

**Prague Alive: Creating an Idealized Entertainment Reporting Platform for Students in the
Czech Republic and United States**

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Introduction

In the last twenty years, entertainment reporting in both the United States and the Czech Republic has experienced considerable changes. While the United States has seen a growth in online entertainment reporting, especially with blogs, the Czech Republic is developing entertainment reporting in a different way. The Czech Republic as a country is only twenty years old. Many of the country's publications are only beginning to find their footing, and some are finding it in a time that is difficult for all media. Entertainment writers in the United States are finding ways to overcome the challenges of a declining print media by blogging and posting their opinions online. They are also finding a generation of readers who are willing to accept the opinions of publications and internalize those opinions as their own. In the Czech Republic, there is a different sense of internalization: The Czech people want to read about their own entertainers. The opinions they want are on their own musicians, artists, and filmmakers. Both countries have consumers who want to read about music and movies; both countries have readers who care about reviews as much as news updates in their entertainment. However, when it comes to the kind of exposure these readers want and how they internalize it, the differences between these two countries truly become apparent.

This paper first looks at two theories that influenced the research: priming and uses and gratifications. Following the discussion of these two theories and their relevance to the research, the methodology is then explained. The research is broken down into qualitative and quantitative methods, with limitations to the research explained. The findings of surveys and interviews are discussed next, followed by what the findings could mean for further research. The conclusion looks to what next steps can be taken to create an idealized reporting platform for students cross culturally.

Theory

Two mass communication theories were used to support the research of this topic. Priming theory and uses and gratifications theory shaped the methodologies used as well as the questions asked in both interviews and surveys.

Priming.

Priming theory is a prominent communications theory, and it is often used to understand audience perceptions toward and recall of political candidates during elections. However, it also has a role beyond the political realm. Priming theory looks to explain how “audience members rely upon available considerations – usually those emphasized by the news media – to determine the criteria on which an opinion about a candidate, institution, or any other object of public attention is based” (Valenzuela, 2009). This means that consistent audience engagement with a topic can influence how accessible the topic is to them cognitively. More media coverage of a topic, whether a political candidate or a music artist, means that the topic is primed more frequently and thus access is easier to that subject. Priming can demonstrate how individuals are vulnerable to media influence, if they are at all (Valenzuela, 2009).

Numerous case studies have been conducted to show how priming theory works. Gabriel S. Lenz of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology gives one example in his 2009 study on learning and opinion change. Lenz writes about one instance in which viewers were exposed to a news story repeatedly and were then tested on their recall of that story in association with a political candidate. The study showed that those who had been exposed to the extended news story were more likely to evaluate a candidate based on his or her stance on that story (Lenz, 2009).

Additional studies have shown how priming can work in the online space. One study was done on consumers interacting with online newspapers and reading about global warming (Lee, 2005). The study showed that consumers who read newspapers with what was labeled a “high” amount of content related to global warming showed priming affects later (Lee, 2005). Priming theory works in both traditional and new media settings.

In this research, priming theory was used to develop questions for professionals to understand how consumers of entertainment publications relate to the content in those publications. Further discussion of these questions and the professionals interviewed can be found in the “Methodology” section.

Uses and gratifications.

Uses and gratifications theory is another major communications theory, and one that has become more prominent with the growth of social media and the digital space. One definition of uses and gratifications theory explains it as having one “clear guiding principle,” which is that “different people can use the media for different objectives” (Garcia Jimenez, Cruz Lopez De Ayala & Gaona Pisionero, 2012). Essentially, uses and gratifications theory is used to see what media choices users make, as well as the results of that usage. Understanding the gratification a user gets from a specific medium is important to the success of using this theory. One study, conducted on viewer gratifications from interacting with crime dramas, says that these gratifications are both “psychological and social in nature” (Brown, Lauricella, Douai & Zaidi, 2012). Gratifications can be represented at varying levels for different individuals, and thus their consequences vary on an individual basis. Uses and gratifications has a special focus on “what people do with the media” (Brown, Lauricella, Douai & Zaidi, 2012).

However, uses and gratifications theory has some drawbacks that cannot be ignored. Uses and gratifications is usually criticized for a lack of strict definition. Garcia Jimenez, Cruz Lopez De Ayala and Gaona Pisionero (2012) write that “needs, reasons, behaviors” are all often ill defined when using uses and gratifications. It also often fails to “predict media exposure” and relies heavily on self-reported answers from respondents (Garcia Jimenez, Cruz Lopez De Ayala & Gaona Pisionero, 2012).

While these drawbacks exist, researchers tend to agree that uses and gratifications is easily adaptable to new forms of media and the research associated with those forms, and that is why it is still often used. Uses and gratifications “continues to have an observable appeal largely because of its applicability to new research areas in communication” (Brown, Lauricella, Douai & Zaidi, 2012). The growth of the Internet, and perhaps most significantly the explosion of social media, has helped uses and gratifications to remain relevant in the field of communication research. “U&G has been fruitful for gaining insight into the uses of new media technologies” (Zeng, 2011).

Combining the two theories.

These two theories were chosen to frame questions and research methods for the primary research. Priming and uses and gratifications bring qualitative and quantitative research methods together and allow the research to have a more holistic picture. Instead of relying just on self-reported answers, in the case of uses and gratifications, the research is also influenced by answers directed by priming theory. The purpose of using these two theories is to strengthen the results found in the findings and discussion.

Methodology

Research was conducted in a number of ways for this project. One of the primary features of the research is combining quantitative and qualitative methods. This is because two theories are supporting the project, priming and uses and gratifications, which also bring together quantitative and qualitative ideals.

In-depth interviews were conducted with professionals in the United States and the Czech Republic. Professionals worked in entertainment media in a variety of ways. Paul Bridgewater is the editor for Line of Best Fit, a music blog that is based in the United Kingdom but has high readership in the United States. In the Czech Republic, Tony Ozuna was interviewed. He serves as both a cultural journalist and dean of the journalism program at Anglo-American University in Prague. Michal Musil, a news editor at mainstream daily publication *Dnes*, was also interviewed. Will Tizard, a journalism professor at Anglo-American and a film writer for *Variety*, was interviewed as well.

A survey was used to understand the uses and gratifications of entertainment website visits. Users were asked ten basic questions, starting with what he or she thinks of as an entertainment website. Respondents then went through and answered multiple choice questions and true or false questions about entertainment website usage. Then for the survey was 20 respondents, who were chosen at random through social media websites including Twitter and Facebook. The survey was anonymous, and only two demographics questions were asked (age and level of schooling completed).

The same survey was then repurposed for the Czech Republic. The host server was changed, and questions were clarified for translation purposes. Overall, though, the content of the survey remained the same, with a goal of 20 for n once more. However, due to limitations in

access to Czech students, only four were surveyed. The total n for the survey was 24 respondents. The survey had a number of limitations in both the United States and Czech Republic, as the sample is likely biased due to reach through social media and known connections. It is not a varied enough response to make generalizations. The survey does not fully represent the populations of entertainment media users in the United States or Czech Republic. Plus, there were considerably more United States respondents than Czech respondents.

After the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with students who met the demographics of the majority of survey respondents. In-depth interviews were conducted with students both in the United States and Czech Republic, and all were chosen randomly. In the United States, interviews were conducted with students chosen randomly by approaching them in a Starbucks. In the Czech Republic, an area referred to as Naplavka was visited and students chosen from the area. All were asked about their entertainment website usage and their specific entertainment choices. These interviews are also skewed, as not everyone in either population had a completely fair chance of being picked for the in-depth interview.

In the interviews with students, questions were modeled after those in the survey. Students in both interview groups discussed their entertainment media usage, talking about what they look for in a publication and also discussing how that usage directs conversations about self-identity and development.

Findings

Attitudes toward entertainment reporting in the United States and Czech Republic share many commonalities but also plenty of differences. While the United States is a geographically large country with a range of influences and entertainment options, the Czech Republic is considerably smaller and has influences from the countries that surround it as well as Western

influences. Visiting an entertainment website in the United States almost guarantees a niche experience; the content of the website will only cover a certain kind of entertainment. In the Czech Republic, the entertainment covered will vary – but Czech artists and interests will dominate it.

Survey results in the United States and Czech Republic.

In the United States, survey respondents cited a number of websites as entertainment options. The list includes sources like Entertainment Tonight, BuzzFeed.com, Rolling Stone, and People magazine. Respondents most typically cited music, movies, television and celebrity gossip as reasons for visiting these websites and interacting with the content. Further, almost 48 percent of the respondents said they visited these websites daily, with another 32 percent saying they visited these websites at least three to five times a week. United States students said they were most interested in entertainment news updates, opinion pieces, and interviews with celebrities. Students in the United States were also asked about their personal identity and its connection to their entertainment choices. Exactly half of the students said that their personal identity is tied to their entertainment choices, with another 45 percent saying they are at least somewhat influenced by those choices.

In the Czech Republic, YouTube was cited as a common entertainment website, as was Centrum.cz. Centrum.cz has specific entertainment sections for areas like television, music, and dating. While there were only four respondents, all of them agreed that they cared about celebrity news, music updates, and film news. All four were also frequent visitors to these websites, with three of the four saying they visited entertainment-oriented websites daily. The fourth respondent visited the websites at least three to five times a week. Three of the four said they were most interested in news updates on entertainment pages, with the fourth being interested in news and

opinion pieces. The four respondents also agreed that their entertainment choices also at least somewhat influenced their self-identity. The respondents were all between 17 and 25 years old.

Interviews with entertainment journalism professionals.

Interviews solidified the differences between the different kinds of entertainment journalism that exists, both within each country and cross-culturally. In the United States, Paul Bridgewater said that creating niches is a key to existence. The idea of blogging in the United States is essential; fragmenting a broad audience is the only way to success as people become more and more specific in their interests. A similar idea was brought up in the Czech Republic but in a different manner. As Tony Ozuna put it, there is a definite interest in entertainers who are “Czech, Czech, Czech.”

Michal Musil also cited fragmenting as an important component of Czech entertainment media, especially with his background at a mainstream publication like *Dnes*. Musil said that there is an understanding that Czech readers want to read about Czech artists. “Some parts of society are really interested” in a given topic, he said, but there is also an understanding that many will not be. When it comes to coverage of global acts, Musil said that those international acts – whether from America, the United Kingdom, or a neighboring country like Germany – will get anywhere from 30 to 40 percent of the space in a publication; at least 60 to 70 percent will be dedicated to homegrown Czech acts. Musil cites the Czech Republic’s short time as a country as reason for a Czech-centric attitude: “We didn’t have an empire or colonies. It’s a small country, and our people focus on our issues.”

Ozuna put it this way: “It goes beyond typical entertainment” in the Czech Republic. Ozuna said that there is a definite style to United States entertainment reporting that puts an emphasis on business first. “The kinds of reporting vary [in the Czech Republic]. It’s not like

Entertainment Tonight in the United States. Czech entertainment articles tend to be more in-depth and informative.” Ozuna gave one example of the type of article he writes. He covers jazz artists, and he said, “I write about art and jazz. Jazz is not popular. Those artists aren’t necessarily trying to entertain.”

Will Tizard supported both of these ideas with his perspective from the film world. He said that in Europe overall, there is a definite “appetite for what Americans would call art films.” He also said that many Europeans like local stories and characters – people they can identify with. Further, “Europeans are proud of their film tradition. Some of the best talents in Hollywood are from Europe. It’s a strong tradition.” According to Bridgewater, niches in the United States are typically genre-driven (whether in music, movies, art, or related subjects). That is why his website, *Line of Best Fit*, focuses on certain musical genres and mostly off-kilter artists. The case is not necessarily so in Europe, and in a place like the Czech Republic, where a national identity is more essential to fragmenting and establishing a niche.

Interviews with American and Czech students.

Interviews with American and Czech students revealed that these entertainment-oriented publications, especially websites, influence the students a great deal as they build their self-identities. One Czech high school student, who had been to America, said that he experienced a combination of influences from reading about entertainment online. “I like British bands like Radiohead, and I also like reading about classical music. But I also like Czech hip-hop a lot,” he said. He said that he felt these different interests all came together on the Internet, as he could easily find out more information about all of these topics online.

One American student said that not only does he feel influenced by publications, but he also believes that these publications direct a lot of conversation around a given topic – especially

concerning specific artists or musicians. “I think Pitchfork [an online music magazine] is incredibly influential and their ‘Best New Music’ sticker carries a lot of weight. It means something to me.” He further stated that he believes pop culture reviewers have an obligation to let their opinion be known, as “art is not objective” inherently. When it comes to writing online about entertainment, the American student believed that websites in the United States are based more on aesthetic and developing what is “cool,” not just on reporting the basic facts.

Discussion

The combination of survey results and interview explanations shows how influential entertainment publications are in countries that are vastly different. Students in both the United States and Czech Republic feel influenced by their entertainment choices and what they read about them. The journalism professionals, who understand the differences between the two countries, explained the differences in these students’ experiences.

The Czech Republic has only been a democracy for twenty years. As such, their entertainment choices are only beginning to expand in the way that America’s have. Additionally, the United States is a large country geographically; the Czech Republic is considerably smaller, and more countries with more influences surround it. All of the professionals agreed that Europeans tend to care about their own art forms, and this is a trend that appears to be passed down through generations. Even as the Czech Republic grows, it remains Czech-centric, and there is a definite avoidance of Western influence. In creating a website for students in the Czech Republic, for example, considerable attention has to be paid to their national identity and the development of that identity.

In the United States, genres dominate the blogging culture. As one United States student said, he felt compelled to read about the genres and artists he was already interested in.

Reinforcement on entertainment websites occurs regardless of the country; while the Czech culture is reinforced in the Czech Republic, personal interests are reinforced in the United States.

This is the key takeaway of this research: It appears that, regardless of the country, users are visiting entertainment websites to get information that they might already know or at least know something about. Few users cited these websites as a platform for discovery, and interviews consistently pointed to artists, movies, and books that were already known about. A user in the United States might visit a website like Pitchfork.com, which was one often-cited online entertainment website, and use that website specifically to have his or her opinion about an artist or album reinforced. Students in both countries agreed that they internalize what they see on these websites, and it seems that is because they want what they are reading to support their already-held beliefs.

There are opportunities to use these websites to aid in discovery of new artists, instead of constantly reinforcing an opinion that already exists. In the Czech Republic, exposure to international artists with sounds influenced by the Czech culture is one potential way to change and adapt tastes. In the United States, associating already established artists with new artists could help to change this trend. Expanding the entertainment options for both audiences is crucial, especially with the growth of the Internet and the availability of information – especially with the growth occurring in the Czech Republic.

Conclusion

Entertainment reporting can be idealized as technology continues to evolve. As the Czechs keep up with the rest of the world and continue to develop their own identities, they may well see the value in developing specialized niches and create entertainment websites in that way. Many opportunities exist for further research in this area. Further research could be done to

determine how young adults develop self-identities across cultures, especially under the influence of entertainment options and what they read about their options. Research possibilities also exist in understanding why some students choose to interact with entertainment websites and what idealized content they want. Further understanding this topic can be beneficial not only to entertainment journalism professionals but also companies who are engaging in content marketing. Understanding what students see as “entertainment” across cultures can allow these content marketing companies to develop the appropriate websites for their potential consumers. Understanding entertainment options will lead to better marketing, advertising, and engagement across cultures in addition to improved entertainment reporting.

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