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Why Napoleon is exciting time after time: media logics and history

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Susanne Popp / Jutta Schumann / Miriam Hannig (eds.)

Commercialised History: Popular History Magazines in Europe

PETER LANG EDITION

Susanne Popp / Jutta Schumann / Miriam Hannig (eds.)

Commercialised History: Popular History Magazines in Europe

This volume of essays is the result of the EU project 'EHISTO', which dealt with the mediation of history in popular history magazines and explored how history in the commercialised mass media can be used in history teaching in order to develop the media literacy and the transcultural competences of young people. The volume offers articles which for the first time address the phenomenon of popular history magazines in Europe and their mediating strategies in a foundational way. The articles are intended as introductory material for teachers and student teachers. The topic also offers an innovative approach in terms of making possible a European cross-country comparison, in which results based on qualitative and quantitative methods are presented, related to the content focus areas profiled in the national magazines.

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Susanne Kinnebrock

Why Napoleon is exciting time after time: media logics and history

At first glance, a history magazine seems to be a self-contradiction from the point of view of journalism, since the journalist is committed to observing events which are current and not past. Accordingly, the continuing and internationally-evident 'history boom in the media'[1] as well as the range of media-offerings that are supposed to satisfy the 'longing for the past'[2] whether through TV documentaries, films, historical events or extensive anniversary reports, may be surprising at first. The diverse range of mass media also includes that segment of the market devoted to popular history magazines, a segment which seems to be growing and whose range appears to be diversifying.[3]

History magazines can firstly be regarded as commercial media products which primarily follow the logic of the market and the presumed interests of the audience (see also the contribution by Fabio Crivellari in this volume). If one wants to devote more attention to their recurring topics, their content-related focus and their patterns of presentation, it

1 Cf. Barbara Korte/Sylvia Paletschek: Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres: Vom Historischen Roman zum Computerspiel. In: Idem (eds.): History Goes Pop. Zur Repräsentation von Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres. Bielefeld 2009, p. 9–60, p. 10; Günter Hockerts: Zugänge zur Zeitgeschichte. Primärerfahrung, Erinnerungskultur, Geschichtswissenschaft. In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 51 (2001), issue 28, p. 15–30, p. 21.

2 According to the director of the Centre for Contemporary History Research (ZZF) Martin Sabrow in an interview in 2009. See the documentation of the interview by the Goethe-Institute, URL: http://bit.ly/10Eyr42 (1.8.2014).

3 Cf. with a reference to the German-speaking countries Walter Hömberg: Die Aktualität der Vergangenheit. Konturen des Geschichtsjournalismus. In: Klaus Arnold/Walter Hömberg/Susanne Kinnebrock (eds.): Geschichtsjournalismus. Zwischen Information und Inszenierung. 2nded. Münster 2012, p. 15–30, p. 21. On the content-related profiles of German-language history magazines see further Christian Spieß: Zeitgeschichte in populären Geschichtsmagazinen. In: Susanne Popp et al. (eds.): Zeitgeschichte, Medien, Historische Bildung. Göttingen 2010, p. 61–76.

seems advisable additionally to consider these popular magazines from the perspective of journalism and communication studies. The question then arises by what logic inherent to journalism do history magazines continually select or construct historical topics and events?

It is the aim of this chapter to unfold those media logics which are generally followed by journalistic coverage (that is, irrespective of the actual topic) and in this way to deduce systematically possible explanations for the content-related design of popular history magazines. This also includes the question of how far can history, a subject which deals with the past, nonetheless meet journalism's central criteria of relevance, namely topicality.

1. Media logics

A central feature of popular history magazines is their periodicity.[4] They are published at regular intervals. They have this in common with other products of journalism and therefore permanently have to address new topics, inherent in every new issue is the promise to present a new topic (or at least an aspect of the topic which has so far not been dealt with) or to incorporate the latest historical insight. This also distinguishes history magazines from non-periodically published printed works such as popular historical biographies in book form. It may well be expected that such books include the latest research, but eventually the search for the topic of the book is at some point finished; there is no compelling need permanently to find new topics, i.e. to write follow-up books and continuously highlight their topicality.

Due to their periodicity, popular history magazines are subject to pressures similar to topical journalism. From a multitude of imaginable historical topics or of possible events in the world, those most suitable have to be identified. In journalism certain work routines have been developed to do this. The established editorial selection and construction programmes (according to which events are chosen over and over again as well as being systematically processed) include in particular news factors, frames, and established narrative strategies, so-called narrativity factors.

4 On the characteristic features of mass media and periodicity see the communication theory classic by Otto Groth: Die Zeitung. Ein System der Zeitungskunde (Journalistik), vol. 1–4. Mannheim et al. 1928–1930.

1.1 News factors

Not all events[5] are suited to be picked up by news coverage in the same way. News value (that is, the extent of the worthiness of coverage) plays a decisive role here.[6] Events with an immanently high news value seem to be more worthy of coverage and usually find their way into the media; events without news value, however, are ignored most of the time. If the news is analysed systematically in terms of content, then certain features of events can be identified which are regularly found in media coverage: so-called news factors.[7] These are the elements of the overall news value, which is formed of their sum. The more traceable the news factors and the more distinctive the individual factors, the higher the news value of the event.[8] This can be measured empirically since the events with a higher news value are more prominently placed (e.g. as lead or top story) or more extensively covered.

Not only do news factors determine the content of today's coverage, they also shaped that of past times. This was shown for example in a study

5 The problem of theoretically defining an event shall not be further addressed here (cf. on this the chapter by Fabio Crivellari in this volume). Since in empirical news research the individual (short) media article is the common unit of analysis, empirical news studies often deal with merely manageable individual events and thus are not at a loss having to define larger event complexes or even historical processes. Indications for the definition of events are usually offered by the titles of media articles.

6 Already in 1922 the US American journalist Walter Lippmann coined the term 'news value' for this and has therewith laid the foundation for the news value theory. Cf. Walter Lippmann: Public opinion. New York 1922.

7 See the overview by Christiane Eilders: News factors and news decisions. Theoretical and methodological advances in Germany. In: Communications 31 (2006), issue 1, p. 5–24.

8 This is implied by the selectivity and additivity hypothesis by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge. Also the complementarity hypothesis may be mentioned here in this connection, according to which the lack of individual news factors can be compensated by the pronounced existence of other ones. Cf. Johan Galtung/Mari Holmboe Ruge: The structure of foreign news. The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crisis in four Norwegian newspapers. In: Journal of Peace Research 2 (1965), issue 1, p. 64–91. On the interaction and evaluation of news factors cf. Benjamin Fretwurst: Nachrichten im Interesse der Zuschauer. Eine konzeptionelle und empirische Neubestimmung der Nachrichtenwerttheorie. Konstanz 2008.

by Jürgen Wilke in which he systematically evaluated the overall picture of the news of four different centuries.[9] Furthermore, news factors can be demonstrated in various cultural circles. Early assumptions about their clear cultural dependence[10] are regarded as disproved; The news value theory is today considered to be universally valid.[11]

The individual news factors refer to different aspects of an event – to actors and localities as well as to the specificities and background circumstances of the event. Lastly, news factors specify the five classic W-questions of journalism: 'who?' (actor), 'where?' (location), 'what?' (specifics of the event), 'when?' (time span), 'why?' (background circumstances).

According to the often-quoted catalogue of news factors drawn up by Winfried Schulz,[12] which is also the basis of my illustrations, the following actor attributes are specified as factors: 'personal influence', 'prominence', 'ethnocentricity' and 'personification'. Comparatively, we hear a lot about influential politicians – such as the president of the USA – in the mass media, sometimes even hearing about their private affairs. They are deemed more worthy of being covered than are less powerful politicians or even people from everyday life. However, for the media to report it can often suffice to be prominent in any way whatsoever: one has only to think about celebrities such as the current US American hotel heiress Paris Hilton or, historically, the Irish author Oscar Wilde. Neither has or had a huge political influence, but they still are or were prominent figures in their times and the presentation of their private lives was or is met with great medial response.

Furthermore, those events are especially interesting in which fellow countrymen and women are involved. Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge have coined the term 'ethnocentrism' for this phenomenon.[13]

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9 Cf. Jürgen Wilke: Nachrichtenauswahl und Medienrealität in vier Jahrhunderten. Eine Modellstudie zur Verbindung von historischer und empirischer Publizistikwissenschaft. Berlin/New York 1984.

10 Cf. Galtung/Holmboe Ruge (note 8).

11 Cf. Urs Dahinden: Framing. Eine integrative Theorie der Massenkommunikation. Konstanz 2006, p. 71.

12 Cf. Winfried Schulz: Die Konstruktion von Realität in den Nachrichtenmedien. Analyse der aktuellen Berichterstattung. 2nd ed. Freiburg/München 1990.

13 Cf. Galtung/Holmboe Ruge (note 8).

Accordingly, it is preferable to report misfortunes abroad if one's fellow countrymen or women have come to harm: French media report about French victims, German media about German victims etc. This also applies to historical events, which are addressed in connection to anniversaries and jubilees. In dealing with internationally relevant events (e.g. both World Wars) the preferred perspective taken is that of one's respective fellow countrymen or women.

Finally, mass media tend to simplify complex matters in that they depict abstract events as individual actions and ascribe the responsibility to a specific person (= news factor 'personification'). Accordingly, international conflicts which are difficult to untangle are presented as the result of an individual warmonger, or the problems of complex economic and social systems are illustrated by striking individual cases of hardship. Journalists prefer to choose events that can be personalised; abstract events are systematically personalised through the work of the journalistic process.

However, the events themselves, and not just those which include people, are of interest to the media. If an event is 'relevant' to many, connected to 'damage', 'success', 'crime' and 'conflict' as well as if it happens unexpectedly (= news factor 'surprise') then it is more likely to be in the media.

In news factor research 'relevance' is ascribed to an event that firstly has a broad appeal (i.e. concerns a large number of people) and secondly leads to long-lasting existential consequences.[14] Accordingly, if it is a question of life and death it is always news worthy. In this way, media extensively report environmental disasters or epidemics, especially if their long-lasting negative effects menace people. This applies to current as well as to historical catastrophes. The earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 was a huge media event that received international attention.[15]

Relevance and 'damage' are often connected. However, the media prefer to record not only the negative, but also the positive aspects, especially 'success'. One may think about success in sports, academia or arts such as winning the World Cup, making ground-breaking discoveries or

14 Cf. Schulz (note 12), p. 42.

15 See Jürgen Wilke: Das Erdbeben von Lissabon als Medienereignis. In: Gerhard Lauer/Thorsten Unger (eds.): Das Erdbeben von Lissabon und der Katastrophendiskurs im 18. Jahrhundert. Göttingen 2008, p. 75–95.

the Oscar awards. Moreover, 'crime', especially if it is linked to the profound violation of a moral norm, is another factor that turns the event into a media story. As historical examples, early single-sided news-sheets (so-called 'Newe Zeytungen') may be mentioned. These already extensively reported violent crime such as homicide and sexual offences.[16] The widely read daily police report, or the elaborate bulletin about spectacular crimes, (something which especially characterises the tabloid press), may also be named here.

The media are additionally interested in various 'conflicts'. Whether it be verbal controversies between the government and the opposition or even violent conflicts such as war, the news is sure to follow them. This also applies to historical conflicts as is illustrated by the manifold media contributions about the First World War in the summer of 2014. Lastly, the media preferentially address unexpected events (= news factor 'unexpectedness'). It has to be considered, though, that only those events can be identified as surprising which are still somehow within the scope of the expected. Unexpected events beyond the expected are not within the radar of the media, i.e. they are usually not noticed.[17]

The 'proximity' between the location of coverage and the location of the event plays a central part in the question of where an event has to take place in order to be of great news value and so be noticed by the media. This proximity is not only defined geographically. If foreign countries exhibit a certain political proximity (e.g. they are also democracies), are economically similar, i.e. also market-economically structured, if there are many trade relations and an intensive cultural exchange exists, the

16 Cf. Jürgen Wilke: Grundzüge der Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert. Köln et al. 2000, p. 22–24.

17 Especially Galtung and Ruge have referred to this connection between expectance and surprise in formulating the news factor 'consonance' (with the expectations), cf. Galtung/Ruge (note 8). However, this factor was dropped again in later studies of news research, because expectations cannot be recorded news-immanently, i.e. the news factor consonance as well as the factor surprise is hardly to be operationalised empirically on the level of news. They can only be determined by a distinct contextualisation, i.e. by means of further sources, cf. Schulz 1990 (note 12).

media interest in these 'close' countries is disproportionately high (= news factors 'geographic', 'political', 'economic' and 'cultural proximity').

The extent to which proximity influences the coverage of foreign affairs is illustrated in a study by Jürgen Wilke and Dagmar Schmidt.[18] They systematically evaluated the world news covered by the large German TV channels and newspapers and found that in 1995 almost 23% of the German coverage of foreign affairs dealt with Western EU states, i.e. states that are geographically, economically, politically, and to an extent also culturally, comparatively close to Germany. This also applies to the USA, the leading economic power, to which roughly 11% of the world news referred. Besides these countries, (arguably, in view of their surface area and total population, overrepresented), some regions of the world are clearly underrepresented in German news coverage. For instance, it is striking that the German media lack interest in Sub-Saharian Africa, to which merely 2% of the German foreign coverage was dedicated, as well as in the CIS states (excluding Russia), with which in 1995 less than 1% of the German world news dealt. The latter can only partially be explained by geographic, cultural, political and economic proximity. Additionally, the political, military and economic power of a nation plays a part when it comes to the coverage of foreign affairs. In this way defined 'elite nations'[19], like Russia and the USA, are disproportionately covered.

The news factor of proximity is, however, not only applicable to the news coverage of foreign affairs. It also holds for coverage of internal affairs, where events which take place close to the location of the medium are of greater interest than events in regions further away. The coverage of local and regional affairs is based on this principle. Furthermore, it is remarkable that there are certain centres (political centres such as capitals, but also established media cities such as e.g. Milan for Italy, Hamburg for Germany or Zürich for Switzerland) from where and about which the

18 Cf. Jürgen Wilke/Dagmar Schmidt: Die Darstellung des Auslands in den deutschen Medien: Ergebnisse einer Inhaltsanalyse 1995. In: Siegfried Quandt/Wolfgang Gast (eds.): Deutschland im Dialog der Kulturen. Medien, Images, Verständigung. Konstanz 1998, p. 167–181.

19 Cf. Galtung/Ruge (note 8).

news coverage is disproportionate. The news factor 'regional centrality' describes this phenomenon.

Moreover, media preferentially take up short completed events. Covering long-term complex processes is clearly more demanding for them. Media that have a short rhythm of publication – newspapers daily, news magazines weekly – find it difficult to continually document long-lasting processes. They prefer short-term events, which are ideally completed between two issues (= news factor 'duration'). Consequently, societal processes such as the current demographic change or the developments of the labour market are rather selectively addressed, as when for example the latest unemployment rate is announced monthly at a press conference or if a new study on age structure is publicly presented. As regards history, the factor of duration also explains why mass media concentrate on anniversaries and jubilees when turning towards processes of the past.[20]

The 'connection to established topics' can be identified as the final time-and-culture-spanning news factor. If a topic exceeds the medial attention threshold then subsequent events are also usually reported. This phenomenon can be discerned for historical topics. For example, the July crisis in the run-up to World War I was extensively covered in July 2014, and German mass media also illustrated aspects such as the story of the difficult relation between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. Without previously addressing the July crisis, however, such profound historical media contributions could probably not have been possible, especially because they would presumably have remained unconnected and therefore incomprehensible for the mass audience, which only has an average interest in history.

The news factors mentioned are not only a phenomenon of our times. They also pervade the news coverage of past times and therefore must have already been set as rules for the selection and construction of media realities in past centuries. Furthermore, they are used, as illustrated with the example of World War I, when it comes to covering history in mass media today. Nonetheless, the catalogue of factors, with its very strong

20 Furthermore, the planning and predictability of the coverage about anniversaries and jubilees ensures that history is often journalistically processed in this way. Cf. Horst Pöttker: Gegenwartsbezüge. Über die Qualität von Geschichtsjournalismus. In: Arnold/Hömberg/Kinnebrock (note 3), p. 31–44, p. 38 ff.

orientation along the lines of the journalistic W-questions presented here, also reaches its limits. On its own it cannot sufficiently explain the structure and design of coverage. This is empirically shown by regressions and variance analyses, which tried to measure the causal effect of the news factors on the placement (as prominent as possible) and the extent of the coverage (amount of lines or broadcasting minutes) and by doing so encountered high values of unexplained variance.[21] This means that news factors alone do not determine the extent and the placement of single articles; there are further factors which explain the overall picture of the news. Therefore, framing, i.e. the connection to established public discourses and interpretational patterns, as well as narrativity factors, shall be addressed here.

1.2 Framing

The underlying assumption of framing states that events are categorised according to existing 'frames'. Frames are interpretational frameworks that last for a longer period of time and are used in order to make sense out of events (which are otherwise difficult to categorise). A frame includes the definition of a problem, the attribution of guilt and the reference to a possible solution for the problem. Frames differ according to how long they are effective.[22]

The way a short frame functions can be illustrated by means of the example of bus accidents: if a great disaster happens then smaller accidents are also more likely to make it into the media. In this way, problems are looked for (e.g. overtired bus drivers) and culprits identified (e.g. overly profit-oriented bus companies). Such frames are, however, at best effective for some weeks.

Additionally, there are interpretational patterns which are relevant in the medium-term and are usually connected to the current social situation

21 Cf. Christiane Eilders: Nachrichtenfaktoren und Rezeption. Eine empirische Analyse zur Auswahl und Verarbeitung politischer Information. Opladen 1997.

22 This definition of framing leads back to Robert M. Entman: Framing. Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. In: Journal of Communication 43 (1993), issue 4, p. 51–58.

a country faces. For instance, unemployment is a problem that has been covered over and over again in Europe for several years, even decades. Other events – such as the reduction of environmentally harmful industries – are then likely to be perceived within this frame. This in turn means that the implications the notional ameliorating measures have for the (local) labour market becomes a central question for the media. Medium-term frames are usually effective for several months or even several years.

And lastly, the media refer to so-called meta-frames, i.e. temporally widely consistent interpretational patterns irrespective of the topic, such as 'progress vs. regression', 'bad vs. evil' or also 'harmful vs. useful for the community'.[23] Meta-frames also include stereotypes and myths. They are well-known and are the cornerstones, so to speak, of collectively shared knowledge. The media can safely refer back to stereotypes and myths if they want to process information for their audience in a way that will be generally understandable. What the audience already knows does not have to be explained again.

Whereas stereotypes are characterised by incredible stability, but are changeable from generation to generation,[24] myths, in contrast, exhibit an even greater consistency throughout time. As narratives handed down over centuries or even millennia they report how the present is based in the past, and describe for example the origin of the gods, the humans and the universe. Patterns can be derived from this to reveal how an event will be carried out over and over again or which moral principles exist. Accordingly, myths importantly assist if we try to make recent actual events understandable or try to fit such events into our horizon of meaning.

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23 The terms for 'meta-frames' vary. Jürgen Gerhards and Dieter Rucht talk about 'master frames' and thereby mean, above all, ideologies; Urs Dahinden, however, talks about content-independent 'basic frames' and in addition to the above mentioned 'progress, moral and profitability frames' includes also personalisation and conflict, which were, however, introduced in the context of news factors here. Cf. Jürgen Gerhards/Dieter Rucht: Mesomobiliziation. Organizing and framing in two protest campaigns in West Germany. In: American Journal of Sociology 98 (1992), p. 555–595; Dahinden (note 11), p. 108.

24 Cf. the latest overview of stereotype research by Martina Thiele: Medien und Stereotype. Konturen eines Forschungsfeldes. Habilitationsschrift. Universität Salzburg 2013.

1.3 Narrative logics: narrativity factors

As the existence of myths suggests, there is a basic form that we use to explain the world, namely the form of stories.[25] Usually, people like good, thrilling stories and can easily understand them.[26] Well-told stories exhibit identifiable features, so-called narrativity factors, i.e. factors immanent to the narrative, which make a text a 'real' story.[27]

Not all narrativity factors can be mentioned here, especially since they partially overlap with the news factors.[28] However, three main factors shall be emphasised: 'good' stories are firstly characterised by an arranged 'protagonist-antagonist structure'. This not only entails pure accentuation of the persons' actions similar to what transpires through the news factor of personification. It also involves the elaboration of the interaction between two persons: details of how a protagonist and an antagonist interact, how the figures develop emotionally and, above all, how the relation between them changes over time.

Furthermore, a 'good' narrative adheres to the narrative arc as already described by Aristotle. At the beginning in the so-called exposition: the world we find ourselves in is described, as well as the central conflict. This conflict develops and mounts to the climax in which the conflict is

25 Cf. Walter R. Fisher: Human communication as narration. Toward a philosophy of reason, value and action. Columbia 1987.

26 Cf. on the reception of narrations Manuela Glaser/Bärbel Garsoffky/Stephan Schwan: Narrative-based learning: Possible benefits and problems. In: Communications 34 (2009), issue 4, p. 429–447; Helena Bilandzic/Rick Busselle: Narrative persuasion. In: James P. Dillard/Lijiang Shen (eds.): The SAGE handbook of persuasion. 2nd ed. Los Angeles et al. 2013, p. 200–219.

27 Cf. on the derivation of operational narrativity factors from neo-classical narratology and on narrativity factors in general: Susanne Kinnebrock/Helena Bilandzic: How to make a story work: Introducing the concept of narrativity into narrative persuasion. Open access research paper. RWTH Aachen 2011, URL: http://bit.ly/1s2AHgR (1.8.2014).

28 Cf. Susanne Kinnebrock/Helena Bilandzic (2010): Boulevardisierung der politischen Berichterstattung? Konstanz und Wandel von Nachrichtenfaktoren und Narrativitätsfaktoren in der politischen Berichterstattung. In: Klaus Arnold et al. (eds.): Von der Politisierung der Medien zur Medialisierung des Politischen? Zum Verhältnis von Medien, Öffentlichkeit und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert. Leipzig 2010, p. 347–362.

somehow resolved, and the story usually ends with a moral message. Not only fairy tales, which end with the words 'and the moral of the story is', but films[29] as well, and even news[30], carry such moral messages[31].

Lastly, there are very specific strategies of 'emotionalisation'. Stories create proximity, enable us to identify with the protagonists and intensively understand their emotions and experiences.[32] Crying for no reason at the pictures is a fitting example. Also mass media use emotionalisation in their coverage if dramatic individual tragedies are described and the presentation of emotions is deliberately aimed at. The explicit description of feelings of happiness, mortal fear or deep sorrow in texts can be mentioned as an example as well as the targeted use of pictures to generate these emotional states (e.g. by zooming in on children's tears). However, it must be emphasised that in the end journalists decide whether and to what extent an event is presented in an emotionalised way. Emotionalisation is mostly the product of medial processing[33], and only rarely a genuine aspect of the event.

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29 Cf. Helena Bilandzic/Freya Sukalla/Susanne Kinnebrock: 'Die Moral von der Geschichte'. Das methodische Problem der Medienanalyse. In: Joachim von Gottberg/Elizabeth Prommer (eds.): Verlorene Werte? Medien und die Entwicklung von Ethik und Moral. Konstanz 2008, p. 245–258.

30 Cf. Kinnebrock/Bilandzic (note 28).

31 The US American linguist William Labov termed these moral messages 'evaluations'. Cf. William Labov: The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. In: Idem (eds.): Language in the inner city. Studies in the black English vernacular. Oxford: Blackwell 1977, p. 354–396.

32 Cf. on the processes of reception in detail Bilandzic/Busselle (note 26).

33 Some essays on news theory define 'emotionalisation' as individual news factors. Cf. the overviews by Michaela Maier/Katrin Stengel/Joachim Marschall: Nachrichtenwerttheorie. Baden-Baden 2010; Eilders 1997 (note 21) and Eilders 2006 (note 7). Since emotionalisation is less a feature of an event than a certain form of processing and presenting it which especially characterises narrations, emotionalisation was mentioned here as 'narrativity logic'. In a similar way, this also applies to the factor 'drama'. It denotes the gradual implementation of a narrative (affect) structure or a narrative arc. Accordingly, it is also rather to be seen as a (narrative) processing routine and less as an event-immanent selection factor.

1.4. Summary media logics

The synopsis results in the following content-related criteria, which play a part in the selection decision, but above all in the processing of media content:

Media logics for the processing of reality	
news factors	specifics of actors • personal influence • prominence • ethnocentricity • personification specifics of the event • relevance • damage • success • crime • conflict • unexpectedness specifics of the location • geographic proximity • political proximity • cultural proximity • economic proximity • elite nations • national centrality • regional centrality specifics of time • duration of the event • reference to previously established topics
frames	short-term topics/interpretational frames medium-term interpretational frames long-term interpretational frames • valuation: progress or regression? • valuation: good or evil? • valuation: useful or harmful? • stereotypes • myths
narrativity factors	• protagonist-antagonist structure • narrative arc/affect structure • emotionalisation

Naturally, the composition of media logics derived from different research traditions cannot claim to be exhaustive. Further specification may be advisable depending on the focus of the research. Similarly, certain factors overlap and are features of the concepts news value, framing and narrativity at the same time; the relation between these three concepts still remains to be theorised. Moreover, this contribution does not explain the basic question of whether news factors are immanent to the event or are the product of an editing process even though the set-up of the empirical studies, on which news research is based, tends towards the latter. After all, it is not the selection processes which are examined, but the results of the journalistic process: the media contents. And last, but not least, in focusing on the output, i.e. the overall picture of the news, the development conditions and the contexts such as the general news situations are also not taken into consideration.

Despite all these limitations the compilation of the relevant media logics may be an instrument which could be used in further studies to examine popular history magazines systematically. Content analyses can make their specific selection and construction mechanisms transparent and in this way questionable. From the perspective of history studies the main focus of history magazines on a few potentates (e.g. Henry VIII, Napoleon I and Hitler), on gruesome world wars and on the own nation may be lamented – and the cultivation of a narrow view on the part of the audience may be feared. However, such focuses correspond to common media logics. And the question which kind of history journalism would be desirable should not be considered without having thought about existing media logics, since the consideration of this set of rules makes it possible to develop alternative modes of presentation. According to the complementarity hypothesis[34] the lack of certain news factors may be compensated for by highlighting others. This implies that the same factors do not always have to be accentuated: taking a pass on great ruling figures may be counterbalanced, for example, by a successful narrative arc; and it is not only negative aspects, but also great success which is interesting. In short, only knowledge about media logics allows their confident handling; and popular history presentation

34 Cf. Galtung/Holmboe Ruge (note 8).

that equally meets the expectations of the media as well as history studies is indeed possible.

2. Topicality

So far the focus has been on the choice of events. But historical topics are also often addressed from a journalistic perspective and processed in a similar way. A specific feature of journalism, which affects the structure of popular history magazines, has thus been given too little attention: the reference to topicality. According to system-theoretical descriptions of society, topicality is the central criterion according to which journalism as a social system processes its environment.[35] So history has somehow to be topical in order to be interesting to periodical mass media.

During the 1920s the communication theorist Otto Groth had already distinguished two dimensions of topicality – a temporal and a social one. Hence topicality not only includes reflection of the latest current events, but also provision of information relevant for the people living in the immediate present.[36] Horst Pöttker has underscored this with his remark: 'not what happens today, but what is important today is topical! Important to the audience […]'[37]. Consequently, events in the past may also be important to today's audience and indeed topical. With regard to journalistic logic, however, this requires a connection between the present and the past.[38] According to Pöttker's argument history functions as a reservoir of potential knowledge which enables (re)orientation in the present. Thereby, (historical) journalism may generally establish references of topicality in three different ways: '[…] "critically", in rejecting the past from a present standpoint or the present from a past standpoint, "analogically", in

35 Cf. Bernd Blöbaum: Journalismus als soziales System. Geschichte, Ausdifferenzierung und Verselbständigung. Opladen 1994.

36 Cf. Groth (note 4).

37 Horst Pöttker: Verstehen durch Vergangenheit. Warum der Journalismus in der Mediengesellschaft Geschichte als Themenfeld braucht. In: Linda Erker et al. (eds.): Geschichtsvermittlung und -didaktik in der Mediengesellschaft. Köln 2013, p. 178–199, p. 178. The article was also published in English titled 'A reservoir of understanding. Why journalism needs history as a thematic field'. In: Journalism Practice 5 (2011), issue 5, p. 520–537.

38 Cf. Pöttker (note 37).

searching for similarities, or "genetically", in interpreting the past as the origin of the present, the present as a consequence of the past.'[39]

Even if in general all three approaches are able to establish references of topicality for historical items, certain processing methods nonetheless appear to be more suitable for some types of events. Critical references of topicality seem to be particularly useful when it comes to blatant violations of human rights. This also explains why they are especially made use of in Germany to cover the NS period. However, the avowedly critical updating mode blinds us to possible lines of continuity which link present to past.[40] These are emphasised via the genetic narrative mode in particular. This updating mode seems especially suited for processing the recent past, i.e. for contemporary history. Earlier epochs, however, are especially accessible when the references of topicality are established in an analogous way.

It is remarkable that establishing references of topicality does indeed seem to be conducive to the understanding of journalstic presentations of history. At least, Pöttker was able to prove in an experiment that emphases on references of topicality evoke distinctively better learning effects than operating with the usual stimulants such as 'sex & crime' beloved of tabloid journalism.[41]

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39 Pöttker (note 20), p. 33. Emphasis in the original. Pöttker reverts to Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen. Zweites Stück: Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben' (1874) and to Jörn Rüsen's four types of historical narration, in: Jörn Rüsen: Zeit und Sinn. Strategien des historischen Denkens. Frankfurt/Main 1990.

40 Cf. Pöttker (note 37), p. 186 ff.

41 In the experiment, German senior pupils were presented with two versions of one press article about the Staufen emperor Frederick II. In the first version, the unchanged passage with the historical information followed after a paragraph that established an (analogous) reference of topicality, in the second version it followed a paragraph with reference to sex and crime in the surroundings of Frederick II. The comparison of the knowledge (MC test) before and after reading the journalistic text resulted in a greater knowledge increase when using references of topicality. Cf. Pöttker (note 20), p. 35–38.

3. Conclusion

These findings suggest two things. Firstly, that the consideration of journalistic routines of selection and construction may be fruitful for the development of advanced history journalism (see 1), and also for the deliberate use of strategies of topicality (see 2). Secondly, the findings point towards a greater gap in the field of history journalism: studies of reception. We know little about what people actually read in history magazines; how they process it in their heads on a cognitive, but also on an emotional, level; what they subsequently remember; and how they connect this to their existing knowledge. Initial studies from the field of television (which, however, have merely dealt with the motives of use) suggest that interest in history programmes is based on needs related to the present: the self-reassurance of one's own identity; the hope for orientation, that is establishing a clear time line that meaningfully connects the past, the present and the future; the wish for entertainment; and lastly the understanding of emotions.[42] There is much to suggest that similar needs also determine the reception of popular history magazines, and little reason why it should not be examined in further research.

42 Cf. Michael Meyen/Senta Pfaff: Rezeption von Geschichte im Fernsehen. Eine qualitative Studie zu Nutzungsmotiven, Zuschauererwartungen und zur Bewertung einzelner Darstellungsformen. In: Media Perspektiven (2006), issue 2, p. 102–106. Similar results were reached by surveys of history journalists. See Manuela Lonitz: Radio-Geschichte(n): Geschichtsjournalismus in ARD-Hörfunk. In: Fernsehinformationen 51 (2000), issue 8, p. 10–15; Klaus Arnold: Geschichtsjournalismus – ein Schwellenressort. Arbeitsweisen, Themen und Selbstverständnis von Geschichtsjournalisten in Deutschland. In: Arnold/Hömberg/Kinnebrock: (note 3), p. 87–108.