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Strategies of Media Use

Strategien der Mediennutzung

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Abstract: Media use is theorized as strategic practice (in Bourdieu's sense) leading to long-term profits or governed by short-term tactic orientations. By strategies of media use, the recipient adapts to the structure of situations, media content and technologies, and they are linked to social structure. The reach of such strategies (in terms of stakes implied in them and profits) may extend beyond their scope, i.e., the part of the subjective reality that enters into the process of media selection and reception. At various levels such as that of modality, focus, attitude, style, repertoire, and arrangements, elements of strategies are chosen by agents to fulfill their aims and to obtain gratifications. This praxeological analysis synthesizes structural and phenomenological perspectives on media use.

Keywords*:* strategic action, media use, social structure, theory of practice, social phenomenology

Zusammenfassung: Mediennutzung wird hier theoretisch als strategische Praxis (im Sinne Bourdieus) gefasst, die zu langfristigen Profiten führt oder von kurzfristigen taktischen Orientierungen geleitet ist. Mittels Strategien der Mediennutzung passen sich Rezipienten der Struktur von Situationen, Medieninhalten und Technologien an; ferner sind Strategien mit der Sozialstruktur verknüpft. Die Reichweite einer Strategie (was die dabei aufgewendeten Einsätze und die Profite betrifft) kann weiter sein als ihr bewusster Anwendungsbereich, d. h. der Teil der subjektiven Realität, der im Prozess der Auswahl und Nutzung von Medien berücksichtigt wird. Auf verschiedenen Ebenen wie derjenigen der Modalität, des Fokus, der Haltung, des Stils, Repertoires und Arrangements können Handelnde Strategieelemente auswählen, um ihre Ziele zu erreichen und Gratifikationen zu erlangen. Die vorliegende praxeologische Analyse verbindet strukturelle und phänomenologische Perspektiven auf Mediennutzung.

Schlagwörter: strategisches Handeln, Mediennutzung, Sozialstruktur, Theorie der Praxis, Sozialphänomenologie

A multitude of concepts has been proposed to describe how people use the media, such as modalities, strategies, styles, and motives; other approaches provide typologies of media use (examples will be cited below). These different concepts are located on various levels of abstraction, ranging from general styles of media use to single concepts such as the suspension of disbelief, escapism, or para-social interaction. The aim of the present article is twofold: first, to provide an analytical and terminological framework to delineate such concepts and disambiguate the multitude of labels applied to ways agents use the media; and second, to construct a theoretical framework that contextualizes them. Although there are parallels to previous research traditions, such as uses and gratifications research, cultural studies, and reception analysis (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990), and although some of the respective literature is of course cited where appropriate, a detailed comparison will not be possible within the confines of this article. However, the present framework aims to be more encompassing and more closely linked to social theory than previous approaches.

As to the degree and kind of activity and the consciousness of aims and motivations implied in media reception (as already discussed in Biocca, 1988), the present approach is differential, allowing for different levels of reflection and planning. However, instead of being merely idiosyncratic, the differences are structured; it will be a central aim of the present article to link media use to social structure and the structure of situations, i.e., to draw on theories that link structure and agency, including the relationship of media use to life in general and an agent's life-world. However, this structural type of analysis should be combined systematically with a reconstruction of how it feels to use the media the way a person or group does, of how media use is experienced by the agents themselves. Therefore, a perspective of objective structuration and a subjective perspective (a phenomenological reconstruction) are combined, an integration that Bourdieu (1973) demanded in his theory of practice. According to the present approach, media use is regarded as structured strategic practice.

1. Strategic Action and the Practical Sense

A strategy is defined here as a pattern of action that is explicitly or, in most cases, implicitly directed toward certain aims, has potentially valuable outcomes, is adapted to the situation, and that is to a certain degree abstract and transferable between different situations. According to Bourdieu's (1972) theory of practice, strategies are not so much rational and cognitive plans of action but schemata for a *praxis*, i.e., action generated by a practical sense (Bourdieu, 1980). This term combines several meanings of the word "sense". Strategic action implicitly strives for things that one has learned to appreciate and to strive for ("sense" as an inner guide). The practical sense *makes sense* of a situation and one's position. This sense-making is practical because it does not necessarily deal with the question of what can be known abstractly about a situation but instead with what can be done and in what way it is relevant to the agent. The practical sense mostly draws on practical, tacit knowledge and generates an intuitive interpretation of situations and consequently generates action, guided by schemata that remain implicit.

Furthermore, the practical sense is not only generative, but restrictive as well: it also consists of knowing what cannot and should not be done in a situation (the sense of appropriateness), what cannot be allowed in one's position, or what are legitimate aspirations (Goffman's, 1951, "sense of one's place").

Generally, strategies contribute to the management of a situation in two ways: changing the physical and social environment as well as the sensory input of the agent, and changing the state of the psychical system of the agent (e.g., re-directing attention, re-interpreting the situation). Strategies are developed or executed in reaction to situations that pose problems (e.g., unfulfilled needs or duties, strain, etc.) or that constitute opportunities for valuable outcomes.

If an agent's practical sense is well-adapted and she is endowed with sufficient resources, strategic practice is "economic" in a particular way, since its efficiency is based on two principles – the practical orientation (with its restricted effort of reflection) and the disguise of interest (Bourdieu, 1973). This is due to the fact that strategies are mostly based on practical knowledge, that the agent's schemata are, in the best case, objectively but unconsciously adapted to the situation, and that valuable outcomes of strategies can be achieved without the agent consciously striving for them (Wacquant, 1989). Those strategies have an elegant and disinterested appearance; their lack of overtly strategic intentions makes them more legitimate, often in combination with an ascribed cultural value. Their apparent naturalness conceals the unequal social-structural conditions wherein such strategies are acquired. However, other agents have to be content to manage a situation more or less effectively without long-term profits, but their ways of acting may be devalued as crude, uncultivated, and driven by simple convenience instead of an uninterested attitude toward activities and objects that are culturally defined as ends in themselves (but highly profitable, nevertheless, in terms of social status).

Strategic action can be seen as a continuum—at one end, there are often-repeated, extremely routinized reactions to small standardized aspects of recurring situations; at the other end, we find preplanned or intuitively and virtuously created far-reaching and complex sets of actions.

2. Strategy and Tactic: The Link to Structure

Social structure (applied here to industrial or post-industrial societies) can be seen as those rules, resources that constitute the stakes and profits of strategies, and the opportunities, chances, threats, and burdens in life that define one's position in the stratified and otherwise differentiated social space and in the life-course. In homology to these objective structures, there is a subjective, internalized structure, the habitus as a "structured structure" that is the basis of the practical sense (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 191). It can be defined as a set of quite generalized schemata for the interpretation and evaluation of situations, actions, and objects, of generative schemata for actions, and evaluative dispositions that convey a value to actions and resources. Those dispositions then manifest as general lifestyles of hedonism, self-actualization, morality, asceticism, etc. The higher an agent is situated in the social space (with its hierarchy of classes), the more resources he commands, the greater are his autonomy (in particular, the freedom from material

concern), his symbolic power (i.e., the ability to determine and potentially enforce his own interpretation of texts, objects, and social phenomena) and his proximity to high culture as an intrinsic value (Bourdieu, 1979). However, inter-personal differences are not only related to class, but also to the gender-specific socialization and division of labor and to phases in the life-course or to generations.

With regard to the implied resources and to their range, strategies can be divided into strategies *sensu stricto* and tactics (following de Certeau, 1980, ch. III, 2nd section; for an application of his framework to media use see, e.g., Proulx, 1994). Strategic agents *sensu stricto* pursue their goals with their own means and they are able to secure the profits from their strategies over time (de Certeau, 1980), and to accumulate them as capital in its diverse forms (even if this is not pursued consciously; on the definition of forms of capital see Bourdieu, 1983). Such strategies can be said to define the rules of social 'games' or at least 'play' virtuously. Tactics consist in the spontaneous and sometimes astute use of opportunities, the compensation of disadvantages where this is possible, and the pursuit of objectively short-termed benefits within a given social order. The tactic agent draws upon a situation defined by others and means provided by others, including texts (de Certeau, 1980). Although de Certeau describes cultural consumption (e.g., reading) mainly in terms of tactics, strategies *sensu stricto* could also consist in a use of cultural goods that is defined as cultivated and legitimate, potentially challenging conventional interpretations and evaluations (or reproducing and applying them in a virtuous way) and eventually contributing to new approaches to certain cultural phenomena. Such strategies then lead to the accumulation of large quantities of cultural and other capital or to successful conversion of one type of capital into another. Tactical practices adapt to given structures and are opportunistic and compensatory, but not uncreative; they may be subversive (diverting and re-interpreting resources such as cultural goods), but in a socially less consequential way, restricted to the agent's own pleasure and relief. More privileged observers tend to devalue deviant interpretations as "incorrect" and ignorant, or merely "passive" and un-productive (see the section "Le sens 'littéral', produit d'une élite sociale" in de Certeau, 1980, ch. XII). Within a more Bourdieusian perspective than de Certeau himself would probably endorse, we conclude from the distinction between strategy *sensu stricto* and tactic that structure (internalized ways of doing things, the distribution of resources, etc.) enables and constrains practices, and that even the most routinized day-to-day practices produce and reproduce social structure (see also Giddens, 1984).

3. Media Use as Strategic Practice

Forms of media use, including the interpretation and management of the respective situation (including technological artifacts) and the processing of media content can be interpreted as strategies *sensu lato*. They make practical use of the media with diverse aims and outcomes. Those strategies are based on resources such as cultural and economic capital and have potentially valuable outcomes. Therefore, they are linked to structure on the micro- and macro-level (the struc-

ture of the immediate situation and of the text, structured dispositions of the agent, and her position in the social space).

In the subsequent sections, different dimensions of strategies of media use are described. They are a set of variables where the user chooses a value on each and combines this permutation to an overall strategy. These (implicit) choices then guide the process of reception that can be summarized as follows: Concrete situations are evaluated and options of media use with their *gratifications* and subjective *costs* come to mind more or less diffusely. Based on the recipient's practical sense, available elements of strategies are recombined to form an overall strategy that is adapted to the structural conditions and subjectively worthwhile, and that can be varied during the process of reception in order to improve its outcomes. On a formal level, strategies include ways of managing an episode of reception (*styles*), selections from a *media repertoire* and *situational arrangements*. Elements of strategies also determine how users interpret media content and allocate attention: Subjective experiences are guided by the ascribed ontological status of worlds represented in some media text (*modality*), the *attitude* toward these worlds (in terms of cognitive belief, forced or disengaged moral and emotional attitudes, etc.), and *foci* of attention among the elements of these world, of the user's life-world, and their relationship. Beyond these elements, strategies are based on objective preconditions that do not necessarily enter into the more or less conscious elaborations and experiences surrounding the choice and execution of strategies (their *scope* as opposed to their *reach*): They draw upon resources such as cultural repertoires of action and interpretation that determine the applicability of elements of strategies and that are "invested" (as *stakes*) in order to produce valuable outcomes. The more far-reaching, strategic aspect of media use *sensu stricto* is most pronounced if it leads to valuable outcomes (*profits*) that transcend the immediate situation (while the scope mostly remains within that situation), .i.e., resources that are accumulated as a form of capital.

The permutation of strategic elements is not completely arbitrary – there are logical and objective restrictions, combinations that are not functional, and combinations that are not available to the agent due to a restricted set of action schemata, competences, and artifacts. Media users are assumed to have overall action schemata that consist in typical combinations of specific options along the dimensions that form an organized whole – a strategy. Adaptation to different situations and media content is possible via processes of assimilation and accommodation among these schemata.[1] However, the question of compatibility of the elements of strategies cannot be discussed here in detail. Furthermore, we cannot systematically distinguish between strategies as the more abstract schemata of action and strategies as the stream of action in concrete situations which can be guided by these schemata or the result of a spontaneous recombination of elements.

1 The accommodation of schemata is defined as the process of adaptation to new experiences, while assimilation is the subsumption of new experiences under existing schemata. A particular case is the reciprocal assimilation or coordination of schemata, where they are combined into an organized whole such as two schemata for actions being coupled to an overall action (Piaget, 1967). Cf. also Suckfüll (2004, pp. 111-112) on the acquisition of strategies of media use.

It is assumed that the concepts subsequently discussed apply mainly to the modern mass media and the Internet, with content (or 'texts' in the broadest sense) such as written text and spoken word, as well as to audiovisual representations and music. Although this cannot be discussed in detail, much of the present analysis may also apply to media that lie at the borders of the category of canonical mass media (e.g., cinema, sound recordings, mobile devices, and books, as opposed to newspapers, radio, or television). The discussion focuses on the receptive aspect of media use, neglecting production, participation, and more interactive practices (although, for example, inter-personal communication during and after episodes of media use can only be separated analytically from the process of reception itself; cf. Holly, Püschel, & Bergmann, 2001). Although the framework should be expanded in future works to include these important uses, its relevance rests on the assumption that the more "traditional", receptive use of texts that are similar to some form of mass media content will persist.

The discussion will frequently refer to concepts and theses that describe media reception on a more concrete level or in particular dimensions. These references have to remain very selective. Although inconsistencies may be unavoidable, a constant level of abstraction shall be kept. We will abstractly refer to cultural competences and knowledge that allows for certain attitudes (instead of, e.g., concrete genre schemata or persuasion knowledge), to abstract elements of media texts and of the worlds they represent, or to personal problems as a potential focus of reception (instead of, e.g. concrete settings of plots or problematic situations), to media repertoires in general (instead of properties of concrete media outlets), etc. Generally speaking, the present discussion rather focusses on formal types and relations of elements of strategies than on their 'content', i.e., the concrete realm they refer to. Applications to substantial cases have to be left to future analyses.

Conversely, the elements of strategies are more concrete than a habitus which consists in quite general schemata of evaluation and the ability to recombine potential parts of practices. Nevertheless, elements of strategies or combinations thereof can reveal an actor's habitus, and their cultural value depends on their evaluations based on others' habitus (which is partly a product of cultural hierarchies of value).

4. Scope, Aims, and Reach

The scope of a strategy is defined here as the part of the subjective reality that enters, explicitly or implicitly, into the process of media selection and reception. Elements of the definition of the situation include the cognitive and practical availability of options of media use, and potential aims, outcomes, and costs or burdens. They are weighted in order to determine what strategies would make sense. According to the theory of practice as outlined above, this "calculation" is mostly based on tacit rules and schemata, not rational deliberation (or on "practical" instead of "reasoning reason", cf. Bourdieu, 1997, p. 90) – agents interpret a situation where, as a result, something "makes sense" or "does not make sense," i.e., it fits or does not fit the implicit or explicit criteria of evaluation activated in the interplay of the situation and a schema.

Phenomenologically, the decision to use the media is often quite diffuse, without clear consciousness of the aims. Rather, it can be theorized in terms of feelings such as "this could be fun" or useful somehow, of "nothing to do", that one should opt for something culturally valuable, be informed about certain things, or that what one has selected and started to use is a waste of time, boring, complicated, trivial, too exciting, etc. Therefore, intuitively, agents take into account the chances of making the situation more comfortable, the opportunity for a small subversion, a sense of duty or the instrumental value of media use, or their intrinsic motivation and lasting "disinterested interest" in certain objects of culture. Similarly, some necessary efforts may come to mind diffusely, and consequences or experiences that one wants to avoid (cf. Fahr & Böcking, 2009). Moreover, media use is often habitual (see below). However, there also may be more elaborate decision-making in situations where media use is particularly problematic.

The scope of a strategy is to be separated conceptually from its reach, i.e., the consequences that are not consciously or implicitly present during media use, but that ensue nonetheless, in particular positive consequences such as the accumulation of competences in the long run. Therefore, the distinction between strategies *sensu stricto* and tactics, and the idea of the concealed strategic character of actions applies to media use.

5. Gratifications and Profits, Costs and Stakes

We will refer to the immediate positive outcomes of media use as gratifications and the long-term positive effects as profits. However, this "economic" terminology should not be mistaken for an example of economism or of a theory of rational choice. Rather, it is used by Bourdieu to indicate that in different social fields, "almost anything [can be constituted] as an interest, and as a realistic interest, i.e., as an investment (in the double meaning the word has in economics and in psychoanalysis) that is objectively paid back by an 'economy'" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 42).

For the purpose of the present analysis, gratifications shall be categorized as cognitive or information-related, emotional (hedonistic or eudemonic), aesthetic, or social (cf., e.g., Katz et al., 1973, for a similar classification).

Although active information seeking may be a reason for media use, it can be assumed that the feeling of being informed is mainly a gratification conferred by routinized or incidental, dutiful or pleasurable monitoring of informative media outlets ("surveillance information"; Atkin, 1973).

Media use can also play an important role in the management of emotion and mood. According to constructivist approaches, emotion can be classified, attributed, interpreted and evaluated differently depending on social positions (e.g., classes or occupational groups, cultures and subcultures, gender and generations), and norms of their appropriateness in certain contexts are associated with strategies of controlling and managing emotions (Neckel, 2006). While some agents may pursue strictly and immediately hedonistic strategies with regard to emotional gratification (as theorized in classical theories of mood management, Zillmann, 1988), dealing with negative emotions in media reception where real consequences are largely absent can be objectively and subjectively valuable in

particular ways (a more general emotional, or eudemonic, gratification). Some agents may confront their feelings or anticipate negative or unusual experiences, and experience this as rewarding (Oliver, 1993). Another source of gratification can be aesthetic emotions (Scherer, 2004). Social gratifications that are obtained immediately while using the media may be, e.g., a sense of community or belonging (with a relation to social identity), or the pleasure of conversations that can accompany media use (Lull, 1980).

While, per definition, tactical practices of media use do not contribute to the real accumulation or conversion of capital, they may at least play a role in the recurrent, short-term reproduction of the force of labor and the "vital force" (Jürgens, 2008), or as an escapist counterbalance for the stress of work and everyday life (e.g., coercive "emotion work"; Hochschild, 1979), and other problems (Katz & Foulkes, 1962). Instead of being accumulative (e.g., enhancing the value of one's force of labor), this type of media use is only preservative or compensatory, but may yield important momentary gratifications for the individual, for example by expressing or acting out otherwise controlled emotions.

Practices of media use may also have strategic functions. They contribute to the accumulation of capital in two ways. First, media use itself may serve as a "class status symbol" (Goffman, 1951) and affect social distinction via the "stylization of life" (Weber, 1922, p. 637) by the use of "cultivated" (e.g., audiophile or stylish) technological artifacts and by applying aesthetic criteria in the choice of content. This then leads to profits such as the acquisition of social and symbolic capital (recognition and access to prestigious social groups and useful social networks), and possibly economic capital. These symbolic effects of media use are based on a cultural hierarchy of media and of ways of media use; what kind of media content one prefers is of great importance to social judgments and in the negative case may stigmatize individuals or whole social groups and classes. Strategic users may also contribute to successfully establish evaluations (e.g., of media, genres and practices) and interpretations (e.g., of texts and of technologies as to their proper functions, uses, and design).

Second, media use can contribute to the accumulation of cultural competences (incorporated cultural capital) by the very preoccupation with media text as cultural products, which may, in turn, also be profitable in economic terms such as on the job market. Those practices may then be exertive work (if practiced out of a "cultural goodwill" in Bourdieu's, 1979, sense; cf. Meyen, 2007) or effortless work, i.e., the pursuit of the Kantian "disinterested pleasure" that nevertheless serves the interests of the agent, because it also leads to the accumulation of cultural capital where capital is in fact accumulated work (Bourdieu, 1983). The maximally effectively strategic recipient is a person who, with the help of his media use, gains information and competences that enable him to participate in discourses over the definition of the "rules of the game" in a social field, of what is aesthetic, who has political power, what is legitimate political action, etc. Those people exert symbolic dominance, especially if they are interested in the respective matters for their own sake, for the love of art, passion for politics, etc., i.e., without a strategic appearance of their practices and outer signs of ambition.

Technical skills in turn are ambivalent as to their profitability: they are a necessary condition for some strategies and socially recognized as such, but 'mere' technical competence is seen as 'nerdy', as narrow, uncultivated, and asocial technocratic knowledge in the dominant framework of cultural value even if it is highly estimated in some milieus.

Also, media use can have consequences for social relationships. In the positive case, the user acquires "emotional capital", and strengthens her intimate relationships (both are a distinct form of resources and a dimension of social inequality; Illouz, 2008, pp. 211, 214-215) via the joint use of the media and shared emotional experiences. However, media use can also contribute to avoiding tiresome personal contacts, lead to social learning, and serve as a means of education and domination in the family (Lull, 1980) or as a pawn in negotiations within social relationships.

The immediate costs implied in media use can be monetary (Scherer & Naab, 2009) or perceived in terms of cognitive effort and time spent on the activity. Moreover, media use can have opportunity costs that enter into the calculation of the user, i.e., disadvantages that result from using the media instead of doing something else, or from using them the way one does instead of the way others would prefer, i.e., social costs.

Contrary to the costs, the stakes of a strategy of media use are defined as what is invested when using the media (with the aforementioned potential profits), or in other words, the resources involved in media use without necessarily being in the scope of the practice. As in the case of profits, cultural capital is also involved on the investment-related side of strategies.[2] In most cases, this is a 'silent investment', because the competences mobilized often remain unnoticed as such, or they are naturalized as described above and not interpreted as a structural condition or subject to genuinely *social* inequality.

6. Style, Repertoire, and Arrangement

Styles can be defined as forms of action or thinking, as recurring patterns in the interaction with the environment and in the processing of experiences and concepts.[3] During media use, these formal parameters can be found with regard to the initiation of an episode of reception and the antecedent decisions and selections, concerning the flow of reception and exploration of media content as well as the interactions with technological artifacts, the processes of sense-making and reasoning, and at times where a decision is made whether to continue or interrupt the process of media use.

A general stylistic feature of strategies of media use is their degree of routinization or habitualization (here the terms are used interchangeably). Aarts et al.

2 It has been argued that cultural capital does not only structure the consumption of artifacts of high culture, but also of popular culture (Rössel and Bromberger, 2009).

3 It is important to note that the notion of *style* as used here only covers a few of the aspects considered in theories of *lifestyle*. The present understanding of 'style' is inspired by a line of research on media use (e.g., Schweiger, 2005) rather than by Bourdieu's or others' analyses of whole lifestyles.

(1998, p. 1359) define habits as "goal-directed automatic behaviors that are mentally represented. And because of frequent performance in similar situations in the past, these mental representations and the resulting action can be automatically activated by environmental cues." (cf. Koch, 2010, and LaRose, 2010, for an application to media use) Habits follow rules that can be more or less specific and transferable to different situations, so they do not simply consist in a mechanic execution of behavior that is virtually unrelated to the environment.[4] Although they are no longer mentally present when following the routine, the initial aims of routinized acts remain the criteria of its success. If they are no longer met by habits, and if there are no other functions and gratifications to replace them (or if a situation usually dealt with in habitual way can no longer be interpreted in a natural, unproblematic attitude), the agent will cease to perform the habitual actions (Renckstorf, 1996; Wood et al., 2005).

Routines may either be pleasurable, repeated because of the appreciation of some serialized media content or because the routine itself conveys some gratifications (e.g., relief of the burden to decide over activities and to structure time actively), or they are felt to be obligatory, so the user would cease to execute them if the perceived duty or necessity fell away.

Schweiger (2005) has provided a systematization of styles of media use including the selection and the phase of reception itself. On this basis (complemented by the work of Bilandzic, 2005, on styles in the use of television, and Dernbach & Roth, 2007, on newspapers, and by some additional dimensions), the following categorization can be proposed: the decision over the medium or the media content used can be based on the user's evaluation or complementary sources such as TV guides or other 'meta-media'. Alternatives may be considered in the order given by the medium (the pages of a newspaper or the sequence of channels as stored in the TV set) or constituted by an actual strategy of the user. The recipient may select some media content directly, or in a process of exploration or ongoing reception, after considering possible alternatives (scanning, zapping, etc.), leading to a different frequency of selective decisions. She may stick to what has been selected once or revise the decision several times. The selection can be based on the content or on formal criteria such as length or duration. In sum and with regard to cognitive and behavioral effort, the selection process may be rather heuristic or systematic. With regard to selection or reception coordinated with other people, styles of negotiation can be described with different forms of roles and hierarchies, rules, strategies of bargaining and argumentation, etc.

4 Within the present approach, "habitus" and "habits" are concepts that lie on a different level of abstraction. If habits were considered as a part of, or identical with the habitus, it would consist of an endless list of relatively concrete recurrent actions instead of being that unifying and generating principle behind all kinds of actions theorized by Bourdieu. The concreteness of habits, in turn, accounts for another kind of efficiency than that allowed by the habitus: while the habitus reduces complexity by guiding a broad range of actions with the help of a few schemata (interacting with varying situations), habits reduce the effort necessary for those generative acts as they consist in more concrete schemata for action already conceived and stored for recurrent use. Nevertheless, habits may still reveal the habitus by their general stylistic features.

With regard to time, several styles may be differentiated in more detail; the term of "flow" could stand for an episode of media use started at some point of time and terminated only when a stimulus internal or external to the media content occurs that suggests the user to stop without considering the amount of time spent on the activity. A "budgeting" approach, in turn, consists of spending a certain amount of time in a period to a type of media use. Finally, a "scheduling" approach delimits an episode of media use by choosing points of time for the beginning and end either in a user-centered way or guided by the temporary availability of some content. Also, a recipient may have a typical, more complex schema of how he structures his time spent with the media (e.g., a typical structure of a workday, with fixed points, combined with budgets for different media, etc.).

Selection among media outlets and texts can be situated at different categorial levels: media in general (as subjectively opposed to other activities in "real life"), media technologies, content provided by one technology (e.g. zapping) and certain aspects of media content (characters, objects, information, etc.) (Hartmann, 2009). We may refer to this categorial structure and the alternatives usually considered at a specific level as an agent's media repertoire (van Rees & van Eijck, 2003; Hasebrink & Popp, 2006). It can be analyzed in terms of size or diversity, categorical levels, and internal structure (e.g., hierarchies of preference, functional equivalence, etc.). An important aspect of repertoires is also determined by technologies and contracts that limit the availability of some channels and categories of content: in a short-term perspective, past investments in devices and access restrict choices in general or with regard to certain times and places.

During the activity of reception, styles of processing or sense-making determine how and at what level the meaning of a text is established by the agent. Making sense of a text is, first, a matter of synthesis – its various elements are presented or at least perceived in a linear sequence, but meaning is constructed by considering a subset of elements and building a model of what seems to be represented, expressed, argued, etc., in the text. The style of synthesis can either be holistic (or synoptic), considering elements from the whole text, or piecewise, considering only elements apprehended within a restricted span of attention. For example, with regard to listening to music, this distinction has been conceived as architectonicism (or structural listening) versus concatenationism (listening for the moment; Kivy, 2001; Levinson, 2006). A second dimension of styles of processing is reasoning: users either concentrate on statements, arguments, and implications supplied in the text, or follow their own lines of thought and, possibly, of discussion with others during media use. Recipients either reason in a systematic or heuristic way, based on episodic or propositional knowledge, biased toward corroboration or criticism of a text's claims, or in an unbiased way (we can only summarily refer to the literature on cognitive style here, e.g., Riding & Cheema, 1991).

The last concept to be introduced on the formal level of episodes of reception is that of the situational arrangement. Media users have schemata of how to locate (or arrange) objects and bodies (including their own) during media use. In this task, space is not understood as empty Euclidean space, but a set of socially defined small-scale regions (Giddens, 1984, p. 119) such as the institutionalized delineation of areas in houses or flats with ascribed functions. Arrangements also

include the number and relationship of different users, and the kind and degree of their interaction. If special attention and emotional, aesthetic or symbolic meaning is conferred to the arrangement of a situation of media use, including its temporal structure, this can be described as a ritual (Rothenbuhler, 1998). Arrangements are either (re-)defined spontaneously, habitualized and relatively fixed by concrete schemata, inscribed in prearranged settings and in the social definition of a medium (cf. Röser & Peil, 2010), and limited by the spatial characteristics of devices (e.g., their size, mobility, or the range wherein texts can be perceived).

Styles, repertoires, and arrangements can acquire strong evaluative connotations in social judgments, depending on the observer's habitus and including judgments on one's own media use. For example, watching TV alone or drawing on a small repertoire of routinely used media outlets are often considered less desirable than cosmopolitanism, experimentation, or social activities. Beyond their symbolic value, some styles are probably more conducive in the acquisition of competences or cultural capital, and ritual media use can be a factor in the acquisition of social and emotional capital. Finally, it may be considered a tactic approach to 'live in the moment' of a sequential text, and a strategic approach to survey its overall structure, or even generalize the structure or meaning of a larger set of texts, demonstrating (or at least deploying) interpretative and analytical skills.

7. Modality, Focus, and Attitude

From a phenomenological perspective, recipients modify their subjective experiences by selecting among different ways to relate to the worlds that are represented in media texts. The respective elements of strategies can be described in the dimensions of modality, focus, and attitude.

The term "modality" is used in vague analogy to the concept's use in philosophy to denote different kinds of being or truth (being real, possible or necessary) and worlds (possible worlds, the actual world, etc.). We may refer to modality as the ontological status the user confers to the world as represented in media content, and to attitude as the relationship to this world (in terms of belief, evaluation, etc., or simply of "being in these worlds") and the degree and form of control over this relationship. While modality refers to the ontological or semantic dimension of media use (what kinds of facts the text refers to), attitudes account for the phenomenological or pragmatic dimension.

Modality is the outcome of an evaluation of whether the worlds, as represented in media content, are part of the real world or disconnected from it and counterfactual, i.e., part of fictional, possible worlds that depart from reality to different degrees (cf. Pavel, 1975; Ryan, 1992).

The modality of media use refers to a person's approach to media content with regard to the presumably intended ontological status of what is represented, not merely the result of an evaluation of truthfulness. However, such an evaluation (cf. Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008, for a theoretical account) may enter into the initial decision for or against a modality or alter it during reception, or lead to a decision to continue or abandon exposure. If a reader approaches an article in a newspaper as a description of reality, not as fiction, he may conclude that this

description is false. In most cases, this does not mean that the user switches to a perception of the text as fiction, but remains in a realistic mode while concluding that the text's description of reality is the result of error or fraud.

Worlds may be nested, and therefore, it has to be analyzed which world or worlds the recipient is dealing with, and what modality is assigned to which world. This not only applies to plays within the play or stories within a story, *mises en abyme* or broadcasts of stage plays, to intermediality (different fragments of what can be regarded as essentially the same "world" being represented in different media, or elements of one world entering another), but also to simple cases where a character or a newsreader reports events that are not directly described or presented to the recipient.

This leads us to consider the focus of reception, defined as what elements of what worlds receive attention from the user. We may refer to a focus that lies completely within the world as described by a text as immanent, as opposed to transcendent (or distanced). Many classifications of levels of form and meaning in texts and of their constitutive elements have been proposed, mainly with regard to literary texts (e.g., Chatman, 1978) such as story and discourse, fabula (or plot) and sujet, setting and characters (with, e.g., para-social interaction as person(a)-centered media reception; Hartmann et al., 2004), etc. Again, a text may include complex constellations of perspectives with multiple levels of discourse that the recipient may focus on.

While there may be a particular complexity in the analysis of focuses with regard to fictional media content, some distinctions may be made in the case of non-fictional texts, for example, along the distinction between person-centered and issues-centered reception, between different levels of discourse, or between an event and an underlying issue or ideology.

An analytical distinction may be made between several forms of transcendent focus – the meaning of the text, the text's materiality, form, and context, and the user's self and life-world. The meaning of a text can be said to transcend its world if the objects, agents, and facts represented acquire a symbolic or metonymic meaning in the user's interpretation, whether this is intended by the producer or not, i.e., they stand for something beyond the text's world. A focus on the formal aspects or the non-immanent meaning could be termed analytical or formal, as opposed to referential (cf. Holt, 1998). This analysis of focuses with regard to meaning and form may again be differentiated by the levels of nested worlds. A further complication is brought about by intertextuality, seriality, etc., where the meaning of one text partly depends on the meaning of others.

We may call a focus on the author, producer, or the context of production, and, even more encompassing, the societal and cultural context a diagnostic or inferential focus. Other potential objects of a user's focus may be the co-audience (Dohle & Hartmann, 2005), whether present or as a virtual collectivity, or finally on the user's life-world and self as set in relation to the process of media use or the world as represented in the text. This latter focus also could be called reflexive (which does not mean that it necessarily implies intensive reflection, but some awareness of the self, i.e., self-reflexivity). In detail, the focus may be on emotions,

knowledge, identity, etc. A problem-centered strategy may be distinguished from a strategy where the user is dissociated from her problems (Charlton et al., 2004).

A final variety of a transcendent focus can be called expanding – a playful extension of the course of action ("what if...?"), or reasoning about topics that can be associated with the text, although not directly mentioned (cf. also Suckfüll, 2004, on some of the preceding forms, and Suckfüll & Scharkow, 2009, for a data-driven analysis finding dimensions such as "identity work" an "production").

However, many forms of media use cannot be analyzed along such differentiated categories of focus, because they include media content only as a diffuse, semiconscious stimulation (the focus may be said to lie almost completely outside any world as constituted by the media). Thus for example, focuses on the emotional expression of a piece of music, the listener's emotions or the form of the work may be distinguished from escapist or diffuse forms of listening (Behne, 1986; Roose, 2008; Rössel, 2009).

If the focus lies outside the world of a text, technology can be the reason or primary objects of interest. It may either "work" (according to socially defined criteria of functioning) or not. The focus may then either lie on the functioning of the technological artifacts, irrespective of some content, or on its malfunction which makes the medium 'opaque', i.e., it does not let the user 'see through' into some world as represented by a text.

We may also assume that users ascribe different ontological modalities to technologies, regarding them as neutral, controllable tools for their own purposes (with a strictly predictable behavior) or as entities with different degrees of agency (Callon & Latour, 1992).

An attitude (in analogy to phenomenological terminology; Schütz, 1945; cf. also Weiß, 2005) can be defined as the way one relates to the worlds represented in media texts, how one experiences them and oneself in relation to them, and as the degree and mode of control over these experiences. Schütz (1945), in his phenomenological analysis of agents' dealing with multiple worlds, not only notes that, dealing with fictional representations, the recipient may shift the "accent of reality" (or focus, in the present terminology) to the fictional world, but by doing so, the agent frees himself from the pragmatic motives and the attempts to master and grasp the real world with its resistant objects. However, that fictional world is taken as quasi-real unless this attitude is disturbed or the agent moves to a perspective of critical or theoretical distance as opposed to a practical, natural involvement with a world.

In social phenomenological literature, the term "natural attitude" usually only stands for an approach to the real world (e.g., Schütz, 1993). Thus, an attitude toward a mediated world can never be entirely natural, since the user is at least dissociated spatially (and often chronologically) from what she sees, hears, or reads. However, an attitude may resemble the natural one to different degrees. We may compare attitudes in terms of their actual phenomenological character as they appear to the media user, whether she knowingly forces or prevents some reactions or whether he understands the text intuitively, mostly without even considering the formal textuality, technology, and its production and without knowingly controlling reactions. The latter, the lack of control or distance, may be called the natural

attitude *sensu lato* toward mediated reality – one without specific efforts to "bracket" that world, but one that takes it for granted, at face value.

In the following, a distinction will be made between an attitude where no particular effort is made to control, alter, or question reactions occurring during media use (as the "natural attitude"), an attitude of forced reactions where particular mental states or reactions are actively sought or strengthened by directing attention and by particular interpretations and evaluations, and an attitude where internal controls are particularly relaxed, also allowing for stronger reactions. Alternatively, those reactions and states may be actively avoided or controlled in an attitude of forced distance or critical appraisal. However, the distinction between the active (forced) and passive (relaxed) elements is not always easy to draw and may be taken as heuristic.

This distinction can then be applied to cognitive attitudes. It has been argued that the basic, or natural attitude toward mediated reality is one of belief, even if fictional media content is processed, since disbelief is more costly cognitively (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; cf. also Böcking, 2008, for the following). This belief is perpetuated unless disturbing or inconsistent stimuli become salient and cannot be automatically explained away in the recipient's attempt to construct a coherent mental model of what is represented in the text. What is usually called the suspension of disbelief (Böcking et al., 2005) may be considered a distinct attitude where unrealistic and inconsistent elements are ignored consciously or unconsciously, explanations are developed to dispel contradictions, i.e., where disbelief is actively suspended or where controls as to realism are particularly weak. Finally, a critical and questioning attitude (disbelief) may be held when internal consistency and external realism are considered too weak. This attitude is not only a consequence of the text's structure but may be sought actively and enforced by the user even when confronted with unproblematic texts (cf. Liebes & Katz, 1986).

With regard to the propositional and argumentative claims of a text, a distinction may be made between an affirmative or dominant (with regard to a "preferred reading" within a dominant cultural order), a negotiated, skeptical and oppositional "reading" (expanding the classification by Hall, 1980, which could be restated in Bourdieu's, 1997, p. 147-148, terminology of "orthodoxy" and "heterodoxy"). The difference between a skeptical and an oppositional interpretation may be seen in the extent to which the user is simply doubtful without developing counterarguments or an alternative thesis. This latter activity certainly depends on the recipient's competences and position in the social field, and may be called strategic if it leads to a certain symbolic power that allows the user to impose definitions and interpretations in a field or discourse (as opposed to merely unorthodox, but inconsequential tactics of interpretations that may be even unaware of their deviance). A critical distance may also have an ironic tone (Scherer, Baumann, & Schlütz, 2005).

A cognitive attitude of belief, combined with a fluent processing of sensory input and a focus on the immanent features of a mediated world, creates the experience of immersion into the world of a text, of being in that world, even if mostly as a nonparticipant observer. This immersion or presence can be described as a phenomenological experience in which all of the person's mental systems and ca-

pacities become focused on the events occurring in the narrative (Green & Brock, 2002), to the point where the subjective feeling (immediately given as a feedback from unconscious processes, as opposed to explicit knowledge) arises that the perceived environment could be the user's actual environment (Schubert, 2009).

On an emotional level, some reactions to mediated stimuli such as disgust or fright occur more or less involuntarily. However, more complex forms of processing can be partly selected and controlled, depending on the individual competences. Users may actively recall that they are confronted with mediated or fictional reality and cognitively and emotionally distance themselves from the mediated world to avoid unpleasant effects. In an analogy to the cognitive level, emotional attitudes may be categorized as follows: an attitude of emotional self-control (or dissociation), natural emotional reactions, heightened emotional sensitivity (a relaxation of emotional self-control), or a forced attitude actively seeking emotional arousal (e.g., by focusing on certain aspects of the text and one's emotional appraisal, by empathizing with characters, etc.) (cf. also Suckfüll & Scharkow, 2009, on "In-Emotion", i.e., the degree of control over emotions and the emotional involvement while feeling to be in a fictional world).

The distinction of natural, distanced and forced attitudes also applies to moral judgments, in particular to the evaluation of situations in mediated realities where morality is not activated by default. We may speak of a natural moral attitude when a moderate effort is made to perform moral judgments, comparable to an everyday level in real-world situations. However, within a natural cognitive attitude of belief with regard to fictional worlds, it may also be the case that the moral standards of this world are accepted for the time of interaction with the media content, even those that would be considered immoral in the real world, or that users sympathize with some 'bad guys'.

Sometimes, in order to heighten enjoyment in other dimensions such as the level of aesthetic pleasure or suspense, some cognitive effort may be necessary to perform a "moral disengagement" (Bandura, 2002) with what is represented in the text, including operations such as recalling the mediated or fictional character of the representation, a search for justifications of a character's otherwise immoral behavior, etc.[5] Moral reasoning may also be suspended in order to activate less elaborate moral sentiments, to enjoy moral condemnations, a punitive attitude, and victories of the 'good guys' where the ends would not justify the means in terms of everyday social norms (Raney, 2005). We could term such an attitude regressive or compensatory because it allows the user to distance herself from complex or restrictive everyday norms and to activate basal moral-emotional dispositions that are normally overruled by conscious control and cognitive elaboration. This is not necessarily restricted to fictional content. Another form of moral engagement is critical and elaborate, seeking to apply one's full range of moral competences.

5 Klimmt et al. (2006) have applied this concept to players of video games who have to manage their moral reactions to violent behavior in the game's context in order to enjoy it. They mention cognitive strategies that could also be applied to other media.

Finally, on the behavioral level, the user usually has learned as a child that he cannot directly interact with the mediated reality, so in a "natural" attitude, behavioral reactions will be confined to a few involuntary responses. However, forced or particularly uncontrolled attitudes may be possible, where one admits or even fosters stronger reactions.

By choosing a modality, focus, and attitude, recipients adapt to the "texto-material" structure of the media (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012), relating it to their aims and possibly to the structure of their life-world or their personality, and they have experiences that result from specific involvement with mediated worlds which is facilitated or hindered by technological and situational conditions. In terms of stakes and profits, however, the competences to use certain variants are distributed unequally. The potentially useful consequences depend on differential knowledge on what to expect from situations and types of media texts (e.g., genre schemata, Rusch, 1987) and how to achieve some gratifications and profits, i.e., on how to use certain useful elements of strategies. Furthermore, the diverse elements of strategies described in this section rank differently on cultural hierarchies of value. For example, immersion and escapism are often seen as more 'trivial', 'passive', or 'uncritical' than distanced and analytical modes of media use. A certain easiness and virtuosity in interpretations and judgments is regarded more cultivated than a learned or scholastic habitus of those who are perceived as educational arrivistes. An overly moralizing attitude that overshadows aesthetic appreciation of cultural products is sometimes considered narrow-minded (but others may condemn an amoral aestheticism). Modes, focuses and attitudes also may contribute differently to the acquisition of knowledge and competences that can be valuable for everyday life or further cultural consumption.

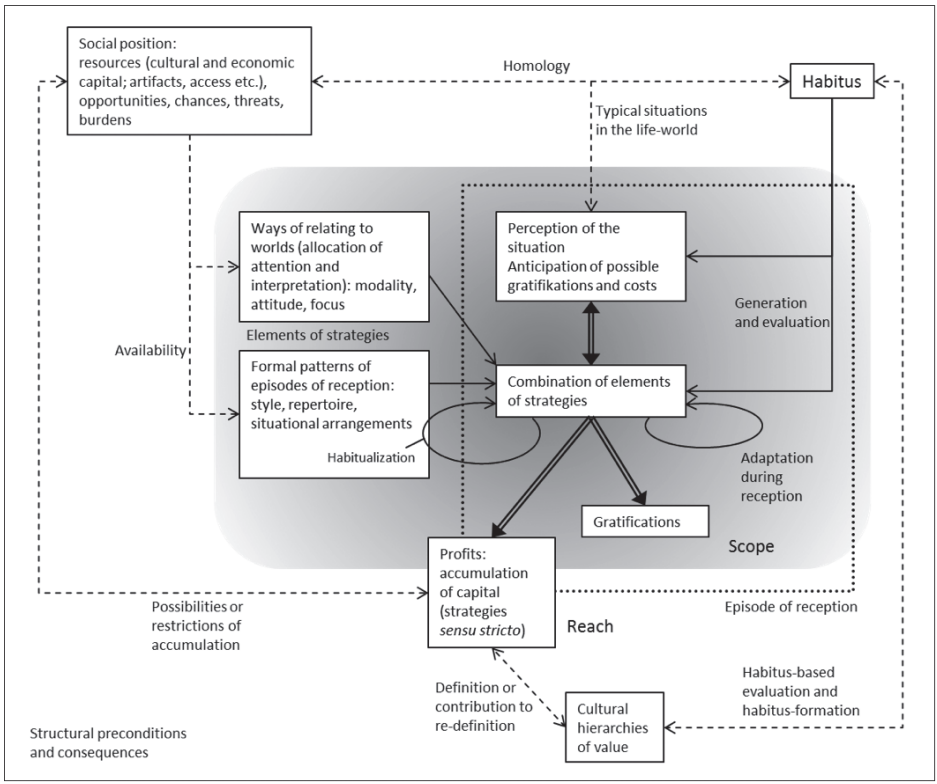
8. Conclusion

This paper has outlined an approach to media use that conceives exposure to media content and its processing as a type of strategic action (Figure 1 summarizes this approach). Strategies are flexible and creative, allowing adaptation to the structure of situations and texts, and they are structured by rules, routines, schemata of action, etc. that may be said to constitute or reveal a habitus.

On one hand, strategies of media use have been analyzed in a phenomenological perspective of what actors experience when using the media, not only in terms of modalities and attitudes with regard to mediated reality, but also in terms of costs and gratifications. Furthermore, formal patterns pertaining to selection, situational arrangements, and to sense-making have been distinguished. On the other hand, media use has been related to the actors' lives and life-worlds, and to social structure, i.e., the rules, (cultural and other) resources, opportunities, chances, threats, and burdens that are distributed unequally in the social space. Strategies contribute to the (re-)production of social structure and partly conceal this reproduction, because some implied stakes and profits are outside the scope of the actor and most observers. Some forms of media use can be described as tactic while strategies that lead to the long-term accumulation of capital have been characterized as strategic *sensu stricto*. The two perspectives, structural and phenomeno-

logical, have been combined in a praxeological approach. Strategies of media use are also cultural practices in the sense that they draw on shared interpretations of reality and repertoires of action, and they are subject to evaluations in terms of cultural value that results in a distinction between more and less "cultivated" approaches to cultural consumption such as media use.

Figure 1: Model of media use as strategic action



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