disposition toward the media characters, that is, the guests, is one of the factors determining the specific adopted strategy. With respect to political talk shows, it is important to note that there is a crucial difference from fictional formats, such as movies: In the former, the participating characters are typically already known to the audience (Schultz, 2006). Viewers might have seen them in a previous show or know them from other contexts (e.g., in the case of politicians, from the newspapers). Therefore, it is likely that viewers have formed affective dispositions toward at least one of the participating guests before the discussion even begins. This is facilitated by the show's host and/or producer, who have an interest in bringing in diverse and even extreme characters to provoke a lively discussion among viewers (Gäbler, 2011).

Therefore, a viewer who tunes in to a political talk show will be confronted with two or more guests from across the political spectrum. They might have already judged at least one of them to be morally favorable or unfavorable. Following ADT (Raney, 2004; Zillmann, 2006), once built, this disposition is rather unlikely to change during their further exposure to the discussion:

H1:   *Viewers who have a positive disposition toward a talk show guest before watching the program will hold a more positive affective disposition toward the talk show guest after exposure compared with viewers who have a negative disposition before watching the program.*

Following ADT, a positive affective disposition should manifest itself in the viewer's hoping for a positive ending for her or his preferred guest. This could be the hope that this specific guest will "win the argument" or will at least be respected for his or her input in this debate. At the same time, these preferences would, of course, be in opposition to the viewer's most disliked guest, whom the viewer wishes to be convinced, defeated, and maybe even disparaged. Hence, a viewer will presumably adopt the preferred character's judgment. In terms of AIM, this means that she or he will follow a predetermined processing strategy, falling back on a preexisting judgment, or choosing arguments according to his or her goal to form a judgment. The result of this particular processing will then correspond with the viewer's affective disposition: The more positively they judge a talk show guest, the more consistent their judgment will be with that of that guest:

H2:   *Viewers who hold an affective disposition toward a talk show guest will adopt a predetermined information processing strategy, which will be reflected in forming a judgment through their affective disposition toward that guest.*

Of course, there could also be viewers who do not know any of the show's guests in advance and who have not built an affective disposition toward them before the discussion begins. Such viewers might be more be susceptible to the formation of a new judgment. Hence, we assume those viewers will follow an open rather than a predetermined processing strategy. Following the AIM, their judgments will be less dependent on preexisting values and rather strongly influenced by affect (Forgas, 1995). For example, if an education policy issue is
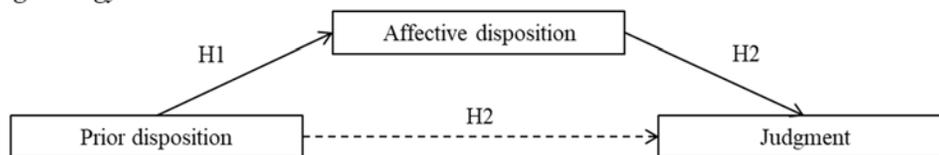
discussed in a political talk show, a viewer will most likely have stronger feelings toward this issue if she or he has a child who attends school compared with a viewer who does not have children.

The personal relevance of the target of judgment has also been outlined by Forgas (1995) as an important factor concerning information processing. In the case of a political talk show where the target of judgment is the political issue under discussion, the viewers' affective involvement with the issue might be of central importance to their opinion. This is supported by the fact that political talk shows often feature emotionally charged political issues that are also discussed in a broader societal context (Schultz, 2006). This might enhance the chance for viewers to happen upon an issue that is of personal relevance for them. Apart from the AIM, several studies have demonstrated the influence of the target's personal relevance to an individual for information processing and judgments (e.g., Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Hence, we suggest the viewers' affective involvement with the political issue to be the main factor when they adopt an open information processing strategy:

H3:   *Viewers who do not hold any prior affective disposition toward a talk show guest will adopt an open information processing strategy, which will be reflected in forming a judgment that is primarily influenced by their affective involvement with the political issue.*

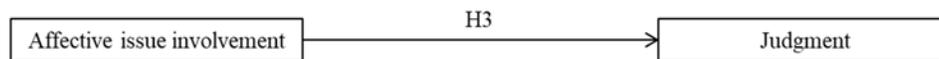Figure 2 summarizes our hypotheses and displays them graphically.

Figure 2. Graphical representation of hypotheses.

Method

Participants

Eighty-four participants were recruited from the local community. Six participants were removed from the sample due to inattentiveness in the experiment or multivariate nonnormality. Further, due to the focus on the participants' formation of a judgment, they were asked whether they already had a determined attitude on the issue using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*I do not agree at all*) to 5 (*I totally agree*). Four participants with a completely determined attitude toward the issue (i.e., with a value of 5) were removed from the data set. Further, we sorted out nine participants who reported prior knowledge of the guest toward whom the participants' affective disposition was manipulated (see below). Finally, eight participants were removed from the sample due to missing values. As a consequence, the sample consisted of 63 participants,[3] with 39 females (61.9%) and 24 males (38.1%), ages 17 to 61 years (M = 30.33, SD = 13.80). The majority had a high school (41.3%) or university degree (30.2%).

Design and Stimulus Material

We created three experimental conditions. Two of them were intended to induce prior dispositions toward the talk show guest in a positive or negative way to evoke a predetermined processing strategy, and the third condition was a neutral one, in which no prior disposition was induced, and was intended to evoke an open processing strategy. The stimulus used was an excerpt from the German political talk show *hart aber fair* (English: tough, but fair; aired on March 18, 2013; two minutes and 49 seconds in length). The show focused on the question of whether taxation in Germany should be increased for rich people. The guest toward whom the viewers' affective disposition was manipulated was not a politician, of whom the participants might have prior knowledge. Instead, the clip showed a longer statement by a middle-class single mother, working as a journalist and author, who also wrote a book on the social decline of the former middle class. Based on her expertise, she argued that due to an increasing inequality in the distribution of wealth and income, social justice and peace was threatened in Germany. When asked by the talk show host about possible solutions, she suggested imposing higher taxes on assets and lower taxes on work.

Experimental Manipulation

For the positive and negative conditions, we designed two newspaper articles, which depicted the talk show guest either as a hero, who showed great social dedication, or as a villain, who absconded from a car accident with a child. The participants in the neutral condition received a third article that described a recent classical concert and had no reference to the guest. Before the actual experiment, we checked the manipulation in a pretest with 21 participants ($n_{positive}$ = 8, $n_{negative}$ = 7, $n_{neutral}$ = 6). To assess the participants' affective disposition, we applied Krakowiak

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[3] For the size of the experimental groups, see Table B2 in Appendix B.

and Oliver's (2012) affective disposition scale (see also below). Despite the small sample size, the results of a one-way analysis of variance showed strong, statistically significant differences between the groups, Welch's $F(2, 9.06) = 22.14$, $p < .001$, $f = 1.48$. The participants' affective disposition toward the guest was highest among those participants who were given the positive article ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.32$) and lowest among those who read the negative article ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 0.69$). The participants in the neutral condition scored in between ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.79$). Although Games-Howell post hoc tests showed that the positive and neutral did not significantly differ from each other ($p < .05$), this is largely due to the small sample size and thus due to the underpowered pretest. As the effect size of Cohen's $d = 1.13$ indicated a large effect, we decided to proceed with this form of manipulation.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted in a separate room in the public library of a midsize city in Germany. The participants were invited to the study via flyers or were directly addressed in the library entrance area or on the street. Participation was rewarded with €10. Upon arrival, each participant was welcomed and randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. They filled in a pretest questionnaire that measured their mood as well as the personal relevance of the issue of social justice to them, their knowledge about it, and the strength of their attitude toward it. Subsequently, the participants read one of the three newspaper articles and viewed the talk show clip on a laptop computer with headphones. Last, all participants filled out a questionnaire that measured their affective disposition toward the guest, their judgment concerning the issue of social justice, their affective issue involvement, cognitive involvement with the clip, external political efficacy, political interest, political orientation, and sociodemographics. Upon completion of the questionnaire the participants were debriefed.

Measures

Intervening and predictor variables. Participants' affective disposition toward the talk show guest was assessed on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*I do not agree at all*) to 5 (*I totally agree*). We used the six items from Krakowiak and Oliver's (2012) affective disposition scale. For example, the participants were given the following statements: "I like the protagonist" or "I would like to be friends with someone similar to the protagonist." Cronbach's alpha was .85. Affective issue involvement with the topic was assessed via five items from Zaichkowsky's (1994) Personal Involvement Inventory.[4] The semantic differentials (on 5-point scales) were employed to measure the participants' thoughts about the issue of social justice, for example, "exciting–unexciting" and "fascinating–mundane." Cronbach's alpha was .76. Both affective disposition and affective issue involvement were assessed after participants had

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[4] Similar to Zaichkowsky's (1994) study, we first employed all of the 10 items and used exploratory factor analysis to build subscales. The analysis left us with two subscales, with five items on each, of which we identified one subscale as representing the participants' affective issue involvement. The other subscale represented their rational issue involvement.

watched the talk show clip. By assessing the influence of these variables in subsequent mediation analyses (see next section), it is possible to get a clearer picture of the information processing strategies used by the participants (Kühne et al., 2012).

Dependent variable. The participants' judgment of the issue was operationalized with regard to the question whether social justice is threatened or not in Germany. It was measured with four items that we had designed for this study on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*I do not agree at all*) to 5 (*I totally agree*): (1) "The social peace within Germany is threatened"; (2) "In Germany, wealth taxes should be higher than income taxes"; (3) "Within Germany, social justice has been achieved"; and (4) "Wages should be increased in the German low-pay sector." The more the participants agreed with the statements, the more consistent they were with the judgment of the talk show guest. Cronbach's alpha was .64.

Control variables. To measure political orientation, the participants were asked for which political party they would vote if the parliamentary elections for the Bundestag were taking place on the following Sunday. They could choose one of the seven most popular parties or write down another party that was in their favor. We recoded the participants' answers into "left" and "right" (according to the parties' positions on a left-to-right spectrum). These categories were dummy coded (i.e., a value of zero indicated preferences for political parties that can be described as conservative or right wing, and a value of one indicated preferences for political parties that can be described as liberal or left wing).[5]

External political efficacy was assessed through the Political Efficacy Short Scale (PEKS; Beierlein, Kemper, Kovaleva, & Rammstedt, 2012). Each participant was asked to agree or disagree with the following statements: "Politicians care about what ordinary citizens think," and "Politicians strive to keep in close touch with the people." The two items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*does totally apply*) to 5 (*does not apply at all*). Both items were strongly correlated ($r = .51$, $p < .001$). Finally, cognitive involvement with the clip was measured by applying four items from Perse (1998), again on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*does totally apply*) to 5 (*does not apply at all*). For example, the participants were asked how far they agree with the following statement: "When I watched the talk show clip, I thought about what the program meant to me and other people." Cronbach's alpha was .62. Further, we measured personal relevance of the issue for the participants, their perceived knowledge about it, and the strength of their attitude toward it, their mood (i.e., arousal and valence), and their political interest and internal political efficacy. However, because there were no significant differences between the experimental groups concerning these variables (see Table B2 in Appendix B), we did not include them into our analyses (details on the measurement of the variables can be found in Appendix A).

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[5] The distribution of the participants in the right and left orientations within the different conditions are reported in Table B1.

Results

In H1, we assumed that participants' affective disposition toward the talk show guest is consistent with the prior positive or negative manipulation. A one-way analysis of variance showed that there was a significant effect of the disposition manipulation on the affective dispositions toward the talk show guest after the clip, $F(2, 60) = 10.53$, $p < .001$, $f = 0.59$. The planned contrast revealed that the positive and negative groups differed in the expected way, with a higher affective disposition score in the positive group ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.84$) compared with the score in the negative group ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.74$), $t(60) = 3.33$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.92$. Therefore, H1 was supported.

To test H2, a simple mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was conducted.[6] According to Forgas (1995) as well as Kühne et al. (2012), mediation analysis is a sufficient method to analyze the processing strategies of the AIM. In line with our assumption, the manipulated prior disposition toward the guest indirectly influenced their judgment concerning social justice through the affective disposition toward the talk show guest (see Table 1 and Figure 3). Participants with a prior positive disposition toward the guest had a more positive affective disposition toward the talk show guest ($a = 0.384$), and participants who had a more positive affective disposition during the clip formed a judgment about social justice that was more consistent with the position of the talk show guest ($b = 0.430$). The bias-corrected confidence interval based on 10,000 bootstrap samples showed that the indirect effect ($ab = 0.165$) did not include 0 [0.048, 0.362]. As the effect size $\kappa^2 = .206$, 95% CI [.058, .399] indicates, the medium indirect effect is around 20% of its maximum possible value (Preacher & Kelley, 2011).

This pattern holds true even if we introduce control variables as covariates into the model.[7] Based on these results, we could also support H2.

Last, H3 posited that, given an open processing strategy, as should be the case in the neutral condition, the judgment about social justice should be primarily influenced by affective issue involvement. A corresponding multiple regression model explained 50% of the variance in participants' judgment of the issue, $F(5, 16) = 3.253$, $p = .032$. In line with H3, affective issue involvement was a statistically significant predictor ($\beta = .538$, $p = .012$) with the highest regression coefficient (see Table 2). Of the control variables, only cognitive involvement with the clip was another significant predictor ($\beta = -.424$, $p = .039$), whereas the affective disposition the viewers might have developed during the clip was not significantly related to the judgment about social justice in the neutral condition ($\beta = -.183$, $p = .350$).

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[6] The means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of the variables can be found in Table B3 in Appendix B.

[7] Details on the results can be obtained from the authors upon request.

Table 1. Mediation Analysis of Effects of Positive and Negative Manipulation of Prior Disposition on Judgment About Social Justice Through Affective Disposition Toward the Talk Show Guest.

Predictors/Covariates		Affective disposition				Judgment about social justice		
		B	SE	p		B	SE	p
Constant	i_1	3.257	0.129	<.001	i_2	2.200	0.556	<.001
Positive/negative manipulation	a	0.384	0.129	.005	c'	−0.135	0.143	.351
Affective disposition		—	—	—	b	0.430	0.156	.009

$$R^2 = .198$$
$$F(1, 38) = 8.806, p = .005$$

$$R^2 = .187$$
$$F(2, 37) = 4.042, p = .026$$

Indirect effect ab = 0.165, 95% CI [0.048, 0.362]

Effect size κ^2 = .206, 95% CI [.058, .399]

Note. N = 40. The confidence intervals are bias-corrected bootstrapped CIs based on 10,000 samples.
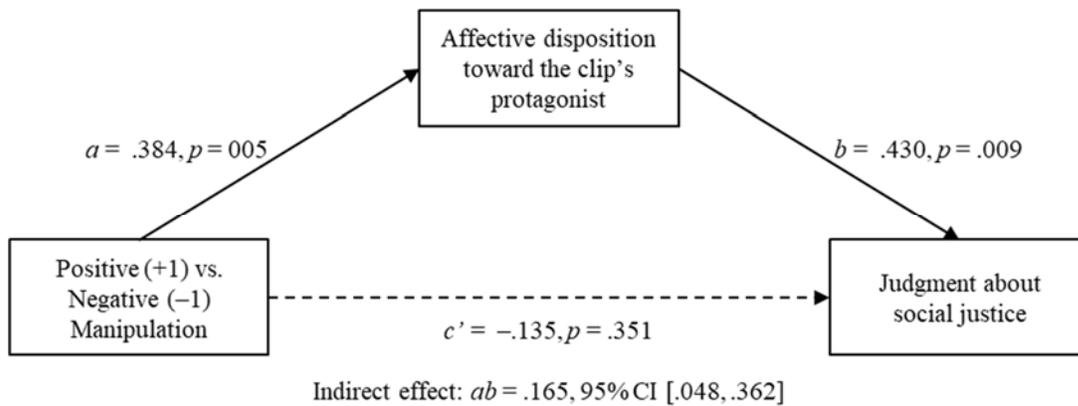

Figure 3. Indirect effect of the manipulation of the prior disposition on the judgment about social justice. The mediator included in the model was the affective disposition toward the talk show guest. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. The confidence intervals are bias-corrected bootstrapped CIs based on 10,000 samples. See Table 1 for details.

Table 2. Regression Analysis Predicting Judgment About Social Justice
in the Condition With Open Processing Strategy.

Predictor	Judgment about social justice		
	B	SE	β
Affective issue involvement	0.359	0.127	.538*
Affective disposition	−0.119	0.123	−.183
Cognitive clip involvement	−0.229	0.102	−.424*
Political orientation	−0.079	0.180	−.085
External efficacy	−0.137	0.094	−.277
	$R^2 = .504$, $F(5, 16) = 3.253$, $p = .032$		

Note. $N = 22$. All significance tests were conducted at an alpha level of .05. *$p < .05$.

Discussion

Summary of the Study's Findings

According to our findings, the affective disposition viewers hold toward a talk show guest is an important factor in how they judge the guest after they have seen the show (H1). This replicates earlier findings in the field of affective disposition (e.g., Zillmann, 2006; Zillmann & Cantor, 1972): In the thought processes of viewers, the villain usually remains the villain and the hero remains the hero. The content only changes this if a story twist facilitates it. However, such story twists are rare in the structured debates political talk shows offer (Schultz, 2006). Moreover, viewers' affective disposition toward a talk show's guest is one crucial factor for their processing of the information dealt with in this political talk show (H2). If viewers hold such a disposition, their information processing and its outcome, their judgment of the political issue at stake, are already predetermined. This study shows that the way it is predetermined is dependent on the valence of this affective disposition: The more the viewers judged the guest as morally favorable, the more they followed her judgment about social justice.

Further, our findings suggest that viewers who do not hold an affective disposition toward a guest in a political talk show pursue a rather open information-processing strategy, which leaves room for formation of new judgments (H3). In this case, the judgments were rather influenced by the viewers' affective involvement with the issue.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

These findings outline the importance that affective dispositions of media users toward media products and their elements have for their opinion-making process. The study supports earlier findings, which already emphasized the importance of moods and emotions for people's political judgments (e.g., Boukes et al., 2015; Isbell et al., 2006; Wirth, Schemer, & Matthes, 2010). More specifically, it provides new insights into the interplay between affect and political judgments. With these insights we can support and supplement assumptions from the AIM in a

new research area. We were able to show that affective dispositions toward a guest in a political talk show serve as an "activator" for predetermined processing strategies in the sense of the AIM (Forgas 1995) or even a foundation for later judgments. Specifically, the viewers' affective dispositions toward the talk show guest had a strong impact on their political judgments; one that even trait-like individual characteristics like political orientation could not compensate.

Moreover, we found that the viewers' affective dispositions not only influence their opinions but also prevent any new judgments from being made. This is also in line with older social psychological theories like balance theory (Heider, 1958), which suggest cognitive consistency is a core component of information processing. Furthermore, this result adds to earlier insights regarding the behavior of political talk show viewers. Roth et al. (2014) demonstrated through a survey that two factors are of central importance when it comes to the decision of whether a show is considered good (and, therefore, watched) or not: Who is the host and who are the guests? This means that the choice of guests for the show can influence exposure as well as processing. However, it might also lead to reduced effects compared with the ones we found in the laboratory. After all, viewers might simply change the channel when the talk show includes a guest they cannot stand.

Nonetheless, the findings also suggest that the judgments of viewers do not exclusively depend on the talk show guests and on viewers' affective dispositions toward them. If viewers are indifferent toward one or more guests (i.e., if they do not hold an affective disposition), their feelings toward the political issue at stake appear to be responsible for the resulting political judgment. In this case, the affect that is relevant for information processing is dependent on the discussed political issue. The original AIM expects moods and affects that are not directly connected to the situation to influence information processing. However, according to our results with regard to political talk shows, affect that relates to the formats' content seems to outweigh people's individual moods and emotions. Of course, this does not completely contradict the suggestion that viewers' other moods and emotions—such as those that are independent from the specific media content—can also have an influence on their political judgments, as, for example, Wirth and colleagues (2010) have found and as Forgas (1995) postulates in the original AIM. Nonetheless, it is a finding that adds to the existing ideas of how information processing of political content looks like.

Taken together, these findings support talk show producers' efforts to compose rounds of diverse and extreme "talking heads" (Gäbler, 2011), because such a diversity also enables a variety of dispositions or no dispositions at all (when the guests are not well-known). However, it also leaves a rather pessimistic picture of the audience: The decision about who will appear as guests in a specific talk show episode seems to have a strong impact on the political judgments of the viewers. Either way, the question arises of how important the "hard" content of political talk shows actually is: Does it really matter what the guests are discussing, if their arguments are of high quality, or even if these arguments are factually correct? Or are the morality or the sympathy of the guests, or simply the producers' selection of guests and/or topics, the decisive factors for inducing affective responses, which then impact the information processing among the audience?

The findings of this study suggest that not all of the viewpoints and arguments exchanged in a political talk show have an influence on viewers' political judgments. Of course, people's political judgments are not primarily or even exclusively based on their affect and feelings toward characters and issues. While we found this to be the case in the context of exposure to political talk shows, this does not mean that these findings can be generalized to every other form of political media content. To the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that people process the information provided by other political media formats, such as television news or newspapers, in a distinctively different way, because the relevance of (diverse) characters and the focus on one single political issue is almost unique for the format of political talk shows. Furthermore, the shows' distinctive potential to entertain its viewers (e.g., Mattheiß et al., 2013; Roth et al., 2014) provides, compared with more "serious" formats, much better opportunities for affective responses to emerge (Roth, 2016).

Limitations

One major limitation of the study relates to the fact that our manipulation could have primed not only different dispositions toward the guest in the show. For example, the negative text about the guest could have also created discrete emotions such as sadness or anger in the participants. These emotions might, in addition to their affective dispositions, have had distinct effects on the participants' information processing and judgments. According to alternative theories on this matter such as the feelings-as-information theory (e.g., Schwartz & Clore, 2007), these effects might have been rather different from the ones we predicted. For example, it has been shown that fear leads to rather pessimistic judgments, whereas anger is rather associated with optimistic views and choices (Lerner & Keltner, 2001).

This, however, leads to another problem. In the original theory, Forgas (1995) explicated the influence of mood and emotion. We did not find differences between the groups or effects of those variables in our analyses; instead, the affective involvement with the issue possessed the central role in the process. This seems plausible from the viewpoint of how the format political talk show looks and what it offers (emotional topics of societal importance), but it is to some extent debatable given the original assumptions of the AIM. Furthermore, to enhance our internal validity and feasibility of the study, we only manipulated the disposition toward one guest and only showed statements by her in the clip. This, however, reduces the external validity of our study because political talk shows live on the debate and argument between participants. Such a more diverse environment might also change the specific impact of affective dispositions on viewers' judgments. Moreover, whereas our ecological validity should actually be fairly high due to using a stimulus from a real political talk show, at the same time this makes it more difficult to generalize our results to other show formats or discussion topics.

Several other limitations need to be mentioned: First, we did not check whether the participants judged the newspaper articles to be credible and authentic. Although we found the manipulation strategy to be successful, it might, of course, have limited its strength if some of the participants became suspicious while reading the articles. Second, we did not ask the

participants after the study if they had been aware or suspicious of the study's goals. Neither can we rule out that demand characteristics—cues in the study that might have influenced participants' responses—might have inflated the effects of the manipulations. According to Orne (1962), all experiments have demand characteristics. Thus, future studies should examine these alternative explanations by conducting postexperimental interviews. Further, the viewers' opinions about the quality of statements made in the show were not measured. However, this could have influenced the form of information processing (which is an important factor in which processing strategy is chosen; Forgas, 1995; Roth, 2016). It will therefore be an important variable to be controlled in future studies. Moreover, it is unclear whether the manipulation of affective disposition was effective long enough to prevent other factors (e.g., low quality of an argument) from taking over the determination of information processing. Last, although the study employed an experimental setting, most of the variables were measured after the participants were exposed to the political talk show video clip. Therefore, the inferences drawn on premises of causality are primarily based on the study's theoretical background rather than on the statistical procedures.

Conclusion

The results of this study show how beneficial a combination of concepts derived from entertainment theory and from information processing models can be. By focusing on influences of affective disposition as well as affective issue involvement, the study shed new light on the relationship between political judgments and political entertainment. In sum, however, it justifies rather pessimistic conclusions about the societal effects of political talk shows: They seem not to be capable of educating those viewers who already hold a specific political opinion. Whereas this may not be surprising as it is in line with the past decades of research on persuasion, this study can offer advice on how to understand such predetermined processing. For example, based on our results, we would encourage media professionals to let more "unknown voices" speak, as this should support the free opinion formation of citizens.

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Appendix A
Operationalization of the Further Covariates

In the pretest questionnaire, the participants' personal relevance of the issue was assessed using one item suggested by Rössler (1997): "How important do you consider the topic of social justice?" The strength of their attitude toward the issue was measured via the question "How determined is your attitude toward the topic of social justice?" Both items were measured on 5-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (*not important at all* and *not determined at all*) to 5 (*very important* and *very determined*). As for the respondents' perceived knowledge about the issue, we asked them to rate it by providing the percentage to which they believe they were knowledgeable (from 0% for no knowledge at all to 100% for complete knowledge). To measure the mood of the participants, we applied Bradley and Lang's (1994) self-assessment manikins for the emotional states of valence and arousal.

In the posttest questionnaire, the participants' political interest was measured through the five items of Otto and Bacherle's (2011) Short Scale Political Interest (SSPI). For example, the participants could agree or disagree on statements like "I pursue political processes with great curiosity" or "In general, I am very interested in politics." The items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*does totally apply*) to 5 (*does not apply at all*), with

Cronbach's α = .88. Last, internal political efficacy was measured through the Political Efficacy Short Scale (PEKS), established by Beierlein and colleagues (2012). Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statements "I am good at understanding and assessing important political issues" and "I have the confidence to take an active part in a discussion about political issues." The items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*does totally apply*) to 5 (*does not apply at all*) and were strongly correlated (r = .53, p < .001).

Appendix B
Tables

Table B1. Overview of Participants' Political Orientation.

	Condition		
	Positive (n = 19)	Negative (n = 20)	Neutral (n = 22)
Political orientation	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Left	9 (23.1)	12 (30.8)	18 (46.2)
Right	10 (45.5)	8 (36.4)	4 (18.2)

Note. N = 61. Participants' party affiliations were recoded according to a left-to-right political spectrum. The lower number of participants is due to missing values.

Table B2. Differences in Control Variables Between Conditions (One-Way Independent ANOVAs).

	Condition								
	Positive			Negative			Neutral		
Control variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Personal relevance of issue	19	4.21	.71	21	4.14	.73	23	4.26	.62
Strength of attitude toward issue	19	3.26	.73	21	3.48	.75	23	3.09	.79
Perceived knowledge about issue	19	54.21	191.81	21	62.29	14.33	23	55.22	19.39
Mood: valence	18	2.17	.71	19	1.79	.86	23	1.74	.69
Mood: arousal	18	4.11	.90	18	3.72	1.07	23	3.83	.83
Political interest	19	3.28	1.05	21	3.07	.96	23	3.14	.77
Internal political efficacy	19	3.39	1.11	21	3.02	.84	23	2.80	.84

Note. Personal relevance of issue: $F(2, 60)$ = .16, p = .85; perceived knowledge about issue: $F(2, 60)$ = 1.24, p = .297; strength of attitude toward issue: $F(2, 60)$ = 1.44, p = .246; valence: $F(2, 57)$ = 1.86, p = .166; arousal: $F(2, 56)$ = 0.85, p = .433; political interest: $F(2, 60)$ = .286, p = .753; internal political efficacy: $F(2, 60)$ = 2.11, p = .13. The varying number of participants is due to missing values.

Table B3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations of the Independent, Moderating, and Dependent Variables and of the Covariates.

	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Affective disposition	63	3.46	0.83	—											
2. Affective issue involvement	62	3.34	0.65	.32*	—										
3. Judgment about issue	63	3.62	0.68	.37**	.53**	—									
4. Cognitive clip involvement	63	3.32	0.82	.22	.17	.08	—								
5. External political efficacy	63	2.11	0.84	.04	.12	−.30*	.15	—							
6. Personal relevance of issue	63	4.21	0.68	.33**	.37**	.23	.21	.04	—						
7. Strength of attitude toward issue	63	3.27	0.77	.19	.33**	.15	.10	.15	.39**	—					
8. Perceived knowledge about issue	63	3.43	1.00	.32**	.43**	.73**	.01	−.25*	.23	.14	—				
9. Mood: valence	57	3.16	0.73	−.05	.03	−.24	−.11	.27*	.28*	.14	−.21	—			
10. Mood: arousal	59	3.88	0.93	−.11	.20	.10	.15	−.19	−.12*	−.05	.16	.11	—		
11. Political interest	63	3.16	0.91	−.02	.09	−.00	.36**	.28*	.02	.20	−.12	.18	−.14	—	
12. Internal political efficacy	63	3.06	0.95	−.09	−.02	−.22	.16	.26*	.06	.19	−.18	.39**	−.25	.57**	—

Note. *p* < .05. **p* < .01, two-tailed. The varying number of participants is due to missing values.