

Using Media in the Foreign Language. Case Study Media Use of the Students of the Babes-Bolyai University, Romania

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Résumé : Ces dernières années, grâce à l'Internet, l'accès aux médias de langue étrangère est devenu de plus en plus facile, fait qui explique l'augmentation du nombre d'utilisateurs de langue étrangère. Cet article porte sur l'utilisation des médias de langue allemande par les étudiants roumains des départements de langue allemande de l'université de Babes-Bolyai de Cluj-Napoca. Le

fondement théorique de l'étude consiste dans la théorie de l'usage et de la satisfaction. Notre recherche accentue le fait que les étudiants de la langue allemande utilisent souvent la télévision allemande et les sites Web allemands.

Mots-clés : Usages, approche, utilisation des médias, information

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*L'usage des medias dans l'apprentissage des langues étrangères :
étude des cas*

Abstract: In the last few years, thanks to the Internet, access to foreign language media has become more and more easy, which is why the number of foreign language media users has increased. This research focuses on exploring the use of German speaking media by Romanian students from the German speaking departments of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. The theoretical background of the study is the Uses and Gratifications theory. The research methods applied were

the focus group, followed by a survey applied to a representative number of students. Our research highlighted the fact that the students from German language programs often used German television and German websites. In regard to the German media in general, most respondents stated that they satisfy, in a very large amount, the needs described by the Uses and Gratifications model.

Keywords: Uses and Gratifications Approach, media use, information

Introduction

Together with the industrial revolution and the technological boom, mass media has known a tremendous rise of the role it plays in people's lives. Mass media has become a role-model, it has partially appropriated the duties of the school and has even managed to become a meeting point for different cultures, codes and norms. But it has also contributed to the learning of the abilities necessary for getting by in society. So, not only the pedagogical and psychological roles should be underlined, but its economic significance also bears an equally great importance: other characteristics of mass media are its commercial and propagandistic dimensions, which are responsible for the personality development of the youth and not only¹.

¹ http://www.gpi-online.de/upload/PDFs/EU-Media/_Kaikitis1-Einfluss_des_Fernsehens-10-09-04.pdf (07.01.2010).

The present paper takes a look at the role played by mass media in the life of young people, of students, because, according to Japanese researchers, in a developed information society, among others, the number of students who use mass media should represent „half of the population of the same age”. Naturally this, together with the knowledge-gap hypothesis, which deals with the great difference between the degree of information of the older and younger generations (Dobrescu; Bârgăoanu, 2003, p. 82), should point at the importance of young people and their pattern of using or dismissing mass media.

Radio has lost ground in the last years and is to be found today mainly in cars as a companion in everyday life: information about traffic or about the weather and the latest headlines are a must. Newspapers, which once were the media, the only source of information, are used nowadays only by people who are looking for specific information or as packing paper. Nonetheless, the internet, with all the online offers, is in vogue: shopping, searching for information, working and even having fun have become, in the meantime, a true lifestyle.

The majority of young people try to reinvent themselves with the help of the new media and to satisfy their own constantly multiplying needs, while using the technical media as an approach. The interests and information needs can be covered easily and more intensively by the usage of technology, but the socialization process needs a more strenuous effort. The most popular pastime, surfing the internet and everything that this implies, but also the media competence required by society, slowly but steadily sweep away the role of reading or practicing sports. Studies have proven that more than 50% of students are followers of the new way to socialize: they operate different platforms and Web 2.0 elements, be it StudiVZ (more than 60% of German students are members) MySpace, YouTube, Twitter or IM. In their search for new friends, they are drawn by the ease of meeting new people. Friends and circle of acquaintance are no longer “won“, but collected and ranked on the basis of aesthetic criteria. But this individualized use of media also offers the students the possibility to meet people who share their interests. The struggle to put oneself on the market can lead to the discovery of common ground, the enlargement of the circle of friends and to love². Initially, the media was only a means to convey information; today it already dictates everyday life (Dobrescu; Bârgăoanu, 2003, p. 215-240). The TV set remains the medium which influences the most, regardless of whether it can be considered a valid source of information or not. Priming and framing, seen from an economic and political point of view, also have their merits. As Patrick Le Lay rightly considered: “so that advertising should come across well, the brains of the viewers must be available for it. The purpose of our broadcast is to prepare them for that.” (Bohler, 2009, p. 127) Political information is also heavily

² <http://www.jugendschutz-niedersachsen.de/Importe/pdf/einfluss-neuer-medien.pdf>
(07.01.2010)

transmitted, so that the media has taken in hand the role of informing and schooling the population about politics.

Cluj-Napoca is a university town, where, year after year, students from all over the country come to study at the most prestigious university, the Babes-Bolyai University. This university has 21 faculties, out of which 8 have German speaking departments: the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science, the Faculty of Biology and Geology, the Faculty of Geography, the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, the Faculty of Letters, the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration and the Faculty of European Studies. Due to the fact that this university has such a large number of Romanian students that study in German, we had the idea to do this study that wants to research the role of the German speaking media in their lives. We wanted to find out if these students follow the German speaking media, what kind of German speaking media they use and especially the reasons for which they use them.

Theoretical background

Our research has the Uses and Gratifications Approach (UGA) (Katz and Gurevich/Haas, 1973; Levy/Windhal 1984, p. 51-78, Robertson, 1984; Palmgreen, 1984, p. 51-62) as starting point, which claims that people use media to satisfy four types of needs: they want to be informed, to relax, to use the media content as a topic of discussion and the fourth is the need to ritualize, meaning that people follow certain programs or read certain papers regularly, because they offer support in their day to day lives. The question is no longer: What do the media do to people? The question is: What do people do with the media? (McQuail/Windhal, 2000, p. 109).

The research of uses and gratifications is developed around a few items, such as determining the structure and the differentiation of communicational needs, the frequency and intensity of media use in order to obtain the gratifications corresponding to the different needs, the complexity and the specific functions of different media categories, the relation between the gratifications obtained through media use and those obtained through other means, e.g. interpersonal communication, the way in which media use produces post-communication effects (Bonfadelli, 2004, p. 171).

Specialized literature explains which the needs that people are trying to fulfill through media usage are, and most important: where these needs come from. It also distinguishes the following types of needs that are gratified by the use of media:

- cognitive needs: arise from the orientation and decision problems of the agent in his environment, and include various sub-dimensions such as unspecific curiosity, environment control, learning, reality exploring, knowledge increase and guide for action, but also self experience. The need for information, for extending one's knowledge, curiosity, the need to control the environment one lives in,

- affective needs: are subject to mood control actions, such as relaxation and recreation through entertainment, diversion, discharge, or even displacement of environmental requirements (escapism), but also search for adrenaline and excitement as a pastime,

- social interactive needs: are based on the desire for companionship and social contact and recognition by other people. In this respect, media provide events and topics for discussion and possible identification with people presented by the media,

- interactive habitual needs: arise from the desire for trust, security, safety and stability in relation to various reference groups, such as family, friends, one's own country etc. Media enable this by habitual usage patterns and ritualized content structures (Palmgreen, 1984, p.51-62; Bonfadelli, 2004, p. 171-172; McQuail/Windhal, 2000, p. 109; Levy/ Windhal 1984, p. 51-78).

In a following model Palmgreen explains this whole process as follows: There are social and psychological origins of needs, which lead to expectations from the mass media or from other sources, leading to different patterns of media usage, with the result of Media gratification, or other consequences (Palmgreen, 1984, p. 51-62).

Media use has developed as a distinguished field of research by differentiating from the media effects research. Michael Meyen presents three categories of factors that influence media use: The first category consists in structural factors, such as the degree of industrialization, of urbanization and religion, work and life conditions, tradition, media offer, leisure alternatives, climate, political system and media law. The second are the individual socio-demographic and position factors, such as income, available time, structure of daily activities, professional position, education, age, gender. The third factors are individual social characteristics, like fundamental needs, individual psychological structure, personal biography, experience in media use, family status, group of friends, social networks, the actual reception situation, attitudes, orientations and values. These are all determining factors of media use behaviour (Meyen, 2004, p. 47).

Methods

The research methodology used both qualitative and quantitative methods. In a preliminary phase we organized four separate focus groups of 8-10 students from various faculties in order to identify their interests and to use their answers as benchmarks and create a basis for our research. Our study was completed by a survey.

We chose to organize focus groups because we analysed a homogeneous population: the students. The focus group is an excellent method for preparing a broader research because only a rough interview guide is needed and the respondents talk freely about the suggested topics. This way, the people who carry out the study can find additional information on the grounds of which they can elaborate the research instruments for the study. On the basis of the vast answers given by the participants, we managed to come up with a series of relevant questions and to draw up a questionnaire in the view of verifying the formulated hypothesis.

We elaborated a questionnaire that focused on the four needs mentioned in the UGA model: information, relaxation, ritualization, using content as a topic of discussion, to which we added the need to improve the knowledge of the German language, while at the same time giving space to specify other needs, which could be stated as answers to open-ended questions. The questions in the questionnaire dealt with the four types of German speaking media in Romania: TV, radio, written press and the Internet. We oriented on results that have to be as specific as possible, thus we narrowed down the range of subjects, surveying only students from the German speaking departments, both undergraduate and master students. Overall, there are approximately 700 students registered in the German speaking departments. After applying the random step, we interviewed 146 students. 63% of respondents were female, 27% were male and 10% did not want to specify.

The age of the respondents was between 18 and 32, the most, 83%, being between 19 and 21. In regard to the faculties they attend, the proportions were as follows: 26% European Studies, 22% Philology, 21% Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, 14% Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, 7% Biology, 5% Geography and 5% did not specify the faculty which they attend. The proportions vary in part because of the different number of students registered to each of these faculties.

Most of the students which answered this questionnaire were, of course, from Cluj-Napoca – 22%, and neighbouring cities, such as Brasov – 15%, Sibiu – 6%, Bistrita – 6%, Medias – 3%, Târgu Mures – 2%, Sighisoara – 2%. The reasons for which a large number of students of the Babes-Bolyai University come from these

areas are, on one hand, the proximity of their home towns to this university town, and on the other hand, the fact that these cities have the best schools and high schools where German is used as a mother tongue.

Findings

The central question from which we have started is: what is the role of German speaking media for students registered in the German departments of the faculties within the Babes-Bolyai University?

The first discussion with the groups revealed the fact that very few of the respondents have access to German media in Cluj. In this respect, many of them use these media when they visit their parents in their home towns. But all of them have access to the Internet, so they made a compromise in order to watch their favorite programs: *I don't have German TV channels in Cluj, but I watch German television online* (f, 21). Another student underlined the fact that not all notorious German TV channels can be watched online, without having to pay a fee: *I use the websites of PRO7 and RTL when I want to watch their programs, but for some of their biggest and most appreciated shows one has to pay a fee, so I watch only those which are for free* (f, 20).

Most of the respondents are used to the German media offer since their childhood: *I am using German media now and I have been using them when I was a child* (m, 21). In their statements we could identify words that indicate a certain habitual use and the frequency of using certain media offers, words such as: *I am used to ,always, sometimes, in the evening, in spring, once, still, monthly. Some of these statements are: I am always watching the Simpsons. I cannot watch the Simpsons in English, it just seems funny, because I am used to their German voices* (f, 19). Another statement which shows a very differentiate habitual use: *I sometimes watch TV, PRO7, RTL, in the evening I watch Taff and in spring I watch Germany's next Top Model. I have once bought the magazine Stern, but I haven't finished reading it yet* (f, 20). This statement shows that the frequency of using German newspapers is conditioned by the frequency of appearance in Romania: *Monthly, when the newspapers are issued and sometimes when I feel like it, I go and buy them. Sometimes I just surf the net and read them online* (f, 22). A student talked about the fact that watching German television is absolutely normal for him: *We have been watching these (programs) since we were little, so we are used to them* (m, 21). We could also identify a certain dependency on these media, because some of the female respondents watch German soap operas, which means that they have a ritual.

Some of the reasons for preferring German media offers is their quality: The content of German newspapers is considerably better and definitely more relevant than that of Romanian newspapers (f, 22). All Romanian media, almost all TV shows are copies of German TV shows and are not as good as the original (m, 22). On the other hand, one of the respondents has complained about the fact that some of the German programs have a poorer quality, than they had initially: The show Galileo was great before. Now it is very weak (f, 21).

Almost all respondents agree that German media help them learn or upgrade their German speaking skills. One of the students stated that he likes certain shows just because they are in German: *The language is and was a central factor. When we were kids, we were watching RTL2. This program offered us the best cartoons* (f, 20). Some of the students criticized the fact that all movies or shows are dubbed. We learned that they would prefer them to be subtitled: *Yes, the translations of movies (including voice)... I find them quite bad. There are some movies with actors which have a really pleasant voice, and those movies are that good because of the way that person is speaking, but then comes a German and translates everything, and then the whole movie is ruined... I like the way Romanians are dealing with this aspect. In Romania all foreign movies have subtitles, so the translation does not happen at a vocal level* (f, 22).

One very interesting aspect that caught our attention during the focus group is that Romanian students find even German informative shows, such as news magazines, to be relaxing: *I like to watch the news on German channels. Besides the fact that they are more informative, they are also very pleasant, also due to the fact that they are only 10 minutes long, whereas in Romania they are too long, about 50 minutes* (m, 20).

The focus groups contributes of course to the process of drafting questions, but they helped us also to exclude some, not to include in the questionnaire some of the questions that are absolutely not relevant for our target group. One of these questions is about whether the students are participating at the events organized by the German Cultural Centre. Almost all respondents have stated that they don't have the necessary time to go and watch German movies or read German magazines there. They prefer to do it at home. These answers determined us not to include the question about the offers of the Cultural Centre in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire

The first questions in the questionnaire have revealed the following:

- the majority of the students, 95% of them, mostly read German internet pages,
- 66% of them watch programs on German television channels,

- 27% of the total read German written press and
- only 20% listen to German radio stations.

In the focus groups students said that many of them no longer have access to German speaking channels in Cluj-Napoca, a fact confirmed by the survey answers, meaning that most of the students watch German TV channels when they go to their home towns, because they still have access to these channels there. The low number of students who read German press can be explained by the high price of German newspapers on the Romanian market.

With regard to the frequency of use of German media, results show that, generally, students watch German TV channels and read German web pages weekly, while German radio programs and German press articles are being followed on a monthly basis.

Almost half, 47%, of respondents stated that they have been using German media even since kindergarten, 28% since primary school and only 7% since university. This leads to the conclusion that most young people who choose to study German are interested in this language and are familiar with it from a young age, despite the fact that a very low number of them are of German descent or speak this language in the home.

Our research has also revealed the fact that those who have been accustomed to German media from a young age, since kindergarten, are the ones who now use German media the most frequently, and this frequency drops in the case of respondents who started using them later.

In regard to the degree of information offered by the German media in general, 61% of the respondents think that they offer mostly relevant information, 18% think that the information offered is mostly irrelevant. There is also a small, but not neglectable, percentage, of 7%, who are of the opinion that the information offered has a very small relevance. In concern to relaxation, 56% answered that German media help them relax and 78% stated that German media offer them conversation topics. Next we will describe the results for each medium.

German television

The questions above reveal the fact that 66% of the young people surveyed watch German TV programs. The reasons for which they do it are the following: 54% of respondents watch the TV programs mostly to improve their knowledge of German.

In what satisfying the other needs is concerned, to each question about 40% answered that they watch these programs out of habit, to relax and to use the contents as discussion topics.

Consequently, in regard to German television, the answers revealed the fact that it equally satisfies, in a large amount, all the needs described by the UGA model.

German written press

We would like to remind the fact that the questions above revealed that 27% of the students involved in the survey read German written press. The results concerning the reasons for which Romanian students read German newspapers are the following: in regard to the amount of information offered by newspapers, we could not identify a common point, because the answers are distributed almost equally on our scale. 28% of them find German newspapers very informative, 35% mostly informative, 45% mostly uninformative and 30% very uninformative.

We have established and discussed the fact that the frequency of reading German newspapers is low, this is why the need to ritualize is not satisfied in this medium, figures show that only 8.2% of respondents read articles in German newspapers out of habit.

With regard to relaxation, using the content as discussion topic and improving the knowledge of German, the answers are again equally shared, for about half of them these needs are satisfied, for the other half they are not.

For half of respondents, the German press satisfies the need for information, the need for relaxation, the need for using the content as conversation topic and the need to improve the knowledge of German. The only unsatisfied need is the need to ritualize, which could be due to the high price of German newspapers and magazines on the Romanian market. This is why the students have not turned reading the press into a habit, a ritual, in the same way they did with the other German media. Thus, only three out of four needs are satisfied by the German written press.

German radio

The same tendencies were noticed in the case of radio. We have learnt from the answers to the previous questions that only 20% of respondents listen to German radio stations. About 65% of them said that the radio does not satisfy any of the needs indicated by us, or only satisfies them in a small amount.

On the other hand, they have indicated other reasons for which they listen to German radio programs, the most frequent of which being listening to German music. Thus, the UGA model only applies in a very small amount.

German websites

The reasons for which the respondents read information on German websites are very conclusive and clear. The statement: *I use German websites to be informed*, applies to 52% of respondents in a very large amount and for 29% of them in a large amount. Only 3% answered that these websites only inform them in a very small amount.

The habit and relaxation factors play an important part here as well. More than half of respondents access those websites out of habit or to relax. The ratio between the ones who use the content of these websites as a conversation topic and the ones who do not is almost equal: 37%:31%.

Meanwhile, more than half of respondents stated that they were improving their knowledge of German through the use of German websites.

Another reason for many students was accessing these websites to procure material needed for writing projects for various courses and seminars.

We were interested in finding out what kind of online formats are being used by students when they access German websites. We would like to remind the fact that the total percentage of respondents who access German websites is 95%. They had the option to tick several online formats that they constantly use; the results were the following:

- 60% read German newspapers online
- 49% use German search engines
- 30% listen to German online radio,
- 30% watch online TV shows,
- 27% read German blogs,
- 20% frequent German social networks.

Other reasons mentioned by respondents were: accessing e-mail accounts on German platforms, using online dictionaries and looking for information written in German on Wikipedia.

These questions were actually control questions, used to verify the validity of the previous answers. The previous answers were indeed confirmed by these answers. The respondents stated that the main reason when accessing German websites was information, which was confirmed by the type of websites used by most of them: online newspapers, search engines and in last place we have social networks, used for entertainment, relaxation and socialization.

Conclusions

Our research highlighted the fact that the Uses and Gratifications theory applies consistently only in the case of two of the German media channels used by students in the German departments of the Babeş-Bolyai University: German television and German websites.

Out of the total number of students, most of them, 95%, read German websites, 66% of them watch shows on German TV channels, 27% read German printed press and only 20% listen to German radio stations. We have also learnt that the limited access that they have to these media outlets is a factor that has an influence on the choice of media that they use and on the frequency. In regard to the German media in general, most respondents stated that they satisfy, in a very large amount, the needs described by the Uses and Gratifications model.

In concern to German television, the answers have highlighted the fact that it satisfies, in the same large measure, all the needs described by the UGA model.

For half of the respondents, the German press satisfies their need for information, relaxation, for using content as conversation topic and the need to improve their knowledge of German. The only unsatisfied need is the need for ritualization, which could be due to the high price of German newspapers and magazines. This is why students have not made a habit, a ritual, out of reading the press in the same way they did in the case of the other German media. Thus, three out of four needs are satisfied by the German press.

The majority of respondents stated that radio does not satisfy any of the needs indicated by us, or only does so in a small amount. One of the reasons for which they listen to German radio, which was frequently indicated by many of them, was German music. Through radio, young Romanians keep in touch with German music in general, but especially with the new German hits. We can say that in this case the UGA model only applies in a very small amount.

The above mentioned model applies almost fully when we talk about the role of websites in the lives of Romanian students. Most respondents stated that these websites satisfy their need for information, relaxation, ritualization, improvement of language skills, and for a smaller number, meaning half of respondents, the need to use the content as conversation topic.

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