

# Media literacy and media use in France and in Germany : a comparative study

## Problem or societal issue the thesis seeks to answer



*The transborder region Alsace / Baden-Württemberg : between closeness and cultural differences, a fertile field for comparative studies.*

**In the context of a growing mediatization of our societies** (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), even if the use of digital media seems to be a transnational fact, the same devices and platforms being available almost all around the world, cultural differences are still vivid (Vinsonneau, 2012) and might also affect media use, as it is never purely individual, but is a social fact (Vidal, 2012 ; Pronovost, 1994).

**In our doctoral work, we focus on the youth:** teenagers from 15 to 18 years old. Young people use digital media the most, according to statistic and audience measurement agencies such as Médiamétrie in France, or the JIM study in Germany (Feierabend et al, 2017). The abilities of the ones some call “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) are not so obvious and they sometimes lack critical distance. Ludic, communicative usage are much more widespread than information search and media production. According to Fluckiger (2008), teenagers have trouble understanding the underlying processes of the media, such as the Internet actual nature, or its economic and strategic aspects. Media literacy, in this context, seems to be a necessity.

**Media literacy is a central stake in the time of mediatization**, as the media shape the way we see the world; therefore, we tried to figure out how French and German teenagers get informed, how they know if an info is reliable, but also how they use social media and protect - or not - their privacy, this theme becoming more and more important since the GDPR.

## Research questions and theoretical framework

**Our first question is to know if media education has the same purpose in France and in Germany, and if not, why.** What are the scientific traditions surrounding the development of media education? What do researchers and school institutions in France and Germany perceive as important? What do these differences tell us about how we see the media?

**Our second field of research is media use and literacy of the youth.** We ask ourselves whether the socio-cultural context of a national space influence their use and literacy, or if they tend to become similar. The two fields that we mentioned are not closed entities ; they will dialog with each other and offer us an insight of media literacy of the youth in both countries.

**Our theoretical background is binational, and multidisciplinary.** Many researchers have reflected the role of media education; our French-speaking references come mainly from the SIC (sciences de l’information et de la communication), as this discipline sets the frameworks for media education (Corroy, 2016), and from sociology - François Dubet, Gilles Pronovost and Anne Barrère, for example.

**On the German side,** we are mainly relying on communication sciences (Kommunikationswissenschaft), but we also use concepts developed by another discipline, independent from the educational sciences, called Medienpädagogik. Researchers in this field have been thinking, since the sixties, about the effects of the media and the autonomy of the youth in their media use (Baacke, 1996; Aufenanger, 1997; Barsch, 2002).

## Method (data collection and analysis)

**For this qualitative research,** we use various methods: discourse analysis of documents about media education, inspired by Marlène Loicq’s work (2011), but also surveys with an empirical approach using media diaries, focus groups and interviews with teenagers. We also rely on a meta-study about media use surveys that we conducted in 2016 (Bosler&Wilhelm, 2017).

**This triangulation of various methods** will allow us to get a better insight on the theme of media literacy.

**Our data will be analysed with codification and categorisation,** partly inspired from the grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Indeed, we believe that an inductive approach is useful to see themes emerge.

## Expected results and usefulness of the research

**Our results will be useful for the world of education.** Indeed, our French-German comparison may make the scope of media education broader, and media literacy richer, by giving a voice to other approaches.

The schools with which we collaborate are also very enthusiastic about the results of the survey, not only to know their own pupils’ media use better and adapt their educative process accordingly, but also to know how their neighbours use the media, as we are living in a borderland.

**For the media industry actors** willing to invest in this sphere, knowing the French and German definition of digital literacy may also be useful.

**Regarding the usefulness of our research for the academic field,** we would like to stress the fact that media education in France and Germany has almost never been compared before (except for Henzler, 2015), so we hope that our work will create a new area of research, and tighten the links between French and German academic worlds.



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